

helping PEOPLE help THEMSELVES

break the cycle of poverty

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

DEDICATION AND EFFORT, NOT "PIXIE DUST," HELP YOUTH DROP IN INSTEAD OF DROPPING OUT

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Camden, New Jersey, is a tough place to grow up. In the city of 80,000 people, the median family income is \$11,000, almost half of the young people live in poverty, and 70% of students drop out of school without graduating.

Jesuit Father Jeff Putthoff and two Lutheran pastors serving in the area were determined to give low-income youths the opportunity to learn and succeed in a competitive job market. In 2000, they opened **Hopeworks 'N Camden**, a faith-based program that combines computer education and skills training with paid work experience. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development provides grant money to Hopeworks, in support of its efforts to break the cycle of poverty in Camden.

Since the Hopeworks doors opened, some 500 young people have taken classes and many have gone to work for paying clients of Hopeworks' business side. Participants have developed web sites for non-profits and have collected data and turned it into detailed neighborhood maps using Geographic Information Systems skills.

Students move from basic computer skills into advanced training opportunities and earn credits toward a General Equivalency Diploma and/or an associates degree from Camden County College.

Hopeworks is a catalyst for change, explains Fr. Putthoff. "Because of past poor experiences in school, a lot of our



Photos courtesy of Hopeworks 'N Camden

HOPEWORKS PARTICIPANTS LEARN COMPUTER SKILLS TO SHAPE MORE SOLID FUTURES. THEY "LEARN TO SEE THEMSELVES WITH THE FULLNESS GOD GAVE THEM."

trainees don't see themselves as people who can learn. At Hopeworks, we put people in a position where they see that they *can* learn, and can also teach others."

The curriculum is self-paced, with open enrollment, says Fr. Putthoff. "There's lots of immediate feedback and no waiting around." The requirements for entry into the program are basic literacy, a desire to change and do something positive in life, adherence to a personal development plan and a commitment to be on time. Fr. Putthoff says that the literacy can be the toughest element. "It's not that people *can't* read, it's that they don't

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friend of CCHD:

Think About It [poverty . . . Talk About It . . . Take Action . . . In this issue you will read the story of *Hopeworks 'n Camden*, a project supported by CCHD through an economic development grant. *Hopeworks* began several years ago when three members of the clergy met to discuss a program for high school dropouts in Camden, New Jersey. They thought about the 70% dropout rate in the city. They talked about how to address that problem and its impact. Then they took action.

Think About It . . . Talk About It . . . Take Action . . . This was also the “action statement” of this summer’s *Brake the Cycle of Poverty* bicycle tour across America, which was sponsored by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Each night the riders held education sessions with Catholic parishioners to raise awareness about poverty here at home and the ways in which CCHD-funded groups are working to end it. The cyclists collected signatures on a banner from parishioners who pledged to think about poverty, talk about it, and take action. The team was welcomed in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 1 by Bishops Wilton Gregory and William Skylstad, the President and Vice President (respectively) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as by Bishop George Murry, SJ, the chairman of the Bishops’ Committee that oversees CCHD’s work, and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington. The riders presented the bishops with the signed banners as symbols of the thousands of people across the country willing to work to break the cycle of poverty in the United States. As the Campaign’s Executive Director, I am deeply grateful to and inspired by the commitment of these riders to help CCHD in its mandate to end the vicious cycle of poverty in America.

If you are interested in taking that same pledge, visit www.brakethecycle.org and click on “Take Action.” Of course, you have already taken action through your ongoing support of CCHD. We are tremendously grateful for that support because it is only through your generosity that we are able to change the structures that make and keep people poor. You remain in our prayers of thanksgiving.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Rev. Robert J. Vitillo
Executive Director

WHAT IS CCHD?

Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the Catholic Campaign has contributed more than \$260 million to more than 4,000 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective and so that CCHD’s investment will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between the poor and non-poor.

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have lots of opportunities to read. But their reading is much stronger after a couple of weeks here.”

A huge challenge to the students is the environment of poverty. “The impact of poverty here is so multi-faceted that it’s almost incomprehensible,” says Fr. Putthoff. “Poverty is tremendously ghettoizing. We live near Philadelphia, but our trainees don’t go there. Camden is very isolated and we have to give the youth openings to connect with the larger world. We do that both through attending professional conferences with our youth and also providing opportunities for them to connect with other groups.”

Fr. Putthoff observes, “Having the Internet doesn’t necessarily connect you to other people, so when students come to Hopeworks, we mix lots of trainees together. They sit next to someone who is learning something different and the isolation dissolves when they see that they can learn that skill, too.”

It requires dedication and effort, though. Fr. Putthoff says, “Technology is not like ‘pixie dust’. You can’t sprinkle a few computers in the neighborhood and expect magic.”

When he taught at a Jesuit high school in St. Louis, Fr. Putthoff “never thought the students wouldn’t show up or that we’d run out of money. Now, this is my daily concern,” he says. To address it, “we have to create an environment where the students want to be. It’s more of a community of care and concern. We have to believe that they can succeed before they do.”

One Hopeworks participant is Erica Lundberg, an energetic 17-year-old who plans to be an entrepreneur. She has taken the Hopeworks web page, layout, and design courses and is now working 30 hours a week in production for several Hopeworks clients. She is also writing and illustrating a book of poetry, marketing her own art, and trying to stir up commercial interest in her one-pound burritos.

Erica’s plan was not quite so clear last year when she was in a youth detention facility after making some bad choices. In January, a friend introduced her to Hopeworks and “I liked what I saw,” she says. “Hopeworks teaches you a lot beyond what they’re meaning to teach you. We learn workplace skills and how to deal with everyday situations.” Erica continues, “If you get into trouble or something’s bothering you, there’s always

someone to talk to. They’ll try to help you as much as possible. Basically, it’s all just positive energy and they even feed you sometimes!”



FR. JEFF, FRANK, AND MARK AT HOPEWORKS.

If she were not at Hopeworks, Erica says she would probably be working as a telemarketer. “I’d be earning more money, but I wouldn’t have the training or the college opportunity,” she says. “I’d be a lot worse off and probably still prone to make mistakes.” She completed her GED at Hopeworks and is enrolled at Camden County College, where she plans to take three associates degrees.

Mark Ford was working in a supermarket when his grandfather brought him to Hopeworks last fall. He moved quickly through the basic training programs and is now a trainer and the head of web maintenance. “They pay me to learn new technologies. Right now, I’m teaching myself PHP program language and will train others on it.” Mark has picked up 15 credits at Camden County College and is the first male in his family to go to college. “Father Jeff and I meet every week about the program, but he also proofreads my term papers,” Mark says with a laugh. He recently won the Second Annual Golden Mouse Award, which is presented to a Hopeworks trainee who has shown exceptional growth and perseverance.

Frank Castillo met Hopeworks during high school and progressed, he says, “from being very basic to being a computer geek—and I’m proud of it.” He is the leader of the GIS summer project, supervising 12 students mapping neighborhoods for the Camden Housing Authority. “Hopeworks sets your mind straight, keeps you organized and makes you think at night,” he says. “The work environment feels professional, but you’re comfortable with the people you work with.” He says that if he hadn’t joined Hopeworks, “I’d be breaking my back working as a mover and wouldn’t have been motivated to go to college.” This fall, he is attending Rutgers University Camden campus.

Distilling the Hopeworks philosophy, Fr. Putthoff says, “We use technology to attract youth and the technology allows them to become empowered and experience a future of their choice. We help youth see themselves with the fullness God gave them.”



ERICA LUNDBERG

CYCLISTS COMPLETE THE BRAKE THE CYCLE OF POVERTY TOUR



On June 1, 2003, a team of bicyclists left San Francisco, California, to embark on a cross-country journey that took them two months and nearly 4,000 miles. Late in the ride, they were joined by a group from St. Bridget Parish in Manchester, Conn. The two teams cycled into Washington, D.C., together and were greeted by bishops, staff from the bishops' conference, and local parishioners.

The goal of the Brake the Cycle tour was to raise awareness about poverty in the United States, to engage more Catholics in the Church's work to break the cycle of poverty, and to support the work of community-based, self-help efforts that address the root causes of poverty. It was a tremendous success. CCHD is thankful to the Campaign's diocesan directors who organized local events and to the many parishes who hosted the cyclists for meals and lodging, and participated in poverty education events and solidarity rides. We are also grateful to the media professionals who covered the tour and thus helped to raise awareness about the 33 million people living in poverty in the United States and about the successful efforts of poor and low-income people working to break the cycle of poverty. Catch up on the tour by visiting www.brakethecycle.org. Here are some of the cyclists' journal entries:

"We are old-school pilgrims, sojourning, relying on the hospitality of our brothers and sisters in the Church. Like old monks in the desert, traveling from monastery to monastery, consumed by God . . . and concerned with water . . . Our hosts have been like family, very welcoming and supportive to total strangers. It is the Gospel in full effect, the Christian way. It is a great feeling to be welcomed. God, help us to remember to welcome those forgotten, stepped on, left to the coldness of the streets. Help us to slow down our busy lives so we can make room for those 'nothing' moments you love to meet us in. Most of all, help us to see our own inner poverty daily so we don't go deluding ourselves into thinking



we're doing any of this under our own power."

—Rob Marco

"All the prayers and offerings of support were amazing.

People opened their hearts

and homes for a bunch of unknown sweaty bikers and their incredibly helpful support crew, with a crazy idea to ride across the country to end poverty. Everyone knows what we are doing will not do such a monumental task, but everyone believes in the hope, strength, faith, and action that is necessary for ultimate change." —Sarah Stolfa

INVEST IN PEOPLE HELPING THEMSELVES

You can donate your time, talent, and treasure to CCHD in many ways. Our annual parish collection is the Sunday before Thanksgiving in most parishes. You can support the work of CCHD with a cash or check donation. You can also support CCHD with a stock donation or a matching gift from your employer. Consider a lasting legacy to help people help themselves—remember CCHD in your estate planning.

For more information about CCHD, contact Mary Mencarini Campbell at 202-541-3365/mcampbell@usccb.org.

"The Catholic Church is alive and thriving in America. With the exception of our time in the desert, we have been greeted daily by Catholic parishioners who opened their homes and parishes to us and showered us with hospitality. We have met and heard from what seemed countless groups who are working, with the funding and encouragement from CCHD, to Brake the Cycle of Poverty. Much remains to be done; millions live in poverty and many millions more have not heard or responded to the cry of the poor. Yet, I am hopeful. We know the way." —Paul Lipetzky



All CCHD funds received are used solely for the support of CCHD's anti-poverty mission. CCHD funds are divided as follows: 87% of CCHD funds are assigned to CCHD's core program mission of community empowerment, economic development, and education programs; 8% is allocated to coordinate the annual appeal and other communication efforts; 5% is assigned to administrative costs. We thank you for continuing to empower low-income people through your ongoing support for CCHD.