

**FALL 2009**

## **A PORT success story— from powerless to purpose**

**K**orey Sufka was a sad and angry 15-year-old when placed at PORT. His parents had divorced and he'd been moved from the comfort of his small town, to a larger city apartment, where he knew no one.

Finding friends wasn't easy. He latched onto a group who weren't making good decisions, landed at PORT, lost his mother and lived an addictive life style that was leading him in the wrong direction.

Now 32, Korey is a mentor program coordinator for Central Minnesota Re-entry Project in St. Cloud and a motivational speaker. His website: [www.koreysufka.com](http://www.koreysufka.com), lists schools, churches and youth organizations where he speaks a message of redemption and hope.

At PORT, Korey remembers living in the home behind the Dairy Queen (now home to the girls' program.)

Say's Korey, "It was at PORT where I felt 'unconditional love' for the first time in my life! I was treated with respect and felt like all the people I had contact with cared for me and that meant a lot." Korey credits PORT with planting the seeds that eventually, when he was ready, led him in a new direction.

Korey remembers a volunteer named Jeff Berg, who talked about spirituality. "It did not mean too much to me at the time, however years later I could look back and see (the impact) that people like Jeff and some of the other counselors had on me."



*Korey Sufka (right) with Bonnie Laabs, two PORT graduates who are inspiring others to set goals and make good choices.*

While Korey typically earns a hefty speaker's fee, he and PORT graduate Bonnie Laabs, have been good about donating their time to speak to the residents at PORT Group Homes.

In the more intimate setting, Korey asks probing questions of the boys; what are their goals? what do they want to accomplish?

Craig Hagen, Boys' Counselor, said, "All the boys sat mesmerized by his (Korey's) story. They were inspired by how he redeemed himself and rose out of the grip of depression and addiction. Korey seemed to stir up some raw emotions in the boys. He is a true success story."

## Finding football



*Jonathan practices football moves at BGH.*

When 14-year-old Jared, not his real name, played football with friends, they admired his skills and encouraged him to go out for the sport. That didn't happen until he arrived at PORT and with the help of a teacher at MLAP (Middle Level Alternative Program) enrolled in 8th grade football.

"I love it," says Jared, who quiet by nature, just beams when talking about his sport. He plays both noseguard and tackle and, as the tallest kid on the team, always runs up the middle.

From his coach, Jared says he's learned, "Never give up, reach for what you want to do." Now, with that same smile, he's talking about joining main-stream school, and maybe basketball come winter.

## LGBT Youth in need

**T**hey're your clients. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth who've been in placement for years, but are only beginning to be recognized as needing services.

Many LGBT youth find themselves in out-of-home placements because of their sexual orientation. They may have been rejected by their families or been victims of physical and/or mental abuse because of their gender identity.

LGBT youth often face violence in the form of bullying or harassment by both teachers and students in and out of school.

LGBT youth are one of the most vulnerable; at risk for homelessness, truancy, chemical abuse, depression and suicide.

Here are some statistics taken from a Child Welfare League of America and Lambda Legal joint initiative:

- ◆ 65% of 400 homeless LGBT and questioning youth reported having been in a child welfare placement at some point in the past.

When compared to heterosexual homeless youth, LGBT homeless youth are:

- ◆ Physically or sexually victimized on average by seven more people,
- ◆ Leave home an average of 12 times as compared to seven for non-LGBT youth.

LGBT students are significantly more likely than other students to:

- ◆ Have been bullied (42% v. 21%) or threatened or injured with a weapon at school (22% v. 5%) and have skipped school because they felt unsafe (15% v. 4%),
- ◆ Report a suicide attempt (32% v. 7%) of other students.

PORT recognizes the need of this underserved population of young people. We are currently researching better ways of providing services in our group home to LGBT youth and welcome any feedback you may have.

Call Desiree Montonye, PORT Group Homes Executive Director, 218-828-6274, with your ideas and comments.

## School project-Picasso print



*Girls at PORT make a Picasso reproduction for a school project.*

**H**ats off to Paula Barrer, who taught her PORT students an art project with math skills and teamwork. First, the students selected a Picasso Still Life color print that Barrer divided into 20 squares. She then had Home Depot cut 20, 8 inch squares out of hardboard.

Next, students chose which square of the Picasso print they wanted to replicate—those with artistic talent picking the more complex, others choosing a simpler background. Then came the math part—gridding out the small piece of design onto the larger hardboard. When the squares are completed in pencil, Barrer puts them together, matching the Picasso. Now comes the teamwork, as some students adjust their individual squares.

After painting with acrylics, students paste the squares on a recycled hollowed core door for a firm backing. And voila, together they have created their own Picasso reproduction to hang on the wall.



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