



Volunteers of America

OREGON



SPRING 2009

inside...

Thomisha Harris, with daughter Tamia, shares how Family Relief Nursery has supported her family through difficult times.

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From the *President* Kay Toran

To Our Loyal Supporters,

First, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all that you do for our organization. It is your on-going support that makes it possible for us to continue to provide high-quality services in our community.

We are pleased to report that our program evaluations continue to prove that our services are helping those we serve to truly transform their lives. Outcomes in our public safety programs are the best in the county. Results in our domestic violence program demonstrate that we are helping survivors to achieve stability and success in moving on to live lives free from violence. We make a major contribution to help parents become reunited with children in the child welfare system. Our adult day services are helping caregivers keep their aging relatives in their own homes.

Volunteers of America Oregon is making a positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

As most of you are aware, these are very challenging times for those most vulnerable in our community. The economic downturn has impacted so many lives. The high unemployment rate; the shortfalls in personal budgets, in government and

corporate budgets; and the decline in investment returns for individuals, foundations and other organizations have made helping those in need of our services even more challenging.

As we navigate through these difficult times, we here at Volunteers of America Oregon will stay focused on the task at hand. We will also continue to commit to providing the highest quality and most cost-effective services possible. We also will continue to advocate for the most vulnerable in our community.

I ask that you continue to support Volunteers of America Oregon. Please let your voices be heard by our policy makers and elected officials so that funding programs for the most vulnerable in our community remains a top priority. This is a time when all of our voices can make a difference. This is a time when we can all work together to ensure that we stay committed to our children, our families, to troubled adults, to the elderly and their caregivers.

It is possible for us to be an even stronger community as we move through this economic time.

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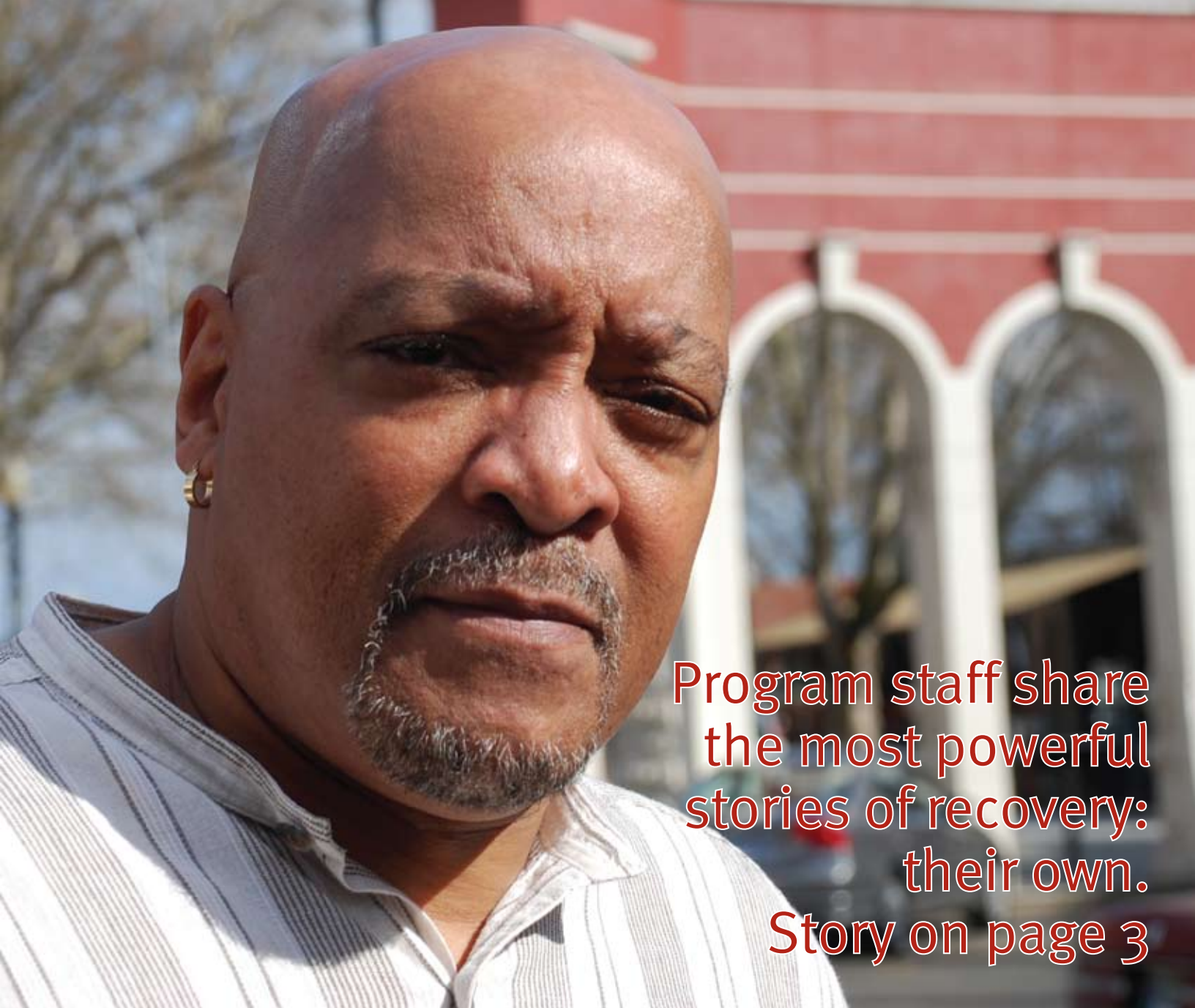
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Program staff share
the most powerful
stories of recovery:
their own.
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Volunteers of America Oregon

Our Vision

Volunteers of America Oregon is a leader in creating vibrant, compassionate communities where every member is valued, every home is safe and every life is self-determined.

Our Mission

Volunteers of America Oregon changes lives by promoting self-determination, building strong communities and standing for social justice.

Visit our website for news:
www.voaor.org

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LEADING BY *Example*

Residential Counselor Martin Getzinger and Program Director Larry Wallace.

In 1982, while serving a second stint in the Oregon State Penitentiary for a drug offense, Larry Wallace never imagined that one day he'd be a role model and inspiration to so many.

The road to recovery was long and hard, but after his release, he went back to school, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees in addictions counseling, and has worked in numerous positions in the treatment field. Today, he is Director of Volunteers of America Oregon's Residential Support Program (RSP), which serves men considered to be "chronic offenders" with long histories of addiction and criminal activity. "I'm able to relate pretty well with these folks," he says. "I have the empathy and know where they are coming from and what they are going through."

With the first group of participants now completing the six-month program, Wallace and his staff are

encouraged by its progress. Already, it has been successful in reducing re-arrests. And they are encouraged by the participant's buy-in. "These men never sought treatment or remained in treatment before," Wallace says. "They are staying here."

What makes the program work, Wallace says, is the staff. Hand-picked for working with this population, many are motivated by their own past struggles with substance abuse. "We all see a little of ourselves in each person that enters the program. We're not about to give up on them."

Residential Counselor Carmelita Anderson had been involved with drugs for years. Despite participating in outpatient treatment programs, she still kept using. "It got to the point where I was so involved in the life that I knew I'd never get clean without a residential program," she says. On July 23, 1997 – her birthday – she turned herself into treatment at the VOA

Oregon Women's Residential Center. "Volunteers of America saved my life," she says.

Since then, Carmelita has completed college and adopted a son, who is nearly eight years old. "I'm proof that good things happen to people who stay off drugs."

Martin Getzinger also exemplifies this. Getzinger had been involved in the



Residential Counselor Carmelita Anderson.



Participants sleep and take their meals on-site and are escorted to VOA's Day Treatment Program, as well as to medical appointments, the gym, and other meetings.



Officer Jeff Myers of the Portland Police Bureau, one of the RSP's partner organizations.

criminal justice system since he was 12 years old. He graduated high school through MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility and then drifted through drugs, alcohol, and crime for the next several years. He arrived at VOA's Men's Residential Center (MRC) after a spree of 18 felonies and 1 misdemeanor, and drug addiction was the common denominator through it all.

His 14 months at the MRC were a turning point. "I found that VOA was like a family that wouldn't let me go," he says, "They showed me that you have to convey love and respect to people." After graduation, he moved into an Oxford House (a clean and sober group home) and began volunteering at the MRC, leading support groups. Then, in 2008, he was hired as a residential counselor with the Residential Support Program, where he applies the tools that he learned at the Men's Residential Center.

"I try to show [the RSP participants] honesty and respect," he says. "That means a lot to guys like us."

For Anderson and Getzinger, the rewards of their job are evident in the progress they see. "These are men who have been put on the back burner," Anderson says. "They come in fighting, and you watch them change. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing these men grow."

RSP was born of a unique partnership including the Portland Police, Multnomah County Parole and Probation Office, Volunteers of America Oregon, and Central City Concern. "We recognized Volunteers of America Oregon as one of the leading treatment providers in the state of Oregon," says Officer Jeff Myers of the Portland Police, and a member of the team that refers participants to the program. "It was a perfect fit because VOA provides treatment for addiction and also the cognitive piece of why someone is involved in criminal activity."

Today, the Residential Support Program houses 12 men. Participants take their meals on site, and are escorted each day to Volunteers of America Oregon's Day Treatment Services for therapy groups, mental health counseling, and employment classes in the morning. In the afternoons, they return to the RSP and then are accompanied to the gym, medical appointments, or Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. In time and with good behavior and progress, their freedom increases. After three months, they move to clean and sober housing at Central City Concern, and from there they work to transition to independent, self-supported housing.

"All their lives, these men have been treated as just a number," says Wallace. "Here, they are treated as human beings." ■

service

Shelter from the *Storm*



A young family struggling for survival finds a safe harbor at Family Relief Nursery

Five years ago, when newlyweds Terrance and Thomisha Harris decided to start a family, nothing could have prepared them for what lay ahead. Twin boys: Terrell and Trevon. Terrell became terribly ill with a rare genetic disease and died three months later. The young family was paralyzed in grief, confronted with overwhelming medical debt, and had no local family support. A third child was born, daughter Tamia. Healthy, thank god. Then a big surprise: another set of twins, daughter Taylor and son Tyler. Again, a rare genetic disease. An emergency room visit led to a bone marrow transplant and a long hospital stay for baby Taylor.

Terrance, working the night shift, was chronically sleep deprived. Thomisha was practically living at the hospital. Taylor was saved, but her health was still fragile. They returned home to face an avalanche of medical bills, a house filled with children and babies. But Taylor, their beautiful baby girl, was alive and getting stronger every day.

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs there is, but when stress factors stack up, parents are simply trying to keep their head above water. The Harris family couldn't afford daycare, so daughters Taylor and Tamia and sons Trevon and Tyler had little interaction with other children. With so much pressure on these young parents, tracking developmental progress and milestones was a luxury they didn't have. Terrance would return from work early in the morning and would watch the children while Thomisha tended to their youngest daughter and her ongoing medical appointments each week. They had survived a huge storm but felt like they were slowly sinking.

Then, the Harrises heard about Family Relief Nursery. At first, they were unsure of the program because they had never left their children with strangers. But when Program Coordinator Bethany Froese welcomed them at the door, their concern melted away. "I knew when I saw Bethany's smiling face that my kids were in the right place," Terrance says.

FRN staff members were confident that with right supports, the Harris family could begin to thrive. "The first thing that I observed with this wonderful family was their spirit," says Teacher-Interventionist Heather Klotz. "So many stress factors loomed over their life, but it was as if they had

created a safe 'eye of the storm' with the things that meant the most: family, safety and love."

When Trevon began to display some speech delays, FRN's teacher-interventionists connected him with the resources to help ensure that he arrives at kindergarten ready to learn.

"The teachers here really go the extra mile to make sure your children are prepared, and they give us advice about how we can work better with them at home," says Thomisha.

The Family Relief Nursery helped the Harrises calm that storm. In the nursery's therapeutic classrooms,



Thomisha Harris with oldest son Trevon, 4.



“The teachers here really go the extra mile to make sure your children are prepared,” says Thomisha Harris. “They give us advice about how we can work better with kids at home.”

Taylor Harris, 18 months, endured a bone marrow transplant, chemotherapy, and several other procedures that saved her life.

the four Harris children received developmental assessments and benefited from age-appropriate activities like circle time, storytelling, and art projects. Home visits and parental coaching stood in for the parents and family living in other states. The children had a safe place to explore the world. Their social skills improved through their interaction with other children and loving adults. The respite time also allowed Thomisha to take Taylor to her medical appointments and gave this hands-on father time to rest. And the Nursery helped the family develop a support system to help ease the burden on Terrance and Thomisha.

However, the financial pressure raged on. Even with insurance through his employer, half of Terrance’s monthly salary went to paying medical bills, and in August 2008, the family was in danger of being evicted from their home. Volunteers of America Oregon arranged for a grant through the Oregon Community Foundation that helped them to remain in their home. Things still aren’t easy for this young family, but Terrance and Thomisha have been inspired by the generosity of Volunteers of America Oregon to give back themselves.

“That’s the most important thing,” Thomisha says, “To love and give back.”

They both volunteer at their church and Terrance has volunteered at VOA. The network of support they’ve developed grows and becomes stronger each day.

The Family Relief Nursery throws a life ring to over 60 families each year. All services are provided at no cost. ■

Families who qualify for Volunteers of America Oregon's Family Relief Nursery display at least eight stress factors, including the following

caring

Terrance Harris with his 18-month old twins, Tyler and Taylor, at Family Relief Nursery.



- Alcoholism/drug addiction
- Anger management issues
- DHS/child welfare involvement
- Developmental disability
- Divorce/separation
- Domestic violence
- English language difficulty
- High emotional stress
- History of abuse or trauma
- History of drug or alcohol abuse
- History of sexual abuse
- Homelessness/no permanent home
- Inadequate family/child supplies
- Inadequate nutrition
- Lack of child care
- Lack of reliable access to a telephone
- Lack of reliable transportation
- Lack of support system
- Medical conditions or disability
- Mental health issues
- Multiple children/births
- Parent incarceration or criminal involvement
- Physical disability
- Poverty/low-income
- Racial or ethnic minority
- Single parent
- Unemployment
- Untreated substance abuse

Research has found that by reducing just two of these stressors, the risk of child neglect or abuse is cut in half.

For more information and to watch a video about Family Relief Nursery, visit www.voar.org



Tribute Event Raises \$234,000

Over 250 people attended the 8th Annual DePreist Award Tribute Dinner in February, which honored the achievements of local philanthropists and community volunteers, Ken and Marta Thrasher. They have worked tirelessly to advance causes that help young people achieve their potential. The event also helped to raise \$234,000 to support Volunteers of America Oregon's program operations.

VOA Oregon Maintains Commitment to Sustainability

VOA Oregon is committed to green practices, making progressive, important changes to reduce waste. Low-flow showerheads have been installed at the Men's and Women's Residential Centers, estimated to save over 100,000 gallons of hot water. We have introduced food waste composting at both residential centers, cutting landfill waste in half. *Catering for a Cause* also composts all on-site food waste and picks up food waste from catering clients for composting.

Unusual Finds Abound at the VOA Oregon Resale Outlet

What do a portable phonograph from the 1920's, a Phoebus camp stove, and vintage baby dolls have in common? All three were recent donations to the VOA Oregon Resale Outlet. These donations translate to vital financial support for our 20 service programs. In addition to the physical store in southeast Portland, these one-of-a-kind items may also be purchased online at eBay and Craigslist. For more info, visit www.voao.org.

Men's Residential Center Reaches Out to Local Students

This year, clients and staff from VOA Oregon Men's Residential Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center have spoken to over 2,200 middle and high school students. With firsthand knowledge of life ravaged by addiction, these men teach about the effects of drug and alcohol use on the brain and body. One student recently wrote, "If I ever consider taking drugs, I know I will just remember your story."

To schedule speakers to visit your school or group, contact Julia Peters at jpeters@voao.org or (503) 802-0299.

Family Relief Nursery Gets a Makeover

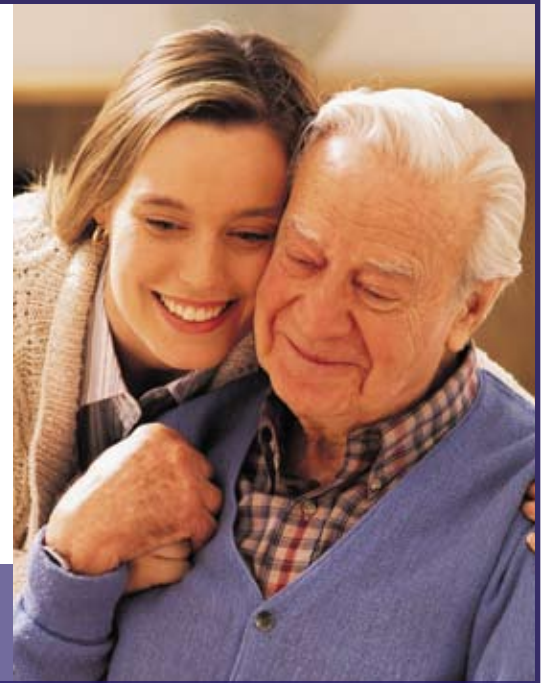
Local and national foundations have helped Family Relief Nursery to make some important facility upgrades. Grants from the **Boeing Employees Community Fund**, the **Juan Young Trust**, and the **Henry L. Hillman, Jr. Foundation** helped to provide new furniture, educational toys and equipment, and carpeting for our therapeutic classrooms and parent resource room. Support from the **Howard and Dorise Irwin Foundation**, the **Samuel S. Johnson Foundation**, and **The Jackson Foundation** has helped the Nursery purchase a 16-passenger mini-bus.

Teaching Teens About Healthy Relationships

Home Free's Teen Program has made over 60 presentations to more than 1,500 Portland Public high school students this school year. Information on healthy relationships helps to prevent teens from experiencing dating, domestic, and sexual violence. To schedule a presentation at your school or community organization, you can contact Home Free's Teen Advocate Lauren Paulk at lpaulk@voao.org or (503) 802-0505.

Adult Day Services

at Marie Smith Center and Lambert House



Your *Caregiving* Solution

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- 50% of people caring for seniors said that the stress of care giving affected their own health. (AARP study)

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