



School on Wheels News

November 2008

I will never forget that the only reason I'm standing here today is because somebody, somewhere stood up for me when it was risky. Stood up when it was hard. Stood up when it wasn't popular. And because that somebody stood up, a few more stood up. And then, a few thousand stood up. And then a few million stood up. And standing up, with courage and clear purpose, they somehow managed to change the world. Barack Obama

Dear Friends,

Thanksgiving is a great word — it combines the thanks and the giving which is the message of this letter. On the top of my list and on behalf of all of you, I thank the homeless children for the joy, inspiration and example of courage and resilience they bring into our lives. It takes so little to help a child or teen, because their response is genuine and an act of kindness or help goes such a long way with them. They carry this experience throughout their lives.

On behalf of all the homeless children and teens, I thank you the volunteer tutors, our financial and material donors and all our friends. Because of you, thousands of children have been helped; may you never forget that **you** are School on Wheels. Think of your giving as helping a little kindergartner going to school for the first time and with the help of a tutor, he/she can be ready to learn; think of a sixth grader entering a new school for the third or fourth time in a year but now doing so with the support of a School on Wheels volunteer who has been with her during her moving; think of a high school student who is failing math, or social studies or exams who all of a sudden has help and is seeing his grades improving. Someone there as a teacher and mentor, having the right supplies, never feeling alone, gives the homeless students a belief in themselves.

Today we are seeing a new group of homeless families who find themselves in a state of shock and frustration. Families who have lost their homes or whose landlords have lost their homes. These families have quickly become homeless. But their children have the same sense of fear, hopelessness, and shame for no real reason other than they have no home and now no school to call their very own. School on Wheels is there for these children too.

We are all in this together and together we give thanks to each other. As the number of homeless families increases, so does the number of students being helped. At this moment thanks to you, 640 tutors - men, women, families - are going out each week to help a homeless student. Now that is something to be proud of - and I hope you are. Thank you for standing up for our homeless children. They will never forget School on Wheels. That means they will never forget you who believed in them.

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

- Gift Cards
- Laptop or desktop computers
- School uniforms
- School supplies
- Backpacks
- Scientific calculators
- Three-ring binders

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TUTOR TALES

Am I My Brother's Keeper?



Jason Rarick applied to become a tutor with us after Googling “at-risk youth” and found our website. On his application he wrote: ‘Owing greatly to my past and present experiences, I have a profound interest in working with at risk children. I have a passionate love for education and the freedom it signifies and want to share that experience with my 16- year old brother.’

When he wrote that, he was going through a rather unique experience. Justin, his 16-year old brother had recently witnessed the murder of his mom’s boyfriend. It was a traumatic event that shook Justin like he’d never been shaken before. And his outlook on life just seemed to get darker and darker. Things began to turn around when his 32-year old brother, asked Justin to move in with him. And their relationship continues to improve now that Jason is his legal guardian. Together they have turned Justin’s despair into triumph.

Jason says that being a tutor has helped him become a better role model and mentor for his brother. He believes strongly that as a School on Wheels tutor he is an “advocate for education and that education is critical for at-risk children. Justin was in survival mode and now, almost a year later, he is doing well in school again and is studying to be a doctor”.

Taking his brother’s lead, Justin has become a tutor too and he and Jason tutor together as a team. One of our Coordinators, Natasha Bayus, matched them up with another two brothers, Raphael, age 6 and 7-year old Kristoff who were living at the time at a shelter in Pasadena. Raphael and Kristoff were delighted to be with Jason and Justin and the interest the other brothers took in them. They were impressed with how Justin and Jason worked so well together and wanted the same thing for themselves. As is often the case, the younger brothers moved to another shelter and even though they were farther away, Justin and Jason moved with them. The brothers still meet once a week .

Jason has seen real results. “They’re academically well above their ages now and as a result, our tutoring hours are not just academic, they’re social too.”

As this is our Thanksgiving Newsletter, we asked Jason and Justin what they are thankful for. Jason said, “I am thankful for what has happened to my brother and me. I am so proud of my brother. He is sensible, calm and rockin’ the school thing. And he even does the laundry!!!”

Justin puts it this way, “I’m thankful for the second chance that Jay has given me and the new positive environment I’m now living in. I’m thankful for being able to do something I really enjoy which is helping the kids. I really enjoy helping others. It makes me feel good. Lots of rough things have happened to these homeless kids, but having a tutor gives them someone to look up to and something for them to look forward to.”

Are we really our brother’s keeper? Justin and Jason think so. And now Raphael and Kristoff do too.

Bonnie Neilson has been tutoring at the Many Mansions after-school program in Thousand Oaks for nearly two years. But her journey with School on Wheels started over six years ago when she first moved to Agoura Hills. She said she was new to the area and was looking to make new friends and help out in the community. She found School on Wheels and remembers vividly her first student Kyle. They met and tutored at a park bench outside his school in Ventura and later in Oxnard. Often times Bonnie battled through the traffic only to find out he was sick that day and hadn’t attended school. Sometimes the weather was not conducive to tutoring, but Bonnie loved the one-on-one relationship she had with Kyle and was there for him week after week.

After Kyle moved into permanent housing, Bonnie began tutoring at the after-school program operated by Many Mansions in Thousand Oaks. Bonnie worked with many students and saw the need first hand for positive adult role models in the life of these children in crisis. So she took her volunteerism one step further. On November 5, 2008, Bonnie was sworn in by a judge in a ceremony in Camarillo as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and will now be working weekly with a foster child in Ventura County, helping them to navigate the system and providing them with the support they so desperately need.



A BIG thank you to Bonnie for her commitment to School on Wheels. Bonnie said that if it wasn’t for her work with School on Wheels she wouldn’t have the confidence to be an advocate for foster youth and knows that she ‘can be a constant in their life.’ Bonnie’s daughter, Lindsay, is a School on Wheels tutor too and a student at UCSB. She meets her student at Transition House in Santa Barbara weekly.

We are sad to say goodbye to Bonnie but we are proud of her and her commitment to making a difference in the life of a child in crisis. Good luck Bonnie and thank you to Lindsay for carrying on where her Mom has left off.

TUTOR TALES

In the summer of 2005, **Jason Wurtz** began tutoring a nine-year old named Keyshawn. While he was a grade or two behind in almost every academic subject, he had a keen perception of the world around him. He remembers telling Keyshawn it was time to go "home" and he immediately corrected him by saying, "the shelter is not my home". Jason tutored Keyshawn for nine months until one day he and his family disappeared. Such is the reality of working with homeless kids. Families tend to move a lot, sometimes without notice. One day they are just gone.



We received news eight months later that Keyshawn was at a new shelter on the west side. His mother asked Jason to tutor him again. Very excited, Jason agreed and trekked to one of his favorite spots, Venice Beach. He arrived at the shelter and was greeted by a large man with an even larger smile. The Pastor walked him down some stairs into a large dining room with rows of long tables. "Keyshawn bounded out of a small adjoining room and practically leapt into my arms," remembers Jason. Jason always had doubts about his impact on Keyshawn. He seemed to enjoy his company, but he sometimes struggled to make progress and often got frustrated. So Jason had a little bit of anxiety about the second time around. After catching up on the last eight months, Jason asked him what he wanted to work on. He jumped out of his seat, marched to the chalk board, and asked Jason for a multiplication problem. He told him five times three. Keyshawn drew three buckets and five apples inside each. "The answer is fifteen," he exclaimed confidently. This floored Jason. Keyshawn used the very same technique he had taught him over a year ago to solve simple multiplication problems. In fact, he remembered a lot of the things Jason taught him. Apparently, he DID make an impact on Keyshawn. This moment helped Jason better understand the important role volunteers can play in the lives of kids like Keyshawn.

It's been two years since Jason's reunion with Keyshawn and his belief in the power of volunteerism is stronger than ever. He knows firsthand the difference they can make.

"I like School on Wheels because you can get on the computers and you have a snack. I like the tutors because they help you with your homework and they play with you." – Desiree

We asked a few of our students at our learning center on skid row why they came for tutoring at School on Wheels and this is what they had to say:

"I like School on wheels because it is fun and we get snacks. I like the tutors because they're good at helping me with my homework" – Khalleel

"They help me improve my report card and they help me with my homework...the tutors are very nice. They help me with my homework so I can improve. They are the best." – Diamond



"They are the best. They help you with your homework and they are all very nice. The best thing about having a tutor is you will get straight A's and B's" – Savannah

"Because it's good so I can be in a safe place and it's fun too. The best thing about School on Wheels is the tutors because they are nice and cool." – Nancy

Thank you to our donors and supporters for providing the resources that enable us to continue to make a difference in the lives of these children and the 1000s of students that we are working with this year alone.

ACTS OF KINDNESS AND BEAUTY

Mitzvah Day

A special thanks to Temple Aliyah and Heschel Day School for honoring School on Wheels on Mitzvah Day. Established at Emanu El in 1992, Mitzvah Day is a congregation community service day created to encourage its members to go out into the community to make a difference in the lives of others. Our Mitzvah Day heroes, Agnes Stevens, Janet Settles and Tutor Coordinator Steve Hibbert were all honored by the above on this special day and received gifts of backpacks and school supplies.



School on Wheels would like to thank

Al Earle for all his hard work over the years writing, editing and producing our newsletter. Al has interviewed many of our tutors and put into words their Acts of Kindness and Beauty. Thank you Al for all your acts of kindness and beauty.

15th Anniversary

School on Wheels celebrated 15 years of service to homeless children on August 20, 2008. Staff, volunteers and friends joined Agnes and Board Members to mark the occasion. Here's to 15 more years making the difference in the lives of homeless children throughout Southern California.



School on Wheels, Staff, Board Members, Tutors and Friends
15th Anniversary Celebrations, Paradise Cove, Malibu
August 21st 2008



School on Wheels

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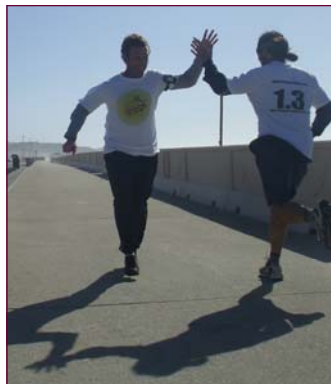
School on Wheels Events

A big thank you to **The Brentwood Art Center** for hosting our 1st Annual Silent Auction Exhibit, held on October 10, 2008.

Over 100 pieces of ArtWork, created by faculty, staff and students were up for auction. It turned out to be a very successful evening. The parents were so proud to see their daughters' artwork displayed as part of the exhibit., CeCe (pictured at left) is a student we met at Bible Tabernacle almost two years ago. Her sister Melissa is in her senior year of high school and is hoping to graduate this year and attend Santa Monica College. Many of our West Side tutors came, bought pictures and helped with the cleaning up (thank you Robin and Phil). We also raised some money. The grand total for the evening was \$7,750. Thank you to School on Wheels staff members, Blue McDonnell and Janet Settles, for all your hard work to make this event happen. We are all looking

forward to next year's auction. Special thanks to tutor **Athena Kwey** for suggesting the idea in the first place!

Another First—Our **1st Annual 5K FUN RUN**, held on Sunday November 9, 2008. School on Wheels staff , family, tutors and friends and 7th Heaven actress, Makenzie Rosman, came together on one of the windiest days in Malibu to run 3 miles along Zuma Beach raising awareness about the shocking number of homeless children in the USA. An estimated 1.3 million homeless children do not have a bed to call their own tonight. Not only did we all finish, but we managed to raise nearly \$4000 from our family and friends. Thank you to all our staff for taking time out of your precious weekends to run.



Matching Employer Gifts

Many employers match their employees' gifts to charitable institutions. Some companies will match the gifts of employee spouses and retired employees as well. Ask the human resources or benefits office at your workplace for more information. Find out if your company has a matching gifts program and ask your employer, to support what we do. Typically a volunteer tutor can **earn \$20** for every tutoring hour they log with their employer for School on Wheels. A special thank you to Amgen tutors who have raised thousands of dollars for School on Wheels through their matching gift program. For more information please contact, Janet Settles, Team Leader, (213) 896-9200 or jsettles@schoolonwheels.org