Somerset HOME Temporarily for Displaced Children

NEWSLETTER ■ WINTER 2002

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49 Brahma Avenue ■ Bridgewater, NJ 08807 ■ 908–526-6605 ■ www.somersethome.org

Good Fortune Brought Joy to Somerset Home

The Somerset Home staff works hard to encourage donations, volunteers and supporters. Sometimes we just get lucky, like the day Joy Mathiowdis called and said she saw an article in the newspaper about us and took a look at our website. She came for a tour of the shelter and then she took off like a whirlwind to start making our wishes come true.

Landmark Education, a curriculum that inspires people to step beyond who they think they are and what they think they can accomplish to live life fully, piqued Joy's interest in the Somerset Home. Joy was inspired to get her entire community involved in helping out the Somerset Home teens. She got some amazing results.

When our residents went back to school this year, many of them were told they needed "scientific graphing calculators," which cost $80 to $90 each. Our staff set out to get donors for these very expensive calculators. We alerted Joy and within 20 minutes she called to say that she had gotten two donations. She later got a third.

She was equally successful with several other items from the Somerset Home wishlist. She has collected many gift cards from friends and businesses that will be used to buy clothing for residents or gifts for their birthdays. When her neighborhood was having a block party, Joy turned it into a Somerset Home fundraiser. She asked her neighbors to bring donations to the party and she collected clothing, phone cards and other items from the wishlist. She also collected $87.

One of Joy's neighbors, Dr. Diane Mihalow, belongs to a "mom's group" at Blessed Sacrament church in Martinsville. Dr. Mihalow shared the Somerset Home wishlist with the other moms and

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Somerset Youth Shelter Hires New Program Director

Jessica Jordan was recently hired as director of the Somerset Youth Shelter. As program director, Jessica is responsible for the shelter and street outreach program, including: personnel, budgeting, fund development, program development, risk management, continuous quality improvement, accreditation and licensing standards, and individual and family counseling.



Jessica Jordan, Somerset Youth Shelter Program Director.

"I was looking for a position that would allow me to combine my clinical and administrative skills, especially in a capacity that helped kids. I am excited to be a part of an agency that has such a solid history of meeting both the physical and emotional needs of this group of adolescents. I look forward to helping the agency continue in this history of success."

Jessica holds dual master's degrees in social work (MSW) and public administration (MPA), and she recently received her New Jersey Licensed Social Work (LSW) certification.

Prior to joining Somerset Youth Shelter, Jessica served in senior administrative and program positions for several non-profit organizations. Most recently she worked in a residential substance abuse treatment center for women and children. Jessica has also worked with foster children and their families.

Jessica resides in Princeton with her husband Stu.

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Jeffrey Fetzko

A Message From The Executive Director

Many of you know Somerset Home as a youth-serving agency. You may not know that Somerset Home is also an advocacy organization. When the founding board of trustees developed our corporate activities and charter in 1970, they wrote: *"to formulate and recommend local and federal legislation intended to assist and improve services for the homeless and displaced children."*

In the 20 years I have served as executive director, one of the most rewarding aspects of this job has been to meet with elected officials and senior staff of governmental entities in an effort to improve laws, shape public policy and expand services to benefit runaway and homeless youth.

We worked with Covenant House New Jersey and the Garden State Coalition to create the New Jersey Homeless Youth Act (HYA), which became law in 1999 and gives kids the right to seek safety from abuse.

In addition, we worked on the expansion of the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) to improve services to "homeless" youth. Many youth served by Somerset Home have long-term needs and are not likely to return home because of extreme family dysfunction. The expansion of RHYA services resulted in the development of transitional living programs (TLP) for youth aged 16-21 and street outreach programs, which can now be found in every state.

This year we are working on many new developments of youth services in New Jersey through the expansion of the N.J. Homeless Youth Act. By expanding independent-living services to older youth, who are 18 to 21 years of age and have aged out of the foster care system, we can ensure these youth will make the successful transition to adulthood.

There are two very promising federal and state initiatives which would extend tuition assistance to make it possible for youth who were formerly in foster care to pay for college.

We strive to provide the highest quality of service to our youth. Part of that responsibility extends to keeping our eyes on the big picture and focusing on the broader issues, which can be solved only by taking our observations and insights to those who are in a position to change public policy. Our founders recognized this was a necessary part of the agency's work in 1970, and for more than 30 years, Somerset Home staff have been working locally, statewide and nationally to expand and improve the services for runaway and homeless youth.

Thank you for your continued support.

Jeffrey Fetzko, *Executive Director* ACSW, LSW, CFRE

Board Members

Thank you to all our Board Members for their dedication and service.

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New Jersey Turnpike Authority

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Alex Ciccone Named Director of Transitional Living Services

Alex Ciccone was recently promoted to director of transitional living services for the Somerset Home. As director, Alex assumes responsibility of two Somerset Home programs for at-risk adolescents and young adults. Passages, a transitional living program, provides young people, aged 16 to 21, with the skills needed to live independently upon graduation from the program. Pathways, a non-residential program, provides life-skills education to adolescents, aged 15 to 21, in the form of weekly workshops, weekend retreats, and one-on-one outreach.

Alex joined the Somerset Home as a part-time youth counselor in 1989. During his career at Somerset Home, he progressed to shift coordinator, case manager and most recently, senior case manager. In 1995, the New Jersey Association of Children's Residential Facilities named Alex childcare worker of the year.

In addition to his responsibilities at Somerset Home, Alex is a certified fire evaluator for the Somerset County Firewatch program. As a Firewatch volunteer, he screens youth who have started fires to determine what treatment they might need. Alex received recognition for these services from the Somerset County Youth Services Commission in 2001. Alex also helps homeless families through his church by collecting, sorting and delivering food several times a year.

When Alex was 25, he became a foster parent for a 13-year-old boy, Alfonso. Alex is very proud of his son and they are still very close. Alex has dedicated his life to helping young people at home and in his career.

"I remember I wanted to quit after my first week as a youth counselor," he says, "because I didn't feel capable of dealing with the complex needs of the kids in the shelter. But I stuck it out and now I can't believe how far I've come, and how far Somerset Home has come."



Alex Ciccone, Director of Transitional Living Services.

"It was exciting having a part in the agency's recent accreditation process. I'm ready for the challenge of being transitional living services director. I look forward to being in a leadership role at Passages as we gear up to open a new program for young adults who are aging out of the foster care system."

Good Fortune Brought Joy to Somerset Home

(Continued from cover.)

collected clothing, batteries, flatware, bake ware and other kitchen items, as well as $100 in gift cards.

Next, Joy approached her employer, Schering Corporation. Schering has a program called "Dollars for Volunteers." Since Joy is a volunteer for Somerset Home, she was able to get a $100 donation from the company to complement her other efforts on our behalf.

Most recently, Joy volunteered to help out with the Somerset Home Run for Runaways and recruited several friends to join her. Her energy, enthusiasm and willingness to help out in any way seem limitless! It is wonderful to have friends like Joy Mathiowdis.

In Memory

Eugene P. Ally
Eugene Berry
Archie Chiles
Marva Cicchino
Katie Clair
John J. Clark, Sr.
Marilyn Durante
Amy Hashkowitz
Loved Ones
Andy & Lee Murphy
Lorraine Noble
Thomas Gerard Ondrof
Rose Raphael
Carol Riley
Joseph & Carmela Sassi
Roberta Scharf
Antoinette & Angelo Scrocca
Catherine Sylvester
Carmela Nicole Toto
Joseph E. Turner, Sr.
Agnes Ruth Wade
9/11 Victims

In Honor

All the teens at Somerset Home
Sholanda Cobbs
Tracey Costanzo
Ray Fantuzzi
Fattorusso Family
Elliott Fredland
Jacob Gelber
Joan Johnson
Henry Joseph Kast, III
Michaela Kelly
Our children and grandchildren
Shari, Meghan, Tierney & Beverly Urbanski

One Of The Many

Julia is a 17-year-old girl who came to Passages from the Somerset Youth Shelter. Julia's mother had been a drug abuser for years. Julia was left home to care for her younger brother while her mother hit the streets to sell her body for money to buy drugs. Julia's mother eventually moved herself and the kids in with her boyfriend. The adults' relationship turned violent and Julia, her mom and brother went to a women's shelter.

Things seemed to be getting better while they were safe at the shelter. Julia started going back to high school; mom was off drugs and looking for a job. That didn't last long, however. Julia's mother was arrested for theft and jailed. Because their mother was no longer with the children, the women's shelter had to report them to the Division of Youth and Family Services, the New Jersey state child welfare organization. This was the first time the family had been split apart. The brother went to a foster home and, because she was older, Julia to the Somerset Youth Shelter. Julia stayed at the shelter for a few months. She attended school at the shelter and was tremendously helpful to the staff and other residents.

Since her mother was not going to have a stable place to live for some time, Julia needed a longer-term place to live. Passages seemed like a perfect fit for Julia.

The Passages program helps Julia deal with the emotional trauma of neglect and abandonment of her mother through referrals to counseling services.

Julia went to the GED program to complete her education. At the age of 16, she had no high school credits because her family moved around so much that she was never able to complete a full year of high school. In no time, Julia took the GED test and passed. The next step was off to community college. Julia is the first in her family to go to college. Her mom is very proud.

Julia is not sure what career direction she wants to go in and is considering teaching or nursing. The Passages staff assisted Julia with financial aid forms, registering for classes and transportation. Julia received a scholarship from the Foster and Adoptive Parents Association to help with tuition. With all this support, Julia is on the right track to having a successful college education.

Julia worked with her life-skills educator at Passages to find employment that would work around her busy schedule. She was taught the proper way to complete a job application and she conducted several mock interviews with her life-skills worker. Julia was hired to work part-time at a store in the local mall.

Julia opened a savings account and deposits 75 percent of her paycheck into her account. This money will help her pay rent on an apartment, buy a car and all the other necessities of a first apartment. She is also studying for her driving exam, so she will have her driver's license when she leaves (maybe even a car).

Julia works daily with the Passages staff on improving her life skills. Julia was already a wonderful cook before she came to the program because she had to cook for herself and her brother. The life-skills educators challenge her to find new, creative and frugal recipes to practice her cooking skills. Staff teach her how to shop on a budget and cook a meal for five other people. Julia is assigned chores every day. She is learning the proper cleaning supplies to use and how to use them safely.

Julia also attends the weekly Pathways life-skills education program workshops and retreats. Julia learns such things as sex education, communication skills, anger management techniques, eating nutritiously, rental rights, and more.

Julia attended three summer Pathways retreats. These provided her with new experiences and activities through an outdoor camping trip, an excursion to Washington, D.C., and a relaxing getaway on the Delaware River.

The future looks bright for this intelligent, talented and resilient young woman.

Leave The Past Behind

We all have to leave the past
behind
or else we will never know
all that we can find.

It may be distracting
sometimes we are just
overeacting.

We all make mistakes
and we just need some breaks.

Always keep your mind on track
'cuz you can be a leader of a
pack.

It doesn't matter at all how you
look
people sometimes live in a book.

You need to focus on you
and eventually your dreams will
come true.

You may get sad
or even mad,

But everyone expresses their
feelings in their own way
your life can change any day.

M.C. age 16

THREE-PART HARMONY: Turning your tuned-out teen into a tuned-in family member

By Scott Albert, *The Packet Group*

If you have a teenager, you probably know the feeling. You ask her about school. She doesn't respond. You thought she didn't hear you so you ask her again. When there's no response again, you realize she wasn't listening.

If this scenario happens too often, you get angry. She feels attacked and storms off! You're exasperated! You look to your friends for support and they reassure you that it's just a phase. They remind you that the teenage years are turbulent, that you just have to hold on and hope to make it through.

Nonsense...It's during adolescence that teenagers realize how we are predictable. That awareness is new to them. They are doing what you and I have done throughout our adult lives. They're predicting people's responses based on their past behavior. How often do we think we know what someone will say before we even ask? They seem so sure about how you're going to respond. More often than not, they're correct.

Sometimes that feels challenging to us and sometimes it's reassuring to them. It's when they tune you out that your home life becomes more problematic. Tuning you out should tell you that you are unproductively predictable. When your kids tune you out, they're experiencing your predictability without hope. They're not testing you because there is no point in doing so. Your communication isn't working.

Consider the possibility that you're still talking to your teenager in a way that doesn't acknowledge her increased understanding of herself and the world around her. Consider that she feels being "talked at" instead of being "talked to." Consider that this is why she rolls her eyes, tunes you out and cuts you off in mid-sentence.

If you want your teenager to stop tuning you out, you need to be genuine enough for him to tune you in. Genuine communication with another person is unpredictable. When you are genuine with your teenager, it will help him realize that there are gaps in his knowledge about you and your life experiences. While he needs to hear and feel the strength of your convictions, he also needs to know some of the vulnerabilities of your life experiences. It is our vulnerabilities that make us feel the unpredictability of life and allows us to experience our humanity. It isn't always safe, but with our teenagers, it has the potential to be very gratifying.

Can you create unpredictable and genuine communication with your teenager? The decision is yours. Consider the following when trying to get your tuned-out teen to tune in:

- Consider telling them a new story about your teen years. When did you last tell them when you made a mistake, how you felt, what you thought and what you learned in hindsight?
- Consider asking your teenager in what ways you are painfully predictable. If they ask you what that means, tell them a story of when your parent was predictable and how you reacted so that they get the idea. Then be quiet and listen. At the end just thank them without comment-particularly if that's unpredictable. Sit with their feedback for a while and decide what in your predictability works in your relationship and what doesn't.
- Apologize for not listening — even if you don't agree with what your teenager has to say. The power of a parent's apology — particularly if history has shown it to be infrequent — cannot be underestimated. Confess that when someone doesn't listen to you, you too tune out. Then begin working on your listening.
- If you've never asked your child a question about your parenting, ask her for three ways that you could be a more effective parent. If they can't answer immediately, explain your reasoning. Promise to ask them again and then do so. Ask until they can provide at least one suggestion. Make sure you understand their answer. Thank them. Post the ideas so they know that you remember. Posting their ideas is not something they would predict. Work on the suggestions that you know are correct. You gain credibility by accepting and implementing their feedback.
- Remind your kids daily that you love them — regardless of their reaction. Start anytime. Make it brief, say it once and say it everyday. They'll always remember it and so will you.

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Save the Date

Somerset Home's 8th

BID FOR BETTER FUTURES

Annual Charity Auction

Thursday, May 1, 2003
Raritan Valley Community College
North Branch, NJ

Special Friends Answer Special Requests



Helen Dombal, co-founder of the Dombal-Vogel foundation.

You've probably never heard of Dombal-Vogel but around Somerset Home, it has become the answer to many difficult questions. When we have a special need for one of our residents, and we try to figure out how we will fund it, there is usually a pause and someone says "Dombal-Vogel!"

Dombal-Vogel is a small foundation that was nurtured by the dreams of Edward Dombal, a businessman, and Jerome Vogel, M.D., a physician. Both men, now deceased, gave generously of their time and finances to help others in need, primarily children. Their concern for children was carried on by their widows, Helen Dombal and Dolores Vogel, who established the foundation to continue helping children in need. The foundation seeks out those situations affecting a child or children where a small amount of financial assistance can serve as "seed money" for improving their quality of life.

The kind people at Dombal-Vogel have become like fairy godparents to many of the young people at Somerset Home. They have been loyal friends for many years. The foundation has responded to such needs as college tuition, purchasing new furniture for our library and providing funds for some our residents to attend their high school proms.

Last year Dombal-Vogel sponsored a holiday trip to the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, which was a wonderful treat for our residents. In October, the Somerset Home kids, with help from Dombal-Vogel, were treated to tickets to see Lion King in New York. The group went in style in a limousine bus with a special dinner at Chevy's Tex Mex. It was a night the kids will remember for a long time.

We at Somerset Home have a special place in our hearts, and in our vocabulary, for the generous people from the Dombal-Vogel foundation. The feeling seems to be mutual. Dombal-Vogel continues to be a compassionate supporter of the special needs of the children at Somerset Home.

First Annual "Time with a Titan" Auction

The East Coast Hockey League team, the Trenton Titans, will be holding their first annual "Time with a Titan" Auction to benefit the Somerset Home on Saturday, January 4, 2003. The event will take place after the 7:00 PM game against the Johnstown Chiefs at the Sovereign Bank Arena in Trenton, NJ.

Somerset Home supporters and Trenton Titans fans will be able to bid on having dinner with their favorite player. The person with the highest bid for the evening gets a special bonus of being signed on as a Titan's player for a day. The player for a day will get to sign their very own contract, get paid, be announced during a game as a new player, have a press release naming them as a new player and get to sit in a special bench side seat.

The dinner with the players will take place on a date and at a location still to be announced. Each player will bring his dinner companion a special gift that is not available to the public. A photographer will also be on hand to photograph each player with his companion as a keepsake.

The Trenton Titans are offering $8.50 tickets to all fans that order tickets for the "Time with a Titan" Auction. For more information or to order tickets please call the Titans at 609-599-9500. Be sure to mention you are calling for the Somerset Home event to be eligible for the discounted tickets.

Very Special Events

Fourth Annual Somerset Home Run for Runaways a Shining Success

The Fourth Annual Somerset Home Run for Runaways benefited from a beautiful sunny day as well as over 450 eager participants. The event raised over $16,000 for the children of Somerset Home.

"The Run exceeded our expectations in every way," said Jeffrey Fetzko, executive director of Somerset Home. "We had more participants and more activities this year, plus a gorgeous day to bring our supporters together. This was truly a successful friend-raiser as well as a fund-raiser and we would like to thank everyone for their support."

The day began with a 5K run, a USA Track and Field 500 point Grand Prix event. Over 314 runners finished the 5K. It was a picture-perfect day for running and the results were impressive.

The overall male winner was 43-year-old Anselm le Bourne from Maplewood, N.J., at a time of 16 minutes, 20 seconds. 17-year-old Eric Meder, from Westfield, N.J., captured second place at 16 minutes, 48 seconds. Third overall was Mark Zamek, 39 years old, from Short Hills, N.J.

Dawn Hausmann, 37 years old, from Summit, N.J., was the first female across the finish line at 19 minutes, 6 seconds. Right on Dawn's heels was 31-year-old Dianne DeOliveira from Brick, N.J. Third place female was Julie Corbin, 37 years old, from Mendham, N.J., in 19 minutes, 31 seconds.

Shortly after the Run began, there was a two-mile nature walk that took participants along the canal in Duke Island Park amid the fall foliage. Entertainment for participants, volunteers and supporters was provided by DJ Mike, from MJ Music Productions in Howell, N.J.

The Run for Runaways also included many activities for children. The big event was kids' sprints with separate races for different age groups from age two to 11. All the young participants got a lot of encouragement from the crowd and a "finisher" ribbon.

Volunteers from the Somerset Vocational and Technical High School offered face painting. Members of First Response Ambulance from Raritan were on hand to give kids a closer look at their ambulances and to provide emergency services if needed. Sergeant Gerald Nunnery of the Bridgewater Police was on hand to provide photo identity cards for children.

Post-race there was a barbeque generously donated by Catered Affair of Hillsborough. Owner Pete Bloom grilled the hamburgers, hotdogs and veggie burgers that he donated. This is the fourth year that Catered Affair has contributed to the Run for Runaways. Mr. Bloom said, "I enjoy supporting Somerset Home through this fun event that brings the community together. It's a chance for me to help out, and I have a lot of fun doing it."

Sponsors of the event included Ethicon, as a contributing sponsor, Ortho Biotech as the award sponsor and Merrill Lynch as the entertainment sponsor.



Future 5K runners getting in shape during the kids' sprints.



Top female finishers, from left to right: Julie Corbin (3rd place), Dawn Hausman (1st place), and Dianne DeOliveira (2nd place).

Thank You for Making 2002 Special

"A House is built of logs and stone,
of piles and post and piers;
A Home is built of loving deeds,
That stands a thousand years."

— VICTOR HUGO

We are grateful to be supported by people like you. The staff and residents of Somerset Home wish you and your loved ones a wonderful New Year!

Somerset HOME *for* Temporarily Displaced Children

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