

# Outreach

YOUTH  
Outreach  
SERVICES

A publication of Youth Outreach Services

## Youth Outreach Services Unveils Exciting New Look!

Youth Outreach Services is unveiling an exciting new look, including a fresh logo, bright color scheme and unique design concepts.

We believe this look will stand out in our communities and achieve increased recognition among youth, families, supporters and friends, thus enabling us to reach a greater number of individuals with the treatment and support they need.

"We are excited about this change," said Rick Velasquez, executive director of Youth Outreach Services. "We hope our brand inspires individuals and communities to get involved in the work we do to help kids find safe homes, remain in school, avoid substance abuse and gang involvement, and make positive choices."

## *With Support, Foster Youth Flourishes*

At just 9 years old, Cindy entered the child welfare system, feeling heartbroken and alone. Earlier that year, she left the care of her grandmother in Mexico and returned to the United States to live with her mother in Chicago. But shortly after her arrival, she was removed from her mother's care due to abuse and neglect.

Cindy was referred to Youth Outreach Services (YOS) Foster Care Programs, designed to provide stable homes and caring families for youth when it is not safe for them to remain with their biological family. Understandably so, she was resistant to care, and the thought of settling in with an unfamiliar family was overwhelming. Sadly, returning to her grandmother was not an option.

But in time, with help from YOS and caring foster families, Cindy began to see things differently. She recalls one foster mother, in particular, who became a lasting influence in her life. She offered the care and love that Cindy longed for.

"She welcomed me into her family," said Cindy. "She waited up for me when I was out and helped me when I needed it. Today, we still talk. I think of her as the grandmother of my child."

Knowing Cindy still missed her grandmother, a YOS caseworker helped offer her the opportunity to return to Mexico for a visit, a highlight of her teenage years. With continued encouragement and support of those around her, Cindy began to thrive and mature.

As she approached age 18, Cindy craved independence. In hopes of transitioning out of care, she appealed to YOS staff, who accepted her into a YOS Independent Living Program, designed to provide the life skills youth need to live on their

own, such as household management, finance skills and tools to pursue a career/education.

"I loved the Independent Living Program," said Cindy. "I think it opened my eyes and helped me mature. They helped me with a lot of important things, like how to get my first bank account and manage my finances."

Today, Cindy is 21 and making something amazing out of her life. She is a loving mother to her 10-month old son, lives in her own apartment, and has set outstanding education and career goals for herself. Currently, she is pursuing her associate's degree and plans to graduate this summer. But she won't stop there – she hopes to obtain her bachelor's degree in social work or juvenile justice, with the ultimate goal of becoming a parole officer.

"I want to find out why people act the way they do," she said. "I want to help them and make a difference in the court system."



Cindy is just one example of the many outstanding foster youth in and around Chicago who are overcoming challenges and succeeding.

"We are proud of all the kids in our care who are triumphing over adversity and making something out of themselves," said Jamie Noto, YOS director of operations. "But these youth can't do it alone. They need the support of caring families and communities. We hope more people will continue to get involved."

For more information on how you can become a foster parent or support YOS Foster Care and Independent Living Programs, please contact Joflynn Weary at 773.777.7112, ext. 7378, or [joflynnw@yos.org](mailto:joflynnw@yos.org).

MAKING AN IMPACT...

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER



### DEAR FRIENDS,

Each May, communities nationwide celebrate Foster Care Awareness Month, striving to raise awareness of and support for the more than 513,000 foster children in the United States. These kids have been separated from their biological families due to abuse, neglect and crises, and are in need of stable homes and supportive families.

What many do not know is that nearly half of these foster children are over age 10 – the hardest population to find homes for. These youth are most in need of our attention because, each year, more than 20,000 kids turn 18 and “age out” of the child welfare system, often without the skills, personal support and resources they need to live on their own.

At Youth Outreach Services, we focus on supporting youth ages 12 – 21 in and around Chicago. It is our goal to connect them to supportive families, mentors and educational resources, offering them the life skills, academic encouragement and support they need to succeed.

We believe in the saying, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and we rely on the help of our talented staff, generous supporters and surrounding communities to impact our youth. There are many ways you, too, can get involved, such as:

- Open your heart and home as a foster parent.
- Become a mentor and share life skills knowledge with youth.
- Make a donation in support of foster care.

Thank you for your support and recognition of Foster Care Awareness Month and the youth in need of care. In partnership, we can continue to help kids thrive, dream and succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Velasquez".

Rick Velasquez  
Executive Director

## CHANGING LIVES...



### Brian LaVaque

Brian LaVaque is passionate about serving youth. A sociology major at Concordia University, Brian got involved with Youth Outreach Services (YOS) last fall as part of his adolescent psychology course. Twice each week, he volunteered in after-school programs, aimed at offering academic support and recreational activities in an effort to keep kids off the streets and out of trouble.

Brian spent a lot of time getting to know the youth, playing basketball and helping them with their homework. After noticing the kids were in need of healthy alternatives for snacks, he went above and beyond his volunteer duties, convincing a company known for all-natural and organic products to donate boxes of snacks to the program.

Though his course ended in December, Brian chose to continue volunteering with the agency. He realized how much the kids needed adult role models and remained dedicated to making a difference.

“The kids didn’t trust me at first,” he said. “But, after I kept coming back, they started opening up to me. It’s important to be consistent – I didn’t want to bail on these kids after just one semester.”

In addition to his work with YOS, Brian is involved in the Illinois Student Environmental Coalition (ISEC) and is an intern for Senator Heather Steans of the 7th District of Illinois, well known for her public policy and nonprofit work. He plans to continue serving philanthropic causes in the future by achieving a graduate level degree in public policy.

Youth Outreach Services salutes Brian for his ongoing commitment to volunteering and his dedication to making a difference in the lives of our youth!

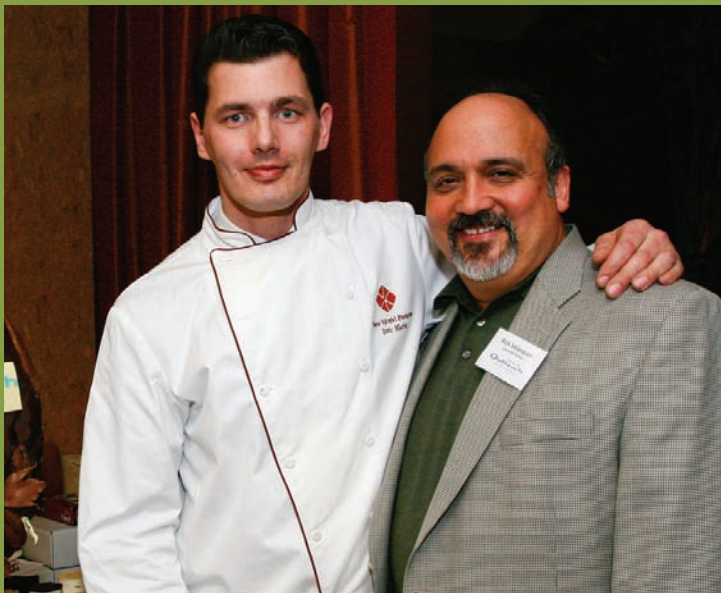
For information on how you can get involved as a volunteer, please contact Ellen Sausser, volunteer coordinator, at 773.777.7112, ext. 7282, or e-mail [ellens@yos.org](mailto:ellens@yos.org).

## *Art of Chocolate Event a Success!*

More than 300 supporters attended Youth Outreach Services' 5th annual Art of Chocolate celebration on Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2008, at Bin 36 in Chicago. Guests enjoyed edible art created by Chicago's finest pastry chefs, along with hand-picked dessert wines courtesy of a variety of wine vendors.

We raised nearly \$25,000 to aid programs that offer youth the treatment and support they need to make positive life changes.

Thanks to all our sponsors, silent auction donors, pastry chefs, wine vendors, Bin 36 and our many generous guests for making this year's event a success!



*LEFT: Executive Director Rick Velasquez and Chef Eric Marie pose by one of the many outstanding chocolate sculptures created for the event.*

*ABOVE: Board Member Mike Hessling, supporter Tracy Contreras and Board Member Jesse Spungin enjoying the event.*

## *Make a Difference with Youth Outreach Services!*

Your support makes it possible for Youth Outreach Services to develop and support the strengths and unique potential of every youth, while also inspiring positive changes within their families and communities. There are a variety of ways in which you can make an impact:

- Make a cash donation.
- Contribute to our scholarship fund for youth.
- Contribute in-kind gifts for our youth, such as personal hygiene products, CTA passes and movie certificates.

- Consider naming YOS in your will.
- Lend your expertise on our Board of Directors.
- Volunteer your time on a committee or for a special event.

For more information, contact Gary Koenig, director of development, at 773.777.7112, ext. 7274, or [garyk@yos.org](mailto:garyk@yos.org).

## THANK YOU...

TO OUR MANY GENEROUS DONORS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO YOUTH OUTREACH SERVICES THIS SEASON!

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**Monday, June 16, 2008**



**SAVE  
THE  
DATE!**

## *Golf Outing*

Ruffled Feathers Golf Club  
1 Pete Dye Drive  
Lemont, Illinois

Tee up for an exciting shotgun scramble tournament at Ruffled Feathers Golf Course. Registration begins promptly at 6:30 a.m., followed by a shotgun scramble tournament at 7:30 a.m. After your round, enjoy lunch, a raffle and exciting prizes.

Your participation in this event will benefit Youth Outreach Services and our efforts to impact youth. We believe all children are capable of excellence and are dedicated to providing the treatment and support they need to succeed.

Tickets will sell out quickly, so grab your friends and reserve a space today! For more information, or to sponsor the outing, contact Ryan Barrett Hastings at [ryanh@yos.org](mailto:ryanh@yos.org) or 773.777.7112, ext. 7226, or visit us at [www.yos.org](http://www.yos.org).

## Our Service Highlights

### "HEART OF THE MATTER" RECOGNIZES YOUTH ACHIEVING SUCCESS

On March 18, five deserving youth participated in Heart of the Matter, a celebration recognizing the ongoing success of youth participating in YOS Counseling Services. Hosted at our Cicero Office, youth invited parents and loved ones to celebrate their triumph over issues inhibiting their personal and academic success.

Staff recognized the youth with certificates of achievement, as well as words of encouragement and congratulations. To finish out the evening, each youth was asked to extend a thank you to someone who made a difference in their journey toward success, including parents, YOS staff, siblings and friends.

After receiving an emotional thank you from her son, one mother tearfully shared a simple, yet memorable sentiment: "Thank you for changing."



### NEW PROGRAM TO SUPPORT HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY YOUTH

YOS is introducing a new program to our service array! Funded in part by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, the Transitions Program will provide safe homes and support to runaway and homeless youth, ages 16 – 19, at risk of abuse, exploitation, drug use and gang involvement.

Many of these kids have been pushed out of their homes due to abuse, neglect and crises, and they need a stable environment in which they can thrive until reunited with their family or able to live on their own.

To care for this vulnerable population, YOS is partnering with dedicated foster families willing to help youth succeed by providing safe homes, academic encouragement and support for up to 18 months.

For more information on becoming a foster parent or how you can support this program, contact Joflynn Weary at 773.777.7112, ext. 7378, or [joflynnw@yos.org](mailto:joflynnw@yos.org).

### BOYS BECOMING MEN IN THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY

On March 16 – 17, ten young boys and three counselors from the YOS Austin Office headed to the Holiday Inn in Palatine, Ill., for the Boys Becoming Men Retreat. As part of YOS Prevention Programming, the overnight lock-in provided structure on a day school was closed.

In addition to traditional lock-in activities, like swimming, basketball and video games, the boys participated in workshops and seminars on leadership, friendship and family values. The boys also received a special surprise. Prior to the retreat, YOS counselors had secretly contacted the boys' parents and asked them to write a letter describing what they value about their child. When the boys read the letters, they had a greater sense of hope and belief in themselves and their families.

"The guys really responded to the letters," said Chaunteney Pritchett, YOS prevention specialist. "They told us they didn't know their parents cared so much. Many were eager to head home and spend time connecting with their parents. It was a really great feeling."

According to Pritchett, the youth are also demonstrating a greater sense of trust in the YOS counselors as a result of the lock-in, opening up and sharing their thoughts and feelings. Thanks to the youth, parents and YOS staff who made this event such a success!

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*Contact Us!*

**Youth Outreach Services**

773.777.7112

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