



BUILDING CONNECTIONS

BILL WILSON CENTER NEWS

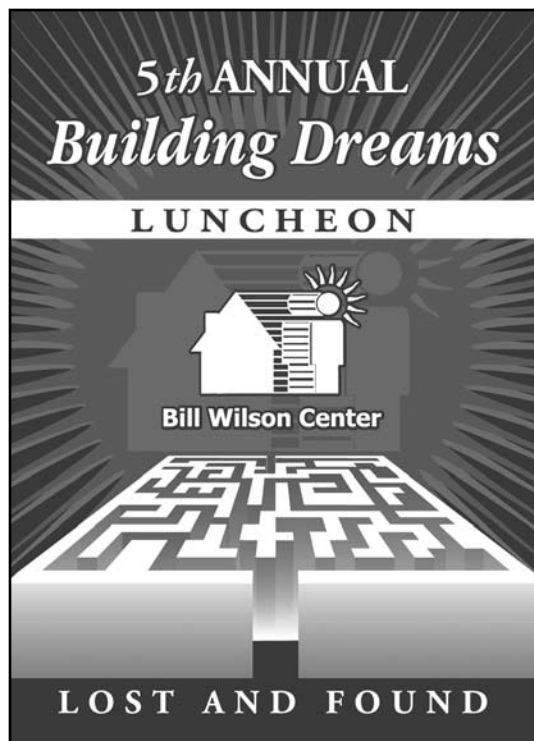
COUNSELING • HOUSING • EDUCATION • ADVOCACY



SPRING 2009

YOU'RE INVITED — 5th Annual Building Dreams Fundraising Luncheon to Be Held May 7th, 2009

Bill Wilson Center would like to invite you to attend our annual fundraising luncheon, "Building Dreams" on Thursday, May 7th, at the Santa Clara Convention Center.



During the one-hour luncheon, you will learn more about Bill Wilson Center and its programs from Bill Wilson Center's Board of Directors President David Lang and Executive Director/CEO Sparky Harlan, as well as board member Cindy O'Leary.

The highlight of the luncheon is hearing directly from clients who have been helped by Bill Wilson Center programs. Bill Wilson Center will premiere a short video featuring past Bill Wilson Center clients and will share in the success stories of the youth.

While there is no cost to attend the luncheon, reservations are required, and attendees will be asked for contributions and pledges.

For more information about event, or to RSVP, please call 408-850-6178 or e-mail buildingdreams@billwilsoncenter.org.

Letter from Sparky

Dear Friends,

This year is as challenging here at Bill Wilson Center as it is throughout the country—and the world. Our investments



have lost value and we are waiting to hear about potential funding cuts from the county.

The financial meltdown has also led to more kids and families turning

to us for help. One 17-year old, Davis, felt that he was a burden to his aunt and left so she wouldn't have to take care of him. After a few days on the streets, he came to our shelter.

We called his aunt who was terribly worried about Davis. She came to family counseling sessions, but Davis wouldn't talk. It took several days, but he finally opened up and told us that his aunt had lost her job and was struggling so he thought she'd be better off without him.

Davis is back home with his aunt again. He got a part-time job so he can contribute to the household—something that is important to him.

There are many other kids and families who are finding themselves in situations they

Letter from Sparky

(continued from page 1)

never expected. They are turning to us for help.

You can help by becoming a host family home. We are seeking people who would agree to be on call to take in a youth like Davis for a temporary placement until we can get them back to their own families. We pay a stipend to be on call, and then an additional per diem when a youth is placed.

Please call us to find out more about being a host family home. We'll provide training and will work to ensure that you have all the information you need to decide whether this is a way you can help. We will certify your home to help you meet any State requirements. As the only youth shelter in the county, we need to be ready to help every young person who turns to us for help. You can help us do that.

I hear from many of you reading this letter that you have taken in neighbor's kids or family members for a few weeks or sometimes months. I hope that some of you will join us in helping more kids who need you.

Best Regards,



Sparky Harlan
Executive Director

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Check out our website where you can donate, find information on becoming a volunteer or a foster parent, and read our wish list. Join us in preventing poverty by building connections for youth and families.

Ben Lujan: SPCO Super Coach!

Ben Lujan, who has been a team coach with Safe Place Community Outreach (SPCO) since 1998, is excited to be spending another Saturday with his team. His day starts early, as he commutes from Stockton to be a mentor and coach to his team of ten youth.

“One of the best things about the SPCO program is that the kids listen to and respect each other. Seventh and eighth graders share their opinions, and juniors and seniors in high school listen,” explains Ben.

Even with his commute, Ben continues with the SPCO program because he believes in the ideals of the program: teaching young people to

become leaders through meaningful connections to adults and success in their community outreach projects.



SPCO Volunteer Coach Ben Lujan chats with an SPCO youth after a community service project

The Safe Place Community Outreach Program teaches youth ages 12 to 17 leadership skills, goal setting, conflict resolution, teamwork, and effective communication. SPCO youth team members work together to plan and lead community service projects. Adults serve as team coaches, mentoring the teens, helping with transportation to SPCO events, and facilitating group participation and team progress.

Ben is a successful mentor because of his advice for the youth, but just as importantly because of his tenure in volunteering. He learned how to coach the kids and let them set the direction—a hard skill for adults who want to tell youth what to do and how to do it. Ben listens carefully to the opinions and feelings of the youth, and encourages the same within the team.

Although Ben admits that his volunteer work is sometimes challenging, he is proud of his SPCO kids and Bill Wilson Center. Ben, we are so proud of you!



CALIFORNIA STATE REQUIREMENTS INCLUDE:

- Fingerprint and Child Abuse Index Clearance (for all adults in the home)
- California ID
- TB test (for all adults in the home)
- Health Screening
- First Aid and CPR certifications
- Household budget and IRS 1040
- Home Inspection.

Want to Learn About Being a Foster Parent or Adopting a Child?

Bill Wilson Center is actively searching for singles, couples, and families to help children in need. In Santa Clara County, there are more than 1,200 children currently in need of foster care, emergency placement (short-term) foster care, or adoption. What many people don't realize is that the steps toward being certified as a foster home are actually pretty straightforward!

The first step in becoming a foster care parent is to call 888-922-KIDS (5437) or e-mail inquiries@billwilsoncenter.org to receive more information. You will be asked a few questions to ensure that there is a basic fit. You will then receive by mail, an interest packet with our agency's brochure, foster care handouts, and an invitation to our next informational meeting.

Monthly informational meetings (an orientation to our foster care and adoption program) are held every first Thursday of each month, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. These meetings have no cost and no obligation. You'll hear about our programs, pick up an application, and have all your questions answered about becoming a foster care parent.

Once you have decided that you are interested, the next step will be for you to fill out and submit your application. You'll then meet with one of our social workers for an initial interview. If you are married or have a partner, both of you will need to be present at the time of the initial interview. The social worker will ask questions in regards to your parenting experiences and beliefs, work schedule, child care plan, work schedule, and other questions that will help us access your readiness in becoming a foster care parent.

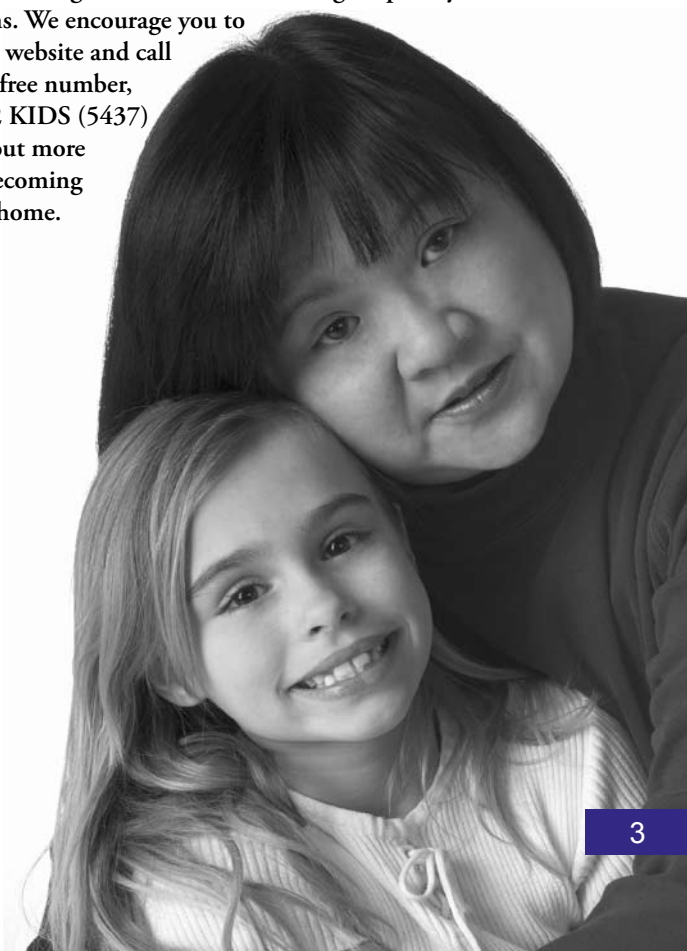
After the initial interview, you'll receive a follow-up phone call informing you if your application has been approved. Next, you will receive a packet by mail that has the second part of the application, forms to allow us to do a background check, and templates for your autobiographies. You'll also receive a copy of the upcoming "Parenting with Care and Skill" foster care parent training.

You can complete the second part of the application, including the fingerprinting and background checks, during the parent training. Once you have completed the training and finished your application and requirements, Bill Wilson Center staff will schedule a home inspection.

After your home has passed a home inspection you will participate in a home study. The home study consists of three interviews conducted by a social worker. The interviews take place in our office and in your home. The home study is used to get to know you and your family better and to match a child with your family.

After the home study is approved you will be matched with a child! While the process for becoming a foster home sounds like it might take a long time, in fact, some homes are certified within just 12 – 16 weeks of attending an orientation meeting. Many factors can influence how long certification may take; Bill Wilson Center's Foster Care and Adoption Program assists applicants through the entire process.

Our website, www.billwilsoncenter.org, has more information about becoming a foster home, including frequently asked questions. We encourage you to visit our website and call our toll-free number, 888-922 KIDS (5437) to find out more about becoming a foster home.



CHAT4Teens Announces New Live Schedule

We're sure you've noticed teens everywhere with their thumbs flying on their cell phones, texting and instant messaging their friends. Bill Wilson Center noticed too, and that's why when CHAT4Teens offered to join Bill Wilson Center, we knew we'd have an ideal opportunity to reach out to kids in their own way.

Jeff Spoelstra, founder of CHAT4Teens, brought the very successful program to Bill Wilson Center to join forces with Bill Wilson Center's team of volunteers.

CHAT4Teens is a way for teens in crisis to connect with a trained volunteer through an online instant message format. CHAT4Teens volunteers are there to listen without judgment and to lend support. Teens can log on and talk about anything

that's troubling them: relationships, parents, school, friends, cutting, suicidal thoughts, pregnancy, depression, abuse, loneliness, or stress.

CHAT4Teens is a safe and anonymous place for teens to vent, work through problems, and maybe even get information about valuable community resources.

Volunteers are available to chat online with teens Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. Additional hours will be listed on our website when they're available.

Please help us spread the word to teens in our community about this valuable resource just for them!

www.billwilsoncenter.org/chat.shtml

Meghan's Story: Immediate Help For Youth in Mental Health Crisis

It's Friday night at a local apartment building, and the younger residents in the complex are talking, laughing, or partying—except for Meghan and two of her girlfriends.

Meghan, Adele, and Stacy were all friends from high school in Gilroy, attending their second semester at a nearby college. She and her friends enjoyed hanging out together on the weekends, sometimes heading over to one of the fraternity houses for a party, sometimes heading to the movies or the local bowling alley. But lately it had been more and more difficult for Adele and Stacy to get Meghan to do anything.

"Geez, Meghan, it's just a biology test," Stacy told her. "Yeah, seriously!" added Adele. "You're a little scary." Meghan had been crying for nearly four hours, ever since she'd seen her biology grade posted in the science building. As the night wore on and Meghan became more and more withdrawn, Stacy and Adele became worried.

"You know, it's one thing to be bummed out from a bad test, but she was going totally over the edge," Adele explained. "We knew we needed to call someone. We didn't know if student health services would be able to help, Meghan didn't want us to call her parents, and we didn't think campus police was the right answer, either."

On the bulletin board in the laundry room of their apartment complex was a flyer for Bill Wilson Center's Young Adult Support hotline. Stacy used her cell phone and called, explaining the situation to the hotline staff. "They took my phone number, and in less than five minutes, one of their mental health specialists called me right back."

After hearing the situation, the Bill Wilson Center mental health specialist offered to come to the dorm to talk to Meghan. "We couldn't believe it," said Adele. "The counselor actually came to us—who does that any more?"

Meghan definitely needed help. Depression stemming from the pressure of college and living away from home for the first time had overwhelmed her. With the help of the Bill Wilson Center mental health specialist who had come to her apartment, Meghan called her parents and asked them to come pick her up.

The mental health specialist also arranged for Meghan to participate in counseling sessions with Bill Wilson Center's Family and Individual Counseling program.

After a two-week leave of absence, Meghan returned to school and her friends. "She really didn't know how bad it had gotten," said Adele. "She really just needed some help."

Once she spoke with her biology professor, Meghan was able to arrange an incomplete for the class, and worked out a plan to complete the work she had missed as well as repeat the test that had earned her a failing grade.

"I didn't realize I had gotten to the point where I just couldn't pick myself up again. I needed help, and I don't know what I would have done if Adele and Stacy hadn't called that hotline," explained Meghan. "I don't know if it saved my life, but it definitely helped me."

St. Clare School Presents Donation to Bill Wilson Center

This past fall, St. Clare School in Santa Clara hosted a dance for 7th and 8th grade students from St. Justin, St. Lawrence and St. Clare schools. The St. Clare Student Council voted to donate 20% of their ticket sales to a local charity to give back to the community, and they selected Bill Wilson Center as the recipient. The \$200 donation was presented to Sparky Harlan, Executive Director/CEO of the Bill Wilson Center in the Spring.



Youth Experiencing Mental Health Crises Can Now Call Young Adult Support Hotline 24 Hours a Day

Bill Wilson Center's newest program provides immediate mental health services to youth ages 16 – 24 who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.

The Transition Age Youth (TAY) Mental Health Services program provides youth with mental health care through a 24-hour Young Adult Support Hotline. The hotline immediately connects youth in crisis to mental health specialists who are able to respond in person—the mental health specialists come to the youth in crisis, as long as the environment is safe for both the youth and the mobile outreach clinician. Such locations include the youth's home, emergency departments, college dorm rooms, other treatment facilities, or at the Bill Wilson Drop-In Center on South 2nd Street.

The Young Adult Support Hotline allows mental health specialists to respond quickly to youth mental health crises, providing short-term treatment to allow the youth to stabilize outside a hospital setting. The mental health specialists are also able to facilitate access to emergency room services or hospitalization when necessary.

When a call comes in to the hotline, call specialists ask questions to determine if an appointment for services will meet the youth's needs, or if an immediate response is required.

If an immediate response is needed, the hotline call specialist transfers the call directly to a mental health specialist who assesses the youth and either arranges for the youth to come to the offices at the Drop-In Center or travels directly to the youth. The mental health specialist works to stabilize the youth or helps to arrange for hospitalization or other treatment. The youth are all assigned case managers, who arrange follow-up services. These include access to the full range of Bill Wilson Center services such as counseling, job skills training, independent living skills training, parenting classes, or transitional housing.

Youth can contact the Young Adult Support Hotline by calling 408-850-6140, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Family members, friends, or school and emergency personnel can contact the hotline on





Andre's Story: Mistakes Don't Have to Ruin Your Life

When you're 16, you tend to make a lot of mistakes. They don't seem like mistakes at the time, but the decisions you make snowball. And when you're 16, you don't have the experience to avoid the situations that can get so quickly out of control.

Andre had run away from home. He was dealing with emotional issues, including depression, and his life at home was more than he could take. After three months on the street and occasionally "couch-surfing" with friends, Andre made his way to Bill Wilson Center's Drop-In Center on South 2nd Street.

A peer educator started talking with him as he dropped by each day to shower, do his laundry, check his e-mail, make a phone call, or get something to eat. "They took just the right approach," said Andre. "There wasn't any pressure—they just let me know what sorts of things they could do to help me out. They weren't judging me."

When the peer educator suggested that Andre go to Bill Wilson Center's Runaway and Homeless Youth Shelter, Andre thought about it and knew it was time to take some steps to try to get his life back on track.

Once at the shelter, Andre started individual and family counseling. His parents came to the shelter three times a week to meet with Andre and a Bill Wilson Center therapist, but Andre was withdrawn and wouldn't participate beyond just being in the room.

After his first week at the shelter, his case manager referred him to a psychiatrist for his depression. A combination of medication and individual counseling helped Andre start to take control of his life again, and two weeks later he started opening up more and more during the family counseling sessions with his parents.

"I had no idea that my depression had built such a wall around me. I couldn't get over it, and no one could get through to me. I thought nobody—not even my parents—cared who I was or what I did. I was in my own world, and I'd convinced myself that I didn't care what they thought. I really just wanted to disappear.

After seven weeks at the shelter, Andre and his parents were ready for him to come home. Andre continued attending Bill Wilson School where he had been making up credits, and he and his parents continued to come to Bill Wilson Center for after care counseling through the summer.

With summer school, Andre was able to start his senior year with the rest of his classmates. "At this point, I'm planning on going to college—probably West Valley or De Anza. Part of it will depend on my job and part on my grades. But I think I can make it happen."

Congratulations to Our Newest Volunteers!

Congratulations to the 14 volunteers who completed all 30 hours of Contact Cares volunteer training on March 31! These 14 dedicated souls will now join more than 50 other volunteers for the Contact Cares program staffing phone lines around the clock, seven days a week.

The Contact Cares program offers multiple, 24-hour, confidential help lines that provide supportive listening, counseling, crisis intervention, and referrals to individuals of all ages. Trained volunteers answer all calls, including calls from youth on the 24/7 line.

Among the hotlines that are answered by Contact Cares' volunteers are

Crisis Line: (408) 850-6125
Offers listening and support, crisis intervention, information and referrals, and parental stress support.

24/7 Line 4 Youth Ages 7 – 24: (888) 247-7717
Provides supportive listening for any reason, including health, relationships, crisis, information, and referrals.

Centre Cares HIV/AIDS Hotline: (408) 850-6179
Offers supportive listening, information, and referrals for those who are infected or affected by HIV or AIDS.

Young Adult Support Hotline: (408) 850-6140
Connects youth (ages 16 – 24) with immediate 24/7 mental health crisis intervention and support.

Volunteer!!

There are always new opportunities to volunteer with Bill Wilson Center. Contact Volunteer Manager Janna Kenniston for more details.

(408) 850-6138 or volunteers@billwilsoncenter.org



Why Donate Gift Certificates?

Most of us think that gift certificates feel a little impersonal—although we all love to receive them! Many people would prefer to buy an item to donate for the youth we serve here at Bill Wilson Center. We do seem to have an unlimited need for new socks, underwear and other items, but gift certificates offer additional opportunities.

We have been very fortunate to have several groups conduct gift certificate drives for our kids. This is why gift certificates are great for our kids:

- The youth we serve may not have had much opportunity to shop for themselves. Youth who are in foster care or homeless may have worn hand-me-downs, donations, and basic t-shirts and pants for most of their lives. While these are all fine, they don't give that 15-year-old girl the chance to select a cute blouse like all the other girls are wearing—important at this age. For these youth, selecting clothes in whatever styles and colors they choose is amazing!
- We also use gift certificates to teach our kids how to shop. They learn that their gift certificates go further when they look for sales, shop in stores that have affordable clothing, buy clothes that can be mixed and matched to create more outfits, or rejuvenate an old outfit with a new belt or pair of shoes.

For the past few years My New Red Shoes has provided back-to-school clothing gift certificates for our kids. These certificates have enabled our kids to select new clothing of their choice and to learn how to shop so they can stretch their dollars. Payless also gave us shoe gift certificates this year. The kids had fun trying on every shoe in the store and selecting just the right pair. We have several other groups who conduct gift certificate drives for our kids at the holidays.

Conduct a gift certificate drive at your religious group, club, or membership organization!

Did you get a gift card over the holidays that you still haven't used? Consider sending it to Bill Wilson Center! You can drop it off or mail it to our main office in Santa Clara:

Bill Wilson Center
3490 The Alameda
Santa Clara, CA 95050

Volunteering at Bill Wilson Center

If you'd like to become a Bill Wilson Center volunteer, we encourage you to visit our website (www.billwilsoncenter.org) and click on "Volunteer" to learn more about the various volunteer opportunities we offer. Most volunteer opportunities are for adults over the age of 18, but we also have a program for youth volunteers: Safe Place Community Outreach (ages 12 – 17).

Becoming a Bill Will Center volunteer requires a special dedication and a significant time commitment. Whether you'll be working with at-risk youth, helping callers with information or providing bereavement support, our clients need someone they can depend over time. For this reason, most of our volunteer opportunities require a commitment of 8 – 16 hours a month for one year.

The process to become a Bill Wilson Center volunteer includes the following steps:

- Volunteer orientation
- Application with references
- Personal interview
- Fingerprint clearance
- Training series.

Volunteer orientation sessions are posted on our website (www.billwilsoncenter.org) as they are scheduled. Trainings are held throughout the year. Contact Volunteer Program Manager Janna Kenniston by phone (408-850-6138) or e-mail (jkenniston@billwilsoncenter.org) to be added to an e-mail announcement list for the next orientation session.



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Get to know Bill Wilson Center



Please join us on a one-hour tour of Bill Wilson Center to see first-hand how Bill Wilson Center is working to prevent poverty in Santa Clara County. Bill Wilson Center staff will give you an overview of our programs, share our guiding principles and a client success story, and tour you through the shelter itself.

During the tour you'll learn about the Rainbow Ladder—a system that encourages good decisions and responsible behavior. The five different levels of behavior and responsibility (orange, green, crimson, gold, and platinum) help youth modify their own behavior. As they move up the ladder they have more privileges—and more responsibility.

You'll hear about a typical day for the youth, including the family-style meals that the youth help prepare each day, chores that are assigned, school, group meetings, and family and individual counseling sessions.

Please join us and become more familiar with how we assist at-risk youth and families. To reserve a space for one of our upcoming tours (tours are limited to the first 18 people) or to arrange for someone on our staff to come to your group or community meeting, please contact Kathie Sheehy at 408-850-6129 or ksheehy@billwilsoncenter.org.