



# School on Wheels News

March 2008

**There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.** *Nelson Mandela*

Dear Friends:

So much of the news today creates uncertainty: wars, loss of jobs, homes, health care. Many feel the stress of this economic threat, so I hope this month's newsletter will lift your spirits. You, as a School on Wheels' volunteer, donor, and friend, have accomplished much and are part of our organization forever.

2008 marks our fifteenth year as a nonprofit organization. Thousands of children and teens have been helped and discovered that they can learn and be in charge of their own learning as they continue through school. They know that hope is real and hope is strong and that they have a future when they become adults. You should all feel very proud.

2008 represents a spotlight on our organization from the **World's Children's Prize For The Rights Of The Child (WCPRC)**. I am honored to have been nominated for what is known as the Children's "Nobel Prize". WCPRC is the world's largest annual educational initiative for children on human rights, democracy and global citizenship. 35,000 schools with over 16 million students in 87 countries support the WCPRC. All students at these schools have the right to vote in the Global Vote. However, very few of these are in the U.S. We are trying to change that. I hope you will take a moment to read more about this organization at: [www.childrensworld.org](http://www.childrensworld.org)

On April 13, two of our students, Brianna and Ed will accompany me and three School on Wheels' team members to the awards ceremony at Gripsholm Castle in Sweden where HM Queen Silvia will preside. The whole ceremony is run by children from around the world who this year have selected me and two wonderful women from Peru and Cambodia. Just imagine: Brianna, 11, and Ed, 12, will represent all our homeless children in America as they join the millions of children throughout the world coming together to understand the struggle of children everywhere and experience the courageous stories of survival and support for each other. They will be flown with us as guests of this Swedish organization and together we will all be the voice for the most forgotten in our society: the homeless kindergartners to the twelfth graders who live in uncertainty every day, in scary situations day and night, who move constantly and are still doing their number one job as an American child: going to school and learning.

As I take this journey to Sweden (I am so very humbly proud, excited and happy), each of you will be with me. My wish is that you will look at how you have helped School on Wheels and recognize that because of you, a child walks with more confidence, feels safer, and carries hope over fear in their heart because they are learning and know they are not alone. Our future as a community, country and world will be stronger no matter what unfortunate happenings are around us.

Warm regards,

Agnes Stevens

Founder & 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.

## Wish List

- Educational software (all grades)
- Laptop or desktop computers
- Laser printers
- School uniforms
- School supplies
- Educational workbooks

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## OUR DREAM HOMES

*There are over a million homeless children in the US. They live in shelters, in cars, in motels and on the street. Their families have ended up homeless for different reasons but they have one thing in common: they all dream of a home of their own where they can be safe and happy. Read about some of our students' dream homes as featured in The Globe Magazine from The World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child. [www.childrensworld.org](http://www.childrensworld.org)*



Jarifri, 11

**Dream home:** A blue house with a black door in Las Vegas, because I like all the lights there. We'll have four bedrooms, four wardrobes and two bathrooms.

"Me, my brother and my parents live in a small motel room. Lots of homeless people live here. Frank, my tutor from School on Wheels, comes here once a week and helps me with my homework. Since we started working together, my grades have gone up. I've got a red belt in taekwondo. I started learning martial arts for self-defense. There are a lot of bullies at my school."



Matthew, 12

**Dream home:** A big house with a huge TV and a skate park out back.

"The worst thing about being homeless is having to change school all the time. I've been to three different schools in the last year. I'm always nervous when I change school, it's hard to try to fit in and make new friends. Right now I live in a shelter with my mom, two sisters and two brothers. I have a tutor from School on Wheels who is really great. I hope she can keep helping me even if we move again. We've lived in different shelters and motels, and this is the best place so far. Our last shelter was in a rough area with a lot of gangs. They were always shooting at night. But I miss the friends I made there. My dream for the future is to stop the violence and to become a professional skater or a police officer."



Shatrea, 12

**Dream home:** A big pink house with four bedrooms, a big kitchen and a backyard with swings, no, a whole playground. I want my own room, in blue and white.

"We've been homeless since mom left our dad because he was mean to her. We've lived in lots of different places. With relatives, in motels and in a car. For a while we moved almost every day. Now we live in transitional housing. It's called that because we've come halfway to getting an apartment of our own. Mom works and saves money so we can survive. This shelter is pretty good. There's a playground outside and there are lots of kids to play with. School on Wheels built a special learning room with books, drawing stuff and computers. I go there to draw and to meet my tutor."

## ACTS OF KINDNESS AND BEAUTY



**Antoinette Holland and William Buys of Westview Services, Inc.** for volunteering their group's talents every week to fill backpacks with school supplies, organizing books and general filing at our Downtown Center. Westview Services is a non-profit organization that enables people with disabilities to meet the challenges of daily life, gain tools to be contributing members of the workforce, and lead more fulfilling lives.

**Bob Morris and the Paradise Cove residents** for pulling off yet another amazing holiday party for our students.



Bob and a big fish!

- **Matthew Solari** for always being there to help us with our technical frustrations and getting our new website up and running. Happy Birthday, Matthew.
- **Hugh Best** and Caladex for storing and delivering 1000's of backpacks and school supplies.
- Temple Judeah and Michael Opell for their ongoing support and the hundreds of backpacks and school supplies they provide to our students every year.



Our computer 'Man Friday', **Max Ho**, for always being on call to fix, reconfigure and set up the dozens of computers that are donated to School on Wheels. Joanne our Operations Coordinator, says "Max is awesome I do not know what we would do without him. He never asks for anything in return. One day we are going to surprise him!"

## TUTOR TALES



Chris and Xelena, at The Lighthouse Shelter, Oxnard, Ventura County.

**Chris Sibrel** is a Mechanical Engineer and has been a School on Wheels' tutor for six short weeks. But in that time he has:

- Tutored his student Xelena over two hours every week (and logged their tutoring sessions online at [www.schoolonwheels.org/tutorcenter/log](http://www.schoolonwheels.org/tutorcenter/log) your hours).
- He has spoken with her teacher, gone through her report card and put together a tutoring plan of action.
- He has motivated his student to get organized and complete outstanding assignments. For Spring Break, Chris is taking Xelena and her sister ice-skating!

"Xelena is smart but she needs direction. I became a volunteer tutor because I value my time and wanted to do something to stop the cycle of homelessness" Chris is exactly right; he is a skilled mathematician and scientist and is putting his valuable time and talents to great use. Xelena could not ask for a better tutor and School on Wheels is honored to have Chris as part of the tutoring team. Keep up the good work!

**Amy Stenftenagel** has been a School on Wheels' tutor for two years now. She is still tutoring the same student, George and has recently started tutoring his brother, Gabe. Amy met the boys and their mom just after they had run away from their home and escaped to a confidential shelter after years of domestic violence and abuse at the hands of George and Gabe's Dad. The shelter was small, but fortunately it had room for them. They were even more fortunate because Amy Stef was there.

"Amy is very valuable to us," says Sue, the manager of the shelter. "She is always there for the boys and goes above and beyond what is expected of her. "

Sue is also thankful to Amy for coming with her to parent teacher conferences and pushing the school to provide additional service for the boys. Amy worries about George. She says, "He's stressed out with the pressure of school. He shuts down a lot and struggles with his self confidence. He tells me that everyone is smarter than he is." Amy is sure this is a direct result of the abuse he suffered and was witness to.

George and Gabe's mom was very brave to leave their dad it is reported that women who leave their batterers are at 75% greater risk of severe injury or death than those who stay. (Source: Barbara Hart, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1988).

Amy understands what a hard life can do to you. Her dad left her mom when she was 5 and they lived with relatives for many years until they could afford a house of their own. She also knows first hand the importance one person can make in a child's life. She wants to be that person for George and Gabe. And she is.

Amy is doing more than her share to improve the quality of their lives. She is not only one of our many dedicated volunteer tutors. She is also a School on Wheels' Volunteer Coordinator. In that role, Amy makes sure that the families and the children have what they need for school: uniforms, backpacks, school supplies, books, and, of course, a good tutor.

We want to support her efforts. So when Sue the House Manager told us that the children there are in desperate need of school uniforms and backpacks and that they would love to have a house computer that would give them access to the web, we said we would get them everything they need. And we did.



**Amy** says **George** and **Gabe** they are the sweetest boys ever. And from the above photo, who can disagree?

### In Memoriam

**Nicole Louise Flaten**, one of our long-time volunteer tutors, died in a tragic accident while climbing Mount Wilson with a group of friends in February. Nicole was one of those very special people who knew how to give of herself. She was a Peace Corps' volunteer in Romania, built houses in Mexico for a nonprofit, collected and served food to the homeless. She was also an engineer who participated in triathlons, rode 100 miles on a bike across Wisconsin, played piano and cello. She was a remarkable young woman, quiet by nature and a doer in acting on her beliefs to make a difference in the world. We will miss her.



# School on Wheels

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## IN THE NEWS

We have a dedicated team who are here to help you. Check out our website to find out more information about our amazing staff. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome two new team members, Linda Huddle and Blue McDonnell. We are very excited that they have joined Team School on Wheels.

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School on Wheels is being written about, talked about, filmed and photographed. The news about what we do and who we help is spreading.

For more detailed information and to read the latest articles/listen to the news stories, please visit our new look website and click on Awards and News

[www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org)

Here are just a few of the publications and media outlets that have been talking about School on Wheels recently:

**NBC Nightly News**—3/14/08, Making a Difference report with Ann Curry.

**KCAL 9**—2/12/08, The Good News Foundation and Office Max made the donation of computers and school supplies to School on Wheels, Harold Greene reports.

**NPR—KCLU**, 2/5/08 Tutoring program helps kids in Santa Barbara and Ventura, Lance Orosco reports.

**KNBC News**— 12/29/07 Homeless Special, Kim Baldonado reports.