

THE GROUP HOME GIRLS

By Hanna Duff

"GIVE IT BACK, JAMIE!"

Anna pulls at Jamie's shorts as the girls charge up the stairs. Hip-hop beats rattle the windowpanes in the living room. *16 and Pregnant* blasts from a TV that no one is watching. Amanda's neon gel pens clutter the kitchen table. Jessica's unattended chicken-fried steak sizzles on the stovetop. Lisa and Melanie chatter about the Glow-in-the-Dark dance on Friday night.

Yes, it's a typical night at the group home.

Not a dull moment passes at the group home. You cling to your School on Wheels badge for dear life as the girls thunder down the stairs to see who rang the doorbell. You trace the tablecloth pattern as you wait for Anna to escape from Jamie's headlock. You glance up just as giant bubbles begin spewing from the dishwasher. Someone accidentally filled it with dish soap instead of detergent. Again.

When you walk past the scary dog next door and up the gravel path to the group home, you never really know what to expect from the girls. But every week, you show up.

From the absolute mayhem of group home life to the uncertainties these girls face everyday, nothing is constant in their lives. Some might be weeks away from heading home. Some might be one mistake away from going back to juvenile hall. So how could an evening filled with stroke-inducing algebra improve this situation? How could a one-hour death march through Newton's Laws of Motion enhance *anyone's* life?

Weekly tutoring sessions give group home students a sense consistency in their otherwise chaotic lives. No matter who got suspended from school or who is on restriction for the week, they know that you will walk in the door Wednesday at 6:30 with the billions of mechanical pencils they requested. You will sit in your usual chair next to the rooster painting. You will be helpful.

Reliability is only the first step in gaining the trust of group home students. But simply by being there, you are showing your students that you care about them. Even if they spend most of the hour showing you photos from their binders or talking about boys from school, you stay the whole hour. And you're there because you want to be.