



## Being an e-Helper Means Making a Difference

**E**-Help is a relatively new and very exciting program! This is how it works: When one of our kids has a special request or need, if (for instance) they can't afford to buy \$80 basketball shoes but have just made the varsity team, we send out an email to all e-Helpers who have opted to join the

program. We tell you the request hoping to be fulfilled and a little bit about the youth requesting the help (keeping all identifying information confidential, of course).

Since beginning the e-Help program in 2004, all requests have been fulfilled by generous people like you.

Join the ranks of the wonderful e-Helpers and know you're making a difference! To become an e-Helper, or get more information, send an e-mail to [absosis@somerset home.org](mailto:absosis@somerset home.org) or call Anne Bradley-Sosis at (908) 526-6605.

Somerset  
**HOME** *for* Temporarily Displaced Children

Non -Profit Organization  
**U.S. POSTAGE PAID**  
 Bridgewater, NJ  
 Permit No. 246

49 Brahma Avenue ■ Bridgewater, NJ 08807



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# Somerset HOME

Temporarily  
for Displaced  
Children

NEWSLETTER ■ SPRING 2006



Member: Somerset County United Way and United Way of Greater Union County.

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49 Brahma Avenue ■ Bridgewater, NJ 08807 ■ 908-526-6605 ■ www.somerset-home.org

## A Place of Their Own

**S**omerset Home is growing—and helping more young people through its transitional living program. In May 2005, My Place opened, giving five young men, ages 18 to 21, the support they need to make a smooth transition into adulthood. And in April 2006, a similar five-bed facility called Whitney House opened its doors to 18- to 21-year-old females, with the goal of teaching them the skills they need to live independent, productive lives.



“These programs helps kids who are aging out of the child welfare system,” says Executive Director Jeff Fetzko. “We’re here to offer autonomous living training in an independent, yet supportive home setting.”

Current residents are also satisfied with the program. “My Place has helped me better myself with the knowledge of life-skills,” said 18-year-old Sam. “I’ve learned about banking, paying bills,

## Helping Graduates Realize Their Dreams

**L**ast year, the Somerset Home Educational Assistance Endowment Fund was created to provide Somerset Home residents with post-secondary educational scholarships. For 2005, Somerset Home was able to provide five high school graduates with scholarships in support of their educational goals. This year, it is anticipated that 15 residents will be eligible for a scholarship.

In keeping with its commitment to improving the quality of life for youth, Somerset Home provides educational assistance scholarships for any type of post-high school education, including vocational programs and traditional two- and four-year colleges.

Recipients of last year’s rewards report they are doing well; all are currently enrolled in college and excelling in their pursuits.

owning a car and eventually having my own apartment.” Sam, like most residents of the program, came to My Place because he was aging out of the child welfare system.

Another resident, Laurence, 19, feels the same. “They’ve helped me get into college and get my

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## Executive Director Honored for Quarter Century of Service




Jeff Fetzko (second from left) celebrates with board members Lisa Warren, Carolyn Zachary and Ray Fantuzzi (from left).

**A**fter 25 years of service, Jeffrey Fetzko, Somerset Home executive director, was honored for his contributions to at-risk youth as a member of Somerset County Youth Services Commission.

Jeff was presented with a Circle of Friends Award for his quarter-century of service to youth in need at a dinner attended by his wife, Joanne, and three Somerset Home board members. Jeff's dedication to supporting abused and neglected youth has been unwavering throughout his years of service.

Board Member Carolyn Zachary has seen Jeff's leadership expand the Somerset Home services exponentially over the years. "Through Jeff's advocacy and leadership, Somerset Home has established a role-model reputation, has earned national accreditation, and, most importantly, has made a huge difference in the lives of the kids it serves. This recognition for his work with youth is richly deserved."

Board Member Lisa Warren added, "Jeff has led the Somerset Home organization for over 25 years without ever losing his enthusiasm and passion for providing youths with the best and most complete services and programs it can offer." This award, she adds, is "simply the community's way of recognizing his tireless efforts for youth advocacy in general."

According to Board Member Ray Fantuzzi, "Jeff has the gift of never being satisfied with the status quo. He always wants to make things better for the youth our agency serves. He is not only an idea person but a nuts-and-bolts person as well." 

## Board Members

*Thank you to all our Board Members for their dedication and service.*

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8 T H A N N U A L

Somerset  
**HOME**

***Run For Runaways***

Saturday, November 4, 2006

Duke Island Park, Bridgewater, N.J.

Scenic 5K Run

2 Mile Fitness Walk

Kids' Sprints

Post-race barbeque including entertainment

*For more information, visit*

*[www.runforrunaways.org](http://www.runforrunaways.org)*

*or contact*

Carla Grabert

(908) 526-6605

[cgrabert@somersethome.org](mailto:cgrabert@somersethome.org)

D O N ' T M I S S I T ! ! !



## Welcome, New Board Members

**W**e are pleased to announce the arrival of two new board members, Katherine Coulahan and Madeline Berlin. Both bring with them extensive experience in communications and public relations, along with passion to improve the quality of life for homeless teens.

Kathy grew up in New Jersey and received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Ohio University. She began her career at Popular Mechanics magazine, and was a writer and editor for Science Digest, the College Board and Crum & Forster Insurance Companies before joining AT&T as a public relations manager.



**Pictured from left to right, Kathy Coulahan, Carolyn Zachary and Maddy Berlin**

Looking for more opportunities to lend her communications skills to the local community, she contacted Somerset Home.

"I wanted to work with an organization that helps kids, and I've watched Somerset Home expand its programs over the years," she said, "giving teenagers in tough circumstances the support they need to grow into productive adults."


Kathy lives with her husband, John, in Bridgewater.

Maddy Berlin grew up in Philadelphia and earned her bachelor's degree in sociology as well as a master's in adult learning and organization development from Temple University.

Maddy is director of global workforce development and organization effectiveness at Hewlett Packard Financial Services in Murray Hill, N.J. Prior to that, Maddy worked for AT&T Capital Corporation and Advanta Corporation. She also has

a background as a community social worker and pre-school teacher.

Maddy, who lives in Lambertville with her husband, Bruce, is happy to be joining the board. "I am extremely pleased to be offered the opportunity to support children and young adults in our communities who may not have a strong advocate for their well-being and development without agencies such as Somerset Home," she said.

Kathy and Maddy came to Somerset Home at the urging of outgoing board member Carolyn Zachary. "Somerset Home will be forever grateful to Carolyn for her 20 years of volunteer service," says Executive Director Jeff Fetzko. "She has been an amazing advocate for the youth we help, donating countless hours to ensure Somerset Home provides the best services possible. She will be greatly missed. We wish her luck in her next endeavor." 

## New Street Counselor Reaches Out




**Isaac Odusanya**

Isaac Odusanya is the new Street S.M.A.R.T. Street Outreach counselor and he's passionate about his work. "I love my job," says Isaac. "I really appreciate the fact that I can come to work every morning knowing that what I do matters."

Isaac, who was hired in 2004 as a senior youth counselor with a B.A. in African Studies from Rutgers University, was promoted to street outreach counselor in November 2005.

As a street outreach counselor, Isaac works hand-in-hand with community support groups, local police officers, and school guidance counselors to ensure Somerset County youth have someone to turn to when they need help.

The Street S.M.A.R.T. street outreach program provides youth with access to housing, employment, and educational opportunities or simply invites them to Brahma House for a shower and a hot meal. Isaac is dedicated to providing any services necessary to get youth off the streets and into safe, stable environments. "He is a wonderful asset to the community and to the youth he serves," says Nikki DeSouza, program director. 



# We would like to thank the following donors and partners for supporting our capital campaign:

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### **A Place of Their Own**

*(Continued from page 1)*

own computer, and also to find a job and save money. This is a place where I can feel safe and work on becoming an independent person.”

After a stay of up to 18 months, program graduates receive outreach and support to enable them to continue meeting their goals of living productive and independent lives. 



## One Of The Many

*A success story from  
Brahma House*

**E**rika was 15 years old when her adoptive mother developed Alzheimer's disease. The two were living alone in a two-bedroom apartment when her mom's health began to deteriorate. Soon, Erika was caring for her mother all the time and began missing school.

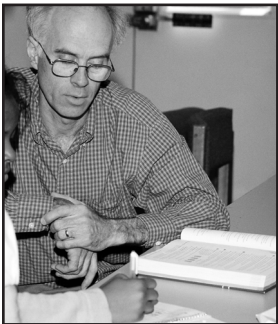
School officials became concerned and reported the situation to the Division of

Youth and Family Services. Upon investigation, it was determined that, due to the Alzheimer's, Erika's mother was unable to care for her teenage daughter adequately. A search for other potential caregivers began and an estranged son was found to be living nearby. Erika's "brother" agreed to assume responsibility for his ailing mother, but was uncertain about caring for a teenage girl.

Erika was then placed at Brahma House. During her seven week stay, Erika, her mother, and her brother

participated in family therapy with a program social worker. Erika and her family established rules and guidelines for their home as well as goals for their family. When the family "team" felt they were ready, Erika began visiting her brother and her mother on the weekends to start building a stronger family relationship. Within a few short weeks, Erika moved into her new home. She continues to do well and checks in with Brahma House staff periodically to let us know she's in a good home. 

## Volunteer of the Year



**Bill Petersen  
with student**

**L**ongtime Somerset Home volunteer William Petersen was honored December 19 as the Garden State Coalition's "Volunteer of the Year." Presented with the award at the Coalition's annual breakfast in Trenton, Bill was applauded by child advocate professionals from around New Jersey.

Known as Mr. Bill to the youth he tutors, he has volunteered in Somerset Home's in-house school (the Transitional Learning Center) at Brahma House for more than two years. With a background in economics, he specializes in clarifying often murky mathematical concepts. Lydia, a 16-year-old resident who has worked with Mr. Bill since October, says he has made a huge difference in her educational experience. "He is so cool he makes learning algebra fun and exciting," she says. To many, that accomplishment seems nothing short of miraculous.


Brahma House teacher James Guillen is overjoyed to have Bill Petersen's assistance in his classroom. "Mr. Bill has been a wonderful asset to our school," James says. "His dedication, loyalty, attitude, and overall involvement with the children are second to none. We are honored to have him as a tutor."

Nikki DeSouza, Brahma House program director,

adds that one of Bill's greatest contributions to Somerset Home is the regularity with which he volunteers. Like clockwork, he helps residents with their schoolwork every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30 a.m. to noon. "Mr. Bill provides a level of stability and consistency in our school program that means the world to our residents," Nikki says. "They are in transition when they're here, so having a consistent schedule is very important."

Brahma House residents are at different grade levels and have varying abilities. Youth live at Brahma House for as little as a day or two, or as long as several months, until a more stable placement can be found. John, a 16-year-old who has been a resident for only two weeks, put it this way: "Mr. Bill is one of the nicest teachers I have ever had. He cares about us a lot."

Executive Director Jeffrey Fetzko agrees. "No matter how much time Mr. Bill spends with each student, he makes a positive impact on them," Jeff says. His commitment to at-risk youth and Somerset Home is exemplary. There is no one more deserving of the Volunteer of the Year award."

Bill Petersen holds a bachelor of science degree in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard. He has been a stay-at-home dad for his four children since 1991 and has graciously contributed his talents, intellect, and passion to the youth served by Somerset Home since 2003. 



# TIPS FOR PARENTS WITH TEENS:

## What Teens Really Mean When They Say...

Thoughts running through teens' heads are subject to an awkward phase, just like their bodies during puberty. Articulating new feelings is tricky. Here's a short guide to what your teens may actually mean when they use hurtful or startling words.

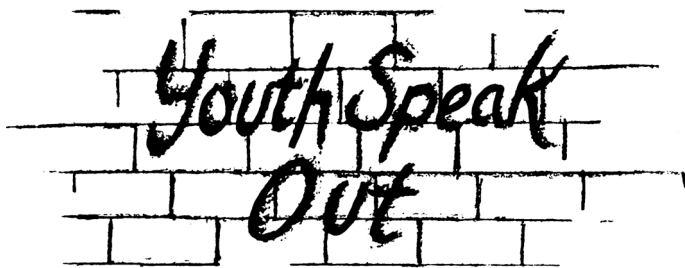
**"Just leave me alone!"** Everyone needs privacy at some point. As frustrated teens sort through their newly emerging emotions, they often reject a parent's concerns. Give space when your child asks for it, but also take note that your teen may be asking for help. Make yourself available to spend time and talk.

**"I hate you!"** She feels anger, but doesn't know how to channel it. Don't take it personally or retaliate in anger. Take a deep breath and stay positive.

**"I'm too fat. I'm ugly."** This may be a reflection on how your teen's peers judge him and how badly he wants to fit in. Emphasize healthy eating, but also support your child's body image with positive comments. Compliment his whole person.

**"You always embarrass me!"** Criticizing you in front of his friends is one way your teen establishes his identity. Model the behavior you expect from your children. When your tone is respectful, your child's will likely be as well. Weather these storms with a cool head and calm demeanor.

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### *My Greatest Accomplishment*

*...is that all of this time I've been away from my family, I've been able to do things I have always wanted to do.* I have been able to take care of myself and stay out of trouble. (B.P.)

*...was meeting my mother.* It was the greatest because I don't really know her that well but I'm happy that I've seen her. Ever since I was born I wanted to meet her and I finally did. (N.G.)

*...is that I have finished the 8th grade with a middle school degree on the honor roll.* I can go to my freshman year of high school and do the same thing. I didn't get in any trouble that whole 8th grade year. (S.M.)

### *My Greatest Fear*

*...is not having a family to go and live with and no one to take care of me.* Having my family is like being the richest man in the world. I think having a family is the most important part of someone's life because kids need someone to take care of them and support them so they don't get into trouble. (B.P.)

*...is not having any contact with my sisters.* My sisters are the only family I really have. I feel as though, without them, there is no me. Even though we speak every day, it's still not enough. But hopefully I will see them soon. If not, my greatest fear will go deeper. (N.G.)

*...is getting violated.* I fear that because it's been done in the past and it scares me a lot! It's not a good feeling to have because it's been done to my family and friends as well. If I was in the streets, my family would be in the streets and my friends would be the drugs. I pray my life doesn't go that way. (F.C.)