

spring 2009 newsletter

success stories



Photo: Laura Dwight

Supported Housing Program Anniversary

Celebrating a Milestone

April 2009 marks the fifth anniversary of our Chelsea Foyer at the Christopher – a program for at-risk and homeless youth that has proven to be an invaluable stepping stone to independence for more than 109 young people who have simply called it “home.” Recognizing the need for additional services for these vulnerable youth, Good Shepherd partnered with the Common Ground Community to open the Foyer in 2004. Forty young people, between the ages of 18 and 25, who have been homeless – living on the street, in shelters, “couch-surfing” with family or friends – or who are aging out of the foster care system and on the verge of homelessness, take part in a program of services to help them learn to become successful, self-sufficient adults.

The core elements of the program have remained the same - prospective residents must apply to live at the Foyer and, once accepted, participate in an educational/vocational program and work at least part-time to cover their living expenses and save for the future. As the program has grown, staff have enhanced services by developing strong partnerships with other organizations and volunteers, and maintaining solid ties with youth who have completed the program.

“Our partnership with the Workplace Center at Columbia University School of Social Work has allowed our staff to become more skilled in workforce development,” says program director Brenda Tully. And ongoing relationships with financial industry professionals have provided residents with opportunities to learn about money management from the experts. But the advice of another group of experts has proven to be invaluable to the young people: the Foyer alumni.

Alumni regularly return to the Foyer for “rap sessions” or panel discussions to talk about their experiences making the leap to independent living. Residents are able to ask questions about their peers’ challenges and successes in finding stable housing, employment and support systems. These discussions are really important to current residents,” says Tully, “it eases their worries about making the transition.”

We caught up with three alumni of the Foyer to find out how they’re doing after leaving the program. Turn to page 2 and find out “Where are they now?”

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

Spring is traditionally a time of transformation, a time when, all around us, there are signs of rebirth and renewal in the flowering trees and budding plants. Each day at Good Shepherd, our staff members are witness to stunning transformations of a different kind – a former dropout who re-enrolls in school, a foster child who is able to return home, a young person with nowhere to live who now has a key to a room of his own.

The notion of transformation is at the very heart of Good Shepherd’s belief in our program participants’ capacity to create real change within themselves and their families and central to our mission to provide young people and their families with a safe passage to self-sufficiency. This newsletter gives several examples of how we help vulnerable adolescents and young adults, in particular, to gain the skills necessary to transform themselves into self-sufficient adults through our supportive housing program, an innovative culinary arts internship or the first job experiences we provide through our many summer day camps. All of these activities help our young people open their minds to potential new career paths, develop basic job skills, and clarify their expectations about the world-of-work.

As our program year comes to a close and we celebrate the graduations and other transformations of our program participants, I want to thank you for your continued partnership in our work. Your generous support has made these and other success stories possible.

Sincerely,

Shellette Lo Monaco

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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Christopher

Without speaking a word of English, 17-year-old Christopher and his grandmother emigrated from their native Colombia to Florida (where his mother was living). But within a few months of his arrival, the family situation deteriorated. Christopher left Florida and came to New York City on his own. For the next year, the teenager would alternate between staying in the City with friends or in foster care programs and trying again with his family in Florida.

Shortly before his 18th birthday, the soft-spoken young man found himself in New York again and was placed in a Brooklyn group home. Focused on making a life for himself, Christopher attended high school in Manhattan, where he perfected his English, gained an education and work experience with a part time job in the school's administrative office. His social worker there told him about the Foyer and encouraged him to apply.

He was accepted into the Foyer in 2004 and was among the first residents of the program, "It was a really nice opportunity for me to learn how to live on my own," he says. While at the Foyer, Christopher earned his high school diploma and found a job working with animals at the Laboratory Animal Research Center run by Rockefeller University. Like many other residents, he found the money management workshops to be very helpful, "You learn how to manage things, what it is to buy your own food," he says. By the time he completed the program in 2006, he had saved enough money to move into his own studio apartment in Queens.

Today, Christopher continues to live independently, though he now shares a larger apartment with his wife. He also continues to work at the lab and has since earned two advanced certifications, while currently working on a third. When his wife finishes her BA in accounting, he plans to return to school himself to get his BA in zoology. "I just love working with animals," he says.



Photo: Laura Dwight

Chris

Like many other residents of the Foyer, Chris was no stranger to the child welfare system, having been in foster care most of his life. At a group home in Brooklyn, he heard about the Foyer from the brother of one of the other residents, and the 18-year-old decided to apply.

Chris moved into the Foyer in mid-2005, after graduating from high school. He began working at the Equinox Fitness Club to support himself, while pursuing his associate's degree in applied sciences and hospitality management at the Art Institute of New York. A chance encounter while out exploring his new neighborhood helped Chris find his professional passion. "Sapa was a restaurant near the Foyer. I had met the head chef and started going to hang out at the kitchen," he says. "The pastry chef put me to work and really jumpstarted my career."

For the next two years, Chris attended school and worked at both Equinox (where he had been promoted to spa management) and Sapa (where he learned everything he could about working in a professional kitchen). He also took his commitment to the Foyer program seriously, checking in with the staff, attending workshops, and saving money. "The Foyer was such a challenge," he says. "It's more or less about yourself; you have to find that point and focus. That's one of the hardest things...just to stay focused."

Chris's efforts paid off in 2007, when he finished his degree and had saved up enough money to move into a one bedroom apartment. His experiences in the kitchen at Sapa led to a position at world renowned restaurant, Per Se, as a pastry chef de partie. "It was an amazing experience," he says, "like going to the Harvard of food." After two years at Per Se, Chris left to pursue the next step in his culinary career. "I'm considering going back to school, a move overseas, or travel," he says.

Naeema

18-year-old Naeema, a young girl from North Carolina, arrived in New York City in 2001 as a freshman student at The College of New Rochelle. She lived in on-campus housing her first three years at the school, but just before her senior year, her financial situation changed and she was unable to afford to live in the dorm. Faced with the possibility of having to return home and not finish school, Naeema at first stayed temporarily with a number of family members and friends. But she soon realized that she needed to find a more permanent solution to her housing crisis.

A friend of Naeema's lived at the Foyer and told her about the program. The 20-year-old college senior, applied and was accepted, enabling her to stay in school and complete her bachelor's degree in psychology. "A bright, articulate and focused young woman," was how staff described her at the time. Their first impression was spot on as, during her ten months at the Foyer, Naeema took full advantage of everything the program had to offer. "The workshops, setting goals and attaining them, writing plans for myself were all really helpful," she says, "and staff were always there when you needed someone to talk to."

Since leaving the Foyer in 2005, Naeema has lived in her own apartment in the Bronx. In addition to her BA, she has earned a master's degree in school psychology and is currently pursuing her doctorate at Capella University. To support herself, she provides behavior therapy to autistic toddlers and psychiatric evaluations for pre-school children. Of her experiences at the Foyer she says, "I learned a lot of life lessons. If you take the program seriously, they really help you transition into being an independent adult. I'm thankful to have been a part of it."

Cook 4 Life



Photo: Annie O'Neill

On Wednesday afternoons at South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS), the “lunch ladies” are banished from the school kitchen and the “Cook 4 Life” students take over. Once a week, for three hours after school, 10-12 students come together to learn the basics about a career in the culinary arts. Cook 4 Life is part of the school’s Learning to Work program, which helps youth gain valuable job skills and exposure to different career paths through subsidized internships.

The 12-14 week program was launched in 2007 by Alona Cohen, a SBCHS science teacher and Dave Arons, the Job and Internship Coordinator. “Cooking is a good medium for teaching a lot of things – math, science, different

cultures,” says Cohen. To develop Cook 4 Life, they worked with the Careers through Culinary Arts (CCAP) program, which provides students at public schools with culinary arts training. In addition to the curriculum, CCAP also provides cooking staples and professional development for Cohen, who teaches the class. Arons recruits the interns, who treat the Cook 4 Life internship as they would any other job. “I help them understand that a lot of what they’re learning in the kitchen transfers to any field – communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork,” he says.

The young people work as a team, learning basic skills in the first month – how to use knives properly and how to read a recipe. They progress to making dishes, planning full menus

and cooking foods from other cultures. “When they come in, many of them say they don’t know anything about cooking,” says Cohen, “they start out making smoothies and by the end they make whole meals.” In addition to broadening their horizons, students also gain a better understanding of nutrition, and some develop a taste for healthier food. Melissa, a former Cook 4 Life intern says, “I wasn’t good with my food choices before, but it changed me. I cut down on bad food, and when we go food shopping, I convince my mother to buy the ingredients for things that we made at school.”

Cook 4 Life has also had a positive impact on students’ lives outside of the kitchen. “Kids who participate are more engaged in school in general,” says Arons. In order to participate in the afternoon program, students are required to have attended school that day. “Cook 4 Life was motivation for me to come to school,” says Melissa, “I really wanted to do it and it was something to look forward to.” Cohen also notes that the program has helped her develop stronger relationships with students, especially those who are difficult to reach in the classroom, “They get to know you as a person, not just a teacher.”

An innovative partnership with Kingsborough Community College (KCC) has allowed Cook 4 Life students to gain exposure to college level faculty and courses. “In the first year, we did an exchange,” says Arons, “The director of tourism and hospitality came and led a class in gutting fish and butchering chicken, then we went [to KCC] and the students participated in a class with college level students.” Last summer, KCC worked with SBCHS to provide a cooking program in which students received culinary

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SUMMER CAMP

Teenagers all over the country are lining up jobs as camp counselors, and, for most, it will be their very first job. The same is true for youth who live in the neighborhoods where Good Shepherds’ seven summer camp programs are located. Each year in July and August, GSS provides more than 1,300 children with swimming lessons, arts and crafts, team sports and fun; and summer jobs for 200 teenagers.

Jennifer Zanger, the GSS Division Director who oversees the Brooklyn summer camps, says, “In Red Hook alone, we employ 80 youth – this helps them gain valuable job experience, keeps them out of trouble, and helps support struggling families. The money they earn over

the summer helps to pay for school clothes, etc. during the year.” Wanda Paban, whose son and daughter are both camp counselors, has definitely found this to be true, “They’re now saving for the future and were able to pay for their own school supplies, which was a real help for me as a single parent,” she says.

“The summer allows GSS the opportunity to continue our youth development work with this young workforce,” says Bronx Division Director Diana Torres, “We are able to provide guidance in making healthy decisions.” Virginia Lugo whose oldest daughter worked as a counselor last summer, noticed positive changes at home, “She became a good role model for the

younger ones and learned how to be supportive when it comes to teaching them,” she says.



Photo: Laura Dwight

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Matching Gifts

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.

Workplace Giving

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.

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Cook 4 Life

training two days a week. This was linked to a science elective where the lessons learned in the kitchen were related to hard science. "It was the most successful summer program we've had," Arons says, "It kept students engaged in the summer cycle, which is traditionally hard to do."

Students also showcase their cooking skills for fellow students, parents, and guests through a number of catered events including parent teacher conferences, lunches for visitors to SBCHS, and a full Thanksgiving dinner for the whole school. "Being able to cook for them was so much fun," says Josh who is a former Cook 4 Life intern, "It made me feel really good to be a part of it." The success of the catering component has led to a second level Cook 4 Life class in which students run two catering events per month both at the school and with outside community partners including the upcoming Red Hook Waterfront Arts Festival and a youth night with Added Value.

"Culinary arts training is ideal," says Arons "students are being trained with some hard skills, but also learning life skills through having to produce a meal as a group." At the end of each Cook 4 Life session, students and staff sit down around a communal table to share the meal they have cooked together. "There's a lot of pride because they're seeing results right away and get to talk about the experience. This is exactly what our students should be doing – having learning and work opportunities connected in a unified way."

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.

New Board Members

We are pleased to welcome two new members to Good Shepherd's Board of Directors: David A. Barr and Brooke Barrett.

Mr. Barr is a Managing Director at Warburg Pincus, one of the oldest and largest private equity firms, where he leads the firm's investments in the Industrial and Consumer sectors. He has been in private equities for 20 years and, prior to joining Warburg Pincus, worked for both Goldman Sachs and Butler Capital. A native Bostonian, Mr. Barr holds a B.A. in Economics from Wesleyan University and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

Ms. Barrett is the Co-CEO of Denihan Hospitality Group (DHG), where she guides the vision and direction for DHG's entire portfolio of hotels. She has been a noted speaker and panelist at many high profile hospitality industry conferences, and her profile and quotes have been featured in leading industry media. Ms. Barrett serves on the board of the New York Hotel Association and is a member of the Women Presidents' Organization.

GO GREEN!

The Success Stories newsletter is now available electronically. Published three times a year, the newsletter keeps you up-to-date on Good Shepherd's latest program activities. If you would prefer to receive Success Stories via email, rather than by mail, please contact Nada Awad at 212-243-7070, ext. 313 or email her at Nada_Awad@goodshepherds.org.

FIND US ON FACEBOOK

Good Shepherd Services recently launched a Facebook page and would like to invite those who use Facebook to become a fan of our work, by connecting to the GSS page. The page features links to videos about how our work has impacted individual participants, as well as photos of our programs in action. A link to the Facebook page is provided on the homepage of the GSS website (www.goodshepherds.org) or just type "Good Shepherd Services" into the Facebook search engine.