



**Volunteers
of America®**

MINNESOTA

Making a Difference. Changing Lives.™

Together, we are changing the lives of over 26,500 children, families and seniors.

Spring 2011

Upcoming Events

May 19: The Art of Possibility—

A benefit supporting Volunteers of America of Minnesota's life-changing programs. 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Centennial Lakes Park Pavilion, Edina. Experience inspiring stories of change, transformation, and new possibilities told through artwork created by the people served by Volunteers of America of Minnesota. The evening will include complimentary beer, wine and appetizers, a silent auction featuring one-of-a-kind artwork, and the opportunity to participate in a community-created mosaic mural that will be displayed at our Avanti Center for Girls. Admission is free, with all proceeds benefiting Volunteers of America of Minnesota. RSVP required kcook@voamn.org.



July: Bowling for Backpacks—Get a team of bowlers together to have fun, kick-off our Operation Backpack program, and raise money for Volunteers of America. Watch for details at www.voamn.org.

Aug: Operation Backpack—Purchase or collect new backpacks filled with school supplies for at-risk children and teens in need. Watch for details at www.operationbackpackmn.org.

Ongoing: Specialized Volunteer Projects
Partner with us to develop a unique, impactful volunteer experience for your group. Contact Kristin Cook at kcook@voamn.org or 952-945-4039 for more information.



Christina learns to cope with troubling emotions*

Christina was an active six year old who lived with her parents, Wallace and Anita, on the outskirts of downtown Minneapolis. When not in school, Christina, who had been deaf since birth, enjoyed playing outside in the family's fenced backyard on her new playground equipment and with the family's dog, Cookie. Although the neighborhood was relatively quiet, there had been some recent gang activity in the area.

One crisp October morning, after Wallace had left early for work, Christina awoke, got ready for school, and began eating a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch at the kitchen table. Anita let Cookie out in the backyard like she did every morning. However, this morning the usually calm Cookie began to bark relentlessly. Anita stepped out the back door into the backyard to quiet the barking animal. Within seconds, Christina watched as her panic stricken mother rushed back into the house with the dog, and dialed her cell phone.

Christina wondered was going on, and peeped out the back door. That's when she saw him. Laying on the grass near the edge of the fence was the motionless figure of a young man wearing bright white athletic shoes, his red shirt stained nearly black with blood. Christina froze.

Anita, now off the phone, was sobbing hysterically and embraced her daughter. Christina began to cry. Within minutes, the police arrived. The policeman with the clipboard spoke to Anita, while two other uniformed men lifted the young man from the ground to a stretcher and loaded him into an ambulance. Then they were gone.

After that, life went back to normal – sort of. Over the next few months, Christina refused to play outside and had nightmares. She was anxious, distracted and was doing poorly in school. She had difficulty explaining how she was feeling. Christina's parents

Continued on page 2

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Christina learns to cope with troubling emotions*

Continued from cover

became concerned and sought out the help of therapist, Alexis Greeves, of Volunteers of America-Minnesota's Mental Health Clinics, who specializes in providing play therapy and counseling services for deaf children using ASL (American Sign Language).

"During a play therapy session, I asked Christina to draw a picture," reports Greeves. "She drew a picture of her family's backyard and the body of the young man." Then Greeves explains, "I hung the drawing on the wall and we talked about it. I asked Christina to describe her feelings about the picture, but she she couldn't. That's when I threw a sticky Blobz ball at the drawing. It stuck for a few seconds and then dropped off. Christina's expression was serious. Then I asked Christina if she wanted to throw the ball, but she didn't want to throw it. So, I threw the ball at the drawing again. This time I said, 'I am so mad that this happened to you Christina.' Christina agreed and said, 'Yes!' I threw the ball again and said, 'Things like this shouldn't happen to little kids.' Again, Christina said, 'Yes!' So, I threw the ball again and said, 'You made Christina's mom cry.' The little girl said, 'Yes!'" Greeves says that Christina didn't agree with all of her statements and if she said something that was not accurate, Christina would disagree and say, "No."

During the next few weeks Christina and Greeves talked about feelings and how to describe them. She began to process her feelings about the backyard incident and started to be able to independently articulate her emotions. Over time, Christina began to refocus in class and her school performance improved. Her fears diminished and she started spending time with Cookie in the backyard again.

**We have changed the name of the subject and certain details to protect privacy and confidentiality. The individual in the photo is a model.*

Play therapy helps meet the emotional needs of deaf kids

Play therapy is a practical and important approach in working with all children because it enables them to express their thoughts and feelings through their natural language of play. It is especially useful for deaf and hard of hearing children because play can be more visual than language-based. "For deaf children, the world is acutely visual," reports Alexis Greeves, therapist for Volunteers of America - Minnesota's Mental Health Clinics. "It is important to bring these children therapy in a non-threatening way using a format that is visual, playful, and accessible." Greeves explains, "Deaf children who have ASL (American Sign Language) delays can communicate much more effectively through play."

Play therapy techniques can be useful in helping resolve problems, strengthen relationships, develop self-understanding, learn self-regulation skills, and build their emotional vocabulary. "Anyone can do it, but parents in particular can benefit from applying the child-centered play therapy approach," says Greeves. "Kids need freedom and not every moment needs to be a teachable moment. Sometimes teachable moments put too much pressure on a child." Treating deaf children with play therapy is not very different from treating hearing children Greeves points out. "Sometimes you need to make adaptations," she says. "And, it's important to remember that even though it's play therapy, it's still often hard work for the children."



Alexis Greeves presents play therapy workshop

Alexis Greeves, Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC), Registered Play Therapist and Supervisor (RPT-S), for our Mental Health Clinics, presented a Mental Health Clinics' workshop entitled, "**Play Therapy with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth**" in February. The program taught community therapists and other professionals how they can apply play therapy techniques to meet the emotional needs of deaf children. The workshop was sponsored by **The Starkey Hearing Foundation** and was presented in ASL (American Sign Language) with voice interpreting.



Volunteerism as civic responsibility

After the 2008 elections, electrical engineer David Fishbaine made the decision to actively volunteer in the community. Our country needs volunteers," he says, "and fortunately, I have the time."

That's when he became a Math tutor for Volunteers of America-Minnesota's Adult High School Diploma Program, which serves recent immigrant and refugees in Minneapolis. He found the opportunity online and since then, has been tutoring adult learners once a week for three to four hours each evening.

Students in the program individually complete a progression of Math worksheets with the assistance of teachers and volunteer tutors. "The students have a broad range of abilities extending from those who need basic assistance such as adding single digit numbers, to those who are at about a ninth grade Geometry level," Fishbaine reports. He explains that he discourages the use of calculators. "It's important for the students to understand how to work through the steps to solve the problems."

Fishbaine's tutoring goes beyond simply building students' Math skills. He helps them learn how to learn. "It's surprising how much knowledge [some of the immigrant adults] have missed, including techniques for learning," he says. He illustrates this with a story of an immigrant woman who needed to learn long division, but could not remember the multiplication tables. "She had no idea how to begin memorizing the multiplication tables. Most Americans use a variety of memorization techniques including auditory, visual, mechanical and rhyming methods. With this student, I taught her how to memorize using visual and auditory repetition," he explains. "Then I told her to sleep on it, which was also a new concept."

Hot volunteer opportunities!

Elementary school tutor

Improve the reading skills for K-3 students in Minneapolis or St. Paul schools through our Experience Corps program. 4-15 hours per week, M-F, daytime hours. For more information, contact Janet Triplett at 952-945-4164 or jtriplett@voamn.org.

Youth mentors

Make a positive difference in the life of a youth residing at our Bar None (Anoka) or Avanti (Blaine) treatment centers. Days/times are flexible. Training provided. For more information, Michelle Rosenau at 763-753-2500 or mrosenau@voamn.org

Tutors for adult learners

Assist refugee/immigrant adult learners at our Education Center in Minneapolis to advance their English, writing and/or math skills. 1-4 hours per week, M-F between 5-9 pm. For more information, contact Muna Ahmed at voavolunteer@gmail.com

More volunteer opportunities

are listed on our website at www.voamn.org. Click on the red "Volunteer!" button on the left side of the screen.

Tutoring adult learners is a rewarding experience for Fishbaine. "It's the follow-on effect," he states. "There's a lot of bang for the buck. I feel that when I help one adult, there's a good chance I may have indirectly helped a whole family," he says. "These immigrants are trying hard to pull themselves up."



Look what's been happening...



Mora residents attend camp

Residents of our Mora Homes attended Camp Confidence, an outdoor center for persons with developmental disabilities, near Brainerd. The camp program promotes self-confidence, self-esteem, and the skills to become contributing members of society through hands on activities and a variety of outdoor experiences. Pictured is Billy Schuroff who is participating in "Smitty's Revenge," a tree climbing experience.

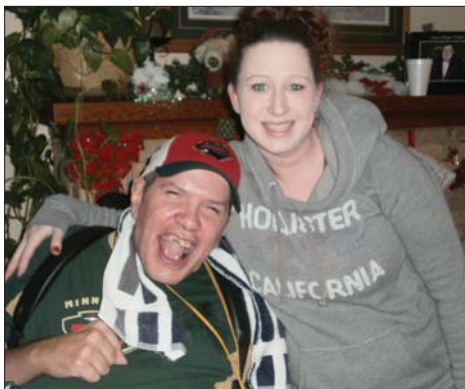


Milaca pianoman

Gary Weinand, a resident of our Stepping Stones/Sheltering Stones homes in Milaca which serves individuals with special needs, was invited to play holiday piano music for a special event at Milaca Floral in November. The event was well attended and both staff and Stepping Stones/Sheltering Stones residents were on hand to lend their support. Pictured are Gary Weinand and staff Marie Ziesmer, Stacie Haedt and Kerry DeBoer.

Seniors Place open house

Community seniors attended an open house at our Seniors Place community center which offers noon meals, exercise programs, games, arts and crafts, educational programs, and other socialization activities for older adults. We assumed operation of Seniors Place in November from East Side Neighborhood Services.



Adopt a Family 2010

Terry Anderson, a resident of our Stepping Stones/Sheltering Stones group homes in Milaca for adults with special needs and disabilities, shows off the new Minnesota Wild hat and t-shirt he received from a sponsor of the Adopt a Family program. Also pictured is Samantha Wilson, staff.

Thanksgiving Food Drives 2010

More than 25 groups collected food and grocery gift cards, as well as assembled over 500 Thanksgiving meal packs to feed nearly 1,500 people in need for our 2010 Thanksgiving Food Drives.



Adopt a Family 2010

Volunteers helped unload gifts on drop-off day for our annual Adopt a Family program which provides holiday gifts for low-income families and individuals. For Adopt a Family 2010, more than 500 individual, corporate, and group sponsors purchased, wrapped, and delivered gifts for more than 3,000 people in need.



Nicollet Towers renovation

We celebrated the closing on financing for renovations at our largest managed affordable housing property, Nicollet Towers, in downtown Minneapolis in December. This financing will allow for over \$16 million in renovation and the addition of a program to assist 19 families and individuals that have been prone to long-term homelessness. The project team partners include Volunteers of America, Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, The National Affordable Housing Trust, The McArthur Foundation, Cornerstone Real Estate Advisors, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Healthy Changes inspires positive changes for seniors

Seniors took part in Healthy Changes, a competitive 12-week incentive-based health and wellness program for seniors aimed at inspiring them to make positive changes in their diet and activity levels to improve their physical health and allow them a better quality of life. The program is offered at three of our senior community center locations, as well as two apartment buildings where we provide services for older adults. Healthy Changes is supported by a grant from the Medica Foundation and by the Greater Twin Cities United Way.



Park ElderCenter celebrates Black History Month

Seniors at Park ElderCenter celebrated Black History Month in February with a special presentation by Dr. Michele Goodwin focusing on African American contributions to the growth of America. Goodwin is the Everett Fraser Professor in Law at the University of Minnesota, a prolific author, and is the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her contributions to the legal community. Pictured are Charles Mays, Bee Vue (Center Director), Michele Goodwin, and Liz Moore.





SALT High School is “Program of the Year”

Our Service Adventure Leadership (SALT) High School was presented with the “Program of the Year” award by the Minnesota Association of Alternative Schools (MAAP) for its inspirational curriculum, structure, outreach, outcomes, and innovation. Pictured at the podium is Doug Eischens, Director of SALT, and SALT staff.



HHS director visits with seniors

Southwest Center hosted Cristal Thomas, Regional Director, Region V, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and approximately 75 older adults in a discussion of The Affordable Care Act and its impact on Medicare in January. Pictured left to right: Michael Weber, President and CEO, Volunteers of America-Minnesota; Linda Walker, Social Worker, Southwest Senior Center; Cristal Thomas, Regional Director, Region V, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Bethany Snyder, Field Representative for Senator Al Franken; Mary Ann Schoenberger, Director, Southwest Senior Center.



Legislative advocacy

David Schuchman, MSW, LICSW, Director of Immigrant and Refugee Behavioral Health for our Mental Health Clinics, and Dega Ali, Senior Human Services Specialist for our Highrise Social Services program, testified before a Minnesota State Legislature committee about the importance of mental health services to refugee populations.

Bingo night in Mora

Zachary Watts, Bernie Weyaus, Scott Polinder and John Cooper, residents of our Villa House for adults with special needs and disabilities, hosted a monthly Bingo night for residents of all three of our Mora homes in February. They made special Valentines and heart-shaped brownies for their guests.



Armenian dancers entertain seniors

A troupe of traditional Armenian dancers stopped by Southwest Senior Center to entertain, educate, and help celebrate February birthdays. One of the things that makes Southwest Senior Center such a great place is that they celebrate and learn from so many unique cultures.



Mental Health Clinics shares expertise with the professional community

Rebecca Goffman, PsyD, LP and **Sara Hegge**, MA, MSW, LICSW, both therapists for our Mental Health Clinics, will present “**Transitioning to College with a Psychiatric Disability**” at the national ADARA conference in April. Additionally, **Alexis Greeves**, MA, LPPC, a therapist for our Mental Health Clinics, will present, “**Play Therapy with Deaf Children**” at the conference. ADARA is an association for professionals who provide services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Jaime Monson, MSW, LICSW and **Rebecca Goffman**, PsyD, LP, both therapists for our Mental Health Clinics, will present, “**Mental Health Needs and Statewide Services for Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing Youth**” and “**Ethics and Boundaries with Small, Rural, or Niche Populations**” at the Minnesota Association for Children’s Mental Health (MACMH) conference in May. Additionally, **Sara Hegge**, MA, MSW, LICSW, a therapist for our Mental Health Clinics, will present, “**Transitioning to College with a Psychiatric Disability**” at the conference. MACMH is an organization which promotes positive mental health for children and their families.





Special Offer: Go green with a red tote!

Sign up for our email list by April 30th and receive a bright red, eco-friendly tote (while supplies last). Simply go to our homepage at www.voamn.org and click on the button labeled, "Sign up for our Email List." Fill in your complete name, email address – and don't forget your street address, then click "Submit" at the bottom of the form.

Leave A Legacy...

After providing for loved ones, imagine how *Your Legacy* can change lives. Consider naming Volunteers of America of Minnesota as a beneficiary in your will. Contact Laura Wagner at 952-945-4061 for specific bequest language.

Volunteers of America–Minnesota
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