



School on Wheels News

December 2006

None of us has gotten where we are solely by pulling ourselves up from our own bootstraps. We got here because somebody bent down and helped us up.

Thurgood Marshall

Dear Friends,

I consider myself a very lucky person. I had a dream and it has come true. Not many people can say that. In the beginning, I just wanted to give a couple of homeless kids a chance to get ahead. And while I have a pretty good imagination, I never anticipated that this little idea would grow as it has to over 350 tutors, helping thousands of homeless children with their studies and trying to get them to dream a dream. It's hard to have a dream when you're homeless.

My dream exists and expands not just because I dreamed it. It exists because of the kindness and generosity of people like you. It starts with a dedicated staff that sees working here not so much as a job, but as an extension of what they believe in. They always do more than they have to. They are always thinking of ways to help the homeless children we serve.

It continues with our tutors and volunteers - people like Eileen McAndrews who coordinates our program in a run down hotel in skid row and improves the life of so many homeless children; Max Ho who uses his own money and time to fix and rebuild computers so that our students can use them; and, Valerie Cavanaugh, Robin Cusato, Jack Davis and Marie Green who have been wonderful tutors with us for over 10 years.

My dream is supported and made possible by our donors, caring people who want to help those less fortunate than themselves. I've noticed that a dream comes true, but not always the way you dreamed it. I never dreamed that School on Wheels would be sustained by such generosity. You donate your money, computers, backpacks full of supplies, your time, your ideas for children you may never meet, but for whom you have given a ray of hope. How's that for a dream!

But life's rich pageant has the bitter as well as the sweet. I see the despair, trauma and hopelessness of a generation of children who through no fault of their own are homeless. Neal Young sings: "there's one more kid who will never go to school, never get to fall in love, never be cool." With your help, we will do our best to change that.

We are coming to the close of another exciting year for School on Wheels. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for making my dream come true. May the blessings and kindness of the season be with you all year long.

Agnes Stevens

Founder and Executive Director

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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TUTOR TALES

Tamar

Tamar has been tutoring with School on Wheels for about a year. But she feels she has been tutoring her whole life. "It's not that I think I have a wealth of knowledge; it's just that I want to help children who can't help themselves," says Tamar. "I've tutored kids with cerebral palsy, disadvantaged kids, homeless kids. Some of these kids have had terrible experiences. Many have never heard anyone say 'good job' or 'I love you'. They see bad things happen day after day and they get numb. They have to - it's their way of protecting themselves."

Tamar wanted our students to understand that there's much more than just life on skid row. She came up with the idea of a trip to the zoo. She thought seeing giraffes and elephants would be a good change of pace and it might even open them up to some of the wonders beyond their world. "We went from one animal to the other. We went to the petting zoo. We saw the bird show" says Tamar. "While we were going from one attraction to the next, I noticed one of the little boys bending down and looking at something on the sidewalk with great interest. I went over to see what had caught his attention."



"What is that?" he said, pointing. "That's an earth worm." I said. "An earth worm...wow! Can you take a picture of it?" he asked. And Tamar did. You can see a few other photographs of their trip to the zoo on our website (www.schoolonwheels.org/kidscorner).

When the traffic is just right, Tamar commutes two hours to tutor for one hour. Some days are better than others. But a few weeks ago something happened that put tutoring in perspective for her. At the end of a session with six kids, each child presented her with big red hearts they had cut out. In glittering letters, each one read *I love you Tamar*. "I took them home and framed them," says Tamar. "It doesn't get much better than that."

Mary

Every time Mary Nadler reads a story about an act of kindness, she cuts it out and adds it to her volunteer folder. For example, one article that immediately comes to mind is how volunteers at a post office took it upon themselves to help Santa answer all the letters sent to him at their facility. Mary opens this file from time to time when she needs a little inspiration or to find an opportunity to volunteer her services. About four years ago, Mary read an article about School on Wheels and called us. And she's been a dedicated tutor ever since.

To give you an idea of how she perceives tutoring, she'll tell you about Kennyatta. Kennyatta was 16 and one of those guys you might cross to the other side of the street when you saw him coming your way. He looked tough.

"But he wasn't," says Mary. "He was the sweetest boy, thoughtful, intelligent, rather shy and very embarrassed to be living in a shelter." Mary believes, as do so many of our good tutors, that it's very important to understand what interests the student she's tutoring. "I think once you do that," says Mary "you can design lessons around those interests."

Kennyatta told Mary he enjoyed drawing which brought a big smile to her face. She told Kennyatta she was a freelance cartoonist. Over the course of their sessions together, they shared drawings and talked about the many styles of drawing and painting he never knew about. She talked his school counselor into giving him more art classes. She loaned him art books. She bought him art supplies. She told him he was good enough to get into art school. But she also told him he would never get there unless his grades improved. Well, you know what happened next; he worked harder on his studies, his posture changed, he looked you in the eye.

Then his family moved and Mary never heard from him again.

"I wanted him to realize he could make a living by drawing. I wanted to inspire him to go for it. I hope I helped him. I hope he got as much out of our sessions as I did," says Mary thoughtfully.

"But let me tell you about a charming little girl named Dre-una" says Mary, her face opening into a big smile. "I call her Miss Flower and she calls me Miss Butterfly!"

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND BEAUTY

Giving Makes Cents

Christine Lee is always thinking about the education of children. Her job as an Independent Education Counselor reflects that commitment. She feels her role as a caring mother demands it. Over the summer, Christine thought a lot about how she could help the Parent Association of Crestview Preparatory School organize a fund drive as some form of community service, a cause dear to the heart of the school's principal, Marge Hana.

"I came to the conclusion," Christine says, "that although everyone wants to do good and be a part of doing good, most parents don't have a lot of time beyond their daily responsibilities and duties. So I knew that whatever I proposed had to be easy."

Her goal for this year isn't necessarily to raise a lot of money (although the campaign is coming along very nicely, thank you) or to help a great number of needy people (although it will). Her goal is to provide the students of Crestview Prep with an opportunity to build awareness about the world outside their cozy comfort zone. She wanted to organize an activity that would instill in them the understanding that community service isn't about cutting a big check, but rather about a lifestyle.

So she decided to involve the students by starting a penny drive. She named it "Giving Makes Cents". And we are the proud recipient of their efforts. Matt Raab, Team Leader for School on Wheels, went to Crestview to talk about homeless children and how much the students would be helping them. The kids have responded in a very inspirational way.



The drive has been building with each week. And so has the amount of pennies in each classroom jar. Some of the kids are now donating their allowances. Some have sold things they don't use anymore and donated the money. And, like everything else that is good, the more people know about it, the more those people dig in...dig into their couches and dig into their pockets for any loose change. The monetary results won't be in until the end of the year. But we can thank Christine Lee, Ms.Hana, the students of Crestview Prep, as well as their friends and parents right now for the wonderful way they have served their community in general and School on Wheels in particular.

Giving Thanks

School on Wheels is successful through the efforts of thousands of people who, without fanfare, give so unselfishly of themselves. We sometimes forget the magnificence of that collective generosity until we need someone or something.

The volunteers who tutor for School on Wheels make a huge difference in the life of a homeless child and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We have other volunteers who, for many reasons can't tutor, but want to help improve our students' lives. Thank you to Matthew Solari who is always there whenever we need help with the web site and all things technological. Mike Kelley not only tutors four times a week, he does arts and crafts with our students in skid row. Tyler Vernon organizes and drives groups of students from Pepperdine University to our skid row learning center to help the kids there. Max Ho spends untold hours refurbishing computers for us. So does Lottie Cherin. Lois Baar gives us good consultant advice, as does Darlene Martini. Jen Polenzani tutors and provides her marketing expertise. Bonni Billingham Harner tutors and provides all sorts of expertise. Tom Jeremiassen is great with numbers and Lancer Shull is great with databases. And a big thank you to Karmen Estlow who has been keeping our staff energized with her homemade cookies and cakes since 1999! Thank you to all of you. You are a part of a vast network that is making a difference in the lives of the homeless kids we see every day.

If you have a story you'd like to share, please call Al Earle at (805) 649-1945 or send him an e-mail: aearle@meekassoc.com

Family Volunteering

Why not bring the kids along? Children between the ages of 12 and 18 can become volunteer tutors if they are accompanied by a parent or guardian. Family volunteering not only provides a sharing experience, but gives children and teenagers a greater awareness and understanding of homelessness and a sense of community responsibility.



School on Wheels

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We are happy to welcome Yannoula Kusulas and Esteban Martinez to our team. Yannoula is our new Operations Coordinator and Esteban is our Regional Coordinator responsible for skid row and downtown Los Angeles. Welcome Yannoula and Esteban!

Non-Profit Mail

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Malibu, CA

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IN THE NEWS

School on Wheels has been in the news recently. (Thank you Edoardo!) If you find yourself in a waiting room, look through all those old magazines lining the wall or spilling out of the tall mound on a too small table until you come to the November 13 issue of **People Magazine**. There's some good stuff in there about Michael J. Fox and his courageous battle with Parkinson's disease, as well as speculation about various stars and their problems! Then, after you read those stories, turn to page 92 for an article on Agnes and School on Wheels. The article will give you insight into Agnes' approach to helping homeless children. And check out the photograph of our staff who keep us running as smoothly as we do.

We've been talking up a storm on radio including interviews on KROQ 106.7, The Beat 100.3, KZLA 93.9, KBLA 1580, and mentioned on National Public Radio, KRUZ 97.5 and MAGIC 106.3. Newspaper articles have featured us in LA Opinion, LA Weekly, and the Ventura County Star. We have also been highlighted on television stations KABC-TV Los Angeles and Univision.

The everyday kindness of the back roads more than makes up for the acts of greed in the headlines.

Charles Kuralt

Wish List

- *Educational software*
- *Educational workbooks*
- *Laptop or desktop computers*
- *School uniforms*
- *School supplies*
- *Backpacks*
- *Educational board games*
- *Calculators*