Gateways for Incarcerated Youth

Thanks and Greetings  By José S. Gutierrez, Jr., Gateways Program Manager

Gateways for Incarcerated Youth is entering an important phase in its rich history of providing cultural, educational and self-esteem-building programs at juvenile facilities and in our communities. We celebrate the continued success of our cultural groups and college classes, the expansion of the Challenge Program to include The Brentwood Home for Girls, the sharing our story with the community, and more.

With the recent departure of founder and self-described ‘dreamer and schemer’ Dr. Carol Minugh, Gateways enters a new era of positive change and advancement. We will miss Dr. Minugh, and we celebrate her legacy of service and passion for people. While Dr. Minugh is truly irreplaceable, the work to encourage, empower and uplift brilliant minds continues to be the duty and responsibility of Gateways, its staff and supporters. We are a part of solutions for the future.

Part of my goal as Program Manager is to develop a strong rapport between Gateways and our stakeholders, which is the community at-large. More than 98 percent of our incarcerated youth return to the communities they are from. Whether directly involved with their re-entry or not, we are all affected by their presence. Gateways and our partners’ strategic, educational and cultural enrichment programs empower our students to return as builders of communities. Gateways has been a champion for education during the ‘thick and thin’ times and that is because people are willing to support our cause to participate in the lives of youth.

Gateways is here because of your support, and I think it is important to share the successes that your support has fostered. Since the fall of 2008 your support has enabled Gateways to pay the college tuition of at least eleven young men who had previously not expected to complete high school. Your support has helped Gateways establish our first and much-needed program for females at The Brentwood Home in Lacey, WA. Your support has helped continue cultural enrichment groups that bring smiles to the faces of young men in places where smiles are not common.

We are developing solutions for our students who have never been told that they are our ‘best and brightest’. Our students at Gateways are capable of transforming more than their own lives – what they do impacts families and communities. My agenda as Program Manager of Gateways is to invite you to step up and commit to supporting our brilliant students.

Gateways’ students at our juvenile facilities require time, attention and sincerity. Whether your contribution is financial or is of your time as a volunteer, Gateways thanks you for your generosity. Your support fuels the efforts, the programs and the successes of Gateways. Enjoy the content of our Spring 2009 newsletter and learn more about who we are, what we do and how we all together make a difference.

The Challenge Program  By Samantha Franks, Challenge Program Coordinator

Every weekday volunteers gather at The Evergreen state College in the Center for Community Based Learning and Action to carpool south to Green Hill and Maple Lane Schools. The car fills with a variety of students who all bond together with their dedication and commitment to the youth that they work with. Once at the institution they spread out to different living units and begin their hour sessions. On the other side the residents give up an extra recreation period, a movie, or group to meet with their educational partners, they plan out what will be worked on for the day and what they need help with so they can use their time.

The focus of the partners vary depending on what the youth need the most help with; ACT and SAT preparation, release plans, resumes, math, science, English, poetry, reading, philosophy, study skills, college preparation, autobiographies, history, politics, cultural empowerment, etc. In the first meeting the partners decide on goals for each other, making it a mutual learning experience instead of a one-sided tutoring relationship. From there every week the partners give each other different assignments that they will need to compete for the next week.

“It’s important to have face to face connections with people, to respect each other and learn from each other by listening, that’s the best tool there is, its all that I can give these guys.” Says Andy Sontag.

The Challenge program depends on the volunteers and their commitment to the program. This year we have had 26 volunteers who have worked with 30 youth and have served over 900 hours, and we have started a new partnership with Brentwood, a girl’s group home in Lacey, where we work with young women who are 13-16 years old.

Thanks to all of the students and dedicated volunteers who help make this program possible; Yonatan, Jaime, Hilary, Alvin, Leah, Corey, Peter, Trevor, Thomas, Astra, Arthur, Christopher, Greg, Jake, Alex, Nicholas, Jason, Ed, Tanner, Aaron, Sascha, Chantal, Ian and Adam.

Samantha Franks is an Americorps member she began working with Gateways as a student in the College Class in 2008 and became a Challenge Partner before applying for the Americorps Challenge Partner Coordinator position.
Gateways Programs

**Cultural Identity Groups** offer participants the opportunity to learn more about their cultural heritage while bonding with others of similar backgrounds. Gateways provides program support to staff with a strong commitment to cultural diversity. Gateways subscribes to the philosophy that when an individual is secure in their identity and proud of their heritage they are able to be more accepting of others.

**College Class** offer residents the opportunity to work with teachers and students from The Evergreen State College. Evergreen students work as co-learners with residents on a weekly basis. Students read and discuss a college level text, write response papers, and engage in a positive peer relationship.

**Diversity Workshop** Through small and large group discussions and interactive workshops, students are challenged to participate and learn from multicultural activities to better understand others while further developing their own identities and social skills.

**Gateways Challenge Program** provides Educational Partners for residents to engage in academic planning, tutoring, goals setting, life skills, pre-college testing, pre-college classes, building self-esteem and critical thinking skills.

**Cultural Evenings** take place once per month and are open to the entire campus. The performances and presentations provided by the cultural evening are intended to entertain, educate, and enhance the audiences understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

**Associate of Arts Degree Program at Green Hill** is taught as a hybrid distance learning program that allows Green Hill students to enroll in full time courses online through Grays Harbor Community College. The curriculum is fast paced, challenging and collaborative with excellent faculty who are student-centered.

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Gateways for Incarcerated Youth provides monthly Cultural Evenings at Maple Lane and Green Hill Schools. The Cultural Evenings started in 2002 and are grant-funded. The mission of the Cultural Evenings is to educate and entertain incarcerated youth about different cultures. The advantage of the cultural evenens is that it be opened to anyone. Unlike the other programs that require an on-going commitment by the students and/or affiliation with a specific cultural identity group, any youth who are at a certain behavior level can come to these events. Cultural Evenings also provide youth with an opportunity to practice public speaking skills by introducing performers and giving presentations on specific cultures before performances.

Cultural Evenings are an opportunity to support state, national, and international artists. Past Cultural Evenings have included Evergreen academic programs and Olympia-based musicians and performers like Mudbug Jugglers, Heart Sparkle Players and Ocho Pies. State performers have been groups like Seattle-based Red Eagle Soaring and 206 Zulu and the Navy Band. We have also had groups come from around the nation like the Pow-Wow Comedy Jam, One Be Lo from Detroit, or now California-based C.A.U.T.I.O.N. International presenters have been Brazilian hip-hop Fato Criminal and the Lost Boys from Sudan. In April, both Maple Lane and Green Hill will host authors of the new award-winning book *Teatro Chicana*, which tells the stories of an all-women theater troupe, why the women joined, and how teatro changed their lives.

To perform or present at a Cultural Evening, contact José at (360) 867-5633.

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**College Class Book Review**

*A synthesis review with comments by Green Hill & Maple Lane Students*  


*Music of the Mill* explores three generations of a family that immigrates from Mexico to work in a Los Angeles steel mill. First, Procopio and his wife Eladia have six children and are able to make a decent, but hard life, through their work. Second, the youngest, Johnny, like his older brothers, ends up working in the mill, and eventually becomes a union organizer. But by the time Johnny and his wife Aracely’s kids come of age there is no mill left for them to work in. Third, their daughter Azucena struggles to find her life and voice in the wake of economic collapse. Below are some reactions to the book from students.

"I think the book is nicely written... It made me want to make a better life for myself." (DeAnthony)

"The steel mill later puts an extreme distance between Procopio and his family. ... His youngest son Johnny is the furthest away from a relationship with his father. So the isolation leads to a street life of crime when he joins a gang. He later becomes incarcerated at sixteen for a term of four years. His mom was the only family to stand by his side while bonding with others of similar backgrounds. Gateways provides program support to staff with a strong commitment to cultural diversity. Gateways subscribes to the philosophy that when an individual is secure in their identity and proud of their heritage they are able to be more accepting of others.

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