

fall 2008 newsletter

success stories



Photo: Federico Rodriguez

Graduation 2008

One Graduate's Story Highlights Our Impact

“Before, I never cared,” Nancy Luna told her fellow members of the class of 2008 and the family, friends and guests assembled for West Brooklyn Community High School’s (WBCHS) second-ever graduation ceremony. “Before, my eyes were closed. But because of WBCHS’s help, I’m finally here.”

In her original school, Nancy had succumbed to what she calls the “addictive” lure of skipping classes regularly. “It was easy to get away with cutting,” she recalled, “sometimes they checked, but sometimes they didn’t. Nobody really knew who I was.” This kind of gradual fading from school is often a precursor to dropping out, but when Nancy’s mother realized what was happening, everything changed.

“When my mom found out I wasn’t going to class,” Nancy recounted in her speech, “she sat me down and said ‘I don’t want you working in factories and cleaning houses like I do.’ When I saw her angelic face full of sadness I began to think; she worked day and night, coming home tired and I was repaying her by not going to school and that wasn’t fair.” Nancy resolved to turn her life around, and met with her school counselor the very next day to discuss options. When her mother subsequently met with the counselor, she found a flyer on the bulletin board for a new school about to open: West Brooklyn Community High School.

WBCHS, our first replication of the transfer school model for formerly truanting or out-of-school youth we developed at our widely acclaimed South Brooklyn Community High School, opened in September 2006 with Nancy among the inaugural group of students. Key elements of our transfer schools include the integration of a rigorous hands-on academic program with the strength-based youth development principles that underlie all our work, and emphasis on the school as a supportive community where each individual student is known and respected.

continued on page 2

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

This is traditionally a season of new beginnings as our school-based programs gear up with the start of another academic year and we launch new initiatives. Fall 2008 is no exception. We are doubling the enrollment in our Bronx transfer school in a new and permanent space, adding the tenth Young Adult Borough Center or evening high school in Brooklyn to our constellation of programs for older students who have fallen off track, and starting an exciting new arts program in a Bronx elementary school.

While the theme of new beginnings is particularly relevant at this time of year, in fact we provide opportunities for growth and renewal every day, as we help vulnerable young people and their families transform their lives and take ownership of a more promising future. We may be helping a family come back together after the children have been placed into foster care or finding an adoptive home for a teen. Alternatively, we may be helping young people reconnect with school or opening their eyes to new possibilities for careers and their role in the community. We see the fruits of our work constantly as our program participants take steps towards a more self-sufficient future. And it is especially rewarding when we can celebrate a significant milestone, such as high school graduation, with them. We are so proud to have set more than 1,000 young people on a path to independent adulthood by helping them earn their high school diplomas during the past school year.

As we begin another program year, I hope that the success stories in this newsletter help to convey the critical role that we hope you will continue to play in supporting this important work. This year more than ever, we count on the strong partnerships we have created with you to sustain and enrich our work with some of our city’s most vulnerable youth and families.

Gratefully,

Annette Lo Monaco

What's inside:

Our 2008 Graduates	2
A New Family Flourishes	3
As a School Closes, GSS Expands its Reach	3
New Board Member	4
Annual Fund	4

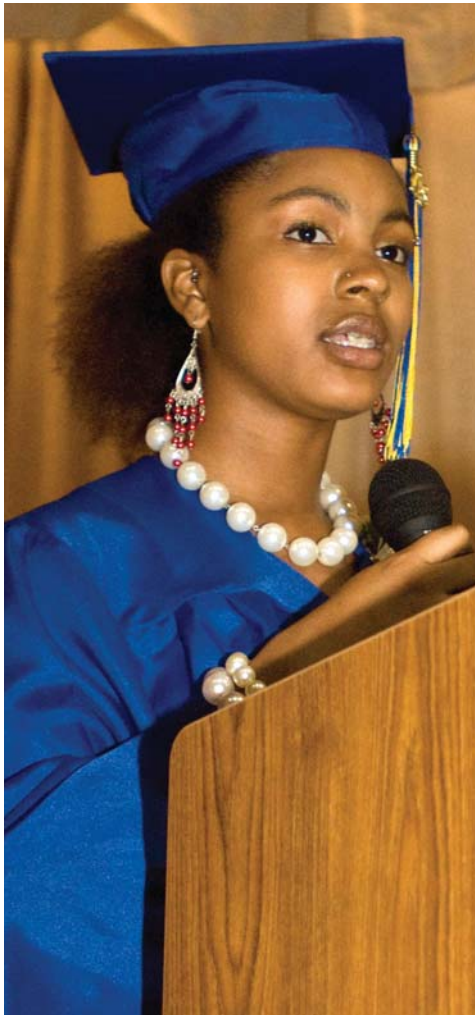


Photo: John Smock

continued from front

One Graduate's Story Highlights Our Impact

Nancy thrived under the attention and support she received at WBCHS, where every student is matched with an Advocate Counselor who makes sure that they don't slip away. "Dereck would call me in the morning to make sure I was awake," says Nancy. "If I was out for a doctor's appointment, he'd say 'Bring your note!' I don't think my old school ever asked for a note." She made the honor roll numerous times and was further encouraged by being recognized at breakfast celebrations for honor roll students, who also had their pictures displayed on the school bulletin boards, and by the personalized nature of the entire school. "The principal would come sit next to me in class and say 'I'd like to see you stronger in Math,' or 'I'm so proud of you in this subject because your work seems to have grown a lot.' It made me nervous at first, but then I really liked it."

Among five students chosen by their fellow graduates to address the audience at the commencement ceremony, Nancy brought the audience to tears with a powerful speech detailing the confrontation with her mother that led

to her transfer and her experiences at WBCHS. She ended with "Mommy, all this is for you." Nancy's mother didn't know what was in the speech until she heard it delivered at the graduation. "At the end," Nancy remembers, "I saw the biggest smile on her face that I'd ever seen in my life."

Nancy is entering college in the fall, and, after having her interest in seeing Europe piqued by conversations with Dereck, aspires to eventually enter a study abroad program. "My life has changed," she says. "West Brooklyn gives students like me a second chance."

OUR 2008 GRADUATES

Nancy is just one of over a thousand young people who completed their secondary education in 2008 through a program operated by Good Shepherd in partnership with the NYC Department of Education's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation.

Building on over thirty years of experience working in New York City schools, Good Shepherd now has 19 Multiple Pathways programs and has become a major voice in the national dialogue about the high school dropout problem at a time when it is estimated that as many as half of the students in large US cities do not graduate on time in four years. "Today, the traditional high school structure simply does not work for many young people," says Executive Director Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, "and the human consequences are staggering."

We replicated our transfer school model again in 2007 with the opening of Bronx Community High School, and have also begun to assist other community-based organizations with opening schools based on our model. Good Shepherd additionally operates ten Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs), evening high school programs for youth 17 years and older that allow students with work or family obligations to receive di-

plomas from their original high schools. Our Multiple Pathways programming is rounded out by two full-time and four part-time GED programs specifically designed for the older adolescent age group. Most of these programs also include a Learning-to-Work component, which provides students with job readiness workshops and subsidized internships. Working in collaboration with the Department of Education, Good Shepherd provides counseling and other supportive services that help young people overcome the issues that threatened their ability to graduate, while DOE staff concentrate on academics. "The obstacles our students face can't be solved by the schools alone, because their challenges aren't just academic," explains Sr. Paulette, "When a community-based organization like Good Shepherd and a public school system committed to these young people work together to comprehensively address their needs, a real difference can be made."



Photo: Federico Rodriguez

A New Family Flourishes

“It was very serendipitous,” Credit Suisse employee Loretta says about the email she received last year asking for volunteers to help with a carnival for adolescents in our residential programs, sponsored by Credit Suisse executive and Good Shepherd Board Member Robert O’Brien. Having decided to adopt an older child through the foster care system, she had recently completed the required training and licensing. “So I called my adoption agency [You Gotta Believe, which specializes in finding adoptive homes for teenagers in foster care] to find out if they knew of Good Shepherd. I was told it was one of the best agencies out there, and if I could adopt through them I’d be very lucky. And I was! It’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”

After making a connection with Good Shepherd at the carnival, Loretta talked with Assistant Executive Director for Residential Programs Denise Hinds. Denise spoke of a resident interested in being adopted, and Loretta immediately recognized the young woman even without a name. “Are you talking about Nef?” she asked.

Nefertiti was a regular participant in panels on adopting teenagers that Loretta had attended as part of her training. “For kids that want to be adopted, it’s not about age,” Nef explains. “Adults still need their parents. And everyone



deserves a family.” Nef entered Good Shepherd’s St. Helena’s residence at the age of 14, having lived with her grandmother for the previous six years. Possessed of a sweet and sunny disposition despite her difficult childhood, Nef quickly became a role model for other residents, eventually taking the responsibility of giving new girls tours and talking to them about the program. “I told them, things might get tough, but don’t walk out, because it won’t help. You have to deal with your problems, there’s no quick way out.”

Nef moved in with Loretta two months after the carnival, and the adoption was finalized this summer. Mother and daughter couldn’t be happier, and both credit Good Shepherd with helping to make their dream of a family come true. “Good Shepherd gave us a lot of support, and I really think they gave Nef a nice foundation in what it is to be a family and what the roles are in families,” Loretta says. Nef agrees, adding “When I was a child, I didn’t want to tell anyone what was bothering me.

continued on back

As a School Closes, GSS Expands its Reach

Among Good Shepherd’s many partnerships with schools, the agency’s relationship with Adlai E. Stevenson High School in the Soundview section of the Bronx, stands out for the length and scope of our involvement. Now, as the school enters its final year, Good Shepherd’s presence on the Stevenson campus is only increasing.

Long considered a troubled school, Stevenson is scheduled to be phased out in 2009 as part of a broader city-wide restructuring that replaces large, failing schools with smaller ones. Since 2002, a number of mini schools have moved into the building, and they are joined this year by Bronx Community High School (BCHS), our third model transfer high school for former dropouts. After spending its inaugural year in temporary space, BCHS is doubling in size to an enrollment of 200 students in its new home on the Stevenson campus. Meanwhile, the original Stevenson school, which in its most overcrowded days had an enrollment of

over 4,000, has shrunk to a population of 350 students who will finish this last year.

Through the many twists and turns of Stevenson’s history, Good Shepherd has played a consistent role as we have partnered with the school to support its most at-risk students: young people whose lives are complicated by poverty, homelessness, gangs, drugs and other challenges. After establishing a small counseling program at Stevenson close to two decades ago, GSS went on to launch a mentoring program in partnership with Ernst & Young, which has become one of the most successful and long running mentoring programs in New York City. More recently, we have been the community partner in one of the new, small schools on the campus, the High School for Community Research and Learning. Since 2005, we have collaborated on a Young Adult Borough Center (YABC) in the building, which provides older youth who have fallen off-track in high school with a second chance to earn their diplomas by

coming to school in the evening. We also provide support services to help other older students earn their GEDs.

As the “old” Stevenson’s student population has dwindled, we have redoubled our efforts to help those who have remained—youth whose needs, for the most part, have been overlooked in the process and who have fallen off track. Consistently, they have shown that they can make dramatic turnarounds when given the right support. Sally, for example, was not coming to school and was far behind in credits when our staff first reached out to her over one year ago. We were able to help her family enter a homeless shelter, get her mother assistance with some mental health issues, and connect Sally to a mentor from Ernst & Young. Through her participation in an accelerated credit program we helped initiate in the school, as well as the ongoing support of her GSS counselor and mentor, Sally has excelled and is now expected to graduate on time. She participated in Good

continued on back

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Many companies have a matching gift program. You can maximize your contribution to us by completing the appropriate matching gift form. Please log on to www.goodshepherds.org to see if your company matches gifts.

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Direct your United Way contribution to Good Shepherd Services by marking **001138** on your pledge card. You will also find us listed in the campaign brochures of the State Employee Federated Appeal, the Combined Municipal Campaign, the Combined Federal Campaign and the CUNY Campaign for Voluntary Charitable Giving.

continued from page 3

Adoption Story

Good Shepherd taught me it was alright to talk about those things, and now Loretta and I can talk everything out, and it's always ok, even if we disagree."

Loretta and Nef also now belong to several extended families in addition to their immediate family of two. Loretta's relatives enthusiastically welcomed Nef into the clan, and the birth relatives that Nef maintains contact with are equally embracing of her new mother. "This past holiday season was the best one I've ever had," says Loretta. "We've all really blended together and formed a pretty remarkable family."

The family will soon be enlarged by one more, with a close friend of Nef's from St. Helena's moving in as Loretta's foster child. "They've been like sisters since well before I came along," says Loretta. Good Shepherd continues to be part of the family as well. "Good Shepherd stays committed to their children even after they leave," Loretta continues, "They were very helpful to us in forming our family, and we're still part of the bigger community. Nef didn't have to give up her friends and the people she lived with for years – no one ever says 'Why are you still coming here, you've been adopted.' It's not questioned. The agency wants their young people to do well, above all else."

continued from page 3

As a School Closes, GSS Expands its Reach

Shepherd's recent college retreat and now has her sights set on college.

With the start of a new school year, Good Shepherd is ready to strengthen the ways that the disparate new schools and programs on the Stevenson campus work together and to launch a new initiative for older youth whose reading levels are too low for them to enter even the GED program onsite. Skilled counselors will reach out to youth who have experienced repeated failure and combine case management, paid internships and an intensive prep course to mobilize them to continue their education and successfully enter the GED program. "We are constantly looking for platforms inside the school and working to extend its reach out to young people who are on the edge," says Jim Marley, Assistant Executive Director of our Bronx Programs. "As Stevenson has retooled itself to better meet the needs of at-risk youth, we have been deeply involved and often a catalyst for the process. While our specific activities have changed, we have remained constant in our approach and in our efforts to find better ways for these vulnerable young people to achieve success."

ANNUAL FUND

Partner with Good Shepherd as we work to help young people build stronger connections to family, school and community. As reflected in this newsletter, we have been working to strengthen, deepen and expand our services so that more young people can be helped in making a safe passage to self-sufficiency. In these uncertain times, your support is all the more important, as we continue to serve as a model for other agencies helping vulnerable youth and families. Please consider helping us reach our Annual Fund goal by sending in your contribution today. Alternatively, you may donate online at: www.goodshepherds.org.