



SOMERSET

HOME

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Somerset Home for Temporarily Displaced Children • Spring 2011

Bridge House Opens: Supportive Housing is Key to Success



Moving Day was a special milestone for the five Somerset Home residents who moved into their own places last fall.

They were the first tenants of Bridge House – phase one of a new supportive-housing program to help homeless young adults on their journey to adulthood.

When older teens are released by the child welfare system, they usually don't have the skills, resources or support network to live on their own. They may no longer need the 24/7 supervision of a transitional-living program, but they do need a safe, affordable place to live; otherwise, it will be difficult for them to continue their education and find a job that will allow them to reach



Top, two new Bridge House residents look on as Antaizha gets ready to unpack and start decorating her new apartment. Above, kitchen and other household items were donated, and volunteers helped residents move everything in.

Move-In Day Brings Smiles (Continued on Page 3)



**Somerset Home
for Temporarily
Displaced Children**

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CREDIBILITY • INTEGRITY • ACHIEVEMENT

Country Singers to Croon in Fundraiser



Ann Brown will sing at Somerset Home fundraiser this summer.

It will be a "Tennessee Friday Night" in New Jersey when the music starts on August 19 and three of the area's most accomplished country singers donate their talent to help Somerset Home's teenage residents.

The 7 p.m. concert in the fellowship hall of the Pluckemin Presbyterian Church will feature Barbara Harley, Al Lind and three-time New Jersey country singer/songwriter of the year Ann Brown. Tickets will be \$10, and ordering information will be posted on somersethome.org on July 1.

The concert is the brainchild of local residents Art and Shirley Richards and will benefit both Somerset Home and Hunterdon Youth Services. 

New Board Members Share Their Skills

Stephanie Durant and Carol Suchit-Hudson are the newest members of Somerset Home's board of trustees. Stephanie is a resident of Hillsborough and is global quality system manager at Ortho McNeil Pharmaceutical in Raritan. Carol lives in Somerset and serves as technology manager for worldwide information security at Johnson & Johnson in Raritan.

In addition to their business expertise, both women have experience as volunteers for nonprofit agencies focused on helping disadvantaged children.

Stephanie is involved with Jack and Jill of America, Inc., an African-American organization of mothers who nurture future leaders and

create opportunities for them to become successful adults.

Carol spent nine years running the youth programs at a community center in Paterson, NJ. Always concerned about who would help guide these youth after high school, Carol said, "Somerset Home serves this age group and helps them make

the transition to adulthood in a thoughtful and systematic way."

These appointments bring Somerset Home's

board roster to 14. "We are pleased to have Stephanie and Carol join us," said Executive Director Jeffrey Fetzko. "Their leadership skills and their concern for families in crisis will help us keep our commitment to be there for the kids who need us." 

**"Who helps these teens
after high school?
Now I can be part
of the solution."**

Local Lawyer Seals Bridge House Deal

For more than 30 years, Steve Lieberman has practiced law and practiced good deeds in Somerset County.

The Somerville attorney recently combined both when he donated his legal services to help Somerset Home purchase the property it hopes to use for supportive housing for young adults who have aged out of the child welfare system.

"I was glad to do it," Steve said. "Somerset Home does good work, and I want to lend support."

Steve first became acquainted with the agency in the 1970s. He had just started his general law practice and joined the Somerset County Board of Legal Services. Gradually, he got involved in other organizations, as well, doing *pro bono* legal work for Interfaith Hospitality Network, Cooperative Housing Corp., HomeSharing, and others. As a founder of a free, walk-in legal clinic in Somerville, he still regularly volunteers there.

"Lawyers have been blessed to get the education we have," he said, "and we have a responsibility to help solve problems for others in the community who haven't been as fortunate."

Steve also did the legal work for the purchase of land for Passages, Somerset Home's first transitional-living program.

"Steve helped us make that vision a reality, and we've been able to help hundreds of young people over the years," Jeff said. 



Move-In Day Brings Smiles

(Continued from Page 1)

their goals and become productive members of the community.

Three residents live in apartments in Somerville, and two share a small house on property purchased by Somerset Home. They have a lease, a rent subsidy, and supportive services from Somerset Home's staff.

Federal funds are being used for operating expenses to supplement rents, furnish the apartments and provide supportive services for the five young adults.

Expanding to Meet Needs

This increase in capacity is another step toward filling the needs of New Jersey's homeless youth, but the goal is to build an 10-unit apartment building to provide supportive housing and services in one location.

The property Somerset Home purchased last fall – a half-acre lot in Bridgewater – is in the same neighborhood as the agency's three transitional-living programs, convenient to schools, banking, jobs, transportation and agency staff support. An architect has been hired and plans are being developed for a building that will look like a two-story, single-family home with 10 efficiency apartments, common areas and



Top, Jamil is thrilled to accept the keys to his first apartment from Executive Director Jeff Fetzko. Above, case manager Alex Slachtianshyn checks in with one of the residents.

laundry facilities.

A capital campaign is under way to raise funds for construction, equipment and furnishings. The agency is working with an architect and township officials to develop the project, aimed at offering residents a solid foundation for starting their adult lives. 



Success Stories

Therapist is Tuned In to Helping Kids

Over and over in her counseling sessions with residents, psychotherapist Loretta Caldwell heard the same thing. "I'm stressed out...I'm angry...I'm sad..."

They didn't know how to handle their feelings, so they often resorted to unhealthy outlets. In addition to helping the teens stay calm, the staff plans lots of regular recreation as a way for the teens to let off steam, but anger and stress and sadness don't appear on a regular schedule.

Loretta talked with the teens about ways to calm themselves down. Almost everyone agreed: Listening to music was something that worked.

So she and the kids came up with a plan. Loretta asked the YMCA where the kids often go to exercise if it would be okay to put a box in the lobby to collect donated iPods and MP3 players. The Y was more than happy to help.

The teens worked together to decorate a box, make a sign explaining the need, and come up with a name. One of boys suggested "Tunes for Teens," and the project was ready.

"The kids were thrilled when the first box of iPods arrived," Loretta said.

The devices can also be used to help new residents get over their nervousness about being in a strange place with new people all around.

For example, one new resident had recently moved to the U.S. from Egypt. She was given an iPod, and another teen helped her download some Egyptian music to help her adjust.

"It was great to see the teens work together to advocate for themselves," Loretta said, "and to use their creativity in a group effort to help not just themselves, but the teenage residents who will be here after them." 🏠

Vo-Tech Students Deliver Sandwiches and Smiles

National Honor Society students at Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School made lunches and delivered them to Somerset Home, creating both a tasty meal and a meaningful service project.

Cathy Fortunato, honor society advisor, said the members purchased the ingredients, made the sandwiches and delivered them to the teens at Somerset Home.

"It was a real treat for our residents to have lunch delivered, and it let them know there are people in the community who care about them," said Executive Director Jeff Fetzko.

Students who are accepted for membership in the National Honor Society demonstrate outstanding scholarship, leadership, service, and character. They also participate in school or community projects.



Making sandwiches for homeless teenagers was a fun project for National Honor Society students at Somerset County Vocational & Technical High School, including (l-r) service project manager Leah Marie Geiser, Anita Wamakima, Jeffrey Erkkila, and Macauley Breault.

Homeless Teens Get Help from Women's Group

Imagine doing something to improve the lives of abused and neglected children around the world, then turning the vision into reality.

That's what the women's philanthropy division of the Jewish Federation of Somerset, Hunterdon and Warren (JFSHAW) has done with its "Imagine" campaign.

Helping at home and abroad

This year, the group's fundraising efforts are helping abused, neglected and homeless teens at Somerset Home in New Jersey and at Yemin Orde, a similar group home in Israel.

JFSHAW kicked-off a year-long fundraising drive with a luncheon last fall where participants learned more about the two organizations chosen to benefit from the campaign.

Hearing a success story

Attendees heard from Crystal, a 20-year-old college student in Somerset Home's transitional-living program, about the obstacles she has faced and the inner strength she has drawn upon to succeed despite the difficult family situation she was born into.



The Jewish Federation's fundraising luncheon gave supporters a chance to hear first-hand from one of the young women their donations will help on the road to success.

According to Diane Naar, executive director of JFSHAW, "Many people aren't even aware that so many children and teens in central New Jersey are facing the future without the support of a family, and we're happy to be able to help."

JFSHAW's next fundraiser for Somerset Home is a bus trip to Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History on June 7. For details, visit jfedshaw.org.



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 June 2010 and March 2011. These donations go into the endowment fund, helping Somerset Home keep its long-term commitment to giving the youth we serve a home and a hopeful 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.

In Honor Of

Ray Fantuzzi & Family
Ted & Dolores Johnson
Suzanne Montgomery

In Memory Of

Mildred Berlenbach
Lynne David
Mary P. Fenton
Cesira Haznedari

Joanne Holland
Jenna's Dad
Morton Krase
Marie Meier

Mark Padovani
Edna Soldivieri
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Hilda Weiner

Merck Teaches Teens About 'Street Law'

The law has been described as a verbal jungle, but the teenagers at Somerset Home are unraveling its mysteries in a series of workshops led by Merck & Co. volunteers.

At weekly sessions at the company's Whitehouse Station headquarters, residents are learning about the laws that affect their everyday lives: warranties, apartment leases, dispute resolution, employee rights.

The workshops are part of Merck's Youth in Transition program. The curriculum was developed with a grant from the Merck Foundation to a national nonprofit called Street Law, Inc. The program is designed to help disadvantaged teens understand legal issues and develop problem-solving skills.

The goal is to demystify the law, but the sessions' leaders also become role models for the teens and a sounding board for their concerns.

"I'm learning a lot of real-world scenarios that I can apply later in life," said one 18-year-old participant.

But it's not just the learning the kids like. Another resident explained,



Merck employee and volunteer facilitator Ellen Lambert discusses a legal issue with Somerset Home residents during a Street Law workshop.

"There's a stigma that group homes are for bad kids, but I'm not a bad kid. The volunteers call us students and treat us like adults."

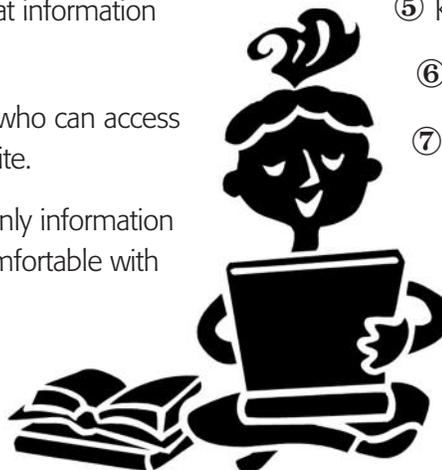
The Street Law program is one of several Merck is presenting for both school and community groups in New Jersey. "This is a wonderful

experience for our kids," said Tichina Smith, Somerset Home's independent-living skills counselor. "They really appreciate the chance to interact with and learn from people in the business world, and they're having fun, too."



SOCIAL NETWORKING: *10 Tips for Parents*

- ① Help your kids understand what information should be private.
- ② Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child's website.
- ③ Explain that kids should post only information that you – and they – are comfortable with others seeing.
- ④ Remind your kids that once they post information online, they can't take it back.
- ⑤ Know how your kids are getting online.
- ⑥ Talk to your kids about bullying.
- ⑦ Talk to your kids about avoiding sex talk online.
- ⑧ Tell your kids to trust their gut if they have suspicions.
- ⑨ Read sites' privacy policies.
- ⑩ Take extra steps to protect younger kids.



Youth Speak Out

Somerset Home Kids Get Creative

This is me...

...caring...and loving."

– *Latoya, 17*

...and I'm not going to change for anyone!

– *Brenna, 14*



Photo: Jasmine, 16

What I have learned from my situation is that...

My life is always on the edge.

– *Latoya, 17*

When I return home I will respect my mother more.

– *Brenna, 14*

I have a caring mother.

– *Tyler, 14*



Photo: Gabriel, 17

I'm most thankful for...

What's left of the good family I have – my grandmom, twin sister and little brother and sister. I'm thankful every-day I wake up and that my mom is in a better place."

– *Jermaine, 20*

Being able to have a place to sleep and a heart that beats. Also for knowing that when kids like me have nowhere to go, people like Jeanmarie give them a place to call home.

– *Jade, 17*

Being able to go to college and go to a place that is safe, puts a roof over my head and is warm."

– *Jamierose, 18*

My family. Family isn't just my blood related family, but my close knit community of friends and my amazing boyfriend.

– *Sara, 17*

Being successful in the Passages home. I have been unsuccessful before I got here and was mad for what happened to me during the past year. The staff here are like family to me. They have changed my life. I don't know what I am going to do without them when I leave.

– *Calvin, 19*

Photos were taken at the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, NJ. The field trip was part of Somerset Home's Visual and Performing Arts Education Program, made possible with private funding.



Photo: Charlie, 15

Save the Date!

5K Run Raises Funds for Runaway Youth

Planning is already under way for Somerset Home’s 13th annual Run for Runaways to raise awareness and funds for abused, neglected and runaway teens in New Jersey.

Each year, the event brings an outpouring of support from runners, walkers, sponsors, donors, volunteers – all people who want to help give these kids a safe environment and a chance for a successful life.

So mark your calendar for November 5, 9 a.m. at Duke Island Park in Bridgewater. It’s 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 most of all, help raise funds for runaway youth. To learn more, visit somersethome.org or runforrunaways.com.



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