



# School on Wheels News

July 2008

"If we are to reach real peace in this world... we shall have to begin with children."  
Mahatma Gandhi

Dear Friends:

In our last newsletter, I told you how honored I was to have been nominated for what is known as the Children's "Nobel Prize" by the **World's Children's Prize For The Rights Of The Child** ([www.childrensworld.org](http://www.childrensworld.org)). In this issue, you will read about the trip to Sweden to accept the World's Children Honorary Award from HM Queen Silvia and some of the wonderful experiences we had. Brianna, Ed, Matt and Catherine will share their most important memories and you can see some of the photographs.

For me, it wasn't just receiving a prestigious award, although that was special. It wasn't just meeting the Queen although that didn't hurt either. It wasn't the cameras or the interviews, although I couldn't help but be a little flattered. What made the trip so special for me was the acknowledgement that we are now part of the world community. Hundreds of the kids we met already knew our story and they wanted to meet us because they knew we were helping other kids.

It started with the welcome at the airport ..... we were all weary after our 14-hour journey to Sweden. That feeling lasted about 30 seconds. As we got off the plane and began our walk through the Stockholm airport, we were greeted by 25 children who began to cheer when they saw us. They held up welcoming banners and signs and presented us with armfuls of flowers. TV and print media were there recording the event and I gave the first of what would turn out to be many interviews. We certainly had not expected anything like this. But it proved to be the usual greeting we would receive as we attended press conferences and talked in school auditoriums throughout Sweden over the following two weeks.

Meeting and living with children from around the world who represent so much of the suffering that children live with each day was humbling. Those children and young teens will forever be an inspiration to me as they laughed and danced and played together.

They have much to teach the world.  
They certainly taught me.

Warm regards,

Agnes Stevens  
Founder & Executive Director



Ed, Queen Silvia, Agnes and Brianna



### Wish List

- Backpacks
- School uniforms
- School supplies
- Educational workbooks
- Laptop or desktop computers
- Gift certificates or vouchers for school supplies

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## The Award Ceremony

The event was held in one of the splendid ceremonial rooms in Gripsholm Castle in the hamlet of Mariefred, about 1½ hours from Stockholm. The audience was there to celebrate the achievements of three great women fighting for a better world and for more respect for children's rights. After a few welcoming remarks from Queen Silvia and representatives of the Swedish government, groups of children from Africa, Vietnam and Sweden performed – singing and dancing beautifully. Then the lights dimmed and on a large screen at the back of the stage, a five-minute video began. It described what Agnes and our dedicated staff and volunteers are doing to help homeless children in Southern California.

The lights came up and all the people in the room, including Queen Sylvia, stood up and applauded our efforts. The queen presented Agnes with an award in recognition of what she and we have accomplished. Agnes walked to the podium and began to speak. She and the two other recipients had been given one minute to talk to the world about the cause to which they had dedicated their lives.

Suppose you had one minute to tell the world about the plight of the more than one million homeless children in America. What would you say? Here is what Agnes said.

*"To the children of the jury who are the voices for millions of children throughout the world, to Ed, Brianna, Matt Raab, Catherine Meek, School on Wheels and the hundreds of our volunteers, to Josefina and Somaly, I am proud to be standing with you for the rights of the child and I thank you for embracing the 1.3 million homeless children in the United States. To the WCPRC, thank you for providing the platform for the rights of the child to be heard loudly and clearly throughout the world, especially the most forgotten in the U.S.—the homeless child.*

*Through the education of each child, adults helping children, children helping children, together we are strengthened in our purpose so that no child is ever left standing alone or forgotten."*



*Queen Silvia, Agnes Stevens, Somaly Mam, Josefina Condori and the prize delegation.*

## The Children of the Jury

The children of the jury are elected on the basis of their merits and their own experiences. The jury is composed of children who represent as many different aspects of rights of the child as possible.

Bwami was nine when his village was attacked by one of the armed groups in the war in Congo. He fled into the forest but was captured and forced to become a child soldier. "I hate the fact that adults forced me to do awful things to others" says Bwami. "I want to fight for children to be treated well, not only in Congo but all over the world."

Hannah, 11, is Canada's youngest advocate for the homeless. She started a foundation when she was eight and has since raised over a million dollars for homeless projects and organizations.

Rakesh was six years old and tending the family's cattle when he was kidnapped and sold as a slave in India. He was drugged and had to work 18 hours a day. "Children should not be forced to work as I had to," says Rakesh, "we have rights."



*Queen Silvia and the children of the jury*

## Memories

### Brianna

I loved getting dressed up for the ceremony. My Mom bought me a beautiful blue dress and I picked out long white gloves to go with it. I never thought I'd meet a queen one day. She was very nice and told me she liked my hair. I loved going to all the schools and being treated like a rock star! Kids asked me for my autograph. I signed 45 autographs at one school!



Brianna the rock star!

### Catherine

As Agnes walked to the podium to receive this amazing award from Queen Silvia and millions of children around the world, I felt incredibly proud and excited to be part of an organization like School on Wheels. I thought of all the hardships, fears, setbacks and frustrations that Agnes had overcome to make School on Wheels happen. Ed and Brianna standing next to her reminded me of the beauty, courage and potential of children.....the children of the jury who have been child soldiers, have watched their families murdered, have been raped and sold into slavery and brothels. And yet .....they danced and sang – like children. They laughed and cried – like children. They played soccer and video games – like children. They fight for their rights—as children.

Let us all come together to defend the rights of the child, especially those homeless children among us, who through circumstances beyond their control cannot help themselves. I demand the rights of the child.

### Ed

It was cool being with other kids from all over the world. Some of them were musicians, some of them were from places I had never heard of. I liked playing soccer with the kids and the adults as well. I liked going to Stockholm and all the other places, but the best part was making new friends. Now I can email them and if I ever go to Africa or Israel, I have friends to stay with.



Ed with friends Gabatschwane, Brianna, Alex, Tommy

### Matt

Everywhere we went, we could feel the rich history in the castles, cobblestone roads and architecture dating back hundreds of years. These impressions were made all the more lasting because we were with Brianna and Ed, who had scarcely been outside of Los Angeles. I will never forget seeing them and Agnes standing on stage in Gripsholm Castle with the Queen of Sweden. Besides the ceremony, the most important part of the trip for me was meeting the child jury, musicians, delegates and representatives from all over the world and watching Ed and Brianna become friends so quickly with all of them. All the children who were there are inspirations to me and give me hope for the future. The kids in the schools we visited asked about our lives, what we do each day, and how old we were! The most interesting questions were for Ed and Brianna. They were about their everyday interests — Do you have a best friend? Do you have a girlfriend/boyfriend? Have you learned to do an Ollie on your skateboard? It was really interesting how many things are universal to kids. Ed was asked what his favorite video game was and his response “World of Warcraft” elicited excited reactions from the students.

What I came away with is this: if children from around the world can come together, love and respect each other, and put their differences aside for the common good of all, then why can't adults?



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## IN THE NEWS

We are now able to serve more children through the opening of two new locations. Last month, donors, community leaders, council members, School on Wheels' board members, staff, volunteers and students were present for opening of the School on Wheels' South Los Angeles Learning Center. John Hope Bryant, Founder, Chairman and CEO of Operation HOPE and Reverend Cecil Murray, one of our Board members, talked about the need for our presence in the community. Regional Coordinator, Orenda Warren says that the afternoon was "a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of homeless children in our community."



In June, we also opened an administrative office in Ventura. Our operations and regional team will operate from here and we can now hold tutor orientation and training programs at this location.

OfficeMax, our generous supporter, donated furniture and supplies, to both locations. Handing Out Hope ([www.handingouthope.org](http://www.handingouthope.org)) provided wonderful new computers and printers. Thank you to all our donors who made it possible to help more children.



Here are just a few of the publications and media outlets that have been talking about School on Wheels recently. Read more at [www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org)

**CNN World Report, 5/10/2008**, within its Women Issues theme broadcasts a piece on The World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child. Agnes Stevens, Somaly Mam and Josefina Condori are interviewed on CNN.

**Ojai Valley News, 5/23/2008**, article reviews Board member & COO, Catherine Meek's trip to Sweden with Agnes Stevens who received the Children's Nobel Prize.

**Ventura County Star, 5/27/2008**, discusses School on Wheels' program in Ventura county .