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Fall 2002

Bill Wilson Center News

COUNSELING • HOUSING • EDUCATION • ADVOCACY

Juvenile Hall: How To Fish

The classroom looks like an average classroom, but students file in and take their seats in a very orderly fashion—quietly, one row at a time. The students are all young boys and wear matching uniforms—a brown shirt and pants, and white shoes. This classroom is in juvenile hall.

Pam Egerton, Program Coordinator for Bill Wilson Center's Independent Living Skills Program, hands out marked pencils. Pencils can be used as weapons or to commit suicide so they need to be accounted for at the end of the class. Pam asks the boys, "What life skills do you think you need to be independent."

"Positive thinking," says one.

"Education," says another.

"Money," says a third.

The question encourages the class to think about self-sufficiency. Upon release from juvenile hall, many of them will be on their own. The four sessions on living skills will cover budgeting, housing, nutrition and communications. They'll also attend sessions covering topics like employment skills and anger management.



"I don't understand how this is going to help me," says a young man in the back. "I'm going to be locked-up for a month. And you think four days of this is going to help me."

"I am not here to solve your problems, or fix whatever it

is that got you in here. But I am here to offer you services that can help you create a better life for yourself," Pam responded. "Bill Wilson Center has programs that can support you once you get out as well. I don't want you to end up back in here, and what I am here to teach you can help you avoid that."

"Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for life."

Pam hands out a packet filled with basic money management information, quizzes, a budget sheet, and a mock-up of a blank check. Each boy pulls out the budget sheet from his folder and begins to learn to build a budget. The first line item is rent. The youth have been given photocopies of the newspaper's rental classifieds. Their task is to find a place to live. Looking through the rental listings, the student's talk back and forth checking where the other has decided to live. "I'm going to rent this two bedroom house in San

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Quetzal House

Flowers line the stairs that lead to the front door of Quetzal House. Inside, the bedrooms are large and colorful. Artwork hangs on every wall. It is no wonder that four times out of the year, the girls who used to live in this Victorian house return to eat, laugh and remember.

Quetzal House is a unique home for adolescent girls who are dependents of the court and who exhibit chronic runaway behavior. The home is named for the Quetzal bird that dies when kept in captivity—at Quetzal House the girls flourish and their lives are changed.

"The majority of the girls have been abandoned," said Sara Ajagu, Program Coordinator for Bill Wilson Center's Quetzal House. "We claim the girls as our own, and they become a part of our family." That is why so many of the girls attend Quetzal House reunions.

Staff and clients design the invitations and they are sent out to all previous Quetzal House residents. The girls living at Quetzal House at the time act as the hostesses for the party. They

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Quetzal House *continued*

prepare the food and decorate the house. Using donated items, they prepare party favors for all the girls that attend.

On the day of the event, as the guests arrive, they immediately bombard Sara and the counselors with questions. "Is my room still the same?" "When did you get this new painting?" "Why is the living room rearranged?" They want to know if the familiar things are still there.

"The girls come back because of the relationships they have made here," explains Sara. "They have developed a connection with the staff, the other girls, even the house itself."

"The girls come back because of the relationships they have made here," explains Sara. "They have developed a connection with the staff, the other girls, even the house itself. My office has an old couch that all the girls love. When they come back to visit, they want to know it is still here."

The reunion at Quetzal House is like any other get-together. The attendee's mingle with one another. Old friends catch up on what they have been up to—where their lives have taken them. They share past triumphs and pitfalls, and talk about future plans.

When residents leave they can take copies of their positive incident reports with them. Positive incident reports recognize an achievement, a kindness, or a helpful behavior. The reports are collected and remind each girl of the positive changes she had made in her life during her stay at Quetzal House.



"We want the girls to be able to take a piece of Quetzal House with them, so they can remember the positive changes they made here," said Sara. "We also want them to be able to claim Quetzal House as their own by leaving a piece of them-

selves here, whether that be a piece of art or a stuffed animal. We want them to know that this is their home and that we hope to see them at our 'family' reunions."

Juvenile Hall: How To Fish *continued*

Jose," one student says to another. "That's ridiculous," responds the other boy. "You can't afford to rent a two bedroom by yourself. I'm going to rent this room here. It's cheap and utilities are included."

The time for budgeting runs out, but before she sends them back to their locked rooms, Pam has one more activity for them. "How many of you have written a check before?" asks Pam. Only one student raises his hand. Pam asks the class to pull out the blank check from their folder and briefly demonstrates how to fill out a check. "Chose something that you want to buy, make up an amount, and then write out a check," suggests Pam. The room fills with voices as students chat back and forth about what they are going to buy.

Today, these youth have learned new skills, and have been encouraged to think about how they'll manage on their own. With enough skill building and support, they may stay out of juvenile hall and not become part of the adult jail population. "Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for life." These boys are just beginning to learn to fish.

The California Board of Corrections is leading a drive to increase detention cells for California children from 6,000 to 9,000. This 50 percent increase in California's detention rate—already the highest in the nation—comes, ironically, after years of declining juvenile crime and during looming fiscal crises for state and local governments. The United States has overtaken Russia as the world's most aggressive jailer. Roughly 2 million Americans are currently behind bars, with 4.5 million on parole or on probation.

Volunteer Information

Partner with Bill Wilson Center!

If you are interested in contributing your time, following are examples of volunteer opportunities:

Bill Wilson School Tutor: Must be available at least one morning a week. Monday–Friday, 9:00 am–11:00 am.

Street Youth Advocate: Work in our Drop-In Center for street youth by helping out with food preparation, linking youth with available resources and building positive bonds. Weekday shifts and Saturday afternoons needed.

***Administrative Support*:** Morning hours. Must be familiar with Microsoft Word, Access and/or Excel.

Mentors for THP: Work with older youth as a mentor in our Transitional Housing Program.

** These opportunities require only the orientation and not the training.*

How do I become a Bill Wilson Center Volunteer?

1. Call our Volunteer Coordinator, Michelle Jurjavcic at 408-850-6156.
2. Attend volunteer orientation.
3. Complete a volunteer application, including finger print check.
4. Participate in volunteer training.
5. Select a volunteer assignment and join us.



Special thanks goes to Century 21 Champion for donating the funds they raised in their golf tournament to Bill Wilson Center. In the photo above Judy Whittier (left) accepts a check from Margot Hessling (center) and Cyndi Garbers (right).

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

VAREKAI

When we went to print we still had a limited number of tickets for *Varekai*, the latest Cirque du Soleil show scheduled to come to San Jose in January, 2003. Join us in this wonderful opportunity to see *Varekai* and to support Bill Wilson Center. Tickets are \$100 each and are for the Friday, January 24th show.

Call Judy Whittier at 408-850-6132 to purchase tickets by phone (Mastercard and Visa only) or send a check to:

**Bill Wilson Center,
3490 The Alameda
Santa Clara, CA 95050
ATTN: *Varekai***

Bill Wilson Center Offers Support Groups

Bill Wilson Center's Family and Individual Counseling Center offers a variety of low-cost support groups to the community. Support groups offer a safe environment to talk and share one's feelings. Bill Wilson Center is currently offering the following groups:

Parent Education Group

Saturdays 10:00a.m. – 11:30a.m.

Parents will receive tools for effective parenting through this 8-week workshop.

Teen Anger Management Group

Saturdays 1:00 p.m. – 2:30p.m.

Teens develop an understanding of what causes anger and aggression, and learn and practice skills to help reduce the frequency and intensity of anger and aggression.

Teen Drug & Alcohol Group

Mondays 7:00 p.m. – 8:30p.m.

The group focuses on helping teens work towards abstinence from addictive substances and behaviors, and developing a healthy lifestyle.

New Groups Forming Now

- Life Transition Support Group—For those who have lost their jobs due to the economic downturn.
- Women's Support Group—The group provides an opportunity to come together to discuss issues specific to women.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ENROLL

Contact Lucy Teo, Intake Coordinator, at (408) 850-6145.

2002 Wish List

If you'd like to donate any item on this list, please give Jeanne-Ann Pine a call at 408-850-6155. Items should be new or nearly new.

Clothing: Shoes, T-shirts, sweatshirts, sweaters, jeans, waterproof jackets, warm jackets, umbrellas, gloves, baseball caps, wool beanies, thermal underwear, tights, stockings, shoelaces, and ponchos. Youth also need new underwear and new socks.

Miscellaneous: Toiletries (deodorant, soap, shampoo, conditioner, hand cream, hair gel, toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouthwash, shaving cream, razors, nail clippers) laundry detergent and bleach, sewing kits, water bottles, backpacks, blankets, sleeping bags, tarps, items to cook with, tools (especially bike repair kits), portable alarm clocks, watches, batteries, nonperishable food, supermarket gift certificates, and fast food gift certificates.

For the Infants and Toddlers of Teen Parents: disposable diapers, baby equipment (high chairs, playpens, car seats), crib sheets, blankets, towels.

For Youth Who Are Moving into Housing: Tables, chairs, kitchen equipment (dishes, pots and pans, glasses, utensils), linens, lamps, beds.

For Bill Wilson Drop-in Center for Homeless Youth: Prepared meals to be served to homeless youth on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday.

For All Bill Wilson Center Programs: Oven/stove, bicycle rack, art supplies, books, event or movie tickets, computers (Pentium IV or higher), printers, videos, Playstation and Nintendo games, tickets to museums and amusement parks, gift certificates to music stores, playing cards, games, bus/light rail passes, certificates for haircuts—just about any gift certificate can be used in some way.

Please bear with us if you call with furniture to donate. As we don't have storage space, we can only use furniture when we have someone moving out of transitional housing.



Bill Wilson Center

3490 The Alameda, Santa Clara, CA 95050
P.O. Box 210 A, Santa Clara, CA 95052
(408) 243-0222

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