



SOMERSET

HOME

Page

Somerset Home for Temporarily Displaced Children • Spring 2012



**Nine members of the Somerset County Youth Advisory Board from Somerset Home created and starred in a video to encourage other teens to get involved. Celebrating at the premiere party were, left to right, Ali, Shamell, Abril and Nasir.**

**T**eens in the child welfare system often feel powerless. The rules about everything in their lives – from where they live to what they eat – are dictated by the state.

So in 2003, when the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) created a youth advisory board in each county to get feedback about its services, Somerset Home residents were happy to participate.

"It gives me a way to express my opinions to the people who make decisions about my life," said current member 18-year-old Nick.

Members of the Somerset County Youth Advisory Board (YAB), headquartered at Somerset Home, wanted to tell other teens in residential care about the benefits of

joining one of the boards. They decided to get their attention by making a video.

"Have a Voice" was written by Somerset Home's YAB members, and nine of them had starring roles. Local independent videographer Brian Stollery donated part of his usual fee for taping, adding background music and creating the finished product. The remainder of the cost was funded by a grant from DYFS.

The day the video appeared on YouTube, everyone who worked on the project celebrated with a "premiere" party.

Sixteen-year-old Candace reported, "It was fun to do, and I was proud to be part of something that can help

other kids like me."

The video is also available on the New Jersey Department of Children and Families web site, Somerset Home web site, and on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.





**Somerset Home  
for Temporarily  
Displaced Children**

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CREDIBILITY • INTEGRITY • ACHIEVEMENT

# New President Guides Board



**Claire Calandra, board president.**

Claire Calandra, who joined the Somerset Home board of trustees in 2008, has begun a two-year term as board president.

A resident of Far Hills, she has been an attorney at AT&T, chief operating officer of Tycom, Ltd., and a member of the Rutgers Business School faculty. Now semi-retired, she is the principal of a management consulting firm.

"My first job after college was working at a youth shelter," she said, "and I've rekindled my interest in helping teenagers who have nowhere to turn. Somerset Home is a wonderful example of giving these kids a safety net."

Joining Claire as newly elected officers on the board are Mark Salandra, treasurer, and Nikkia Miller-Blakes, assistant treasurer. Re-elected were Madeline Berlin, vice president, and Marsha Montgomery, secretary. 

## DONORS HONOR LOVED ONES

We would like to express our gratitude to those who made a contribution as a tribute to a family member or friend between April 2011 and March 2012.

These donations go into the endowment fund, ensuring Somerset Home will be able to meet the needs of homeless youth long into the future.

For a gift of \$250 or more, you may have an engraved brick placed in our Walk of Fame, a garden walkway at Somerset Home, as a permanent symbol of your generous support.

To request a brick, you can use the form on the enclosed envelope or contact Kathleen Doolin at 908-526-6605 or [kdoolin@somersethome.org](mailto:kdoolin@somersethome.org).

### In Honor Of

Children, Grandchildren & Loved Ones  
Laura Fisher  
David Gelber, Ph.D.  
Bill Held  
Ted & Delores Johnson

### In Memory Of

Arthur G. Alte, III  
Charles Palmer Bateman, Jr.  
Gloria Bellina  
Mildred Berlenbach  
Theresa Bradley  
Maryann Braukmann  
Teresa Butler  
Louis Caruso

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Mary Parr  
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Mary & Peter Rabosky  
Ethel Rothman  
John Rotz  
Thomas Sheehan  
Elaine Strampp

## E-helpers Make Wishes Come True

*Jason wanted to order his high school yearbook.*

*Sara hoped to attend her senior prom.*

*Matt loved music and wanted to take guitar lessons.*

All of these wishes were fulfilled by generous donors who signed up to be e-Helpers.

When one of our residents has a specific request, we send out an email to see who can help, and within a few days – and sometimes a few hours – we receive donations to cover the cost of these extras that mean so much to our residents, giving them a chance to feel a little more like normal teenagers.

The list of e-Helpers has grown to nearly 300 people, and since it started in 2004, every request has been fulfilled.

If you would like to know when one of our teens makes a request, you can sign up on our web site, [somersethome.org](http://somersethome.org), or by sending an email to [kcoulahan@somersethome.org](mailto:kcoulahan@somersethome.org).



## Success Stories Learning Life Has No Limits



**Calvin is proud of his accomplishments, including buying his first car.**

Calvin's mother struggled to raise her little boy, who was born with a severe hearing impairment. He was 7 years old before she could get him hearing aids; he was 9 before he was enrolled in a school for hearing-impaired children. After that, Calvin's schoolwork improved and he became more outgoing – milestones his mother was able to savor before she died a short time later.

Calvin moved in with his grandmother, and later an aunt, but he was physically and emotionally mistreated by both of them.

Despite having hearing aids and learning sign language, it was still hard for him to tell people how angry, hurt and lost he felt.

He was a teenager when the state intervened and placed Calvin in foster care. He was moved several times before landing in a loving home, where his foster mother became his strongest supporter and provided the structure he needed to thrive.

When he turned 18, Calvin applied to Passages – Somerset Home's transitional-living program – so he

could learn to live on his own. He was gregarious and friendly, but still had a lot of emotional issues to work through. His case managers, Jeanmarie and Sara, and therapist, David, helped him develop healthy ways of coping.

Calvin worked hard to graduate from high school while holding down a part-time job. He also "graduated" to My Place, Somerset Home's independent-living program, where he and four other young men are taking important steps toward adulthood.

One by one, Calvin is making his dreams come true. First on the list, buying a car – every young man's symbol of independence – with his savings and some help from a generous benefactor. He is attending college, something he never imagined would be possible. Next, he hopes to attend Gallaudet University, the only four-year college for deaf students in the country, and become an interpreter.

And after that? The sky's the limit.



# Arts Give Teens Outlet for Emotions

Art, dance and sculpture may not be at the top of the list of things homeless teens need to learn. But for the students in the Transitional Learning Center – the in-house school at Brahma House – these experiences can make all the difference.

Introducing residents to various visual and performing arts forms gives them an outlet for their feelings of anger, abandonment, frustration and loss. They get a chance to develop new skills and find success creating projects, which builds confidence and self-esteem.

An even bigger benefit is the improvement they make in social skills such as communication, cooperation and conflict management.

"We know arts education has a tremendous effect on a child's development and helps level the 'learning field' across socio-economic

groups," says Torie Esposito, the Brahma House TLC teacher. "Studies also show it has a measurable impact on at-risk youth, reducing truancy and increasing academic performance."



The visual and performing arts program began in 2009 with two grants totaling \$10,000. This year, it is funded by Horizon Foundation, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Provident Bank Foundation, Ronald McDonald

Charities – Tri-State Area and Target, with grants totaling nearly \$30,000.

Monthly workshops use a variety of teaching methods: hands-on experiences, reading assignments, videos, discussions, and field trips to art galleries, museums, plays and musical performances.

The arts program has had a measurable impact on the teenagers who attend the workshops, increasing their knowledge about art and decreasing behavioral problems. But the intangible benefits may be just as important.

One budding young artist explains what the arts program means to her: "Drawing is my way to express myself because it's hard for me to talk about being sad."

This is just the kind of support Somerset Home wants to continue giving the kids in its care. 



## Bridge House Builds Confidence

Somerset Home's newest program, Bridge House, has passed the one-year mark, and is proving that safe, affordable, long-term housing is the foundation for a better life.

The homeless young adults who live in subsidized apartments have been consistently employed, stayed at the same job, and met at least one of their goals.

The statistics look good, but the true test of the supportive-housing program's value is its effect on the young adults it serves. A recent satisfaction survey captured their thoughts.

Somerset Home's plans for its own building with 10 efficiency apartments have been approved by the Bridgewater Township Board of Adjustment, and a capital campaign is

under way to raise funds for construction and furnishings.

*"I am so thankful for this program. It's been like another family to me and I really don't know where I would be without it."*

*"It allows me to mature and grow up in my own space."*

*"The understanding staff has helped me better myself."*

*"I like it here, and everyone has been helpful with all the issues I had."*

*"It has given me stability, serenity, happiness and a place to call home."* 

# Youth Speak Out

## Somerset Home Kids Share Their Thoughts

### One thing I'm good at is...

Writing – *A.M., Age 14*

Dancing – *S.R., Age 16*

Football – *K.R., Age 15*

Drawing – *S.W., Age 15*

Giving advice to other people when they need it the most. – *G.R., Age 17*



### The person I admire most is...

My therapist. He has passed his beneficial knowledge down to me and over the last year it's kept me on a good path. – *G.R., Age 17*

My grandma. She took care of me when no one else did. She treated me as her daughter, pushed me through school, and is the reason for my free scholarship to Rutgers. – *O.B., Age 17*



My aunt Maria. She was a strong confident woman and helped me with everything. – *S.R., Age 16*

### If I could change one thing it would be...

My attitude – *S.R., Age 16*

My bad habits – *A.M., Age 14*

Me not going in DYFS – *K.R., Age 15*

My life situation. I would have done things differently when I was first put in DYFS and went to my dad. – *O.B., Age 17*



The reckless decisions I've made in my past because they've gotten me nowhere but in endless trouble. – *G.R., Age 17*

### The most important person in my life is...

My aunt and brother. They're my idols, and even though they made mistakes, they're there to advise me and make sure I don't make those mistakes. – *S.W., Age 15*

My mom. I love her and she's there for me. – *A.M., Age 14*

My four sisters. They're like my kids and we've been through so much together. – *S.R., Age 16*

Nobody. I don't trust people. – *D.A., Age 14*

My son. He's made me stronger, independent and more mature. – *O.B., Age 16*

My brother. He basically raised me and taught me everything I know today. – *G.R., Age 17*



### My life will be better when...

I understand everything – *A.M., Age 14*

I'm back with my family – *S.R., Age 16*

I am fully educated and I'm back with my mother – *K.R., Age 14*

I move in with my aunt and brother! – *S.W., Age 15*

I move to a foster home – *D.A., Age 14*

I get my situation together and have my son back in my life. – *O.B., Age 17*

I'm officially an adult who can handle everything by myself without help from youth and family services. – *G.R., Age 17*



# Tips for Parents: *Is Your Teen Over-Connected?*



Ironically, being over-connected leaves many teens feeling completely disconnected.

On any given day, more than half of American teens are logging on to a social media web site; 25% log on more than 10 times a day, says an online report in *Pediatrics*.

Just 10 years ago, teens spent most of their free time playing sports or games or hanging out with friends. Now, the majority of free time is monopolized by technology.

## Upside of Social Networking:

- Builds a strong support network
- Keeps teens in touch with family and friends
- Encourages teens to express themselves creatively
- Grants teens access to valuable news and health information

## Downside of Social Networking:

- **Cyberbullying**, or teasing, spreading rumors or humiliating other to isolate or harass their peers
- **Hypertexting** – sending more than 120 messages per school day – has been linked to increased risk of drinking, smoking, using drugs, fighting and risky sexual behavior
- **Hypernetworking** – spending more than three hours on networking sites per school day – has been associated with poor grades, stress, depression, suicide and promiscuity
- **Sexting** is another way teens

exploit themselves and their peers, often followed by regret and possibly disciplinary or legal action

- **Facebook depression** – a new term for mood swings and changes in appearance, diet and sleep patterns that often result from spending too much time on social media web sites.

## Parents are not powerless against the lure of the internet:

- “Friend” your teen on Facebook and experiment with social media sites yourself.
- Make a plan to get them active, involved in extracurricular activities and spending time with the family.
- Teens who are suffering from the side effects of too much time online may benefit from counseling, wilderness camp or other programs to give them a break from technology and the “noise” of daily life.



## Volunteers Cook for Kids

Many caring people offer their time and talent by planting flowers, bringing food, providing birthday gifts, collecting school supplies, teaching a craft and holding fundraisers. At right, Jersey Cares, Inc., recruited Met Life employees Jamie Johmann, Suzanne Napolitano, Debbie Elofant and Jasmine Fletcher to prepare an Italian feast for the residents of Brahma House.



# Teens Tackle Fitness

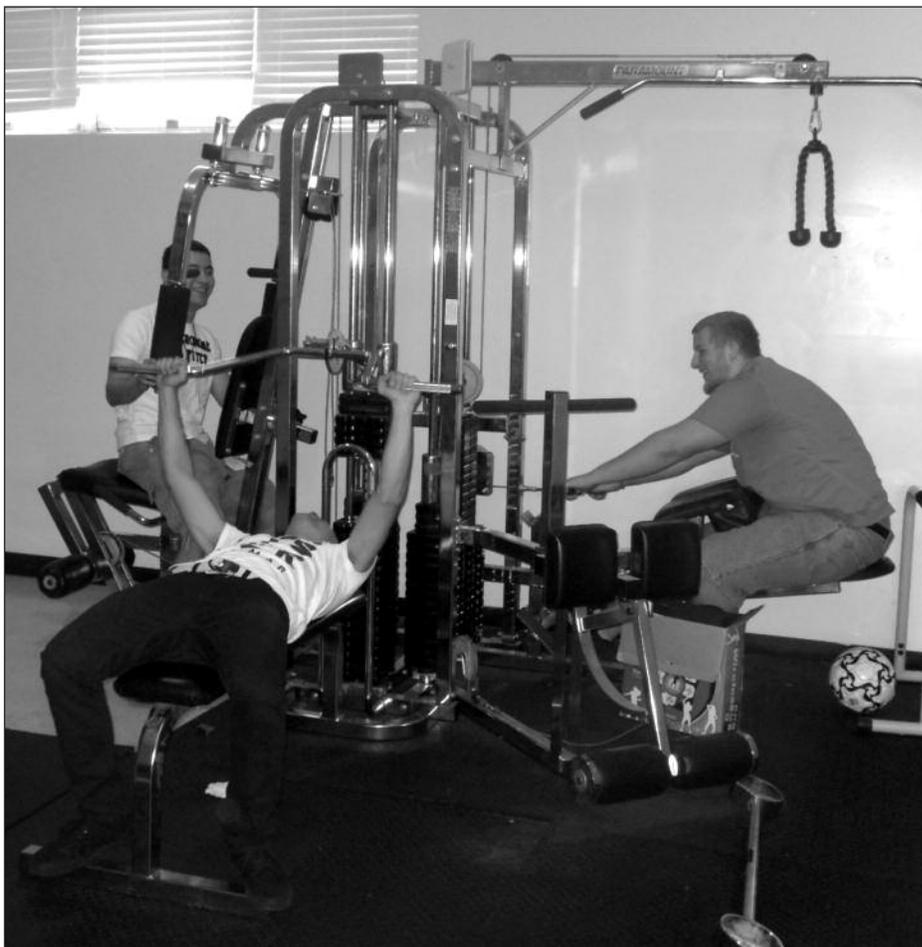
Everyone wants to get in shape, and the teens at Somerset Home are no exception. So with the help of board member Mark Salandra, they launched their own exercise program called SHAPE (Success through Healthy Choices and Physical Exercise).

Mark is a personal trainer and owner of StrengthCondition.com. He teamed up with holistic nutrition consultant Lisa Tesa to put together a 10-week program of personalized fitness training and nutritional counseling.

Thanks to equipment donated by Dr. John Scancarella of Martinsville, and Belle Mead Physical Therapy owner Mark Nagel, the residents developed individualized workouts, with contests and incentives to help them stay on track and meet their fitness goals.

"It was great to have help putting together my own exercise program," said Ben.

"I love being able to exercise right here in our rec room," said Marie. "It's so convenient!"



**Miguel, Juan and Hans go through their workout routine before meeting with "coach" Mark Salandra, a fitness expert and board member.**

## CAR DONATIONS HELP HOMELESS TEENS

Donating your old car (or truck, camper, motorcycle, boat) to Somerset Home is an easy way to help out residents.

The advantages: convenience and a tax deduction for you, funds to help more homeless teens for us. In addition to the tax write-off, you can avoid expensive repairs on an older vehicle, a low trade-in offer from a dealer, and the inconvenience of selling it privately.

Somerset Home has partnered with Charitable Auto Resources

(CARS), which provides answers to your questions, and a simple process from start to finish.

That was the experience of Somerset Home's first car donor.

"I gave CARS the vehicle information and put the title in the car," she

said. "I didn't even have to be there when a towing company picked it up. A few weeks later, I was notified of the amount of money Somerset Home received. It was as simple as that."

Because CARS is a national program, people anywhere in the country can donate a car to Somerset Home. So ask your family and friends if they'd like to help homeless teens, too. Just direct them to [somersethome.org](http://somersethome.org) and click on the car donation button.



## Homeless Teens Get Scholarship Help



*Courtesy of Courier News*

Graduation is a big achievement for our residents, and we reward them with a picnic celebration and a scholarship to encourage them to continue their education. They continue to receive a scholarship award every year they are in college or pursuing other post-secondary education. It's our way of letting them know we're there to support them in their journey to becoming successful adults.

Last year, eight residents graduated from high school, seven were accepted into college, three attended adult vocational school and four continued their college education.

The awards are possible because of donations to the Somerset Home Education Endowment Fund, which ensures there will be

a nest egg to provide scholarships far into the future. You can make a donation to the scholarship fund by visiting our web site at [somersethome.org](http://somersethome.org) or by sending a check, with the word scholarship on the memo line.

### *SAVE the DATE*

#### **5K Run Raises Funds for Runaway Youth**

**Mark your calendar for November 3, 9 a.m. at Duke Island Park in Bridgewater.**

**Somerset Home's 14th annual Run for Runaways is a great way for people of all ages to get out and run, walk or sprint; enjoy snacks, massages and games; bid in a silent auction; and raise funds for runaway youth.**

**Visit [somersethome.org](http://somersethome.org) or [runforrunaways.com](http://runforrunaways.com).**

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