



School on Wheels News

April 2006

If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today, I still dream.

The Trumpet of Conscience – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our Mission

The enhancement of educational opportunities for homeless children, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Our goal is to shrink the gaps in the education of these children and provide them with the highest education possible

WE NEED YOU!

We have hundreds of homeless children in Southern California who need you to tutor them for just one hour a week.

You don't need any experience, just the desire to make a difference in a child's life. Please visit the Volunteer section at our website:

www.schoolonwheels.org

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Dear Friends,

Hope is the symbol for this time of year where graduations, parties, proms, dreams, and aspirations are in the air around us. This is the time of year, where rains and clouds and early nights burst into sunshine and flowers and longer days. As a world, as a country, as a people right down to the smallest homeless child whom no one really knows, hope is essential to survival and growth.

Hope comes from within. Hope is strong, not weak; hope is certain, not aimless; hope is a feeling of self-worth from within, not depending on the outside. The end result is confidence, purpose, excitement, and joy in taking on the next challenge. Hope is optimism.

This is what School on Wheels offers to every homeless child or teen we work with. Hope is what each of our volunteers help a child develop as they work consistently with them every week. Hope, in its truest meaning is developed within — step by step, little by little, and struggle by struggle; one small success to another and another until one day, a belief in oneself starts to take hold. That is the magic of learning. That is the magic of discovery and this is the magic of the relationship between School on Wheels' volunteer tutors and our homeless children and teens.

As you will learn in our newsletter, this sense of optimism and possibility will continue for children and teens who apply to The Catherine McAulay Meek Scholarship Fund. This is a momentous next step for the homeless children and teens, for their parents, for their volunteer tutors and for School on Wheels.

It is with deep gratitude and pride that we introduce to you the first recipient details of this Scholarship Fund. The generosity of The Catherine McAulay Meek Scholarship Fund will allow so many homeless children over the years to continue their dream.

With gratitude,

Agnes Stevens

Founder and Executive Director

TUTOR TALES

Ellen and James

Our volunteer tutors have many reasons for tutoring. This is Ellen Green's tale.

There was James: he couldn't read, at least not well. And he didn't like to. Who could blame him? He had to struggle over every word and when he read out loud, at school or home at the shelter, the other kids made fun. He was two or more grade years behind. He'd rather just watch a *Spiderman* video; *Spiderman* was his favorite superhero.

Then there was me: not a teacher, not even a tutor with experience. No saint and no martyr either, just a fifty-year old divorced woman raising a teenage son and trying to jumpstart a long-stalled career. I had problems of my own. But, on the other hand, my life had been filled with blessings; my son went to a great school, had private tutors when he'd needed them and, above all, had a warm and wonderful house he knew he'd come home to every day. Lots of kids in Los Angeles don't have that. Maybe it was time to give back.

So I became a School On Wheels' tutor and I met James. Once a week I'd come to the shelter where he lived with his mom. Once a week I'd help him with his homework and try to get him to read. Once a week I was there for him, simply to let him know someone else, someone besides his mom, cared about how he was doing. Once a week I wheedled, cajoled and bribed him to read. "You read one page, I'll read the next. You do your homework and then we'll read from this *Spiderman* book I bought at the bookstore. Yes, I bought it for you and yes, you can keep it if you promise me we will read a chapter every week."

James' reading improved. It wasn't a miracle, or even a mystery solved. I showed him how to sound out words, shared the tricks of blending sounds and rules of vowel combinations. I guess his teacher never had time, or James just didn't understand the first time through. Of course, as he improved so did his confidence. The better he read the more willing he was to try. Soon his mother said he was reading billboards and signs out loud, something he'd never done. His teacher commented on his progress. Soon he'd have a book waiting when I arrived, anxious to show me how well he could read it. He was proud of himself, and I was proud of him.

When winter break came and he had no homework, I told him we'd make a book. His own book; one he would write and illustrate, as a reward for becoming such a good reader. It would be a *Spiderman* book, of course. He wrote the story and, while he drew the pictures, I formatted it on the computer, then printed and glued it into a blank journal. I took photos of him for the inside cover and together we wrote "About the Author". I downloaded superhero pictures from the Internet to composite a front cover and took it to be color-Xeroxed so that it would look as glossy and professional as possible. I gave it to James, and saw the smile on his face, and watched him run around to show it off to the other kids. Then I felt the smile on *my* face and, well, that is why I tutor.

Andrea and her many Students

Andrea de Lange has been tutoring for almost a year. While she tutors one-on-one, it is not with the same student, but with whomever needs help. The group that shows up is comprised of about 15 core kids. She signed up to tutor with us because she wanted to improve the quality of "young lives that have endured harsh living situations where it can be difficult to trust others." "Some of the students open up more easily than others," she says, "but the longer we get to know each other, the more comfortable they become. That's so satisfying."

Like most homeless children, Andrea's students don't get a lot of positive attention, so she feels her goal is to make them feel special. "They see me come back every week and know that I really care about them, which adds to their self-worth. They have many reasons to be disillusioned with life, but I am constantly amazed at how resilient they are," says Andrea.

She believes that whatever effort she puts into tutoring, she gets just as much back. "I feel good knowing I'm showing them kindness, when they've had such a rough start in life," she says. "It's also good to reinforce the value of education. This will encourage them to create different kinds of lives for themselves, when they're older, than those they've experienced in their youth. It's all worth it to me when I get there, and see all these excited kids lined up and waiting for me to open the door."

That's what our tutors do: open doors. Thank you Andrea.



Sisters!

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND BEAUTY

The Catherine McAulay Meek Scholarship

Last year we announced the Catherine McAulay Meek Scholarship Fund. In 1934, Catherine was forced to leave school at 14 to help support her family. At the time, this was not unusual for those who lived in the Gorbals, one of several projects in Glasgow, Scotland. As an intelligent woman who saw how her lack of education impacted her life, Catherine was determined that the same fate would not happen to her children. Many people in the neighborhood never finished their basic schooling. And no one in her family had ever gone to college until her children did.

Using Catherine's example as our model, we set up the fund to help the Catherine McAulays of this world who could achieve great things if only they were given a chance. We are excited to introduce to you to the scholarship's first recipient. Rather than tell you about her, the letter she submitted for scholarship fund consideration explains why we chose her.

My name is Ankara Brazil Arburtha. I am 16 years old. My birth father is African-American and my mother is Mexican. I live on Skid Row in Los Angeles. My father is in prison and my mother doesn't have enough money to live in an apartment or house. I live in a hotel. The rooms are very small and six people live with me. Our bathrooms are down the hall. I usually go to the bathroom with a group of girls, because of the predators that live here. There are a lot of drugs and violence where I live. Also, there is a lot of prostitution at the hotel. My 4 year old brother already knows what heroin is and has seen many people shoot up. The hotel is filthy and scary, but it is the only home I have.

I attend Westcoast High School. I am in the 10th grade. I want to go to a good school and the local schools are full of gangs, drugs and violence. But, this year, things are worse. A lot of students smoke weed, gamble and sell drugs during class. The restrooms always smell like weed. Lately, I have seen guns on the campus. I was a straight A student, but it is getting more difficult to be a good student while surrounded by all these distractions. I am working on bringing my grades back to all A's again, but the first semester this year was really difficult.

I need a good education because I want to become someone. Education is the most important thing in my life. I want to become a neurologist. That means I need to go to a good school. If I can get a decent high school education, then I can go to a good college. For that reason, I'm applying to a private school. I think a private school can give me the education that I need. My family can't afford the cost of a private school. That's why I am asking help from this scholarship fund.

If you can help me, it will completely change my life and the future will offer hope. I will be in a position to achieve my goals and be able to give back to others.

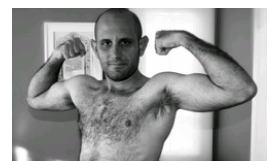
We wrote about Ankara and her tutor Patti Berman in our September 2005 newsletter. (check it out on our web site). Patti continues to be a major influence in Ankara's life. Patti believes in Ankara so much that she planted the idea of finding a better school. She encourages her to excel and promoted the scholarship fund to her. We hope you, dear reader, will support this scholarship fund so that children like Ankara can become neurologists or teachers or plumbers or anything else they want to be. (www.schoolonwheels.org/giving)

Chubalooza Fun Raiser

At the beginning of every year Ross Novie makes the same resolution: to lose about 15 pounds to get to his ideal "fighting weight" of 160. This, despite the fact that he has no interest in fighting anyone. As Ross would tell you, he is a lover not a fighter. This annual resolution has gone on for a few years now without Ross ever hitting his goal. But Ross vowed this year would be different.

Ross considered what would force him to hit his target. The answer became obvious: a bet with Jeffrey Rothman, his oldest friend and most competitive rival. Ross, who was roughly the same size as Jeff, called him up. Fortunately for both of them, Jeff told Ross that on that very day, he had been unable to fit into a prized pair of pants. Ross immediately challenged Jeff to a diet weight down. And he accepted.

Exactly at midnight on January 7th there was a weigh-in. They had both looked better. The rules were simple. Whoever lost more pounds by March 5th won the bet. To make the competition a little bit more interesting, Ross and Jeff asked friends to pledge money based on pounds lost by their favored competitor. Any money pledged and collected would be divided between two charities. So the real winners are School on Wheels and Light of Life Foundation for Thyroid Cancer. Because of this fierce competition, School on Wheels received a purse of over \$3,000! We won't tell you who won, but you can find out by going to Ross' website <http://homepage.mac.com/rossnovie/Chubalooza>. We should warn you though, it's a little bit scary because the site displays before and after pictures. This is the after!





School on Wheels

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We are happy to welcome **Orenda Warren** to our team. Orenda is our new Regional Coordinator responsible for South Los Angeles. Her background includes working with Minority AIDS Project and Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Welcome Orenda!

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HOMELESS IN AMERICA

Amy Armstrong was leafing through the LA Weekly when she came across an article: *Coming of Age in the Mouth of Madness*. It's an accurate glimpse into the life of children on Skid Row. So accurate in fact that it made her heart sink.

The article discusses the chaotic lives and desperate circumstances of the children living in what the author called "a local facsimile of Calcutta". When she saw School on Wheels mentioned in the article she called and asked how she could help.

We told her we always need school supplies. So she told her friends and associates about us. Soon there after, she delivered six boxes of

paper, pencils and other school supplies.

We told her about some of the other things we are doing like buying school uniforms, and educational software. So she asked for donations around work, put up handbills and spread the word about us. Soon thereafter, she presented a check to us for \$365.00. "It's not much," she said, "but I'm not done."

Not much? If everyone did what Amy Heartstrong has done, the life of kids on Skid Row would be significantly better that it is now.

If you'd like to read *Coming of Age in the Mouth of Madness*, please go to the News section of our website.

"We know that what we have been doing to address homelessness is not enough, and that the cost of our current situation is much too high. That cost can be measured in terms of the diminished health and wellbeing of homeless people, the burden on businesses through impaired access to their goods and services, and the detriment to the general community due to fear and restricted access to our streets and parks. It is a cost measured by the huge expense of health care, incarceration and shelter now dedicated to responding to and containing the problem. And it is a cost marked by the loss of a sense of our humanity when we confront human

intolerable circumstances. When we calculate the sum total of all of this, it is not hard to conclude that we can afford to do better."

UCLA Dean Emeritus Len Schneiderman, member of panel "Bring L.A. Home: The Campaign to End Homelessness."

Wish List

- Educational software
- Educational workbooks
- Laptop or desktop computers
- Laser printer
- School uniforms/supplies