

Homeless students, on their own, wait for a second home



Mary Metheny is the retired homeless liaison from Beaverton and currently works as a McKinney-Vento Homeless Education coach for the Beaverton School District.

BY MARY METHENY
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Josiah is nearly 18; he will graduate from high school in June. He is enrolled in honors level classes and is a scholar athlete. A model handsome, well-groomed young man he appears to have the world on a string.

But Josiah is homeless.

When he speaks about his future it is with confidence and determination. "When I go to medical school," "When I become an anesthesiologist," reflect his attitude and somehow, you just believe it. He has the aptitude and passion to achieve his goals if he can focus on his studies instead of survival.

When his home life became too chaotic for him to bear, Josiah hit the road. Drug use and sales, strangers coming and going daily and a parent who is unpredictable and most likely mentally ill, made going home harrowing. Josiah is currently living at a friend's home and is able to stay with this

family for another few weeks. The homeless liaisons for the Beaverton School District are working with Josiah in an attempt to secure him a housing opportunity with the Second Home for Youth Program.

Second Home for Youth is a program created to meet the unique needs of unaccompanied, homeless youth currently attending a school in the Beaverton School District. Second Home is a partnership between Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Program of the Beaverton

School District, the City of Beaverton's Dispute Resolution Center and volunteer home-providers. Caring people open their homes to provide stable housing for young people in need of

stability to complete high school. A formal agreement is part of this process. Background checks, home visits and ongoing case management provide the scaffolding required to make Second Home a viable solution to a seemingly insurmountable problem for some amazing youth.

Several other school districts in Oregon have joined the Second Home for Youth effort. Using Beaverton as a model, Second Home is impacting students in the far corners of the state. This project operates on a micro-budget and pays very modest administrative costs. At the home level, no dollars change hands. Students in Second Home are given a rent receipt each month for doing some routine chores in the home and for attending school successfully. They are creating a rental history that will aid them in obtaining future independent housing. In some cases after a student graduates, they leave Second Home and head off to post-secondary pursuits. Typically, a bond is formed between the student and their Second Home family and regular contact is maintained.

Josiah is getting tired and is anxious about his immediate living situation. If he is matched to the correct Second Home his future looks bright.

Currently, his grades remain high and he is hopeful that scholarships will come his way. At 17 he displays amazing maturity and is realistic about how challenging the coming years are going to be. There is a meeting scheduled for Josiah and a potential Second Home family. The liaison who is working with him has confidence that once these people all meet this will work out well for all concerned, most especially for Josiah.

In 2014, nearly 20,000 Oregon students were registered as homeless. This column is part of Street Roots' ongoing coverage on issues related to students experiencing homelessness.



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