

Street Smart program, stung by funding loss, turns to volunteers

The call came in to Jennifer Amaya, Visions and Pathways director of outreach and prevention, at 2 a.m. She was not alarmed – calls like these come in to her regularly as coordinator of the Street Smart teen outreach program.

This one was from the North Plainfield Police. A homeless teenager was wandering the streets and walked into the police station just to get warm. “They realized he had nowhere to go,” said Amaya.

By 3 a.m. Amaya was in North Plainfield collecting the parentless 17-year-old and taking him to Visions and Pathways’ Brahma House residence. Within days Amaya and her staff were able to locate a sister in Virginia, and the youth was sent to join her.

A life saved? Perhaps.

Street Smart is the go-to program for police in Somerset, Morris, Middlesex, and Union counties when encountering teen runaways, teens kicked out of their homes, or teens, some as young as 13, who may already be victims of human trafficking.

“We do not turn anybody away,” Amaya emphasized. She said troubled and home-

less teens are getting to know Street Smart and trust the work the program does. “We are not the authorities,” said Amaya. “We are not the police. We are a support system.”

The program that has helped thousands over the years became endangered in the fall when its grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was withdrawn. But Street Smart refused to fold. It has been soldiering on with help from volunteers. These volunteers help staff the outreach office in Morristown, work directly with clients, and accompany staff on emergency calls.

Volunteers from companies and organizations in Central New Jersey are also lending a hand to donate badly needed items such as food, clothing, and blankets.

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HOMELESS FOR THE HOLIDAYS -- and every day -- is the plight of more area teenagers than you would think. These youth are counseled, fed, clothed, and housed by Visions and Pathways’ Street Smart outreach program. Withdrawal of federal grants has forced the program to depend more and more on volunteers and college interns to do rescue work.



DANCE BAND performs at Spark! Gala June 8.

Spark! Gala set for June 8



Cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, dinner and dancing, a wow of a silent auction, and community awards mark a pleasure-filled evening when Visions and Pathways holds its annual Spark! Gala on Thursday, June 8 at the Park Avenue Club in Florham Park, New Jersey.

The festivities begin at 6 p.m., and all are welcome. Proceeds from the gala support Visions and Pathways programs, including housing for abused, neglected, or homeless teens,

combatting human trafficking, life skills training for those headed for independent living, and college scholarships.

Last year’s gala raised \$65,000, and co-chair Erin Caragher DeLoreto said this year’s goal is \$75,000.

“Every year we try to raise a little bit more,” said DeLoreto, assistant vice president of operations at Cigna in Piscataway, who heads the gala committee for the third time.

The theme for the gala this
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Success Stories... When homeless youth find a home

Meet Deon...

As a young man who lived on the streets of Paterson, New Jersey, Deon used violence and drug distribution as a way to survive. His family was not intact due to dysfunction, and the only support he had at the time was his sister. His sister was the sole provider for their family. As a result, there was only so much his sister was able to provide for him. At the time, attending school was not a priority for Deon. He was bullied in school by his classmates for not having the nicest clothes to wear and especially when they found out he did not have food on the table at night or barely had a place to sleep. Instead of going to school and facing these issues, Deon decided to run the streets and provide for himself the best way he knew.

During Deon's teenage years, he started to notice that the life of crime he was living was not the life he wanted. He researched various programs and started getting

connected with services in order to better himself. Through those connections, he landed a meet-and-greet at Visions and Pathways. After interviewing with staff members, Deon was accepted at the Passages transitional living program.

When Deon first entered the doors at Visions and Pathways 16 months ago at the age of 17, he didn't know what to



DEON, no longer in a life of crime.

expect. At the time, he was attending high school but did not have the proper job training in order to land employment. We connected Deon with counseling, life skills, and job coaching.

Today, Deon has shown great improvement in his motivation to succeed and continues to do his best every single day to achieve his life goals. With the help he has received from the Visions and Pathways staff and the tools he has utilized from being a part of our program, Deon has graduated from high school, gained job experience, and saved money to purchase a vehicle once he transitions out.

"When I was young I was searching for missing pieces in my life, said Deon. "Different programs gave me good and bad pieces during my journey but Visions and Pathways taught me that no matter how hard I search for those missing pieces, there are always going to be new ones waiting around the corner."

Meet Greg...

Greg's story exemplifies that sometimes your tragedies can turn to triumphs. Greg was kicked out of his father's house when he was 17. There was a lot of dysfunction in the house, and it was not a positive environment for him. With no other family members able to take him in, Greg plunged into a world of homelessness. He couch surfed for a couple of months but then exhausted his stay at people's homes. Just when he felt he had no options, a school counselor connected him to the Visions and Pathways Street Smart street outreach program, and he was placed at our My Place transitional living program.

When Greg first entered the doors at My Place 15 months ago, he was scared,

depressed, and suicidal. Visions and Pathways connected him with intensive mental health services at Richard Hall Community Health Center, provided life skills training, educational counseling, and a supportive staff to encourage him along the way. Greg is now on the path to success because he was given the essential tools he needed to get back on his feet. Greg appreciates his struggles because he believes they helped him become a better person. His tragic circumstance was his motivating factor. It ignited a fire in him to work hard to improve his life.

He is a full-time student at RVCC and works part-time at a local store. Greg hopes to become a theatrical producer.

"Visions and Pathways is a great organization to learn independent life skills," said Greg. "The resources provided are great tools for those who take advantage of them."



GREG, now at Raritan Valley Community College.

Meet Rosa...

Starting a new life in a new country can be difficult for most adults. Imagine what happened to young Rosa. When she arrived at the airport from Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic) to start a better life in the States, Rosa's father's family was supposed to be waiting to help her. Much to her chagrin there was no family to be found! They had decided they did not want to pick her up, which left her to fend for herself until the Division of Child Permanency & Protection (DCP&P) services came

into the picture.

DCP&P was able to provide much needed support for Rosa, but it could not do everything for her. In November 2015 the DCP&P staff referred her to Visions and Pathways so she could participate in the Prosperity program to gain life skills and learn to live independently. In the Prosperity program, Rosa learned about resources in the community and gained help with scholarships, budgeting, drivers education, renting an apartment, etc. She was also able

to get funds to purchase furniture for her apartment. Last year, Rosa obtained a Certified Home Health Aide certificate and secured a job. She also began taking classes at Middlesex County College.

"Through my experiences, I have learned what is best for me and I am not afraid to take a chance," said Rosa. "I am independent, determined, and a survivor. Best of all, I now don't have a problem asking for help when I need it."

Visions and Pathways youth display works at Art Expo

Nearly 100 paintings, watercolors, inks, and drawings captured the eye March 30 during Visions and Pathways' 2017 Art Expo at the Jewish Community Center in Bridgewater.

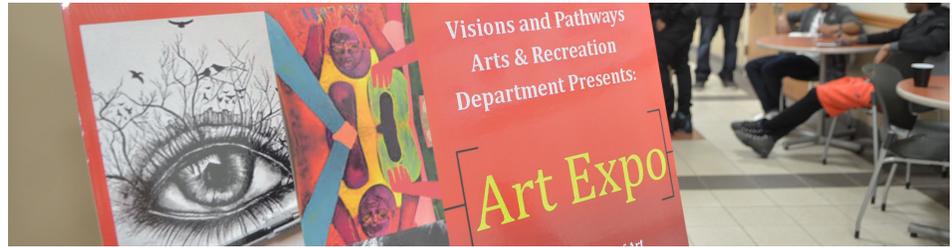
Young artists from Visions and Pathways worked on the exhibition since last September, when they began studying with art instructor Jim Pruznick every Thursday for a few hours at Brahma House.

Pruznick has taught artistic expression in schools and human services organizations for the past 25 years. He is on the faculty of both the Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton and the Center for Contemporary Art in Pluckemin.

"Jim is the most patient person I have ever met," said Elizabeth Alfaro, Visions and Pathways' recreation and arts coordinator, who planned the Art Expo. "He has done an amazing job with our young people."

When guests entered the exhibit, they were given a scorecard to vote for the artwork they liked the best. When the votes were tallied, the winning piece was by Kyla E., who has become adept at using paints, graphites for shadows, watercolors, and inks.

Following the exhibit was a short reception and comments by staff administrators and members of the board of trustees.



ART SHOW in March featured nearly 100 works created by Visions and Pathways youth



STANDING AT CENTER of his Visions and Pathways students at Art Expo 2017 at the Bridgewater JCC March 30 is arts instructor Jim Pruznick, who comes to Brahma House every Thursday for a few hours to teach youth. Pruznick was praised for his patience teaching young artists.



VOTING ON Art Expo 2017 works they liked best were Stan Prater (left), a member of the Visions and Pathways Advisory Council, and organization Executive Director David Walker.



WINNER OF the ART Expo 2017 competition is Kyla E., who uses paints, watercolors and inks in her work.

Street Smart still strong

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“We could not continue this program without the volunteers who have stepped up to help us,” said Amaya.

Now Street Smart has added two interns to its staff, one from Montclair State University and the other from Pillar College in Somerset, New Jersey. Both are heavily into their formal training – the state requires at least 14 hours – and are already adding value.

The training, Amaya explained, is rigorous. The interns have to learn about conflict resolution, cultural and ethnic sensitivity, LGBT issues, and how to deal with clients with HIV/AIDS, among other problems. Training to combat heroin and prescription opioid addiction is also front and center since every day 91 Americans die from an opioid overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Street Smart is there to prevent that from happening to even one teenager, especially those who live on the streets. “In outreach we never really know who we are going to be in contact with,” said Amaya. “Training involves knowing how to assess a situation and how to diffuse it.”

With teenagers, outreach worker training in suicide prevention is mandatory, she went on. “The training involves recognizing the signs and symptoms in youth who are depressed,” said Amaya. “You’ve got to let them know they are not alone, and you have to be able to provide the resources to help them.”

In time, the two interns will go with Amaya and her staff as they fan out to parks and soup kitchens, areas where homeless youth congregate. They also visit libraries and convenience stores to post information about Street Smart, talk to high school guidance counselors and police departments, and staff booths at local street fairs where they hand out literature.

Donations go to homeless teens in Street Smart outreach

With winter behind us, more and more teenagers are living on the streets, and the Street Smart outreach program is looking to supporters for donations to help in their rescue.

Among the clothing items we need now are rain jackets or ponchos, T-shirts in sizes M, L, and XL, and flip flops, plus socks and underwear.

Necessities we need include: blankets and sleeping bags, backpacks, wind-up lanterns and flashlights, bottled water, small first-aid kits, clear zip bags, towels, wash cloths, and hygiene products.

You can bring them to the Street Smart office at 175 Washington Street in Morristown or 16 Fourth Avenue in Bridgewater.

Spark! Gala will be June 8

(continued from page 1)

year, according to DeLoreto, is “A Hopeful Future for Youth.” One way the gala committee is trying to insure the future for those Visions and Pathways serves is the Fund-A-Need Board. At the gala there will be cards posted for teens’ specific needs, such as tutoring time or music lessons. Gala goers can take a tag (or tags) off the board and make a donation of these items.

“Some of these lessons and services

are taken for granted in our everyday lives,” noted DeLoreto, “but not for the kids of Visions and Pathways. This is really something special for our youth. It’s my favorite part of the gala.”

Another exciting part of the gala is the awards Visions and Pathways gives out to the companies, organizations, and individuals who have been instrumental in our success over the past year. This year’s honorees include: AT&T/AT&T Pioneers, Stan Prater from JCP&L, Bonnie Hodge, a volunteer for the Street Smart outreach

program, and Shake Shack restaurant in Bridgewater, New Jersey.

AT&T and its retirees, the Pioneers, gave grants to Visions and Pathways to cover such projects as a full library in the Passages residence. Moreover, they regularly promote programs where employees and retired employees act as mentors to youth.

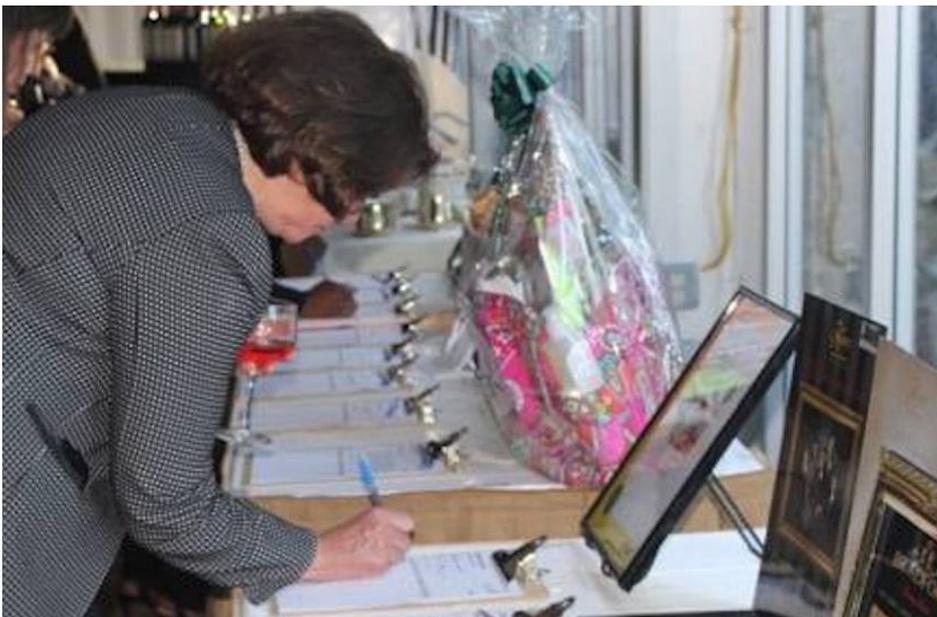
Prater is a member of Visions and Pathways’ Advisory Council and has been instrumental in getting JCP&L involved in the organization. Hodge, a resident of Randolph, New Jersey, sits on the advisory committee of the Street Smart program.

She noted that beside the short keynote speech and dancing to a lively rhythm and blues/soul band, another highlight of the gala is the awarding of the Lisa Warren Scholarship, which goes to a client of Visions and Pathways who is graduating from high school in June or receiving a GED and plans to continue his or her education at an institution of higher learning.

DeLoreto’s co-chair for the gala is Ted Eldracher. Their committee is made up of 12 men and women from the Central New Jersey business community.

Tickets are \$150/person, available by calling Visions and Pathways at (908) 526-6605 or online at www.visionsandpathwayssparkgala2017.eventbrite.com.

There are still corporate sponsorships available. Please contact Adriana Gonzalez at Visions and Pathways, (908) 526-6605, ext. 312 or email agonzalez@visionsandpathways.com.



BIDDERS FOUND tickets to professional sporting events, dinners at restaurants, and many luxury goods and services at the Gala’s Silent Auction last year.

Know more about us . . .

Visions and Pathways provides abused, neglected, homeless, and runaway youth with housing, a stable environment, and supportive services that guide them in becoming self-sufficient.

The agency runs 11 programs for vulnerable youth: Brahma House residential crisis intervention program; Passages, My Place and Whitney House residential transitional-living programs; Prosperity independent living skills education program; Street Smart street outreach program; Transitional Learning Center for in-house education instruction; Bridge House and Village House, supportive-housing for aged-out youth, an Arts and

Recreation Program, and the Transitions Aftercare Program.

Since 1970, over 8,000 youth throughout central and northern New Jersey have come to seek shelter, food, clothing, and support services. The agency's residential programs are located in Bridgewater, New Jersey. There is a satellite Street Smart street outreach office in Morristown, New Jersey.

For more information, visit visionsandpathways.org or contact Executive Director David Walker, Esq. MSW at dwalker@visionsandpathways.org.

Wish List

Because the need is great, Visions and Pathways maintains a Wish List, where items go to the different programs we run, resident and non-resident. The Randolph Kiwanis Club has been a regular contributor, and the JCC in Bridgewater collected for Visions and Pathways during its March Mitzvah Madness event. Among the things we need most are clothing for youth (must be new), men's and women's slippers and flip-flops, personal care items such as soap, shampoo, and toothpaste, new household items like towels and pillows, art supplies, sketch books, yoga mats, reference CD-ROMS, and scientific graphing calculators.

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Visions and Pathways Board welcomes three

The Board of Trustees for Visions and Pathways is proud to announce the addition of three new members: William (Bill) Goodwin, Keraya Jefferson, and Mark Milano.

Bill Goodwin is retired from AT&T, where he served most of his professional career in product and process management roles. He also served as an economist for Charles T. Main and General Motors. Bill is a member of the Visions and Pathways Scholarship Committee.

Keraya Jefferson is the Vice President, Chief Compliance Officer for Hartford Funds. She has been a major donor of Visions and Pathways over the past few years and currently serves on the Spark! Gala Committee.

Mark Milano is a chemical engineer with Merck and became involved with Visions and Pathways through the Merck Street Law Program. He currently serves as a group mentor with the Journey to Manhood mentoring program.

New members join Advisory Council

Visions and Pathways is excited to announce the addition of five new members to the Advisory Council: Dennis Flynn, Samieh Franklin, Grant Gallagher, Linda Hill, and Lisa Warren.

Dennis Flynn is an engineer and site director for facilities at Bristol-Myers Squibb. He is a former vice president and president of the Visions and Pathways Board of Trustees, where he served from 2000 to 2016.

Samieh Franklin is a manager with AT&T and has been a volunteer with Visions and Pathways for many years. She received the Dedicated Volunteer award at the 2016 Spark! Gala.

Grant Gallagher is an external affairs and financial education specialist at Affinity Federal Credit Union, where he has helped provide financial literacy for Visions and Pathways youth and supported the Prosperity life skills program.

Linda Hill is a social worker with the Union County Central Local Office of the Department of Child Protection and Permanency and has been a volunteer with Visions and Pathways for the past few years with her chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Lisa Warren is Assistant General Counsel at Johnson & Johnson and served on the Visions and Pathways Board of Trustees for 30 years before retiring in 2015.

Black History Month celebration attracts broader community

For the first time, Visions and Pathways Black History Month celebration went public when it filled the auditorium at the People Care Center in Bridgewater in February.

African-American culture as well as history was on display. Visions and Pathways Executive Director David Walker welcomed guests and noted the significance of the organization bringing its Black History Month celebration to the public for the first time.

Some teenagers in the program exhibited their artworks. Two others, Ruth R. and D'andre C., did a lively step dance, and a young woman from Nigeria, Titilayo A., performed a traditional Nigerian song.

There were several original poems. Alexis read her poem, which went like this: "Oppression is a word that weights heavy on me. Racism is a word that weighs heavy on my heart."

Kameron S. composed a poem in honor of Black History Month called "I'm Walking in the Shoes of My Forefathers."

"Whether we are Black, Green, Blue, Orange, Purple," he read, "each and every one of us at the end of the day, we're all people."

Nigel H. wrote a poem on the spot:

Black history goes back to captivity
Acts as facts visiting
Then taps the caps listing
Art and creativity start to relate willingly
Smarts that aren't billing me
Starts with parts filing me

There were several presentations about African-American leaders and entertainers, including Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Viola Davis. There was a talk as well about Parisian dancer Josephine Baker, the first person of African descent to be a world entertainer. Baker refused to perform for segregated audiences when she toured the United States, and she helped the French resistance during World War II.

Closing remarks were made by Carlotta Spence, MSW, Visions and Pathways director of residential services, who saluted the creativity of the teenagers who performed and gave speeches.

Elizabeth Alfaro, Visions and Pathways recreation and arts coordinator, arranged the presentation, which included soul food refreshments. African Drumming provided the music, and the evening was emceed by a Visions and Pathways graduate, Candace B., who is now in a transitional living program and works as a manager in the retail field.



FIRST PUBLIC CELEBRATION of Black History Month for Visions and Pathways opened Feb. 20 with a welcome by David Walker, the organization's executive director.

Support our exciting Fall 2017 Events

Tricky Tray:

A September date and place to be determined – 6 p.m. An entertaining evening with great food, entertainment, and those raffle tickets you put in the boxes lead to dinners at great restaurants, admission to professional sporting events, travel/vacations, goods, and services. Proceeds benefit Visions and Pathways' Street Smart outreach program to help keep high risk youth off the street, prevent their exploitation, and combat human trafficking.

19th Annual Run for Runaways:

Saturday, Oct. 28 – Duke Island Park in Bridgewater, New Jersey – 8 a.m. Put on your running shoes!

This is a great morning for runners and their families. Beside the 5K run there is a 2-mile Poker Walk in which participants collect cards from five stations and depending on their hands win great prizes. The event also has good food, entertainment, and games. Proceeds will benefit Visions and Pathways' Arts & Recreation Program.

For more information and details on these events including tickets and sponsorship opportunities, contact Adriana Gonzalez at agonzalez@visionsandpathways.org or (908) 526-6605 ext. 312.



STEP DANCE performed by Visions and Pathways residents Ruth R. (right) and D'andre C.



SINGING a traditional Nigerian song.

Donors change lives forever

THANK YOU to the companies, foundations, and service organizations that have made generous monetary contributions from October 2016 to date* to support Visions and Pathways and the homeless and runaway youth the agency serves.

Affinity Federal Credit Union Foundation
Aldersgate United Methodist Church
Apple Food Services NJ
Allstate Foundation
American Legion Post 12
American Legion Post 327
Anonymous
AT&T
AT&T Pioneers
Bliss Wellness Edison Center
Bridgewater Woman's Club
Bristol-Myers Squibb Company
Cigna Foundation
Christian Fellowship Club of Concordia
Curtis McGraw Foundation
Direct Energy
D'Leons/Fratellos
Dombal-Vogel Foundation
Financial Resources Federal Credit Union
First Energy

Greater Houston Community Foundation
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Morris Arts
Morristown Cotillion

Neshanic Reformed Church
NJM Insurance Group
Novartis
Our Lady of the Mount Church
Peapack Reformed Church
Pfizer
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Provident Bank Foundation
Rally Social Sports
Raritan Valley Community College
Rite Aid Foundation KidCents
Rotary Club of Morristown
Somerset Local Arts Program
South Branch Reformed Church
Swiftwater Foundation, Inc.
TD Bank
Tyler Foundation
United Methodist Women - First United
Methodist Church

*As of April 1, 2017. Donors from January 2016 through October 2016 were listed in the previous (year-end) newsletter.

Women in Energy group partners with Visions and Pathways

Direct Energy, a leading provider of electricity and natural gas in New Jersey and across America, formed a partnership with Visions and Pathways last fall, which has led to a \$1,800 donation and receipt of more than 100 personal care packages for Visions and Pathways' young residents.

The donations were arranged by Direct Energy's Women in Energy affinity group, which held a bake sale to raise funds from colleagues and collect items that included tote bags, towels, washcloths, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, and other hygiene items.

Women in Energy also hosted some of the female Visions and Pathways youth at its offices.

"Direct Energy engages communities throughout North America by supporting charitable organizations through corporate donations, strategic sponsorships, local fundraisers, in-kind contributions, and employee volunteering," said Renee Pegeron, Direct Energy Senior Business

Process Excellence Lead.

"As part of our focus on a better tomorrow, Direct Energy supports organizations focused on improving the lives of children. This year, Direct Energy, through its Women in Energy affinity group, is proud

to begin a new relationship with Visions and Pathways. We look forward to working together as Visions and Pathways continues on its mission to protect, mentor and empower young individuals to become all they can be."



WOMEN IN ENERGY, an affinity group of Direct Energy, an electric and gas provider in New Jersey and across the country, acts as mentors to young women of Visions and Pathways. Members recently hosted a Visions and Pathways group at its offices for a tour and explanation of what utilities do. Women in Energy also arranged for Visions and Pathways residents to receive personal care packages around the holidays.

Here is the Spring 2017 issue
of your Visions and Pathways
donor newsletter.

*Thank you
for investing in the
future of our youth!*

Transitional Learning Center helps youth maintain academics

Think about a teenager suddenly being uprooted from her home and then from her school, where her friends and teachers may be the only people she can confide in.

When youth come to Visions and Pathways' Brahma House emergency shelter, they not only leave their home but many of them have to leave their school, too, because they are living for an extended period in a new district. Unfortunately, this means their academics can be negatively impacted. Fortunately, through the Visions and Pathways Transitional Learning Center (TLC), youth are able to maintain their academic progress.

The TLC is a program that ensures the educational needs of residents are met by providing in-house instruction, coordinating with the youth's current school, and working with the youth's new transfer district.

Visions and Pathways is on a mission to strengthen the TLC in a variety of ways, including enhancing its in-house libraries to provide resources for youth. Dr. Felecia Nace, education consultant for Visions and Pathways, is currently reaching out to the



YOUNG PEOPLE at Brahma House maintain academic progress through the Transitional Learning Center. Here Coordinator Gabrielle Pfitzner (left) goes over a lesson with a resident.

broader community to request donations of books and videos.

Another way Visions and Pathways is enhancing the TLC is getting the resident advisors more involved with the education process. "Visions and Pathways understands that it takes a village to improve students' education, and the resident advisors are a key piece of that village," said Dr. Nace. "Something as simple as consistently asking

the youth what they learned today in a specific subject can be extremely helpful in maintaining a positive learning environment. Visions and Pathways is 'home' to our children. We are also looking to partner with more colleges and higher learning institutions to be a part of the village."

The TLC Education Coordinator Gabrielle Pfitzner works each day with youth at Brahma House and provides tutoring support for youth in the other residential programs. "It is wonderful to be part of such a collaborative team that works closely together to ensure our youth receive the support they need in order to be successful," said Pfitzner. "We work to provide stability for our students and align our instruction with their interests, abilities, and learning styles. My hope is that through the establishment of a caring, encouraging relationship, I can support the students in essential areas such as making positive life decisions and helping them realize their unique potential."