

groundviews



REACHING SOLID GROUND

An independent existence

See story, pp. 2 & 3

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Brilliance... Kindness... & Persistence...

Thanks to generous folks, our annual Community Building Luncheon raised **\$185,000!** Special thanks to Co-chairs Dan & Cindy Brettler, all of our table hosts, and our sponsors: **Partnership Level:** Adobe Systems, Boeing, Champion Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, KCTS/9, Microsoft, Seattle Children's Hospital, United Way of King Co. & Wireless Advocates; **Supporter Level:** Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP), Charlie's Produce, College Success Foundation, Common Ground, Corr Cronin Michelson Baumgardner & Preece, Foster Pepper, K&L Gates, Moss Adams, Seattle University, Sprague Israel Giles Inc., Turner Construction, Washington State Mentors & Whole Foods Market; **Table Host Level:** The Cobalt Group, Helsell Fetterman & Tonkin Hoynes. ...

A tip of the green thumb to Lettuce Link's plant start growers: Anthony & crew, Bud, India Carlson, Deeja, Jermye, Gabriella Labelle, Karen Mallin, Michael Seliga, Sarah Shapiro, Carol Thompson & the West Seattle Girl Scout Troops, & Edward Watanabe. ... The heavy tilling, weeding and harvesting at our Giving Garden at Marra Farm was made light by volunteers from Accenture, Boeing, CAGJ (Community Alliance for Global Justice), CREW, Earth Justice, Expedia, Foster Pepper, Google, Master Builders, One Brick, Reel Time Productions, Seattle Works, Starbucks, Tilth, United Way of King Co., UPS & the YMCA. ... Now that's brilliant!

PROGRAM NEWS

From the Ground Up

JustServe mobilizes our community to end youth violence. Solid Ground's JustServe AmeriCorps program is partnering with 13 schools, community-based organizations and the Youth Violence Prevention Initiative at Seattle Parks Department to work directly with youth at risk of violence and incarceration in our community, and to mobilize adults in our community to reach out to youth in positive ways. Members come from diverse backgrounds; a significant portion of the team has personal experience with poverty, immigration, violence and/or incarceration.

USDA grant supports development of new urban farm. Solid Ground's Lettuce Link program has provided leadership for a coalition of agencies that secured a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to increase access to healthy, locally grown fruit and vegetables. Among the projects funded in the grant are a new community farm in Seattle's Rainier Valley, modeled after our work at Marra Farm. The new farm will grow food for hungry people in a community that faces barriers to accessing fresh, organic produce.

REACHING SOLID GROUND

An independent existence

by Pascal, Family Shelter program participant

“Years ago, I was a homeless kid on the Ave [a popular hangout for Seattle’s homeless youth]. The story of how I got there was an old one — impressionable girl from the Midwest moves to the big city in search of adventure, and instead finds the wrong guy, the wrong friends, and a whole lot of trouble she is ill-equipped to

handle. My father had often cautioned me against getting too close to dangerous elements of society, even as a curious observer, because before you know it you have become that which you observe – but I did not see that this was happening to me. Within a year I was on the streets. I was nineteen.

“Losing my apartment and the life I had worked so hard for was devastating to me. I thought that as long as I never repeated the same mistakes I could keep the promise I had made to myself, that I would never be homeless again. As the years went by, I went to school, had a very steady job, and had a stable place I was proud of. I thought all that adversity was behind me.

“In 2008, on my fiancé’s birthday, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Even though we had not planned a baby, she was our delight, and we were determined to give her the best life we could. I stayed home and cared for her, and he worked long hours as a union roofer in order to provide for us. Even if it was difficult at first, it was a challenge we welcomed, and soon our little family was prospering.

“My life had been stable for so long that I had forgotten something I learned years ago: That in reality, no matter how sober, thrifty, or careful you are, you are

never that far from the streets. My fiancé was involved in an accident outside of work which required extensive surgery on his arm. The damage to the nerves and tendons meant that he could do no work of any kind. I knew from watching the news over the past year that the economy had taken a massive downturn, but our little bubble of comfort had prevented me from really understanding it. Well, that soon changed.”

Years of stability, suddenly at risk

“Knowing I would have to become the provider, I instantly dove into the job search. I had a good résumé, education and job history. I knew I was unlikely to land my dream job, but I was unprepared for absolutely nothing. We had immediately gone to DSHS (Department of Social & Health Services), but they give a family of three \$528 a month to live on. That amount would not even rent a room, much less pay our rent of \$850. A week after it was due, we received a pay or vacate notice. Within one month we were evicted. The defenses I had built over the years of sobriety, stability and caution had nonetheless failed me. Again, I was devastated.

“When I first made contact with Solid Ground, it was after exhausting every resource I thought



To respect their privacy, Pascal’s family is not pictured in this newsletter.

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Urgent need for affordable housing

Family Shelter is one of Solid Ground's three programs providing a place for homeless families to stay while they get back on their feet. Due to the economic downturn, Family Shelter has seen a huge increase in need for services this year. In August 2009 alone, 768 families requesting shelter had to be turned away – a 236% increase in turnaways over August 2008. For more information about or to make a donation to the Family Shelter program, please go to: www.solid-ground.org/Programs/Housing/FamilyShelter.

And because so many families like Pascal's need shelter, Solid Ground is increasing our stock of affordable housing for families at our Sand Point facility. For more information on helping us build affordable housing at Sand Point, please visit: www.solid-ground.org/GetInvolved/SandPointCC.

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available. Hours looking online for help, endless conversations on the phone only to be redirected to the same numbers I'd already called – it got so discouraging. I was beginning to give up. Incredibly, the very thing I was so proud of, that we were a two-parent household, seemed to be the biggest barrier to receiving help.”

A positive response

“Solid Ground was different. When I left that first message with Eileen Corcoran, who would later become my Family Shelter case manager, we were staying in a run-down motel on Aurora Avenue. We had the money upon our eviction to pay for a week, but that week had flown by so quickly without any leads on housing or employment, even though we were looking every day. We were faced with the reality of checking out the next day and having nowhere else to go, no money to extend our stay.

“She called me back within a few hours with the only positive response I'd received in days. Not only was she a part of an organization which was willing to find shelter for families with fathers – thank God! – she honestly listened as I explained our situation and left me with the feeling that she would do everything possible to expedite any help they could give us.”

Support, with respect

“Now our family is part of the Family Shelter program through Solid Ground that will help us achieve the self-sufficiency we so long to have. We were at the point of being so displaced that I would have welcomed a single room shelter for our family, something even less than the motel we were staying in. Instead, the unit we moved into through Solid Ground is spacious, with a separate room for us and baby. We have a full kitchen, a washer and dryer, so much more than we expected. The very term ‘shelter’ used to fill my mind with scenes of mats on grimy floors, noisy and smelly, no place I

would want to take my baby. Well thankfully, this is not the case. We have a clean, proper place to live. That alone makes me feel respected by those helping me, not like an ‘other’ or a ‘case.’

“I have worked extensively in the nonprofit sector and know how important case management is to any kind of emergency service. That is why I welcome the continued help offered by Solid Ground. The job search is still proving slow, but in the meantime our case manager is working with us to improve our prospects once it is time to move on. As a family, we are working with Solid Ground to take inventory of our credit, rental and criminal history in order to improve our eligibility for future housing.

“Occasionally we have had times when we've needed diapers or formula, and Eileen made sure we were covered. Through our association with Solid Ground we've also been referred to other agencies and services that have really made a difference to our family, such as Baby Boutique, which has helped us get baby clothes, shoes and equipment we otherwise would have had to do without.

“My family is the most important thing in my life, and is what I pray every night for God to protect. We are doing all we can to just have a modest, independent existence, but at this point we can't do it on our own. Solid Ground has been an answer to our prayers, because they are doing so much more than helping us with our immediate need of shelter – they are helping us take the steps that will ensure we have a home tomorrow also.”

COMMUNITY NEWS

Cool / Not Cool

Cool: *Support for Advocacy:* While public funding for advocacy efforts is facing dramatic cuts, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has stepped up to provide major funding for advocacy through our Statewide Poverty Action Network. The Foundation recently granted \$200,000 over two years to support Poverty Action in developing a Community Table strategy around which legislators, advocates, representatives from the Governor's office, key State agency staff and others will work in a collaborative manner to create and implement policies to better support people living on low incomes across Washington State.

Not Cool: Our legal advocates report a cut in the standard deduction for Food Stamps that results in a reduction of \$1 - \$2 in food assistance for most clients who rely on food stamps to meet their nutritional needs. "Since it is a change that affects all clients, there is really no individual hearing right associated with it," our ace Family Assistance program staff attorney, Evonne Zook, explains – so the cut limits our leverage to advocate for change for the people we serve.

Cool: Founder & CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, Geoffrey Canada, gave an inspiring and moving keynote speech at Solid Ground's Community Building Luncheon 2009. If you missed it, or if you want to see it again, go to: www.solid-ground.org/News/AnnualLuncheon.



Luncheon Speakers

(l. to r.): Carolyn Blanchey, Advisory Council member; Geoffrey Canada, Harlem Children's Zone CEO; Dee Hillis, Broadview Shelter Director; Larry Gossett, King Co. Councilmember; Cheryl Cobbs, Solid Ground Executive Director

Photo by JB Photography

TAKE ACTION

Enough about Us, What about You?

Everyone deserves a Happy Holiday! Adopt-a-Family is Solid Ground's annual program that brightens the holidays for the families we serve (such as Pascal's, featured inside this newsletter). Through your generosity, we purchase gifts cards with the goal to "Let Parents be Parents." The gift cards empower parents to make their own purchases and create celebrations appropriate for their own family's needs. Parents are very excited to have the opportunity to pick out gifts for their children!

Visit www.solid-ground.org/GETINVOLVED/DONATE/ADOPT-A-FAMILY or contact Indiigo at 206.694.6825 to adopt a family for the holidays.

solid ground 
Building community to end poverty
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A Community Action Agency... Helping people, changing lives.

groundviews is Solid Ground's newsletter, published six times a year to highlight our efforts to create a just & caring community, free from poverty, prejudice & neglect.

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