

SO *the* JOURNER

N E W S L E T T E R

Mother and Son “Get Ahead”

In the last edition of our newsletter, we told you about the *Get Ahead* program started in March 2008 by Robert Zack, a long time volunteer who saw a need for further educational assistance to those helped by Sojourner House. The program began with 19 women interested in furthering or completing their education. The women attended an informational session with representatives from Empire State College and Monroe Community College, who brought applications for their schools, and encouraged those interested to apply right away.

One success story from Sojourner House that relates directly to the *Get Ahead* program is that of **Willie Jeanne Lester**. When Willie Jeanne came to Sojourner House in 2005, she was asked to create goals for herself. One of those goals was

“To succeed in life, you need support. I don’t feel alone because of the support.”

to go back to school and get her degree, so she could get a higher paying job. After enrolling and struggling through her first semester, Willie Jeanne realized she needed a tutor. She was guided to the *Get Ahead* program. Working with her Sojourner House tutor, and other tutors available through MCC, Willie Jeanne went from a 2.1 grade point average to graduating this May with a 3.4 grade point average and even made the Dean’s list. Willie Jeanne attributes her success to the support she received from Sojourner House and her *Get Ahead* tutor, “He doesn’t let me down. He pushes me. To succeed in life, you need support. I don’t feel alone because of the support.” Willie Jeanne is also very grateful for her friends and Sojourner House, “I am so glad I got involved with

them. Sojourner has never let me down. I am so glad they gave me a housing opportunity.”

Willie Jeanne’s hard work and perseverance have also inspired her son, Byron Lester to get his life back on track and begin to take courses at MCC. Byron has been working with a tutor from Sojourner House for about two years. His goal is to go to St. John Fisher to study Sports Management. When asked about his experience with Sojourner House and the *Get Ahead* program, he said that



Willie Jeanne Lester with son Byron

he has grown as a man since he began working with his tutor. His mother is very proud of his accomplishments and has seen a big difference just this semester with his grades.

“I don’t want Byron to make the same mistakes I did.” Willie Jeanne said. “I’m proud of my son. He’s still my baby.”

Due to the main tutor being out of the country frequently on business, participants have had to put in extra effort. They hold their sessions with the tutor over the telephone and scan/email their homework files back and forth. When asked whether this causes a problem, Byron said “It’s hard since he’s far away, but (he) is the backbone of the program.” Both Willie Jeanne and Byron are very happy with the way the new

system is working out and are surprised that the distance has not really been a problem.

Willie Jeanne has recently reached a major milestone: She moved out of supportive housing into her own apartment last month. “It’s a new life and it’s scary. But it’s great!”

After her graduation from MCC in May, Willie Jeanne plans to continue to take Certified Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counseling classes so she can help others who are struggling with alcohol and chemical dependencies.

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Dear Friends,

What keeps tulip bulbs from freezing over a sub-zero winter? If the bulbs are planted deep enough in the soil and early enough in the fall to attain a small bit of growth, they remain hardy and ready to bloom in the spring.

Humans respond much like tulips when it comes to blossoming. We all need nurturing and some protection from the elements to reach our potential. Women and children whose spirits have been stunted by homelessness, addiction and violence are not good candidates for productive survival. These

families have a particularly difficult time finding stable, nurturing places where they can grow.

Fortunately, Sojourner House is here for those who seek to develop more responsible, meaningful lives. Adults take up a structured routine attending recovery and mental health therapy groups, working on chores at the House, and participating in life skills classes to develop constructive lifetime habits. At the same time, children enjoy a home that nurtures them emotionally, mentally and physically. Over nutritious evening meals they laugh while exchanging stories of the day. Two evenings a week they take advantage of one-on-one tutoring to reinforce academic success and often play games to round out the evening.

Over the years, your generosity has made it possible for Sojourner House women and children to blossom. Thank you for believing in their potential and for keeping the promise of spring alive for them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Germaine".

Germaine G. Knapp
President

Our Mission

Sojourner House provides shelter, structure, strength, and inspiration to women and families in need so they are prepared to lead responsible and meaningful lives.

Our Vision

Women and their families achieve their full potential by embracing the Sojourner House experience. Sojourner House is the foremost provider of support services for women and families and is widely recognized for its innovation, expertise, and belief in each person's capacity to grow.

Dreamseeds Academy of Performing Arts

The Dreamseeds children's program grows each season with exciting new opportunities for Sojourner House children under the direction of the very talented director, Carlos Merriweather.

"Seedlings," one of the new programs, is designed just for children ages three to five years old and now features a Creative Movement class.

Children in the African, Modern and Tap dance classes as well as those in the Caribbean Drumming class performed before a packed house on Sunday, February 15, 2009 at the Memorial Art Gallery's Celebration of African-American Culture.

Myai Blackwell and Al-Dre Geathers, students of the Dreamseeds Academy of Performing Arts, were chosen, in a competitive audition, to perform in the film portion of a local project called Songs of Freedom about the Underground Railroad.

The 2008 summer pilot, Dreamseeds Experience, was rated a success by the 30 participants. As a result of feedback from participants, the 2009 Dreamseeds Experience will include several days of riding and horse care at the EquiCenter in Mendon, New York; a visit to the Corning Museum of Glass and performances at local nursing homes.



Back to School Project

*Back to School Project ... already?
But spring isn't even here yet!!*

We promise we are not rushing spring and summer away! We are just planning ahead. Difficult economic times are making us think further into the future. We hope to continue our annual back to school tradition in August 2009; however, we need your help more than ever. We still hope to reach our goal of 200-250 brand new stuffed backpacks for our school-aged children, and for women going back to school to complete GED's or enter higher education. This year, we may need to hold back on picnic festivities, but will continue our drive for new school supplies!

If you would like to help, please contact Portia Chiarella at 436.7100 Ext 117, or portia_sojourner@yahoo.com.



Sojourner House Recognizes Exceptional Support

At the Annual Donor Recognition Luncheon hosted by Bill and Annie LaForte on September 24, 2008 at Oak Hill Country Club, supporters who have provided outstanding financial and organizational support to Sojourner House were recognized.



Philanthropy Award

Richard and Vicki Schwartz were honored with the 2008 Philanthropy Award for their generous financial and volunteer support for Sojourner House women and children and for their generosity and social initiatives in the greater Rochester Community.

Vicki served on the Sojourner House Board of Directors and, during her tenure, was actively involved in a strategic planning process to set the course for the future of Sojourner House. She was also instrumental in creating the Dreamseeds program and coordinated the Creative Writing section of the program for two years. In addition, Vicki served on the Advisory Board of the Henrietta Hammond Institute for Life skills, a program that offers comprehensive life skills training for Sojourner House women.

Richard helped lead the Rochester Area Community Foundation for over a decade. In 2004 the Foundation recognized Richard for his commitment to the mission of community philanthropy by giving him the Joe U. Posner Award.

Sojourner House is proud to honor Richard and Vicki Schwartz for the enduring commitment to improving lives and making our community a better place to live.



Germaine Knapp (right) presenting Philanthropy Award to Richard & Vicki Schwartz



Germaine Knapp & Lorraine Wolch, CPA, Treasurer

Community Partner Award

Tempo Development Corporation, the not-for-profit homeless housing project of Temple B'rith Kodosh in Rochester, New York, received the Sojourner House 2008 Community Partner Award for its long-standing commitment to providing emergency, transitional and permanent housing with support services for low income families in the greater Rochester area.

In 2007, Tempo included Sojourner House in a Housing and Urban Development contract to locate 11 Sojourner House families in the Holyoke Apartment complex in Greece, New York. A full-time, credentialed social worker employed by Sojourner House works on-site each day providing intensive case management and counseling so the families can reach their full potential.

Sojourner House is also proud to honor Tempo Development Corporation and the congregants of Temple B'rith Kodosh for their dedication to serving the homeless in the greater Rochester area and for believing in the dignity of all people.

Joining Hands to Support the Dream

Sojourner House Gala 2008

Hundreds of supporters gathered Saturday, November 1, 2008 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center to celebrate the seventh annual Sojourner House Gala. The theme, Joining Hands to Support the Dream, was based on a drawing by one of the Sojourner House children. Joanne and Dr. William Cala were the honorary chairs of the event at which there was a high-end auction led by Carol Ritter Wright and dancing to the music of Gap Mangione and his band. Guests also enjoyed a dance performance by students in Sojourner House's Dreamseeds Academy of Performing Arts.

Thanks to the event sponsors, supporters, raffle and auction donors, volunteers, committee members, board members and staff this year's Gala was a resounding success!



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Honor Memorial Donations

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June 2008 through January 2009

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Henrietta Hammond Institute for Life Skills (HHILS) Program

We Appreciate Your Holiday Giving!

Even in tough economic times, the Rochester Community comes together for Sojourner House.

Once again, thanks to the outpouring of kindness and support from the Rochester Community, 2008 holiday needs and wishes were fulfilled for over 250 Sojourner House women and children.

We are ever grateful for the individuals, families, community organizations and businesses that provided monetary contributions, adopt-a-family gifts, stuffed stockings, food baskets and general donations. Holiday activities and special events were joyful and festive thanks to our dedicated and loyal volunteers!





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Interested in Sponsoring Our Next Newsletter Edition?

The Sojourner is distributed semi-annually to approximately 3,000 Sojourner House supporters in the greater Rochester area. Sponsorship levels range from \$500-\$2,500. For details, contact Deborah McAuley at 436.7100 x 104 or deborah_sojourner@yahoo.com.

Dreamseeds Note Cards For Sale

Two outstanding pieces of artwork, created by children in the Dreamseeds Academy of Performing Arts (DAPA) Program, have been made into note cards to raise funds for the program. The note cards are available for purchase at Sojourner House and **cost \$10 per package of 8 blank note cards with envelopes**. To purchase note cards call 436.7100.



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