

I developed the professional standards and ethics that govern street outreach in most of the USA today. I have had the opportunity to work as an International Consultant in 12 countries focusing on street outreach to children and youth. I returned to the Twin Cities in 2000 and became the Director of Face to Face Health and Counseling and in 2004 came to StreetWorks.

Q: In your opinion; what are the benefits of the StreetWorks programming?

A: I think I could make the case that street outreach benefits the whole community in many ways. Outreach workers are able to make contact with youth who are severely isolated, living in abusive situations, living without supervision, or without nurturing family members. I believe that outreach and connection to these children and youth is critical. As adults in our society we are ALL responsible for ALL of our children.

I also believe that outreach reduces crime in communities and is a lifeline to many young people who would otherwise become more desperate. Street and at-risk youth are also often very undernourished and suffer many health and mental health problems. These problems go unaddressed in society until outreach programs exist and outreach workers are in place to advocate and bring services to children, teens and youth.

Q: What are some of the tough realities of your job?

A: Walking the streets to train new OW's becomes more difficult for me as I age; however, when I'm out on a beautiful day walking the streets, training a young outreach worker, connecting to youth, I still get a thrill. I have always loved this work, it keeps things very real.

Also, HUD funding is clearly complicated for all of us because it defines homelessness so narrowly. So many youth are couch hopping, clearly alone in life, often with inappropriate, uncaring or incapable adults and HUD doesn't recognize these youth as homeless. This is endlessly frustrating.

Q: What are some of the rewards of your job?

A: Mentoring, training and watching new outreach workers grow into their jobs, and seeing them connect with youth, there's nothing better! Particularly watching a young person, who's been homeless, who stabilizes, becomes an outreach worker, and goes back to school, graduates, becomes a case manager and then a mid-level supervisor. That's a miracle, and watching it happen enriches my soul.

Q: Are there trends in the needs/ services of the youth participants that you've seen repeatedly over the years?

A: Abuse just never seems to go away; both sexual and physical, youth need so much care to heal from these experiences. Mental health issues are really prevalent in the population we work with, particularly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but other MH issues also. There has always been a shortage of adequate housing for our youth. Young parents have such a difficult time. Maybe the pregnancy rate has gone down in national statistics, but not in our population. Poor health care and nutritional needs. Lack of opportunity in education and employment. Poverty and racism is a large factor in youth homelessness. Sadly, I've seen this all over the world. Struggles for youth who are "new" population youth, immigrant youth, especially undocumented youth.

Q: Are there any surprising trends out there currently with the needs of the participants?

A: Internet and cell phones have changed the face of homelessness completely; it makes it much harder for us to locate the population we serve. A really positive trend is that schools are more anxious to work with us; thereby we can identify couch hopping homeless youth who are still in school.

Q: Why did you choose to work in this profession?

A: I started running away from home in my small Wisconsin town at age 14. At first I would just go to friend's homes nearby or in the next town. By age 17, I was in Minneapolis and pregnant. There were no services back then and I got in a heap of trouble that lasted for many years. When I had the opportunity finally to begin to work with youth I knew that being in the streets and in the community with youth was crucial. Services had to change and be more "user-friendly" for youth. Plus, I like teenagers immensely!

Q: What was your immediate reaction to hearing you had received the HEROES award? What was the highlight of the event?

A: I thought a mistake was made, or someone was pulling my leg! After that, I was deeply honored and very, very touched. Oh, and a little bit excited!

The highlight turned out to be a young outreach worker from Tumbleweed Outreach Program in Phoenix, AZ., named Steven Serrano. He came up to me after the award ceremony and said, "I came to this conference to meet you, I brought the manual you wrote for you to sign, we do StreetWork YOUR way!" It was just humbling and very dear to me.

THANK YOU

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For a complete list of needed
items please visit

www.freeportwest.org

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www.freeportwest.org

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

COOKING

Freeport provides two meals a day for the participants that use our services. If you enjoy cooking for large groups you are welcome to volunteer to cook a meal for our youth. There is also an opportunity to facilitate a cooking class to teach the youth the basics of cooking a well-balanced meal (and dessert too).

TUTORING

Many of Freeport's participants are also working to achieve high school diplomas and GED's. There is a need for adults to assist the youth with homework during our evening hours of 4:00 – 8:00.

FACILITIES & LOGISTICS

Freeport is housed in three separate buildings. There are numerous opportunities for organizing and cleanup.

GARDENING

Freeport strives to bring fresh homegrown vegetables to our kitchen so our participants can enjoy a well-balanced meal. Yet, we need assistance with the regular maintenance of the garden from planting to harvest.

There is an opportunity to enrich the nutrition of young people. There is also the option to assist with flowers and landscaping too!

For more information on Freeport's volunteer opportunities please visit our website www.freeportwest.org or call 612.824.3040

UPCOMING EVENTS

StreetWorks Training Session 4

Brain Development – October 28th, 1 – 4 pm, \$25
Presenter: Richard M. Cash, author of forthcoming
book “Advancing Differentiation”

Call 612.824.3040 to register.

3rd Annual Home & Heart Benefit

October 22, 2009 – 5:30 pm
Saint Paul Union Depot
214 E 4th St St Paul, MN 55101

Appetizer Reception and Silent Auction
Dinner with Youth Speaker Presentations
Live Music

Coming Soon! Freeport Coat Drive and Toy Drive, Winter 2009

For more information on Freeport’s events please visit our website www.freeportwest.org/news

If you would like to be added to Freeport’s email or mailing list, please contact Dorothy Abellard by email at dorothy.abellard@freeportwest.org or by phone at 612.252.2714.

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