

Gateways for Incarcerated Youth

Issue 2

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Issue Editors: José Gutierrez, Jr. & Tony Zaragoza

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 effected 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, Alvina, 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.

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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.



Alex Duncan offering rhymes, wisdom and inspiration to students at a Cultural Evening at Green Hill School.

Photo: José S. Gutierrez, Jr.



Alex Duncan with Emily Sladek (l) and Hilary Hacker (r) after Alex's performance at Green Hill School.

Photo: José S. Gutierrez, Jr.

Cultural Evenings by Emily Sladek

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 evenings 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 Mudbay 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.

College Class Book Review

A synthesis review with comments by Green Hill & Maple Lane Students
Rodriguez, Luis. *Music of the Mill: A Novel*. Rayo Press, 2005.

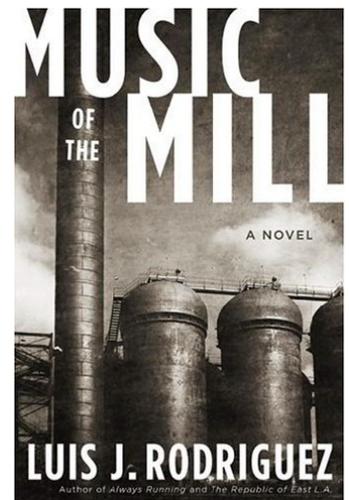
Music of the Mill explores three generations of a family that immigrates from Mexico to work in a Los Angeles steel mill. First, Procopio and his wife Eladia have six children and are able to make a decent, but hard life, through their work. Second, the youngest Johnny, like his older brothers, ends 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 visit him. He later tells her he doesn't want to be anything like his dad. He said that because he felt the steel mill kept them apart." (Rory)

"I learned a lot about Johnny the

youngest son. He has grown up and learned that honest living is the way to go, so he slowed down and became focused. The ex-convict/gansta has straightened up his life." (DeAnthony) "What I thought was messed up was how Johnny got hurt and still had to go on to finish the job even though their lives were at risk. This shows really what the mill thinks of their workers. They don't value their lives very much." (Saul) "In the book, I like how Johnny tries to organize things so that they can all be looked at equally instead of differently by the higher ups." (Dominique) "It is exciting to read on how something is being organized, put together...out of nothing, how all the groups that hate each other unite together for the greater good." (Sergey) "I thought it was kind of messed up that male workers would not help the women understand their jobs. But it was nice that Johnny did help." (Patrick)

"I liked the book because it was about challenges. And how you could go through hard time with yourself and loved ones and work so hard to come uphill and fall over again and be back down and then back up. I also learned from this book on what not to do when I become a father. I will always place my kid over everything." (Tavonne) "Many parts of the book were very profound



and had deep meaning. Very descriptive too. The metaphors really stick out to me." (Azal) "The reading showed how things change with the passing of time." (Evan) "I couldn't put the book down once I started reading it. I love it how the book has stories within stories within stories." (Sergey) "It touched on a lot of real-life problems that people run into growing up and even as adults. This book has a sense of feeling. When I read it, I feel sad or happy or excited. It's like I'm right there with the characters." (Justin) "This book teaches a lesson: treating people with respect is one of the most important things in life and standing up for what you believe in is what brings power to yourself and power for others." (Tavonne)