Homeless Youth: The Theme of the 2000 SOS Fund Drive
by Emma Mulvaney-Stanak

Nearly one-and-a-half million youth in the U.S. struggle to survive on their own on the streets of cities as well as in rural areas like Western Massachusetts with little or no financial or emotional support. Nationally, by most accounts, young people are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.

Homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn money to meet basic needs or be recognized by the law for legal independence from families. Many homeless youth find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter, is their only chance of survival on the streets. In turn, homeless youth are at a greater risk for contracting HIV or other STDs.

Many agencies and shelters also do not directly serve homeless youth because of limited funding. Youth can easily be lost between the foster care system and the system of shelters which does not have the capacity or finances to directly serve homeless youth until they reach the age of 18. Most shelters do not offer beds for homeless youth independent of a family because regulations don’t allow it. Additionally, most youth do not seek assistance at shelters because of this common shelter policy, and also because they prefer anonymity.

Local agencies- Amherst Shelter for Adolescents, Jessie’s House, and Grove Street Inn- address youth homelessness and provide therapeutic supportive services.

Such programs help relieve stress, provide support networks and resources, and address emotional problems which arise from disruptive family conditions. These shelters and services may include helping to reenroll youth in local schools, group therapy, social events, drug therapy, and counseling to address former abuse.

The SOS Fund Drive, which lasts from February 18 to March 25, will raise money for these agencies.

Help the Animals

If you’ve been missing the friendly bark or purr of your pet at home, an animal shelter is a wonderful place to spend some quality time with furry friends. SOS is in the process of adding two animal shelters to its directory of agencies. Call the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) in Springfield at 736-2992, or the Greenfield Animal Shelter at 773-3148 if you are interested.
Preparing for the Spring Fund Drive

SOS has conducted an annual fund drive for over thirty years with varying themes. Past causes have included hunger, women’s health, and illiteracy. Last year, the Smith community raised $2000 to help children touched by HIV and AIDS in our area. This year’s fund drive will focus on youth homelessness.

To prepare for the event, fund drive co-chairs Emma Mulvaney-Stanak ’02 and Holly Burke ’01, spent the fall semester researching youth homelessness. They have developed informational brochures, table tents, and posters. They have also organized a drawing project with two local youth homeless shelters. Drawings by homeless youth will be put on display in Neilson Library at Smith College during the month of February to coincide with the kick-off of the fund drive. Along with the rest of the SOS Board, they hope to raise awareness on this issue in the Smith community as well as exceed last year’s total by raising even more to help address this critical need.

The fund drive’s success hinges on the 38 SOS House Representatives who serve as liaisons between SOS and Smith students. The House Reps will go door to door, requesting donations from residents in their houses, and from other members of the Smith community. (continue on page 3)

CASH FOR COTS!

Well folks, the campaign has come to an end as of December. Elizabeth Gray and I would like to thank all of those who participated in our joint effort to fight homelessness. In sum, 16 represented houses, various fundraising events, and faculty donations enabled us to raise $1600 for Northampton’s Interfaith Cot Shelter.

The Cot Shelter sleeps 16 homeless individuals every night from November 1 to April 30. In addition, the Shelter provides housing and employment services. Thanks to all of those who helped!

-Brooke Harrison

It's Bowl-A-Thon Time!!

WHO: Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County
WHAT: Our Annual "Bowl for Kids' Sake" Bowl-A-Thon
WHERE: Northampton Bowl, 525 Pleasant St, Northampton, MA
WHEN: Saturday, April 8, from 12-4pm
HOW: Teams of four bowl together. Each bowler raises at least $50. Call to register your team or to find out other ways to support this great event. 586-3339

There will be lots of prizes, laughs, surprises, and of course, some bowling! Big Brothers Big Sisters is counting on the success of this event to help them continue to make a difference in the lives of the children in our community.
Along those lines, I observed that rather than excitement at being down to just a few cards, the girls panic and do whatever they can— including taking stacks of cards, rather than just one off the top of the draw pile— to beef up their hand. They’re really only comfortable when they have at least 20 cards or more. Like I said, I don’t think games among them frequently come to a conventional end. At first I was puzzled and disappointed that they’d forgotten how to play. Then I realized that how we play is of no matter to them. When they have something they value, be it a cookie or a Wild Card, they save it and savor it. To them, hurrying to get rid of your cards is just silly. Who cares if you’ve won? It’s much better to continue playing indefinitely. And I have to admit, that in the end, I agree with them.

These girls have taught me lots of lessons over the past four months, one of the most important being that no matter how busy I think I am at Smith, when I return I will FIND time to volunteer. The lessons I learn when I give my time are every bit as important as those I gain from reading my textbooks, if not more so. I’m just so glad that in the process of reshuffling my life abroad, volunteering found its way into my schedule. I have always known how important it is, but knowing with just my head wasn’t enough. Now I understand with my heart. It’s silly that I had to travel so far from Smith to learn something that I could so easily have figured out in Northampton if I’d just given it a chance. But I guess that’s the point of JYA.

Some new volunteer opportunities...

**Neighborhood Networks Center**
Put your computer skills to use by volunteering at the Neighborhood Networks Center, an agency in Holyoke dedicated to teaching computer skills to people of all ages, incomes, and educational levels. Volunteers are needed to teach classes or help with computer repair and networking. Call or email director Sharon Feldman at 552-0385 or <holyokenn@yahoo.com>.

**Wistariahurst Museum**
Do you wish you could volunteer but don’t feel like you have time? Wistariahurst Museum would be an excellent place to do a short-term project with a group of friends. This museum, a house which captures the history of the Holyoke area, needs groups to come for periodic gardening, spring cleaning, or painting activities. HCAs, this would be a great house service project! Call Susan Lofthouse at 534-2216 for details.
A game of UNO

Clair Null '01 is JYA in Russia this year, where, in her free time, she volunteers at a local orphanage spending time with young girls. Clair writes:

For Christmas I gave the girls I play with a deck of UNO cards brought over in my suitcase. They were mesmerized by the shiny new colorful cards and listened attentively as I explained how to play. They seemed to have the rules down pretty well when I left them that day and I hoped that they would get some enjoyment out of the game even when I wasn’t with them.

Three weeks later I returned after traveling over the holidays to find that like everything else that crosses cultural borders, UNO had morphed a bit from its original form, both physically and theoretically. All the cards were dog-eared and as grimy as the girls’ hands, and I was thrilled to understand from their appearance that they were often played with and much loved. We sat down to play, and after ten minutes I was out of cards. The girls, who are pleasantly unconcerned with competitiveness, decided to continue play without me. I never saw the end of that game. There probably wasn’t one. Though they played by the conventional rules for the most part, the game turned out quite differently than I’d ever witnessed. For starters, at my suggestion that Nastiya play her Wild Card, she patiently explained to me that since they’re the most valuable cards, they like to save them. I never saw a Wild Card played during the duration of the game. (continued on page 3)