S.O.S. welcomes all of our new board members and interns for the ‘00-’01 year, and congratulates our ‘99-’00 board for such a successful year. Thanks also to everyone who dedicated their time to long-term or short-term community service projects this year!

SASS Program Enriches Children and Tutors

by Jill Testerman

Because of busy working-parent schedules, when the final school bell rings at Jackson Street Elementary School in Northampton, many kids have to stay at school until their parents can pick them up. Smith students help brighten these children’s after school hours by participating as tutors in the SASS (Smith After School Service) program. SASS is the tutoring component of an afternoon program at Jackson Street School, sponsored by the YMCA, that provides crafts, games, and fun. This year, 32 Smith students participated as tutors with SASS, devoting from one to four afternoons a week helping kids in grades K through 5 with reading, writing, and homework skills. Students can volunteer as tutors, or receive payment through America Reads, a federal grant that provides money for student tutors on work study.

Melissa Wilson, the director of SASS, notes that both the kids and the tutors benefit from the program. “Many of these children don’t get much personal attention during the day,” she explains. “The one-on-one relationship they develop with their tutors is very important.” And Smith students, in return, learn from the children. “Jackson Street is a diverse community, and is a challenging environment to work in because of that,” notes Melissa. “Tutors are constantly gaining new skills.”

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Spring 2000 Community Service Fair

By Briana Welton

S.O.S. holds a Community Service Fair at the start of each new semester to rejuvenate the spirit of volunteerism on the Smith campus. The spring 2000 S.O.S. Community Service Fair was held on February 7 in Davis Ballroom. Students had a chance to meet with representatives from 31 agencies located throughout the Pioneer Valley. Two new agencies (Neighborhood Networks Center and Vision Community Services) appeared at the fair for the first time.

Neighborhood Networks is an organization in Holyoke that has created a computer lab in a low-income housing area to teach local residents computing skills. The lab is comprised of donated used computers that they have refurbished.

Vision Community Services (a.k.a. Mass. Association for the Blind) pairs volunteers with visually disabled clients of all ages to assist them with sighted tasks such as grocery shopping, reading, correspondence, bill paying, etc.

Here are a few comments on the Fair from other agency representatives:

♦ “Surprisingly well attended for the spring semester. Students were very responsive to our presentation and sympathetic to our stated mission.” – Jesse Ferland, Food Bank of Western Mass.

♦ “This is great way for students to make career choices. I wish I had this option.” Melissa Roberts-Cote, Decisional Training.

♦ “This has always been an excellent opportunity for us to recruit volunteer troop leaders. Smith students have been an important part of our volunteer force for many years.” Sara Crawley, Western Mass Girl Scout Council.
Community Education Luncheons Are An Important Link For Students
by Jill Testerman

Each semester, S.O.S. organizes several lunchtime discussions on campus to let members of the Smith community know about local issues and ways they can become involved. These community education luncheons bring in speakers related to certain issues, and in the past have focused on water quality, domestic violence, and other diverse topics. The first luncheon of the spring semester, held on February 1st, centered around an agency in Northampton called Decisional Training, which trains volunteers to work with prison inmates.

“I was really excited about the luncheon,” said Janet Dahlberg, the representative from the Decisional Training program who spoke at the meeting. “There was a very large group of students-almost 40-in attendance.” At the meeting, Janet Dahlberg talked about the way the Decisional Training program works, and how Smith students can become involved. She believes that volunteering is an invaluable part of society, and that college students are at the perfect point in their lives to be volunteers. “College is a great time to start volunteering. Believe it or not, you only get busier after graduating!” she pointed out. While this may be debatable, it is clear that the community education luncheons are receiving an eager audience at Smith. The last one this semester focused on homelessness and welfare reform. S.O.S. Board members Cindy Rho ’00 and Sara Frank ’00 have done a wonderful job organizing the luncheons this year.

Volunteer Profile: Stephanie Campbell’01
by Briana Welton

As a volunteer with the Decisional Training program, Stephanie Campbell ’01 works with inmates from the Hampshire County Jail to help them make better decisions about their lives. Each week she meets one-on-one with an inmate for an hour, and with a group of 16 inmates and three other volunteers for another hour. She talks with the inmates about their history, and about what kind of decisions they have made. She helps them to think clearly about the choices they make, and teaches them how to be better problem solvers. Whatever valuable life skills the inmates learn from Stephanie, she says, “The main thing is just being there, showing someone cares.”

Before counseling at the Jail, Stephanie was oriented by Decisional Training, an organization that has been training, placing, and overseeing volunteer counselors at the Hampshire County Jail and the Franklin County Correctional Facility for over 25 years. The counseling program leads inmates through a structured curriculum to improve their decision-making skills.

Stephanie became involved with Decisional Training through the Smith College Community Service Internship Program run jointly by S.O.S. and the School for Social Work. Although she has experience volunteering with the homeless, she said Decisional Training has been the most rewarding. “It shows you that it could be anybody. You can’t judge anyone.”

(see more about Decisional Training in the Community Education Luncheon article below)

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Vandana Nakka ’03 has certainly benefited from being a tutor at Jackson Street:

“In our classes at Smith it is easy to forget that a stimulating academic environment is not the only place where we learn. That is why I enjoy tutoring at Jackson Street. The opportunity to learn from kids there is both a refreshing change and a valuable exchange.

I especially like working with the “difficult” children. Earning their trust and respect, seeing them respond to your attempts at understanding them and relating to them is an amazing feeling. A SASS tutor is a special type of person who is both an academic resource and a friend to the children. Both jobs can be challenging but they are always rewarding. The knowledge I’ve gained as a tutor is every bit as enriching as what the children learn.”

SASS is already in search of new tutors for next year. If you would like to participate in this “valuable exchange” with kids at Jackson Street (and get paid for it if you are on work study) call the SOS office at x2756 for more information.

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Calling all volunteers...
now is the time to set up volunteer placements for next fall!

Northampton Nursing Home
Be a companion for an elderly resident, reading, walking, or talking with them. If you have any musical, culinary, artistic, theatrical, or other talents, share your skills with a small group at the nursing home. Volunteering here is a rewarding way to spend time with older people. Call Mona Wilson at 586-3300.

Care Center
The Care Center in Holyoke serves teenaged mothers, providing GED courses, case work, childcare, and transportation. They are seeking volunteers to serve as tutors in the GED program, or to help with extracurricular activities and classes. Because the majority of women at the Care Center are Hispanic, bilingual volunteers are desired. Call Ana Rodriguez at 532-2900.

Neighborhood Networks Center
Put your computer skills to use by volunteering at this 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 <holyokennc@yahoo.com>.

Some agencies that have early fall orientations (so call them now!):
UMMY Decisional Training  UMY Everywoman’s Center
UMMY Necessities/Necessidades  UMY WomanShelter/Compañeras

Another Successful Blood Drive
S.O.S.’s spring Blood Drive was held on March 1st and 2nd. 211 people donated blood, including 43 new donors. Thanks to Mariel Turner ’01 for organizing the drive, and thanks to everyone who came to give “the give of life.”

Toiletry Drive
Many toiletries were donated by students in the recent S.O.S. drive. They will be donated to the Grove Street Inn, a local homeless shelter.

Good News From Winter Gifts
by Jill Testerman
At the end of last semester, the S.O.S. office was filled with piles of bags and boxes containing baseball gloves, lego sets, sticker books, warm scarves and mittens, and other gifts and clothes. Through the generous enthusiasm of Smith students, all of these items were able to make needy children in Western Massachusetts happier during the winter holidays. This Winter Gifts project has been a successful S.O.S. campaign for the past few years. It benefits the Hilltown Food Pantry's annual toy drive, which provides 2 toys and 2 items of clothing for each of the kids in Western Massachusetts it sponsors.

At Smith, houses participating in the Winter Gifts project raised funds and bought gifts specific to the ages and preferences of the children they were assigned. In all, Smith provided over 200 gifts for 51 children. Diana Bennett, the organizer of the Hilltown Food Pantry toy drive, was excited about Smith's involvement. “S.O.S. provides more help than any other group,” she said. “They were responsible for 51 of the 130 total kids who benefited from the drive.” She stressed the importance of the gifts to needy families in the area. “Many of these working families have a hard time making ends meet, and it's hard for the parents who can't give gifts to their children during the holidays. The toys and clothes mean a lot to both the kids and the parents.” S.O.S. board members Christina Cooney ’02 and Maria Worthen '00 deserve recognition for organizing such a successful Winter Gifts project. Get ready for an equally exciting gift drive next year!
A Welcome to Our New Chaplain!

Smith College and S.O.S. welcome our new Chaplain to the College and advisor to the Protestant community, the Reverend Doctor Leon Tilson Burrows. Rev. Burrows will be serving both the Amherst and Smith College communities. He comes to us from Philadelphia, where he served as Pastor of the East Bethel Baptist Church for 7 years. Outreach, including a food giveaway and an unwed teenaged mothers program, has been a main focus of his work. Music is also very important to Rev. Burrows. He is an accomplished organist and has served as the Minister of Music at the Historic St. Michael’s Lutheran Church in Philadelphia. He received degrees in music and divinity from Yale University, and earned his Doctor of Ministry from Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia. Welcome to Smith, Rev. Burrows!

Fanfare for the Fund Drive

The ‘99-’00 S.O.S. fund drive to fight youth homelessness raised over $4,000, thanks to generous donations from students, staff, and faculty. Fund drive chairs Emma Mulvaney-Stanak ’02 and Holly Burke ’01 did a fabulous job. Several highlight events contributed to the success of the drive. All of the proceeds from the Rally Day show, $500, were donated. In addition, the drive received all of the money raised at a coffee house at Davis where the Smithereens gave a benefit performance. The house reps did a wonderful job this year soliciting donations within Smith residences.

Special congratulations to Cushing House, which raised over $330 (more money than any other house), and Capen House, which had 100% participation. Both of these houses will be honored with performances by the Smithereens and Notables. The money will be given in a grant to a local organization that deals with youth homelessness. We’ll let you know next fall which organization was chosen!