HOMEWORK HOUSE IS TRULY WHERE THE HEART IS

By Hoa-Lan Vo

It’s 3:30pm and students are currently tutoring at Our Lady of Guadalupe Social Center every Monday and Wednesday from 3 to 5 pm. They are already at their desks scribbling away at the day’s homework, zealous to get it done so that they may compete at a game of multiplication flash cards. It is here at Homework House in Holyoke, Massachusetts that 3rd to 6th graders are developing this amazing type of behavior.

At Homework House, students who are at risk for academic failure receive free after-school tutoring and mentoring. Tutors work towards rekindling the students’ interest in learning and self-improvement so that they may become productive members of the community.

Sisters Jane Morrissey and Maureen Broughan took the concept of Homework House from a program of the same name in California, which opened in 1992 and have been expanding it ever since. The Sisters have started three Homework House sites in Holyoke, one of the state’s poorest neighborhoods.

One of the goals of the program is to teach children study skills. Children attend the program on Tuesdays and Thursdays or Mondays and Wednesdays. This allows the students to do their assignments independently on alternate days.

“Homework House is an amazing program. I’m so happy to be part of it be-

Tuition at Homework House.

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FROM SOMALIA TO SPRINGFIELD: MAKING A HOME IN AMERICA

By Sarah Anne Kam & Tiertza-leah Schwartz

This fall, Ada Comstock Scholar, Jessica Prodis approached the director of voluntary services, Tiertza-leah Schwartz to discuss developing a new specialized tutoring program to assist Somali refugee children living in Springfield with academic support and mentoring. Jessica was inspired by her work last year with Jewish Family Services New American program tutoring a Somali mother-of-four who relocated to Springfield two years ago.

“I tutored Fadumo for the ’06/’07 school year as my fieldwork for education courses and I have learned immeasurably from my ex-

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The American Red Cross and SOS came together yet again this fall semester to organize a very successful blood drive. It was held on the 22nd and 23rd of October at the Smith College Campus Center and over 300 students participated in the drive. The response from the houses was overwhelming and it was difficult to give every person who wanted to donate blood an appointment. By the end of the drive, the American Red Cross collected 162 productive pints of blood from 211 presenting donors. 486 patients were helped from the blood collected at the Smith drive.

The blood drive was followed by a bone marrow registration drive held on the 9th of November, in collaboration with the National Marrow Donor Program. The drive was promoted specifically to find a matching donor for Sam Cross. Sam is a senior at Harvard University suffering from leukemia and in need of a half-Caucasian, half-Asian bone marrow donor to save his life. The drive attracted over 75 donors from the Smith community. While SOS has no information at this point if a matching donor has been found for Sam, on behalf of the NMDP, the American Red Cross and SOS, I would like to thank all the volunteers and donors who participated in both drives for helping us to have two important events that greatly serve the community we live in.

S.O.S. Annual Fund Drive
By Samin Green and Dylan Barnett

It’s almost that time of year again: time for the SOS annual fund drive! Every year the Smith community participates in a month long series of events and fundraising opportunities organized by SOS.

This February we are excited to raise funds and awareness for United States veterans. The transition from life in war to life back home is not an easy one. About one-third of the adult homeless population are veterans. On any given day, as many as 250,000 veterans (male and female) are living on the streets or in shelters. Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at risk. About 45% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and slightly more than 80% suffer from alcohol or other drug abuse problems.

Throughout the month of February and into March, we will be holding various events to support our local veterans. They have served our country bravely and we would like to help thank them by providing some support, goods, and services that they may need. We know that with the support of the Smith community this will be a great fund drive!

Enchanted Forest
By Elizabeth Wolfson

During Family Weekend last semester, six Smith volunteers helped out at the Hitchcock Center of Amherst’s annual Enchanted Forest event. The center invites local children and families to come (in costume!) to celebrate Halloween with crafts, fortune telling, a bake sale, and a walk through the enchanted forest. This year’s theme was “Spineless Wonders”, so our journey through the forest included encounters with clams, starfish and bees, portrayed by local volunteers. Smithies helped facilitate a spineless wonder memory game, pillbug, and worm crafts for kids, and led families on walks through the forest. S.O.S. Board Member Rachel Finklestein adds that, “The Hitchcock Center is a center for environmental education, so all of the evening’s activities focused on learning about, appreciating and taking care of nature and our surroundings, all the while proving to be very stimulating and fun!” Overall, it was a lot of fun, and we hope you’ll join us next year!
HOMWORK HOUSE

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cause I can see the improvement in Johnny each time we meet,” says Meg Helming ’10.

Great bonds are shared between students and their tutors; therefore, each child is paired with the same tutor every session. These bonds strengthen the students’ interest in learning. In addition to helping them with homework, Smith students also serve as positive role models.

“After only a short week with my students, we were already laughing and giggling together over stories read and homework being done,” remarked Louisa Onyewadume ’09.

Homework house is going strong with over 84 students and with 24 more on the waiting list, there is always more room for tutors.

FROM SOMALIA TO SPRINGFIELD

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experience with Fadumo and her family. I learned that the Somali students, many of whom have grown up in refugee camps and some of whom had never attended school prior to re-settling in the US could benefit from one-on-one tutoring assistance.”

Jessica and Tiertza-leah contacted Maria DeAngelis from the Springfield School Volunteer Program who identified a small cluster of 12 Somali refugee children from 5 families who attend the White St. School in the Forest Park section of Springfield. After a series of meetings this fall with the Principal Geraldine Barrett, reading specialist Wendi Johnson, and Maria, a new community partnership developed the White Street School-Somali Refugee Tutoring Program.

Initial meetings focused on identifying the specific needs of the children, and how tutors might be able to assist the teaching staff. Currently the children are in the 1st-5th grade. Six Smith students are now working with the Somali children, focusing on vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The program provides initial and on-going training on teaching reading comprehension, background on the experiences and needs of Somali refugees and on-going reflection sessions. The program is an America Reads agency so students can volunteer as America Reads Tutors and be paid if they are work study eligible. “I believe that this is an incredible opportunity for Smith students to share the wonderful education that we are receiving, as well as an opportunity to effect change in the greater Pioneer Valley community,” says Jessica Prodis, a mother herself.

Initial observations at the White Street School helped tutors and Tiertza-leah gain an understanding of how to better meet the children’s needs. “Our classroom observations have given us tremendous insight to understand how best to work with the children. The work of the classroom teachers is impressive and will prove to be an excellent model to guide and support the tutors in their work” says Tiertza-leah.

The Somali children have lived in the US for two years. Prior to that they lived in refugee camps in Kenya and some have experienced significant trauma from these

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Looking for an off-campus work-study job? Volunteer & Get paid!

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This year, as in the past, S.O.S. participated in the Winter Gifts program with the Hilltown Food Pantry. Through the generosity of 23 houses and 13 student organizations, faculty, departments, and staff members, we were able to sponsor 61 local children, providing presents for the holiday season. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this great cause!

Rachel Hanlon, Head of House Reps; Kathryn Freeman & Rachel Finklestein, Short Term Projects Co-Chairs.

Understanding more complex concepts and vocabulary.

Two recent examples teachers cited were a writing assignment asking the children to describe how to make buttered toast, another reading comprehension assignment about a horse that felt “proud”. Tutors would need to think about how to explain what toast is to children who most likely have never eaten toast or used a toaster in their home. Or how to explain what the word proud means in terms that the children can understand. The program is looking for tutors who have empathy and respect for the fortitude of these children. For more information, email Tiertza-experiences. The main focus of the White Street School program will be to help the children increase their vocabulary and reading comprehension by helping the children to understand background context in their assignments. Additionally the tutors can assist the children with writing skills and math.

Much of the work the teachers are focusing on in the classroom is to prepare for the MCAS. Because of the Somali children’s experiences living in a very different culture and in refugee camps many of the children lack a cultural context to understand more complex concepts and vocabulary.

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