



**school on wheels inc.**  
Tutoring Homeless Children Since 1993

## Newsletter

July 2009



### THE FOUNDER'S MESSAGE

*"I was so proud of being smart I never wanted people to say, 'You got the easy way out because you're homeless,' " she said. "I never saw it as an excuse. I think about how I can convince my peers about the value of education. . . . I have found that after all the teasing, these peers start to respect me . . . I decided that I could be the one to uplift my peers . . . My work is far reaching and never finished." Khadijah Williams, School on Wheels student for many years, on her way to Harvard. (See In The News, page 4).*

Dear Friends,

Graduation is an event that is full of joy, excitement and a sense of accomplishment. There is a certain feeling of pride in a job well done through hard work and the help and support of countless people. This newsletter relates some remarkable stories of School on Wheels students who have graduated from high school and will be stepping into the halls of colleges; and those of middle school students who have conquered what I see as the most difficult years of any student and are heading into the next phase: high school. Hundreds of our students graduated from the safe, warm environment found in elementary schools to now enter the unknown: middle school. All these students had our volunteers standing with them who will now witness their students entering a new phase in their lives. Be proud of yourself as each of you have a part in our students' educational journey, no matter where it takes them. The confidence, joy and excitement they feel is due to the dedication of our volunteers and the generosity of our donors.

In June, 1993, I wrote my first newsletter on a plain piece of paper to less than twenty people; today, thousands receive this newsletter. I, too, am ready to graduate and move on to the next phase of my life. I do so full of joy, excitement and a sense of accomplishment! As a Founder, words can not express the wonder and gratitude that I have in my heart for our donors, our volunteers, our School on Wheels' team and our Executive Board. I will be witnessing the unfolding of School on Wheels under new leadership bringing educational assistance to the ever growing number of children and teens who have no place to call home and no school to call their own. I have requested Catherine Meek (President of our Board and a volunteer tutor for several years) to take on the role of Acting Executive Director so that I can focus on the Founder's Challenge and as an advocate for the homeless child in their struggle to receive an education. Catherine is deeply dedicated to our educational mission for homeless children and has enhanced School on Wheels over the years so that we can assure everyone we are a solid, focused organization.

I will still be around, dedicating a great deal of my time to raising funds through the Founder's Challenge to find 5,000 new donors who can donate or raise \$100 a year for our educational mission. I will also be open to what I will be in my next phase of life – I truly do not know, except that like all of us graduating this year, it will be challenging, exciting and joyous!

Warm regards,

Agnes Stevens  
Founder

#### OUR MISSION

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

#### WE NEED YOU!

There are hundreds of homeless children in Southern California who need you to tutor them for just one hour per week.

*Experience is not necessary* -- just the desire to make a difference in a child's life. For more information, visit: [www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org) and view the "Volunteer" section.

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The BUS Program.....	2
Student Success.....	2-3
In the News.....	4
Wish List.....	4

## Michael and Raphael



Michael's mother was in the hospital in a coma for several months. Michael, who was 14 at the time stayed with his best friend from the football team. Every other week, Michael stayed with his mom in the hospital. "It was hard. I had to grow up fast."

When his mom's condition improved and she was finally released from the hospital, they had nowhere to go. They moved into the Project Stepping Stone homeless shelter in Long Beach, California. Michael didn't tell anyone at school about his personal difficulties. He was afraid people would look down on him. His grades dropped and he almost lost his place on the football team. "Through School on Wheels I got a tutor, Raphael. With his help, I managed to catch up and get through my school work."

Fast forward three years, Michael and his mom are now living in permanent housing. His mom, Lisa, works for the homeless shelter where they previously lived. And School on Wheels is proud to let you know that Michael graduated from high school in June and will attend college in the fall.

His mom attributes some of Michael's success to his continued relationship with his tutor. "Raphael has been a blessing in disguise; he became more than a tutor, he is Michael's life coach and big brother. We know he is only a phone call away. When we lived in the shelter it was a relief for me to know that there was another adult in Michael's life that cared about his success at school as much as I did. When you live in a homeless shelter it is hardest on the kids, they have no one to vent their frustrations and anger on. Raphael was always there to listen to Michael."

School on Wheels asked Michael if he had any advice to give to other kids living in homeless situations. "There is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Don't give up, it will pass. I didn't want a tutor at first. My mom made me; but when I met Raphael he seemed to understand me and my age and when he talked he seemed kinda wise."

School on Wheels has helped him a lot over the years, he said. "I always had a new backpack and the scientific calculator was a real bonus." After moving into permanent housing, Michael still meets Raphael every week, but they now meet at coffee shops, cafes and book stores. They go to lunch from time to time and talk about their shared interests, mainly football. Michael is looking forward to college and is planning to be a firefighter. In the fall, he will be attending The Fire Academy at Rio Hondo College.

School on Wheels is so proud of Michael and how he stayed focused on his school work throughout the most difficult times. His mom says that he is a typical teenager, but we think that he is extraordinary and we wish him all the success in the future.

School on Wheels has invited Michael to apply for The Catherine McAulay Meek Scholarship. To become eligible for consideration of this annual award, a student from a homeless family must demonstrate through their grades and contributions a desire to serve their community and make the world a better, more peaceful place. It sounds like Michael is a perfect candidate. We will keep you posted. For more information about our scholarship program, please visit our website, [www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org).

## BUS PROGRAM



School on Wheels' **Believe, Understand, Succeed (BUS) Program** was developed to provide specialized educational and career services to homeless youth from eighth through twelfth grade. Our goal is to strengthen their education, encourage them to earn a high school diploma, and motivate them to pursue careers that they never thought possible in order to achieve a productive and stable future.

It is difficult for our teenage students to imagine a future as their families struggle with the day-to-day existence of living in a shelter. A job, a career seem unobtainable goals that are beyond their reach. The BUS program provides resources for our students and their tutors so they can plan, create and achieve their career goals. We have taken students on several field trips and campus tours, including Santa Monica College, UCLA and Cal State University Channel Islands. They also visited LuRoss Beauty Academy in Ventura. On a recent campus tour, one student was amazed that students actually live on campus and for the first time, she realized that she too could go to college and not worry about where she lived. The BUS program has come a long way since its inception last summer. We have developed the materials and completed a pilot program. With our students' feedback, we have created interactive materials for our Tutor Center on our website. We are really proud of how much our volunteer tutors want to help and see their teenage students succeed.

### Luis and Jack



Tutor Jack Sandoval & Regional Coordinator  
Linda Huddle

Luis is eighteen and has been in the foster youth system since he was taken away from his family home when he was fourteen. In June, he graduated from high school and in the fall will start college. We are very proud of his achievement, but we are also worried.

97% of foster youth do not go to college, and less than half complete high school. Up to 50% of former foster youth become homeless within the first eighteen months of emancipation. (National Foster Care Statistics: 'On the Move')

School on Wheels works with youth in group foster homes and because of the commitment of our dedicated volunteers and staff, we are hearing more success stories like those of Luis. He has overcome the first two statistics, but can he avoid the third?

School on Wheels talked to Luis and asked him about his experience as a foster youth, as a participant of our BUS program and how we can help him succeed in his goals, now and in the future. We asked Luis what advice he would give other youth in foster care. "I would

tell them to stay motivated; it's not the end of the world; follow the rules, above all, follow the rules. No one can get you if you follow rules. If you are angry, talk to someone, exercise, find other ways to release your anger. My tutor, Jack, helped me to stay motivated over the last few months of school and he helped me to learn to trust and rely on him."

Luis, like many foster youth has a big problem with trust, especially trusting adults. "Living in a group home, you are on your own, lots of adults come and go; some say they can help and then you never see them again. School on Wheels and Jack were different. He turned up every week and helped me. At first I was like, OK, great, a tutor, but I guess seeing him every week, I got used to him and knew he was there for me."

Luis said that his greatest achievement is graduating from high school and that his greatest fear is: "Being on my own, not having work, not being able to make it. I'm scared of being independent and making the right choices."

We asked how we can help him. "School on Wheels can help me with college. Help me decide what I want to be, give me resources and ideas, help me get school supplies, paper and pens. What I need most is support and advice about transferring colleges, choosing the right courses in the future."

Graduation is a time to celebrate, let your hair down and relax, but not for Luis. By the time you read this, he will have aged out of the foster care system. He does not know where he will live. He may stay with his grandmother or ask friends if he can stay with them. His best friend at school knows that he lives in a group foster home, but his other friends think that he lives in a regular house just like them. Unlike them, he has a 50/50 chance of becoming homeless.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

I have had the pleasure and honor of working with Agnes Stevens and School on Wheels for many years. When Agnes decided to focus her energies on being Founder, I agreed to take on the role of Acting Executive Director. This will not only allow Agnes the opportunity to raise funds for her beloved School on Wheels, but also allow me to continue her vision and contribute to our goal of finding a volunteer tutor for every homeless student in California. Our mission and core beliefs, shared by our exceptional team and Executive Board, will not change.

We believe in:

- Providing educational opportunities for homeless children from kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- Recognizing the courage of our students who continue to learn and achieve in the face of hardships, pain and loneliness.
- Respecting our volunteers who take time out of their busy lives every week to be with and enhance the life of a homeless child.
- Acknowledging our donors who sustain us and help us grow, and providing them with an invaluable return on investment -- an investment in the education and future of the children we serve.

I will continue to work with our Board to ensure School on Wheels' long-term success and to collaborate with our team to reach more volunteers. By doing so, we can encourage more homeless students to go to school, stay in school and achieve in school. I am honored to have the opportunity to fill this role.

Kind regards,

Catherine Meek  
Acting Executive Director



school on wheels inc.  
P.O. Box 2283  
Malibu, CA 90265

Phone: 310.589.2642  
Fax: 310.589.0606

Email: [administration@schoolonwheels.org](mailto:administration@schoolonwheels.org)  
Website: [www.schoolonwheels.org](http://www.schoolonwheels.org)

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Oxnard, CA  
Permit #1691

## IN THE NEWS

Front page story - **Los Angeles Times**, June 19<sup>th</sup> 2009

**Khadijah Williams** graduated on June 12th 2009 with high honors, fourth in her class. She was accepted to more than 20 universities nationwide, including Brown, Columbia, Amherst and Williams. She chose a full scholarship to Harvard and aspires to become an education attorney.

We have known Khadijah, her sister and mother for many years as they came in and out of Skid Row, Orange County and Ventura County shelters. Khadijah had such amazing drive in her and that helped her make it to Harvard. School on Wheels was there for her over the years and to witness that wonderful spirit. How proud we all are of her!

We sent this story to all our tutors and we received many wonderful emails back. Here is an excerpt from one tutor: *"This is such an incredible story! I am humbled and awed by Khadijah's accomplishments. I have my own future Khadijah, whom I work with and tutor on a weekly basis. My student, Jesse, has more drive and intelligence than all of the students in my private tutoring business put together! This year, I was happy to help him achieve a 4.0 over the course of the sixth grade, and together with his mother, I successfully lobbied to have him accepted into his school's 7th grade honors program. He wants to go to UCLA to major in video-game design, or become a professional clarinetist, or a rock and roll star. I can't wait to see what he becomes! I hope that one day, Jesse's story is also splashed on the front pages of the LA Times, as a living tribute to the incredible and joyous work that School on Wheels performs for Los Angeles children."*

Congratulations to all our students and tutors. May there be a thousand more Jesses and Khadijahs in our future!

## WISH LIST

To help prepare our students for the upcoming school year, we are seeking the following donations:

- Backpacks
- School Uniforms
- Educational Software
- Educational Workbooks
- Laptop Computers
- Desktop Computers
- Educational Board Game
- Office Supplies
- Copy Machine