

Teen Feed Times



UNIVERSITY STREET MINISTRY

Spring 2005

Positive Youth Development?

Often times these youth test me; I see a series of bad choices and am convinced that it will only go on. But just about every time I have a doubt, one youth or another approaches me to talk about how they haven't used for more than a month or how they just got into housing. I think about it for a moment and realize that, over the past few months, I'd had numerous conversations with this kid and not one seemed positive; his bike was stolen or she had had a bad encounter with an older man and was worried he would find her; and there was nothing I could do but listen and make a poor attempt to console him or her.

Getting deeper into this profession people call social work, I've become familiar with a philosophy that goes with it: Positive Youth Development; and this philosophy guides much of what I do. It reminds me that my simple presence and open ear in the face of their dumbfoundingly terrible stories is worth a lot more than I ever thought it could be and calms the desire to reach for any kind of quick fix in this work.

Positive Youth Development tells us that individuals develop resiliency when certain individuals provide what are called 'protective factors.' This philosophy outlines three in particular: unconditional

care and support; high expectations; and the opportunity to participate in something bigger than themselves.

Let me explain. The first is quite simple: caring and supportive relationships help to influence one's decisions in a positive way. Myself, our case managers, the advocate volunteers at Teen Feed, we all work to let these youth know that whatever choices they make, we do not judge them for it.

The second fits right in with this. Individuals live up to the expectations of those around them—you tell a kid he's worthless, that's precisely what he'll think about himself. When, instead of judging



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www.usministry.net

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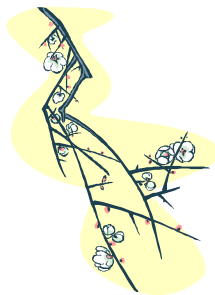
Harm Reduction and Homeless Youth

- Smoking 5 cigarettes a day instead of 10.
- Wearing your seatbelt.
- Using clean needles to inject IV drugs.
- Practicing safe sex.

Harm Reduction, in its most basic sense, is defined as "any positive change." Encouraging any positive change in the homeless youth we work with, however small, is one of the key philosophies behind the work we do in case management, at Teen

Feed and other programs. Harm reduction is involved with every youth interaction, as we ask questions motivating youth to consider what small constructive differences they could make.

The first Washington State



needle exchange – a place where IV drug users can trade in used needles for clean ones – began in Tacoma in 1988. The exchange was started by a social worker, Dave Purchase, who saw clients contract HIV and strains of Hepatitis by sharing needles. With a needle exchange in the area, new cases of HIV and Hepatitis decreased – with no discernable increase in IV drug users. Purchase saw a distressed population put into danger by certain behaviors.

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Teen Feed Times



“LIVING ON THE STREETS, IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM LIVING IN A SAFE HOME... IN SURVIVAL MODE, OUR GUESTS ARE NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG.”



In 1989 UW Medical Hospital reported cases of malnutrition in many of the homeless youth who visited their emergency room. Collaborating the efforts of local churches and concerned neighbors USM began Teen Feed.

Cont. from p. 1 — Harm Reduction

He set about to reduce risk.

Tele and myself also set about to reduce the risk our youth encounter daily. The ideal aim might be housing and education ... but you can't climb the mountain in one step. We begin where a youth is at. We encourage youth who are sexually active to use protection. We educate youth who are using drugs about clean needles, safer ways to use, and, when they are ready – treatment programs. We encourage youth to apply for food stamps to better their nutritional access, or to stop by clinic for illnesses. Each small positive



change is one step closer to a healthy life, and, ultimately, life off the streets.

One might ask, “But, if the kids weren't homeless, they wouldn't have all these prob-

lems! Shouldn't every effort be directed towards housing?” True, many of the risk factors our youth face come from living on the streets but when it comes to maintaining a stable situation in an apartment or house, there are often other concerns that must be addressed first.

We are here to encourage positive change in the lives of these youth—in whatever form it first occurs to the youth—whether to finding housing or quitting smoking.

Megan Gibbard
Direct Services Supervisor

Our Community and the Youth We Serve

January 23rd was a bad day. All of our Teen Feed keys were stolen, jeopardizing our partner churches and leading to the expensive re-keying of all four buildings. It was difficult not to take this anonymous break-in personally.

Two days later, our guests gathered. They shared feelings of outrage that their resources had been so threatened. Rather than focusing on anger, they spoke of how they could make it right – how to show appreciation for the services available and assure the community that the actions of one did not reflect the rest. When a guest told me they had decided to organize a rummage/arts and crafts sale to raise money for the churches, I remembered why we do this work. Our guests repeatedly demonstrate resiliency, forgiveness, and compassion that astounds me.

Colin and Megan have shared how we provide services based on philosophies of harm reduction and positive

youth development. Also essential is remembering that living on the streets, in survival mode, is very different from living in a safe home with loving family and friends. Our guests are not always able to live according to their beliefs on right and wrong. Again I turn to our guests as our greatest teachers, as they have shown such courageous compassion towards themselves and others:

The young man who described growing up with his addicted father's unpredictability and abuse. “I love my dad, I just can't live with him. He was my worst enemy and my greatest teacher.”

The young woman who gave her baby up for adoption, and later reflected on that decision. “I'm glad she's got the parents she does, that she's not growing up with a single mom, different boy-friends coming and going. This is best for her.”

The young man processing his doctor's words. “He said if

I don't stop doing drugs, he'll be reading my name in the obituaries within a year.”

The transgender guest explaining how it has been, trying to break out of the female body he was born into, met with rejection and ostracism from family and friends. “I just want to be one of the guys. That's all I've ever wanted.”

The guest who tried so hard to hide an abusive relationship from us, until tearfully confiding, “I didn't want you to be disappointed in me. Thanks for being so understanding.”

With these teachers and so many more, I remember what we're doing here, building a community that relies on the strengths and contributions of all members, recognizing guests, volunteers and staff as equally essential. Thank you all for joining us in this partnership.

Tele Aadsen
Outreach Case Manager

Thanks for a Great Holiday Party!

This years holiday party was a special day for over 100 youth-in-need who, thanks to the generous donations of many of you, received not only a good meal, but also a special gift.

Special thanks to:

Sammamish Presbyterian Church, University Unitarian Church, Safeco, Wallingford United Methodist Church, Summit Research Group, Sakson and Taylor, U Congregational, the UW Carlson Center and Evans School, Temple Beth Am and the fabulous Bremerton Bakers



Changes at USM—Farewell to Kim and Mark!

There have been some major changes in the office USM in the last few months.

In November our Executive Director arranged a meeting with the Nonprofit Assistance Center to discuss our financial struggles. We were very impressed with the competence and wisdom we found there. So when we were told by fiscal manager Doug Phonsavanh that our payroll costs were far too high for our income we had to listen. The Board met and weighed our goals, and it seemed to us that our highest priority was direct service to the young people who depend on us.

Anyone who has watched USM grow from a one man organization to what we were in the fall of 2004 will know how difficult this discussion was. In the end we let our office queen, the marvelous Kim Clark, and our most enthusiastic supporter, ED Mark Snow, go. Let it be said, we miss them terribly. The Board has taken a much more active roll in the day to day running of the office, especially Board Chair, Mike Weybright. Outreach Worker Megan Gibbard has accepted the role of Acting ED. Colin Knight, Teen Feed Coordinator, is tackling grant writing, along with

Megan and Mike. Tele Aadsen remains our font of wisdom and practical knowledge. Doug has worked long and hard on the financial end of the organization, and Board members Jeff Albertson and Luciann MacDonald have pitched in when they could. Raising money continues to be a major goal as is finding other ways to pare expenses without in any way shorting the youth we serve.

Luciann MacDonald Board Member



University Street Ministry has been dedicated to serving homeless youth since its inception in 1987. It runs a nightly meal program called Teen Feed and outreach case management outfit known as Service Links for Youth.

Cont. from p. 1 — Positive Youth Development

these youth for a poor decision, we remind them that we know they are more capable and competent than that, they are a little surprised. There's a pretty good chance they're thinking: "Yeah, what was I thinking?"

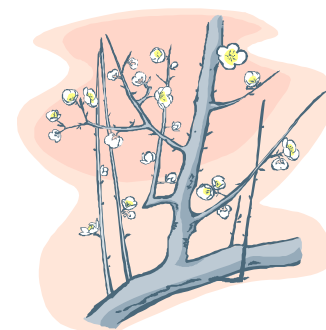
Finally, the third important protective factor allows room for growth. If a youth is provided an opportunity to partici-

pate, to take ownership for the services they rely on or to help create something they better realize that they are actually capable and competent.

Each of these protective factors acts as a filter for the decisions they will ultimately make—whether or not to steal something from a local shop, to use drugs or not, to look for a job that day or not—it gives

these youth a stable support who will not judge them for their mistakes, the confidence they need to make difficult decisions, and the power to take responsibility for themselves.

Colin Knight Teen Feed Coordinator



TEEN FEED TIMES is a quarterly publication of University Street Ministry. Questions and comments are welcome!

Board of Directors:

Mike Weybright, Chair

Jeff Albertson

Luciann MacDonald

Staff:

Megan Gibbard,

Direct Services Supervisor

Tele Aadsen,

Outreach Case Manager

Colin Knight,

Teen Feed Coordinator

The most recent facts about Washington State hunger:

- **One in 25** families in Washington State (about 260,000 people) have at least one family member who goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food.
- **1 in 8** families in the state are food insecure, or worry about where their next meal will come from.
- **1 of every 6** of the state's children, or about 280,000 kids, is at risk of going hungry because their families are food insecure.
- **Children make** up 40 percent of food bank clients.
- **1 in 3 children** qualify to receive free or reduced price school meals.

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