Prevention Program Attends Horseback Riding Camp!

In June, eight of our Prevention Department participants attended a one week camp with Detroit Horse Power, which is a non-profit organization that provides opportunities for Detroit’s youth to learn how to ride and care for horses.

The girls learned how to clean the stalls, feed, groom, ride, and make snacks for the horses!

There was also a chance to learn about career opportunities. A Detroit Mounted Police Sergeant shared information about his job responsibilities, and introduced the girls to Elmo, a Detroit Mounted Police horse (pictured below, far left). Additionally, a horse massage therapist and veterinarian described their job duties, and allowed the girls to use veterinarian tools to listen to a horse’s heartbeat (pictured below, middle).

AFG volunteer, Mary Hale, who helped at the camp, reflected that, “The girls were positively impacted by lessons focusing on confidence, responsibility, empathy, determination and teamwork!”

AFG Shelter Resident Speaks on Youth Panel

On June 13th, the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth hosted an event to raise funds and awareness for transportation, which is one of the top barriers faced by homeless youth.

The event, “Pedal for a Purpose,” started with 15 community members biking from Ypsilanti to Detroit. The 40-mile bike ride concluded at Alternatives For Girls’ building, where a community event was held. The event included a youth panel discussion facilitated by Councilwoman Raquel Castaneda-Lopez.

Several young women from AFG’s shelter participated in the awareness event, including Makaila who spoke on the youth panel. Makaila, who is 20 years old and has been at AFG’s shelter for five months, shared some specific things that people can do to support homeless youth. “Encourage and motivate us, and listen to us to understand our situation,” she explained. Makaila also shared with the audience some negative behaviors that can be detrimental to youth experiencing homelessness, such as people “judging us and talking down to us.”

As a member of the panel, Makaila enjoyed having the chance to express herself, and said that it was also helpful to hear stories from other youth about situations they were able to overcome.

Makaila is working as a Youth Leader this summer in AFG’s Rise N’ Shine summer camp, where she is responsible for working with the elementary age girls to help them with activities, improve their reading skills, and model the importance of respect. Makaila is excited about being a Youth Leader because she enjoys working with children. After completing her GED, she plans to join the National Guard and go to college to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice.
Reflections: Strengthening Families Program

For the past three years our Prevention Department has participated in a research program through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s Safe Start Program utilizing an evidence-based curriculum called “Strengthening Families.”

Families were eligible for the program if they had been affected in some way by violence, either in their own home or in their community. The program built upon family strengths in order to prevent, face, and cope with violence. Weekly workshops were designed to teach the parent and child strategies that reduce the mental, physical and emotional impact of violence, improve family communication, and teach conflict resolution skills.

Families involved in the program completed a 16-week course. Within the three years of the Strengthening Families program, eight 16-week sessions were completed, serving approximately 450 families!

The program came to a successful end in October. At the conclusion of each cycle, the family members wrote reflection essays about their experiences in the program. Below are some excerpts from those reflection papers:

Grey Family:
Some of the things I have learned is to calm my anger and my yelling. This is how my household was when growing up. When I was growing up, I told myself I did not want to be this way with my future family, but I started doing the exact same thing to my family. And now, my daughter is starting to do the same. I want to stop it now before it gets any worse. I don’t want my children to feel depressed and lonely like me. I’m taking with me today the knowledge and courage that you have given us that we can change our ways in behavior and control our anger.

Poe Family:
I feel that the Strengthening Families Program is a wonderful project. It has taught me how to reduce “problem behaviors” between my daughter and I, and improved our relationship as a whole. My household has learned to communicate more and to work better together as a team. I think the lesson that impacted me the most was Session 5 (Noticing and Ignoring). By not commenting on every little bad behavior and giving little praises when she is doing good behavior, I found myself with less stress related headaches. She [my daughter] also has had more good behaviors because she enjoys me noticing her for the good things she does. My daughter does even more good behaviors because she has noticed that she doesn’t get any attention for the bad ones.

Winston Family:
Being a part of the Strengthening Families program has been a wonderful experience. I have learned so much through the course of this program that has benefitted my daughter and my relationship. My daughter and I have better communication. Our conversations used to be a one way street; I talked and she listened. I used to always focus on the negative and never the positive. Now, I focus on the positive and I use active listening skills when my daughter talks to me. Our conversations are now a two way street and we enjoy each other’s company. I feel confident and strong in my parenting.

Eastern Market Farm Stand Returns to AFG!

The Eastern Market Farm Stand has returned to AFG for the second summer! Every Tuesday from 2:30 - 5:00pm, through September 29th, two Fresh Food Fellows (pictured right) will be selling fresh produce, and will be available to provide expertise on how to prepare fresh meals. The Farm Stand is open to the public, and will provide a delicious, affordable, variety of fruits and vegetables every week! They accept Cash, Credit/Debit Cards, Bridge Cards, and Double Up Food Bucks.
Staff Member Highlight: Alana Gracey

Alana Gracey has worked at Alternatives For Girls for the past nine years! Alana has held several different roles during her nine years here, but for the past six years, she has been the Safe Choices Project Manager in the Outreach and Education Services Department.

In this role, Alana coordinates the efforts of the Safe Choices Project, which includes; working with girls and women involved with the commercial sex industry, working with victims and survivors of human sex trafficking, managing our Street Outreach and New Choices programs, and providing case management services.

We sat down with Alana to learn a little bit more about her!

What is your favorite thing about working at AFG?
Working with adult women is very important to me. Little girls grow into women, and if their needs have been neglected along the way, it is often more difficult for them to receive compassion and assistance with the numerous barriers that they face regularly.
I also really enjoy working with people who see the world in a very similar light as I do. My co-workers are pretty awesome!

What is most challenging about your work at AFG?
Not having the funding to do more with our program. I’ve seen what New Choices looks like when we have the resources to increase our support services. Even though it’s a relatively small group, there could be a lot of big change happening there with more resources. New Choices was once a program that ran four days per week and had three full-time members. Currently, the program is held two days per week and has one full-time staff person.

What is something you’re most proud of that you’ve accomplished?
There’s a poem painted on the wall in the shelter that I wrote for the residents. That really means something to me (pictured right).
Also, I believe that I’m the longest running Safe Choices Project Manager in AFG history. This program has been a part of who I am as a person for a while now.

Where are you originally from?
Born and raised in Detroit.

Do you have any favorite hobbies?
Reading is my favorite hobby. I read every single day. My tastes have changed over the years, but right now, I read mostly fantasy.

What’s something about you that people might not know?
That I’m a pretty good spoken word artist. ♫

Mission:
Alternatives For Girls’ mission is to help homeless and high-risk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy and exploitation, and help them to explore and access the support, resources and opportunities necessary to be safe, to grow strong and to make positive choices in their lives.

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Shelter and Transition to Independent Living:
AFG’s Shelter Program provides a stable home, counseling, and life skills training to homeless young women age 15-21 and their children. The goal is to empower them to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Outreach and Education Services:
AFG’s Outreach Program helps teens and women engaged in high-risk activities, such as street-based prostitution, drug use, and gang involvement, to understand the risks of such activities and transition to safe choices and healthy lives.

Community Based Prevention:
AFG’s Prevention Program serves girls ages 4-18 who are at risk of pregnancy, gang involvement, abusing drugs or alcohol and school truancy. We engage them through after-school programs, a teen leadership program, and a summer camp.

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“Team Graham” Fundraiser and Camp
Brandon and Carlyne Graham hosted a fundraiser on July 11th, which supported AFG. Both Brandon and Carlyne were raised in Detroit and attended Detroit Public Schools, which shaped their desire to give back to youth in Detroit. Brandon played football at the University of Michigan, and now plays for the Philadelphia Eagles. After completing her undergraduate degree, Carlyne earned dual degrees in social work and child and family law from Loyola University. In addition to the fundraiser, they also held a one-day camp on July 11th for 125 boys and 125 girls in the City of Detroit. The camp included football drills, an obstacle course, yoga, and workshops that focused on the importance of education. Young women in AFG’s programs had so much fun attending the camp! Thank you for your incredible support, Brandon and Carlyne!

Seeking Mentors
AFG is seeking volunteers to mentor middle school girls in our new program, the Asset-Building Project. This project aims to help girls stay on path to graduate high school and then enroll in a post-secondary educational program. Each month, girls will save money toward their education and AFG will match a portion of their savings. The program will also include educational workshops and academic support. Interested mentors must be a graduate of a post-secondary program or currently enrolled, willing to invest at least 10 hours per month, and make at least a two-year commitment. Mentors will receive training and ongoing support from AFG. For more details, please contact Melody Moore at (313) 361-4000 x280 or mmoore@alternativesforgirls.org.

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Donor and Volunteer Corner

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