



Project Connect Gazette

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Project Connect

January 2007

WILD Adventures Ahead for Zoo-Mates

Helen O'Rourke

When was the last time that you saw a cheetah up close or had the chance to go behind the scenes in the elephant house? Well, that's exactly what 27 Project Connect students get to do this year through the **Zoo-Mates** program!

Zoo-Mates is a unique and exciting collaboration born out of a desire to connect students experiencing homelessness with college students in a setting that would be conducive to forming strong mentor mentee relationships.

Project Connect, The University of Cincinnati and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden came together last spring to create Zoo-Mates. We kicked off the program in October with a *Zoo-bration* for the mentors and the



Zoo-Mates pose with their tulip bulbs (above) and then get down to work planting them (below).



mentees and their families.

Zoo-Mates meet once a month from 3:00 to 4:30 pm. During our first activity, Zoo-Mates planted

Carl Lindner tulip bulbs. On our next session, we visited the Cat Ambassador program and learned about the cheetah, the serval and the lynx. Zoo-Mates, of all ages, were fascinated by this up close and personal experience!

Zoo-Mates will continue to come together each month at the zoo culminating with our year end celebration in May at the University of Cincinnati. Thanks to our partners who made this worldly and wild experience possible!

Special thanks to staff from **USB Financial Services** who adopted the Zoo-Mates for Christmas and purchased winter coats and shoes. Now, the Zoo-Mates will be nice and warm as they hike through the zoo this winter!

Welcome to **NEW** Project Connect Staff

Elissa Pogue, Coordinator, is a school social worker with seventeen years of experience in Cincinnati Public Schools. She feels very fortunate to be working on the complex issue of school connectedness for children and youth experiencing homelessness with such a skilled and dynamic staff.

Crystal Alexander, Family Ally, attends Cincinnati State and will soon transfer to Northern Kentucky University's Social Work Program. She was drawn to Project Connect because it gave her the opportunity to be an advocate for children. During her time with PC, she hopes to connect children and families with the services that they need.

David Sanders, Family Ally, is a recent graduate of Mt. St. Joe and has committed himself to working with our PC families. David brings much community awareness and experience to his work as he grew up in Cincinnati and graduated from Woodward High School. After his term with Public Allies, David plans to continue to do service work.

January 2007

The Legal **CORNER** Karen Fessler

In 1983, under the Reagan administration, a federal task force on homelessness was created. Pressure was growing to address the problems of homelessness in a tangible way.

In 1986, Congress passed initial parts of the "Homeless Persons' Survival Act." Later that year, legislation was introduced as the "Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act." In 1987, the legislation was passed by bipartisan majorities in both houses of Congress.

The chief Republican sponsor of

this legislation was Stewart B. McKinney. After his death in 1987, the act was renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and was signed into law by President Reagan on July 22, 1987. The original act consisted of 15 programs addressing a broad range of services for homeless people.

Title VII of the original act authorized several programs administered by the Department of Education, the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and

Human Services. By 1993 the legislation had trickled down from the Department of Education to the Cincinnati Public School system and by 1995, Project Connect was created. In the last 11 years, Project Connect staff have served approximately 20,000 local children and youth experiencing homelessness.



Have you ever wondered what prompted the creation of PC? If you have, you clearly have plenty of free time and should call immediately for volunteer opportunities!

Seriously, we are often asked how and why PC came to be. This very first edition of "The Legal Corner," will explore the history of the law that was the impetus for the creation of PC.

We Asked and you Responded! Shelley Werner

This year, with even more families in need than ever, community members provided holiday gifts for over fifty families experiencing homelessness, as well as, a good number of our unaccompanied youth. We heard from wonderful old friends, and many new, calling in to ask what they could do to help our families most in need.

The holiday season began with the annual Breakfast with Santa hosted by our friends at the **First Unitarian Church** of Cincinnati. For the fifth year in a row, members of the congregation gathered together before their service to enjoy eating, singing, and visiting with Santa. Each child in attendance brought a beautifully wrapped present to give to the children experiencing homelessness of which Santa would be visiting on his sleigh later that month.

For the sixth year in a row, alumni

from the **University of Dayton** hosted their annual Christmas Off Campus party. UD alum tried something new this year by sponsoring twelve families instead of hosting a party just for the kids. They held one of their larger fundraisers ever to help fulfill the wishes of each family member. Happen, Inc. got the families interacting with one another by providing crafts and having the parents wear their finished product in a fashion show. **Cincinnati Bengals, Shaun Smith and Tab Perry**, helped celebrate by signing footballs and posing for family pictures, but, the man of the hour, was good old Santa Claus who arrived in a helicopter.

The holiday celebrating continued as gifts from individuals, families, boy scout troops, businesses, book clubs, sewing groups and others poured into our office. Staff from **Fidelity Investments**

adopted three families and their gifts arrived in two trucks! This is the second year in a row that their staff adopted families. Special thanks to our public ally, **Crystal Alexander**, who organized our largest sponsorship program ever! I don't know how we will continue such a wonderful program without her next year.

Another event that has become an annual tradition is the displaying of a Giving Tree at Cincinnati Public School Board Office sponsored by **Central Office Employees Association**. Each year, members of the COEA, ask employees to choose an item from the tree to purchase. This year was no exception and hundreds of items such as school supplies, gift cards,

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One parent struts her stuff down the catwalk at UD's Christmas Off Campus party.

... The man of the hour, was good old Santa Claus who arrived in a helicopter."

Project Connect Homeless Children's Fund

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We Asked and you Responded! Shelley Werner



Here are drawings from two PC students at Oylar Elementary.



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socks, underwear, gloves, hats and toys were ready to be picked-up and taken to those in need.

And finally, before our children at Oylar went home for the winter break, **Sandy Downing**, her family and friends from **Anthem** and **Landmark** church, hosted a party for the students participating in the CincyAfter-School program. This was the fourth year for the event and, as always, was a big hit with all the kids. Each child received a shoe box filled with presents. The kids also got to visit with Santa—he's a busy man—and created a craft.

While receiving is nice, giving is better. Sandy came up with a wonderful way for the children to give to others. While at the party, the children were more than happy to write letters to the elderly, wishing them a Happy Holiday and placing it into the hands of a cuddly teddy bear. These bears were then delivered to a local nursing home. Way to go kids!

We thank you so much for all you do for our children. Together we can create a sense of normalcy and, who knows, a little bit of magic for the children, who, at the moment, don't have a place to call home.

In case you are in the mood to do a little post-holiday shopping for PC, here's a list for you!

- New underwear
- New socks
- Wal-Mart gift cards
- Kroger gift cards
- Crayons
- Markers
- Pocket folders
- Hygiene Products