

TEEN FEED TIMES

Summer 2004

You're Invited!

Would you like to help homeless youth over the summer? Come to Homelessness 101, a free training for people interested in learning more about our young people and ways to help. This summer's Homelessness 101 dates will be:

June 9, 6:00—8:30 pm

July 14, 6:00—8:30 pm

Aug. 11, 6:00—8:30 pm

To RSVP and get location information, please email Laura Pritchard, lrpritchard@yahoo.com.

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Inside this issue:

Teen Feed Tales: 2

Helping Hands

SLY Update 2

Writers' Corner 2

Director's Cut 3

USM Finances 3

How to Help 3



To Be Seen and Heard

"Hit a street kid in the face for \$1!" The cardboard cried, echoed with energetic calls of the young men selling themselves. Hit them in the face with a pie, that is: a paper plate of shaving or whipped cream, depending which was cheaper that day.

My heart sank at this salesmanship. What I saw as internalized oppression, these boys saw as success. They truly felt they were coming up, that this was the best way to provide for themselves. Unable to get legal work without ID, and frustrated with the lengthy ID process, they set upon this plan. Brilliant marketers, they quickly found the best schedule was 2 am, when the bars closed and drunk students embraced their invitation. They stopped staying in shelter: "We've got to work; we can't afford to miss that crowd."

So many of our youth have learned that rewards hinge on degradation, that they must bear abuse and exploitation to survive, let alone succeed. Recently I've seen the incongruity between the stereotype of our kids' hardened exteriors, and their intense vulnerability.

Several nights ago, one guest called me over to ask, "Do you think I'm a good person?" I was again struck by how much our kids crave affection and attention. Our guests are so hungry to be liked: to be seen for their unique skills, enjoyed for their individuality, valued for their humanity. They clamor for our attention, aching to be noticed beyond their immediate needs, to be a person beyond a need for food and clean socks. "I feel like I'm just paperwork," one said of his experience with a social service.



With recent media coverage of a sex offender who targeted Seattle street kids, we are reminded how very fragile and vulnerable our young people are. How hungry they can be for someone who will take an interest in them. If we aren't there as a supportive community to fill that need, someone else will be, with less-than-good intentions. Thank you all for helping us to create the kind of community where our guests can be safe and recognized as valued members.

*Tele Aadsen is USM's
Direct Service Supervisor
and Outreach Service
Coordinator.*

One Guest's Thoughts

How did I get here? What put me in these ridiculous circumstances? Once again, I find myself penniless, homeless, broke and perhaps broken in this city named Seattle. I wanted to take an honest look at myself and my choices and even my present situation. I had been running from this day for a long time.

Last night I let myself feel what it feels like to not know where I'm going to sleep on any given night. I let myself feel what it feels like to be alone and scared, with no one to turn to, nowhere to hide. I, at 20 years old, finally faced the fact that I have been living to dilute my reality...running to the numbness

associated with the toxins I pummeled into my body.

I was at this NA meeting, listening to people talk and everything anyone says sounds like the words that should be jumping out of my own mouth.

Continued, page 4

Teen Feed Tales: Helping Hands

"These kids make every effort to show their appreciation for what we're doing."

*Colin Knight is
USM's Teen Feed
Coordinator.*

Seeing sixty kids an evening for only one hour makes it difficult to get to know most of these kids beyond a name and a nod. Yet in many cases, as they surf the tide looking for a safe place to land, they make an effort to get to know me. These few kids, making every effort to show their appreciation for what we're doing, aptly illustrate the lighter side of a group whose

reputation precedes them.

Accustomed to jibes or a cold shoulder, taunts or just yelling, these youth have offered to help out almost every day since I've been here. So two or three of the kids help me set up tables and chairs before we open. Then I get a chance to sit and chat with them about the finer things, playing rummy or just lounging.

With that time I get a closer vision of their volatile lives and attempt to provide a sense of calm and security in an otherwise turbulent world.



SERVICE LINKS FOR YOUTH UPDATE

It had been a strained week – some rough moments with youth, and a new case manager's insecurities: "Am I doing *anything* to help these youth?"

That afternoon, I was checking phone messages on my way to the U-District. The last message was from a young man I hadn't seen in over three weeks and had been worrying about. Rumor had it he had found a

"place" – and I'd heard nothing more. The young man's message contained words used in incredibly creative combinations and exuberant profanity – quite frankly, it made me smile. What's more, he was talking into the phone at a volume I could hear clearly in the next room. He had good news, he hollered – call him back.

Reflecting on this edition of *Teen Feed Times*, what

strikes me about that afternoon is not the colorful message. I'm thankful I am able – and we are able – to hear youth's stories just as they tell them. They are shouted into our phone messages, or told across the Teen Feed table. Youth share with us what is important to them – when and how they are best able to.

These stories are incredible gifts.

*"He had good news,
he hollered -
call him back!"*

*Megan Gibbard is
USM's Outreach
Service Coordinator,
and is thankful for the
incredible gifts of each
youth's stories.*

Guest Writers' Corner

Soft skin deep brown eyes,
the way I feel is no surprise:
Beauty found perfectly timed
losing my head, heart in a
bind. What can I say thought
it before, wanting your touch
begging for more. Wherever
you go do know I'll follow with
sweet dreams of bliss 'till I
wake tomorrow.

*Noah Page:
poet, artist, musician,
and better-er of the
world
(one city at a time.)*

[The following is from a young man's letter from jail, who wrote us, "Although you try your best, some people have to fall over and over again in order to finally find the strength and inner-support from themselves to achieve what they've always wanted or been denied. That's coming from a person who knows better than most people."]

Sooner or later everyone will fall short of something important to them—whether it be a job, a dream, or a relationship. But failure has taught me that life is a road with unpredictable forks and unexpected tomorrows. You can't let yourself be destroyed by a defeat or let others set the limit on your ability to achieve.

We live in the most prosperous society in the recorded history of the known universe.

And yet we have many children in our society whose only assurance of a nutritious meal is the result of a generous neighbor's kind donation.

Make no mistake - it is only by neighbors helping neighbors that a neighborhood can thrive. And the health of the community is contingent upon the health of its constituents. This is precisely why USM's mission of serving the needs of homeless youth is at once a service to our neighbors - our neighbors, the kids, obviously. . .

and our neighbors, the homeowners and apartment dwellers . . . and our neighbors, the merchants and corporate professionals. . . and our neighbors, the University community. . . and neighbors of every other demographic profile. . . we're all in this together.

So, as we look to the future, USM will be looking for opportunities to forge partnerships and build bridges of shared responsibility in common destiny. We will be deepening our corporate relationship with Safeco - an organization recently recognized by United Way for its outstanding volunteer program of

which Teen Feed is a beneficiary. We will be partnering with our neighboring merchants and restaurateurs in mutual support on the occasion of our open house on June 26th. (See you there!) Our new, expanding board of directors will be extending community collaboration in future fundraising events. And our youth will be given opportunity to have their artistic product become meaningful contributions to our overall fundraising efforts.

Continued, page 4

USM's Financial Report:

We want to thank all of you who sent in gifts to be matched by Allen Shawn Feinstein! Our total from this year's fundraiser was down about \$4,000.00 from last year's \$8,500.00. Donations are still welcome! We are able to accept credit card donations. Thank you so much to those of you who donate monthly via your credit card— if anyone else is interested in donating a specific amount every month to USM, or a one-time credit card donation, please see below. All donations are tax-deductible.

Kim Clark is USM's Office Manager. She thanks everyone who contributed to April's matching funds campaign..

Opportunities to donate and volunteer:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Please send me more information on how I can help!

Credit card donation: Name on card _____

Card type _____ Card # _____

Exp date _____ Amount of donation \$ _____

Would you like this to be a recurring donation from your credit card? YES NO

Please cut out and mail this portion to:
4740-B University Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105

Or a financial contribution sufficient to:

- Teen Feed supplies for one month (\$200)
- Train 10 new volunteers (\$250)
- Give toiletries to 20 youth (\$25)
- Buy Birthday or Holiday gifts for 2 youth (\$60)
- Buy bus tokens for 20 youth (\$50)

TEEN FEED TIMES is a quarterly publication of University Street Ministry. Questions or comments are welcome!
4740-B University Way NE Seattle, WA 98105, (206) 522-4366.

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Kim Clark, Office Manager

Colin Knight, Teen Feed Coordinator

Tele Aadsen, SLY Direct Service Supervisor

Megan Gibbard, Outreach Case Manager



Directors Cut, from page 3

Perhaps the best quality of my job is the chance I am afforded to work with so many wonderful people. From staff to volunteers to partners, I am constantly reminded of the goodness and care that is evidenced all around us. And when I see the kids, I recognize the reflection of ourselves. Our help today will be reflected in their future tomorrow. Feed the future; support Teen Feed.

Mark J. Snow
Executive Director

We appreciate the generous support and contributions from our printers.

We encourage our readers to patronize their establishment.

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Guest, from page 1

My heart felt bloody, alive, cut so deeply the tears seemed to emerge from below the scar tissue formed by over half a decade of being on and off the streets. The scar tissue from hitchhiking since I was not even a month into 15, to escape myself and my past. The scars from my parents' divorce, and the insane amount of poverty and despair I have lived in since then. The scars from being half Alaskan Native in the 21st century. The scars were leaping out of me, coming out through rivers of tears pouring down my face, hot, wet tears that needed to be free and expressed and felt.

I felt a release inside of me last night as I surrendered to love and to loving and accepting myself as I am. I felt relieved that I had been brutally honest with myself and that I was starting to take ownership of my actions and reactions to life's circumstances. That's all I'm in right now, circumstances.



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Helping Our Youth To Meet
Their Future Off The Street

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