

# DRIVERS WANTED

The Community Transition School is seeking a school bus driver for the fall, roughly 20 kids on the route.

Join a small, dedicated staff, helping kids of homeless families get a chance at a stable school experience. We provide door to door transportation to our pre-K to 8th grade students, wherever the families are living.

\$16/hr., about 4 hours a day, split shift, 4 hour minimum guarantee.

The shifts are roughly:

Morning: 6:30am-8:30am

Afternoon: 2:45-4:45pm

The ideal candidate would have the following:

CDL with both P (passenger) and S (school bus) endorsements, and a current or recently expired state school bus driver Certificate.

Please leave a message for Tom at 503-249-8582.

We at the Community Transitional School have been transporting and educating kids in pre-K to 8th grade since 1990. Learn more about us at our website:

<http://www.transitionalschool.org>

## CTS, from page 9

said. "They are called 'the hidden homeless.'"

One of the biggest challenges for homeless parents – a challenge that is passed on to the school – is simply to get the kids to school and home again. A family might have to move quickly over a weekend; things can change in the middle of the day, and the child has to be dropped off at a different stop. CTS eases that one stress point.

The rule is that parents have to call with any changes of location before noon to get on the next day's schedule. But Tom can be a little flexible.

"Sometimes if they warn me something might happen over a weekend, I can be on the lookout, and then if it happens to be near one of our normal stops, I can usually fit it in and let the driver know ahead of time.

"When it's not close, and we can't handle it, then the parents are bringing them in," he said.

Some CTS parents have cars, but it's not the norm. And even if they do, he said, "it's probably a car that often doesn't work so well, or if it's toward the end of the month, they wouldn't be able to afford gas or something. Then they're putting the kid on TriMet to get to the stop."

Tom may have to figure out where a family has moved. Once, when parents didn't call in, Osa told the child, "Find an envelope that has an address on it, and tell us what it says, and then we'll figure out where to go." Every day, that second grader read out a new address, and called in to say where she was. She moved 22 times that year. This past year, one student moved 13 times in 110 days, and missed only two days of school.

"Usually I'll figure out approximately which bus a child should go on and what route," Tom said, "but that doesn't always translate into a realistic picture of how things will actually work, and the drivers – sometimes they'll have to decide what makes sense, which side of the street they can pick up on. If an apartment looks seedy, they might not want to let the kid off until they see a parent there. Or if the kid's never

been there before, he might say, 'I'm not gettin' off here!'"

If a child doesn't show up at the morning bus stop, Tom or someone in the office will call to find out what's going on – but if they can't get through and the child doesn't show up for a couple of days, they stop sending the bus. It's a painful part of the job: "You get to know the kids, and then they're gone."

Osa described what these families deal with: "It's chaotic, a brutal lifestyle. Outside of school, it's near-constant instability."

Once the children arrive at CTS each day, they're safe, well-fed and cared for. For homeless families, that may seem more important than the education the kids are getting, she said; many of their parents didn't finish school.

"The family culture is survival," she said. "Even kids who've been with us a long time, they don't understand that education is their ticket to a better life."

Yet at school, "someone is holding them accountable and believes in them enough to have expectations."

Tom knows to expect tense moments.

"The situations that the kids are in, it tends to make their whole family stressed out," he said. "Parents might be mad at something else, and they direct it at us. Like if I say the bus will be there at 7 and it's not there till 7:10, they'll be like, 'How dare you!'"

Tom is understanding about such outbursts. "They're doing the best they can."

The rule of thumb, he said, is that about two-thirds of each route will be the same every day. Other than that, it's anybody's guess. A parent can't find her car keys. A bridge is out. A bus has a flat tire. A kid says he's moving, but the parent hasn't called. "Every single stop has its quirks," he said.

One of the hardest things about his job, Tom said, is finding bus drivers, and their work is an essential piece of the daily puzzle. He's occasionally had to drive one of the runs himself.

There's a kid-written butcher-paper sign beside the office door, sporting a child's drawing of a cheerful guy in jeans and a green t-shirt and listing office rules of behavior:

"Stay focused.

"Quiet voice.

"Wait your turn.

"Be respectful.

"Don't waste others time.

"No messing with things.

"Don't ask for things you shouldn't have."

Tom embodies these rules so naturally and completely that they might have been written specifically to describe his behavior.

He said that what he should have is buses that never break down, and he'd like to be able to pay drivers better. But he makes do. When a bus does break down on the road and can't be repaired right there, there's no back-up bus waiting at school. Tom has to call on local taxi companies to rescue the kids. Yes, it's expensive, but what else can he do? The kids are depending on him.

"Bus situations just kind of keep happening," he said. "It's overwhelming. But compared to what these kids and their families have to go through ..." He shrugs. No need to finish that sentence.

Behind Tom's desk, there's a huge pink heart made from construction paper. It's decorated with messages, in children's practiced handwriting – a list of words to describe Tom: happy, clever, good artist ("Without you, I wouldn't have known what shading is"), good with computers, helpful, organized, brave, "helps us with our math problems," "has a big job." And thank-you notes: Thank you for the keys to the bathroom. Thank you for lifting the tables at lunchtime, for driving the bus, for bringing color into our lives.

And one last note: The unsung hero of CTS.

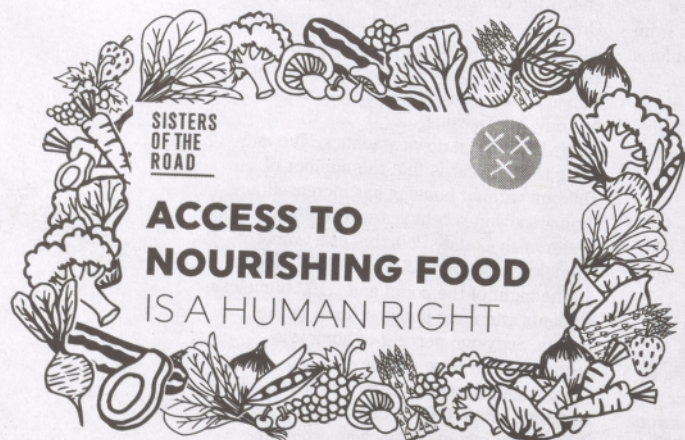
Tom dismisses any talk of his own accomplishments and puts it all on the children. He doesn't get them to school, he insists; they do it.

"A lot depends on the kids' initiative," he said. "They have to figure it out. Somehow, magically, they find a way to get here."

It's a remarkable place, and magic doesn't seem too strong a word.

What would Tom most want others to know about the Community Transitional School?

He answers slowly, pausing to think, and finally decides: "That it exists."



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