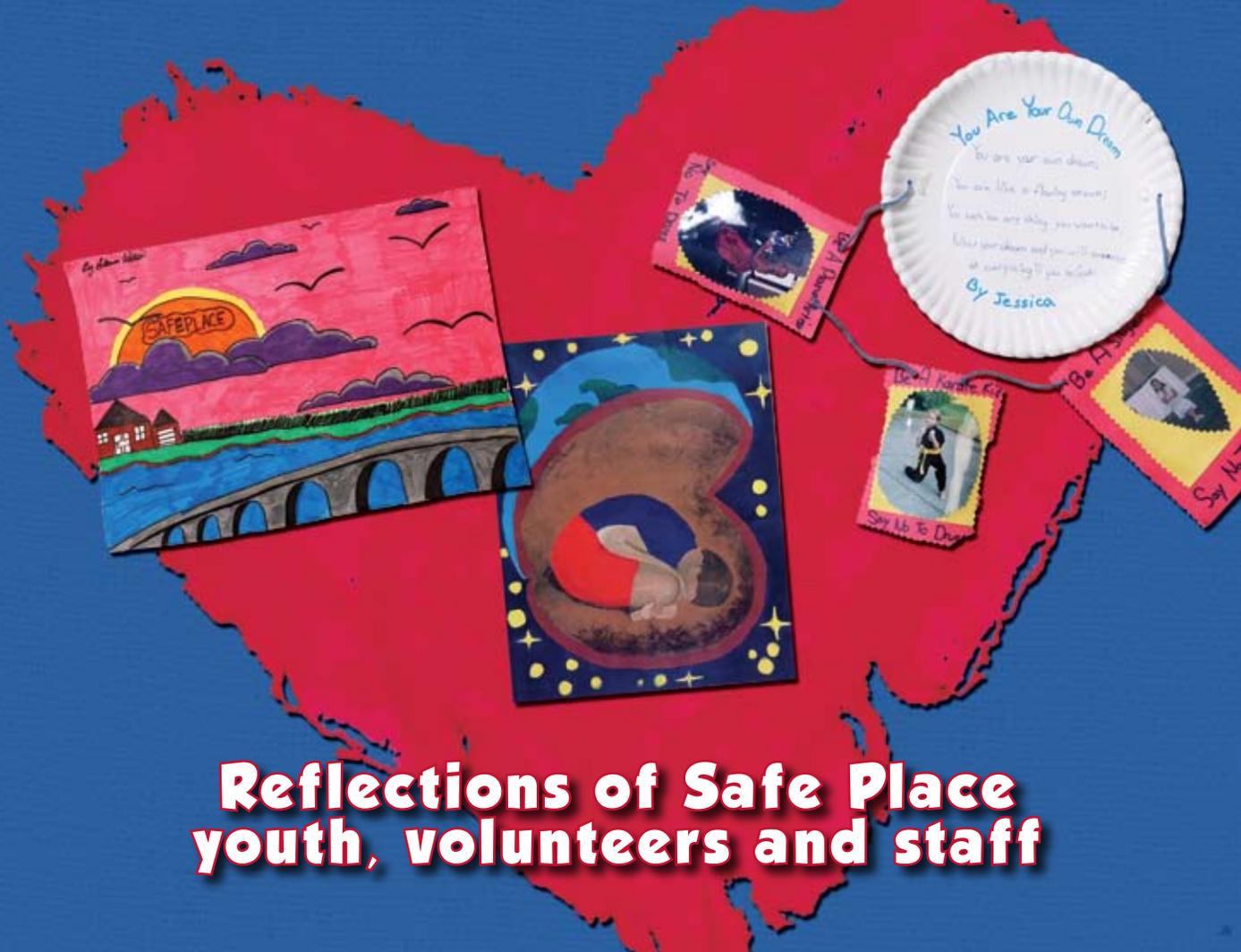


Heart of the Matter



**Reflections of Safe Place
youth, volunteers and staff**



To the reader of *Heart of the Matter*,

Heart of the Matter is a collection of creative work by young people, staff at Safe Place youth shelters and employees at Safe Place locations. The poems, artwork and stories that are included reflect the difficulties these youth experience and their hope for a brighter future. They represent their passion, courage and heart as they strive to overcome adversity.

Safe Place exists because of these young people and because of the commitment of thousands of community volunteers, businesses and youth serving agencies that make the safety and well-being of youth a priority. *Heart of the Matter* is a small sampling of situations that children and teens experience each day.

This collection is intended to help you understand the difficult circumstances in which many young people live and encourage you to listen to what they are saying. The work included reaches into the hearts of young people and those who connect them to help and safety as they share their innermost thoughts and feelings.

Heart of the Matter is dedicated to

Larry Wooldridge

Larry's passion for young people led to the creation of Safe Place in 1983.
Through his vision thousands of youth in crisis have been helped.

Table of Contents

"Title" / Name		"Life" / Cienna	19
"The Heart of the Matter" / Whitney	2	"Solo" / Nick	20
"Reaching Out" / Chris	3	"Me" / Brett	21
"The Bridge" / Steven	4	"I Don't Want To Go Home!" / Lila	21
"Somebody, Someday" / Porsha	5	"I Tried SOO Hard" / Chris	22
"Help" / Anonymous	5	"Don't Speak" / Krystal	22
"Rusty's Testimony" / Rusty	6	"Lost Your Way?" / Jessica	23
"Cornerstone" / Dorothy Baggett	8	"Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" / Wendy Keighley	24
"The Rocky Road" / Darlyn	8	"Memoirs: An Unseen Middle Child" / Brett	24
"You Are Your Own Dream" / Jessica	9	"Safe Place" / Lila	25
"Free" / Ashley	9	"Rebecca's Little Heart" / Rebecca	25
"Courage" / April	10	"Gabe's Story" / Gabe	26
"An Unexpected Guest" / Presley	10	"At The Core" / Kylar	27
"Letter from Safe Station Client" / Danielle	11	"Dear Mr. President" / "Jeannie"	27
"Red Leaf" / Marvin	11	"Open Road" / Mary	28
"Promise House" / Richelle	12	"Truth" / Peggy	29
"Faces" / Anonymous	12	"Feeling So Bad" / Nikki Wieglos	30
"Violet" / Anonymous	13	"Connection" / Sean	31
"Open Doors" / Christopher and Jason	13	"Safe Station" / Kiera	31
"The Power of New Shoes" / Bonnie Bazill-Davis	14	"Firefighter Engine House 13" / Tridgett Kent	32
"Smiling Faces" / Bonnie	15	"Away From The Noise" / Cornelius	32
"Heart" / Essence	16	"Welcome Mat" / Trent	33
"Yellow" / Jonathan	16	"Tammy's Story" / Eric Tadatada	34
"Busy Streets" / Maurice	17	"Silent" / Lacey	35
"Never" / Jericah	17	"New Beginning" / Essie	36
"The Grass is Not Always Greener" / Karen Bonnewell	18		

The Heart of the Matter

The heart of the matter is does it matter, how our hearts feel,
when we have no place to go for help but to our peers, because
adults think we'll just figure it out in a few years.
When we're searching for a way out but the only offers we receive
are drugs, because the only people who listen are our peers who
are just as lost as us.
I'm not in control of my life right now but I'd really like to know,
that i have somewhere to go
when mom and dad are fighting,
and i cant bear it any longer,
When i made a big mistake,
and my clothes can't hide it any longer
When i hung in long enough,
and i can't be any stronger.

When the only relief i get comes in crimson red.
When he touched me the wrong way,
and i know no one believes me,
When the guy i'm with is leaving bruises all over my body,
but no one cares enough to ask where their from.
When i'm alone all week with no food in the fridge,
and i'm taking care of my fathers kids while he works out of town
since mom isn't around.
When i need help with problems at school,
and my friends don't have the answers,
I'd like to have a place to go, not just any place a "safe place" when
my problems are bigger than i am and i need someone to be, here
for me, to help get my heart feeling better about the matter.

Whitney, 16
Salt Lake County Youth Services
Salt Lake City, UT



Chris
Children's Bureau
Indianapolis, IN



Steven, 15
Tennessee Valley
Family Services
Guntersville, AL

SOMEBODY, SOMEDAY

I am determining to be somebody, someday
And I have my mind set.

My whole life my mom told me that
I will never be nothing
But I'm still here to prove her wrong,
because I am very strong.

And I got it in my head that I am determined
to be somebody, someday.

I know deep down inside that it's going to be hard
But if I keep my head up and stay strong,
nothing should go wrong.

I am determined to be somebody, someday
and I'm going to do it
In my own sweet and special way.

Life is a hard thing to live, even when you
don't have a mother there to give.

But that don't stop me cause
I'M DETERMINED TO BE SOMEBODY, SOMEDAY!

Porsha, 16
North Texas Youth Connection
Sherman, TX



Anonymous
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY

Rusty's Testimony

My name is Rusty Booker. I'm 17 years old. I was born and raised in Louisville, KY. I just want to thank all of you for giving me an opportunity to share the story of my life with you.

My life was never easy. I was born to a mom of 17. Living with my mother and stepfather was difficult. My stepfather came every night, got drunk and beat my mom. My brother and I didn't sleep well not knowing if we would be next. At age eight my parents divorced and my mom started drinking. She never laid a hand on my brother and me. Drinking was her way of forgetting the past. I was sent to live with my stepfather and his wife at age nine. The abuse started then. Belts, ping pong paddles, even his hand all against my flesh. I wouldn't be able to sit while my bottom and legs were marked with bruises. My brother soon came afterwards. I was placed in foster care and then back with my stepfather. Months after I was placed back with my stepfather, I started sending letters to my previous foster family

from an abandoned house's mailbox so my stepparents wouldn't know. A month or so after the letters, I had built the courage to run.

I contacted my previous foster family and they told me to look for a Safe Place instead of going back home. I went to a library that had a Safe Place sign on the front. I was 12 at the time and until that day didn't know what Safe Place was but was glad that there was a place like the library where I could get help. They took me to the YMCA Safe Place Services shelter in Louisville. When I got there the staff welcomed me. I felt safe for the first time in many years. They did an intake and got me clothes, hygiene products and clean linens. The next morning I had a warm breakfast and it was good. I met with a caseworker who would change my life forever—Mr. Bill. When we talked, at first I had a hard time connecting with him and getting solutions, but it wasn't long before I was sharing my life's story with him.

The shelter determined that going home was not going to be possible and I understood. Within two weeks, they arranged for me to be placed in a foster home with a loving family. But I still had problems and over the next several years, I was placed in a psychiatric hospital and along with that came therapy and meds. Then came another foster home, group homes, even jail. I started using drugs and after witnessing my friend getting shot because of drugs, I thought to myself, nobody asked me what I wanted. I felt like I was to blame and was powerless to change my life. I had no family, no home and at this rate, no future. After another failed foster home, I went to Safe Place again and asked for help.

I knew the shelter was there for me. Again I felt safe and understood. I met with Ms. Missy and told her everything that I had been through. She didn't judge me or laugh at me. She understood me and made me feel wanted. The next day I met Mr. Quan, a man with a story for every lesson he learned that I needed to learn or had already but in a rougher way. He too

“***I started using drugs and after witnessing my friend getting shot because of drugs, I thought to myself, ‘Nobody asked me what I wanted.’ I felt like I was to blame and was powerless to change my life.***”

understood me. He has taught me very many ways of how to not let little things get blown way out of proportion. And then there is Mr. Bill. When I saw him again after several years, I gave him a hug. I felt so relieved to see someone I knew that really cared about me and loved me more than anyone I know. I'm not really going to put his business out to the public, but I will say that he has been through a huge amount of things that other kids and me can relate to. Bill, Ms. Missy and Mr. Quan and the other wonderful and amazing staff at Safe Place Services are keeping me drug and alcohol free. I don't know the last time I have felt this good about myself.

To some, these people I mentioned may just be ordinary people, but to me and six hundred other kids a year in Louisville, these people are heroes. Mr. Bill even

gave up his vacation to bring me to DC so I could testify today.

There are 14 kids at the Safe Place Services right now who have experienced many of the same things that I have. I would like to be able to convince kids that Safe Place is a first step to get help and the shelter is a place where they can feel safe and begin to solve their problems. Many times when I was younger, I wanted to run for help, but when I was in a rural area there weren't many places to go. Louisville is a smaller city compared to here in DC or LA or even Atlanta. Kids all around the country, thousands of kids, feel like I did. No one understands them and they need a place to turn. I hope that they, too, will be able to get to find Safe Place sites to get to a shelter, feel safe, and have a bed, food, someone to talk to instead of



Mr. Bill
and Rusty

running the streets, bumming money or doing anything just to survive.

I'm asking for your help to make a difference for kids just like me, because every kid deserves a second chance. I plan to finish my GED and plan to go to college and get a degree in law enforcement. Thank you for letting me share the experiences I have had. I know I'm headed in the right direction. I used to always ask myself "Why me?" Maybe this is why. Maybe what I have been through can make a difference for someone else. I hope you will make it possible for kids like me to have these programs in their city.

Rusty, 17
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY

Cornerstone

The road turns west
next to an eagle's nest
perched high on a utility post,
It twists and turns
through the deep dark woods
of palmettos and wild grape vines
beneath tall majestic pines
and giant ancient oaks which are
draped with gray Spanish moss
It continues on over the bridge
and on down by the Ala a River
When I arrive at dawn
I'm greeted by mockingbirds
singing their medley of songs
And by young voices saying
Good morning, Ms. Dorothy
Then I gladly begin my day
At Cornerstone Youth Shelter
and I'm thankful to God above
for my job which I dearly love
which was an answer to my prayers

Dorothy Costine Baggett
Youth Care Specialist
George W. Harris, Jr. Youth Crisis Shelter
Bartow, FL

The Rocky Road

*This life is filled with a lot of ups and downs,
I guess you can say its like a roller coaster.*

*The mountains are way too high and the valleys are way
too low, I guess you can say its like a rocky road.*

*Its a road of unbelief, broken hearts and shattered
dreams, but for me its all opportunity.*

*Just as a potter molds a pot, its left up to me to mold
the scene and fix the broken pieces -
to create a place where life is truly overflowing with the
greatest gifts from above.*

*Just as clear spring, only I can fix the rocky road an
close the gaps between them.*

*I will have to walk this road with my Maker; hand in
hand, almost as if it was me who walked with him and
left footprints in the sand.*

*There have been many times I've stumbled and fell into
shattered glass, and just as a wolf howling into the dark,
blue, starry sky, I too, have cried.*

*There's never been a time where I couldn't find him by
my side, within in the very depths of the valley and dark
stormy nights; he was always the light I searched for.*

*Regardless of what type of storm came, I've always
looked toward the one that would bring me through...*

Darlyn, 17
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY



Jessica, 12
Youth Crisis Center
Jacksonville, FL

Free

Will I ever be free of this pain you've
caused me?

All the others are beginning to see how
you've scarred me mentally.

My pain comes deep within
You weren't supposed to do it to your kin.

Now, you want me to lie

Pretend like it never happened, why?

You make me never want to trust another guy.

It's sad here I am can't sleep
Writing poetry that's really deep
I jump at every creep.

I didn't deserve this pain
I feel like I'm going insane.

Because of your stupid choice
It takes a lot to make me have Joyce.

Why does this have to be?
It's all trapped inside of me,
All I want is to be free.

Ashley, 19
Haven House
Raleigh, NC

Courage

Courage is finally picking up the phone after months of staring at the same number.

Courage is continuing to dial with shaky fingers even though it becomes difficult to breathe.

Courage is remaining on the line to hear the first ring. Palms begin to sweat then the heart rate increases.

Courage is keeping calm during the next three rings, while all the possibilities race rapidly amongst the mind.

Courage is the very last silent pause...before the voice answers "hello."

Courage is relaying "hello" taking a deep breath and following with whatever comes next.

Courage is having the will power to seek closure.

*April, 23
Open Inn Inc.
Tucson, AZ*



Presley, 15
"An Unexpected Guest"
YSB Safe Station
Mishawaka, IN

Letter from Safe Station Client

Growing up for me during Christmas time wasn't always great. From 5 years to 10 years old was the worst. My mom's boyfriend would get drunk all the time and usually beat me or make me and my sister do dumb things. Then 11 years to 16 years, I lived with my dad and he was never really a family man. Christmas to him was just another day. But Christmas of 2004, I was in a foster home and she never acted like we were family. Christmas to her was just another appointment. But Christmas this year was the best ever! Safe Station gave me a feeling that I've wanted my whole life. I felt like I was part of a family. I felt the Christmas spirit that I thought never existed. I was showed that people who don't ever don't even know you can care more than those who do. They gave me belief that no matter how many bad Christmas' you have, there is always that one that gives faith. I've never met anyone like the staff at Safe Station and I'm glad that God put me in their hands. I know this will be a Christmas I'll never forget. I got stuff I needed like sweaters and also stuff like I always wanted. I got a CD player, jewelry, lotions and other things. The present that meant the most to me was the feeling they gave me. It was the best present I could ever ask for. It makes you feel so much better about life in general. So I thank Safe Station for all they've done for me and all they'll do for future residents.

Danielle, 17

Youth Services Bureau Safe Station
South Bend, IN



Marvin, 7
Youth In Need
St. Louis, MO



Richelle
Promise House
Dallas, TX

So many faces,
that come and go.
People whom you,
Don't even get to know.
It's almost as if,
They want us to be,
Thinking of our issues,
In solitary.
But this absolute boredom,
Is making my mind wander.
There are far too many things in my head,
that I continue to ponder.
Which is the road,
That I want to travel?
Which path won't allow,
my life to unravel?
The path that leads into your arms,
Down which I'd dare not tarry.
Because you my love,
Are my sanctuary.

Anonymous
EOC Sanctuary
fresno, CA



Anonymous
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY

Open Doors

You open your doors to us
Not knowing who we are
Giving us something to look forward to
Like a shooting star
Steering us in the right direction
Teaching us improvement not perfection
Offering a place which brings relief
A place to heal, to raise belief
For which you put your hearts together
To give us a chance to make things better
You give us that little extra push and shove
Not with criticism but with full of love
We thank you very much
For your little extra touch

Christopher, 15 and Jason, 13
Youth Services Bureau Safe Station
South Bend, IN

The Power of New Shoes

Walk with me today while I take you on a journey through time, when walking meant romping through, grass, mud and sandboxes—a time when my feet were full of innocent softness, and I could slide each puggy foot into a pair of little laced-shoes.

But my little shoes were not merely for play—they were for running and hiding. They were for escape. My shoes flew down the hallway while I screamed and cried and hid behind furniture. While I pleaded, “Daddy, no-Daddy don’t hurt me!” Within my little shoes, my 4-year-old baby feet shook dreading the moment I would be caught. One of many sexual assaults I endured until I was in second grade. Little shoes have no power over a 300-pound man whose own shoe is a size 13.

As time marched on, my little shoes grew to become big, brown “Earth” shoes of the 1970s. And again, they became adept at escaping. They ran into the bathroom

“*On behalf of the 100 street kids in the Dayton community whose shoes are still walking and hearts are still broken; I thank you for walking a mile in my shoes. Every one of these kids has the potential to do exactly what I have done and far more.*”

while I locked the door to shut out the yelling, and the threats, and the constant criticism that my father poured out like venom. And they ducked down in the bathtub when the door came crashing down with my father’s blood red face was screaming inches from my own. But my shoes were clean and polished in the evening while the wood putty patched the door so the guests at the card party would not ask questions. You see, it was always important to never let anyone outside the family see my dirty shoes.

Escape was still the mission, and my Earth shoes pounded the streets at night in search of refuge from the constant fighting that sent dishes flying through the air and phones yanked off the walls. Fighting that left me feeling drained, exhausted, and

hopeless. My brown shoes walked out of police stations after I would get picked up 40 miles out of town and dragged back home. They staggered out of bars and drug parties where I tried to go numb to it all. And they stepped into dangerous cars driven by older men who stopped to pick up the stray, hitchhiking, abandoned teenage girl by the side of the street. I neither thought about risk nor cared about my welfare. I only wanted to stop the unending ache of my tired feet and broken heart. It is miraculous that my shoes were not replaced by a toe tag clinging to cold, hard feet in the county morgue. I will never completely understand how I lived through those times to be standing today. Perhaps my shoes had the invisible wings of angels.

If that were true, then by destiny those winged-shoes landed at an old house made into a safe haven for runaway teens. It was a place to prop up tired feet, mend broken-hearts, and to start fresh with a new pair of shoes. A place appropriately named Daybreak. And at Daybreak I learned that I didn't have to hide my dirty shoes. I could finally talk about how and why my shoes became so filthy in the first place. My shoes no longer needed to run and escape, because I was finally safe. Daybreak started me on a fresh path of healing and self-discovery where today I love and respect the person who stands in my shoes.

Along that new path, I changed shoes many times. Gym shoes supported me while I hustled to college classes, therapy sessions, and support groups. White high heels held me up as I married a wonderful, supportive partner who has stuck by my side for 23 years. Blues pumps matched by business suit as I became a therapist helping others who were chemically-addicted. Now I wear them as I speak out about abuse, train others how to intervene

with hurting children, and proudly work for the same Daybreak that uplifted me so many years ago. Yet on most occasions, my shoes are in a pile on the floor as I shuffle around my house bare-footed caring for my two precious children.

And this leads me right back to a pair of little shoes, but these have Velcro instead of laces. The tiny, soft feet that fit these shoes are my daughter's. And when she runs and hides it is because we are playing Hide-and-Go Seek. She will **never** need to wear them to run for her life or escape from a cycle of violence and pain. And all little shoes deserve to be so happy.

On behalf of the 100 street kids in the Dayton community whose shoes are still walking and hearts are still broken; I thank you for walking a mile in my shoes. Every one of these kids has the potential to do exactly what I have done and far more. I know this simply because they are still standing. Young shoes that can walk through misery can learn to walk through anything. They only need a safe place

where they can rest and be loved and find the power of new shoes.

Bonnie Bazill-Davis
Training & Project Specialist
Daybreak, Inc.
Dayton, OH



Bonnie, 7th Grade
Children's Bureau
Indianapolis, IN



Essence, 17
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY

YELLOW

Abused and Neglected

You want to run but you don't know where to go
When you're confused and heart broken
and there's no where else to turn
think of yellow

Because yellow is the color of the Safe Place sign
It leads you to help and brings you peace of mind
No matter where you are it's always local
You can be a runaway or just be troubled in general
We'll help you out and mediate the problem
If it's shelter you need it's shelter you'll get
If it's counseling you seek it's counseling you'll get
So the next time you need help don't forget
Look for the big yellow sign with the bold print
Because then you know you're on your way
To a Safe Place

Jonathan, 16
B.E.A.C.H. House
Daytona Beach, FL



Maurice, 8th Grade
Children's Bureau
Indianapolis, IN

Never

Never say I love you
If you really don't care
Never talk about feelings
If they aren't really there
Never hold my hand
If you are going to break my heart
Never say you are going to
If you don't plan to start
Never look into my eyes
If all you do is lie
Never say hello
If you really mean good bye
If you really mean forever
Then say you will try
Never say forever
Cause forever makes me cry

Jerica, 20
EOC Sanctuary
fresno, CA

The Grass is Not Always Greener

One young man will stick forever in my mind. Like so many young people, he thought the grass was greener on the other side. He had been raised by his mother and step-dad in rural northern Virginia. The parents ran a pretty tight ship. There were rules, and chores. The young man, now a sophomore in High School, was already a standout on his high school basketball team.

But the lure of living in North Carolina with his dad was something he always wanted to do. Now that his dad was out of prison where he had been for all of his son's life that change was a possibility. After much begging his mother gave in.

Dad lived with his mom, and his brother. The brother too had been incarcerated. Grandma welcomed her grandson but it was soon apparent she backed her sons with their continued illegal dealings. Fearing her grandson would say something to the authorities she and his dad forbid him to spend any time with friends. He even had to give up his basketball. He was delivered to school, and picked up immediately after the school day was over. No extracurricular activities at all. They had no phone. Physical and emotional abuse were also a part of his miserable days. He managed to keep his grades decent and to keep his mouth shut out of fear.

One day it was just too much! He went to a counselor at his high school and told her he just couldn't take it any more, he was terrified to go back to his Dad's home. The counselor called Wrenn House, the resource officer took the young man to the closest Safe Place Site where he was then transported to Wrenn House. The young man's mother was notified and within minutes she had begun her five plus hour drive. Late at night she and her husband arrived. By the next morning they were all back home where the young man intended to stay. Lesson learned—the grass is not always greener! And reasonable rules and chores are not a bad thing! And a nearby Safe Place site can be a life saver!

Karen Bonnewell
Safe Place Director
Haven House Services
Raleigh, NC

Life

Transitioning life styles, changing world
Broken promises, lies twisted and curled
Tears streaming down my saddened face
As the talking continues, my tears pick up the pace
Rolling down my cheek and off my chin
As I'm swallowing many more within
Nothing's easy when you feel this down and low
Everything and everybody's my worst foe
Touching me won't help the pain
Nothing can erase the stain
The stain of blood upon my skin
The images of the looney bin
My heart aches and pleads
To be blessed with good deeds

To be left alone to recover
All this transition has left it to smother
It's not fair to me, but then nothing is
I'm just another one of those lonely kids
waiting for life to deal them a better hand
To leave the hell they're in for something grand
Artistic expressions, temporary help when in the mood
or else upon myself I'm harsh and crude
But then again that's how I was raised
Transition is nothing worthy enough to be praised
So when I struggle the way I do
Realize that this nothing new
I deal with it every day
So now what do you have to say?

Cieana, 17
Volunteers of America
Sioux Falls, SD



Nick, 17
Pinedale Boys & Girls Club
Pinedale, CA

ME

Someone help me,
Someone save me,
Someone set me free.

I need to be let out of this cage,
I need to let go of all this rage.
I'm an abused puppet on an empty stage.
Will the audience seize the puppeteer,
Or leave the puppet alone from fear?

I love the world,
But hate my life,
It is dismal and filled with strife.
But with some help it could be nice.

Please fill it with love,
for it is dear, without someone surely
the end is near.
Hopefully someone will hear...

Brett, 14
Lutheran Services
ft. Myers, FL

I don't want to go home!

Here I am thinking to myself
To go home or depend on Foster Care
If I go home it will be too much to bare

Mom, I don't want to go home
I'm tired of your hits, the abuse
And the misuse of your love
I'm tired of the use of drugs

Little advice, I want a mother not a friend
Stop doubting, I'm not at the end
I'm mature for my age

My heart is too firm for you to break it
My head is too high for you too bring me down

My Love is too strong
To be taken advantage of
You are my mom and I thank you for not aborting me
But I'm old enough

So listen carefully, I forgive you but I don't forget
I'm tired of hearing and feeling your regrets
I've to live with the scars, flashbacks and
the abuse by husbands!

Mom, I'm sorry I don't want to go home!
Here I am safe and not alone

Lila, 15
Girls & Boys Town Central Florida
Oviedo, FL

I Tried SOO Hard

My life has the many ups and downs that everyone in life faces day after day. I've been through Hard Times and I've been through good times. And the only one that could make this possible is God himself. My Lord. He showed me the way out and I took it. Once someone told me That "The man who walks with God always get to his destination. And to tell you the truth I see that. And he's helped me through everything and anything that stands in my way. I now live my life through a quote my Father told me one day and that is "To get Respect you have to give it First. And through everything life offers it comes down to respect. I'm Sorry!

Chris, 16
Family Connection, Inc.
Maylene, AL

DON'T SPEAK

Listen! Chill!

*Keep your mind still; judge me later and think
What you will.*

*This is my heart. I've pulled the last stitch.
I've kept my lips sealed, but now it's time to bitch.*

*They expect it to vanish, my deep dark past,
But the memories stay from the first to the last.*

Picture the dawn all cold and blue.

When I close my eyes it reminds me of you.

My heart too far away to touch.

Just one more day is that asking too much?

I'm shattered like glass every last edgy shard.

Picking up the pieces is getting too hard.

Why was I dealt this ugly card?

Watch what you say, get to class, do your work,

It's fail or pass.

Every rule is like a kick in the ass.

What do they want? What do they mean?

I'm feeling too old at thirteen!

So yeah I know it could be a lot worse,

That's what they say, but I'm driving this hearse.

The road is dark ain't no way to switch lanes,

I can't stop or speed cause these aren't my games.

It happens like this when I think too deep.

So just hush, leave me and please

Don't speak!!!

Krystal, 17
Youth Service Bureau
South Bend, IN



Jessica, 6th Grade
Youth Services of Tulsa
Tulsa, OK



Photo by Wendy Keighley
"Girls Just Want to Have Fun"
Crosswinds Youth Services
Cocoa, FL

MEMOIRS: AN UNSEEN MIDDLE CHILD

Brought into this alien world in 1993,
Nobody in my family was really free.
Everybody had to work 'cause everybody had to eat,
Otherwise we would be starving on the barren streets.
At eight bankruptcy took away our lives,
My father even lost his kids and wife.
Five years of abuse and running away:
A band of brothers with nowhere to stay.
At thirteen abuse led me to attempted suicide,
I figured who can decide if I live or sail away?
Three hard days later I wind up with my dad,
And it made me anything but sad.
Now at fourteen I live with my best friend,
Silently hoping the scars will mend...

*Brett, 14
Lutheran Services
Ft. Myers, FL*

CRIES HERSELF TO SLEEP

Lost and all alone, abandoned all on her own
She cries herself to sleep
She has nothing to her keeps
Inside she's a young woman so sad
Locked away, this makes her mad
Razors unfortunately were her only friend
Then she came to the safe place
And signs a contract of no self harm
Because of her family her body and soul are scarred
And too her living life is so hard
I know what its like to be numb inside
I'm the girl who cries herself to sleep
I'm the one tired of being weak
I'm opening up to new things
Now I'm ready for what the future brings
But I'm not fully cured but I'm getting there
Least now I'm being heard no longer all alone
I have the safe place sweet as amazing graze

Lila, 15
Girls & Boys Town Central Florida
Oviedo, FL



Rebecca, 11
Youth Focus
Greensboro, NC

Gabe's Story

What brought me to shelter was well my Mom got addicted to crack. She abandoned me and my sister for long periods of time and the last month my sister was alive me and my sister were on our own. We had to take care of ourselves, then one night when me and my sister was at home by ourselves she hung herself. I was on the run from, CPS for awhile then they caught me and put me in states custody. I stayed on the run long enough to go to my sister's funeral in Indiana. The state put me in a residential placement called Spring Meadows. I escaped Spring Meadows and got caught in Mt.

Washington and brought back. The next night I was sent to Ten Broeck Hospital and diagnosed with ODD, depression, & conduct disorder. While I was at Ten Broeck my Dad killed himself and I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral making me more depressed. I escaped on New Years Eve after being there 2 months. 12 days later my pastor told me about Safe Place so I came here.

Since I've been here I've learned that there are people who care about me. So I think a lot about the reasons for me to live, such as maybe in a few years there will

be someone in the same shoes I'm in that I could relate to and help their situation. Since coming here I've worked on a lot like my depression, aggression, my cutting on myself, and my wanting to run from everything.

This place has changed my life. They gave me a chance, they believed in me when no one else would and I appreciate that. The Safe Place is my favorite place in the world, it's a place where teens can come to sort out their problems. I love this place.. thanks for hearing me.

Gabe

YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY



Kylar, 21
EOC Sanctuary
Fresno, CA

Dear Mr. President

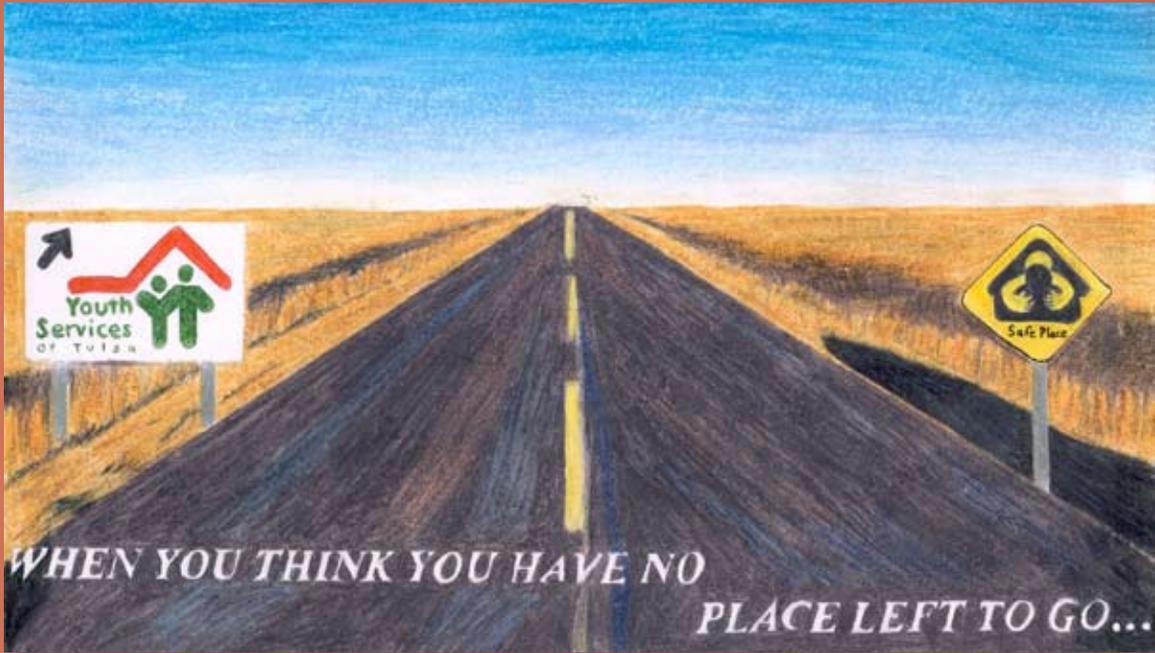
we have so many issues, some I just don't understand
Some that are small, some much more in demand
we have deadly diseases, most without a cure
How will you fix this Mr. President, all this pain we endure?
Drug addiction, world hunger and blood shed on the street
Homeless people sleep right outside your gate with no
food to eat

we have more problems then we need and this is
why I cry,

I shed tears on my pillow just wondering why
There are kids younger than me walking the streets in
the darkness

so tell me Mr. President, what are you doing to stop this?

"Jeannie" 18
youth Crisis Center
Jacksonville, FL



Mary, 12th Grade
Youth Services of Tulsa
Tulsa, OK

Truth

Living in a world filled with fear,
Can often times make things unclear.
So then you still make a choice,
Failing to hear your truthful inner voice.
You're failing to hear it, because that's what you chose,
Then before you know it, you're in
unfamiliar clothes.
That's what you see when you look in
The mirror, a stranger.
At once, you recognize you are in danger.
The next thing you know you're building
up anger,
When all you had to do was put the
clothes on a hanger.
Sadly it's the world you blame, when the
anger is towards you,
And because you don't admit it, you're
Lost and don't know what to do.
In the end you hate yourself, because
it's your own path that you drew.
At this point, you can't act like you
didn't have a clue,
Because you previously recognized that
Something was wrong,

And chose to ignore what mattered all
along.
If you truly love yourself, you'll want
to feel free,
But admitting that to yourself, is the
only way this could be.
This is because truth was, is, and
will always be key.
To lie to oneself, is the worst lie
of all,
That is because in the end, you will
always fall.
Having someone you fully trust to
call upon,
No matter if it's from sunrise to
sunset, or dusk until dawn,
Is bottom line to accomplish being
honest with who you are,
Because Jesus exists, and he's
never too far.

Peggy, 17
Salt Lake Youth Services
Salt Lake, UT

Feeling So Bad

Christopher called several times during the day asking about Safe Place. He works at the library and they have a sign on the building. Christopher was calling because he said he couldn't return home. He wanted to finish his shift at the library and then come to Alternative House. I spoke with the librarian who informed me that they were all concerned about Christopher and would hold his job for him if he needed time off.

Christopher arrived at Alternative House around 5pm. He stated that he did not want to speak with his parents. Upon

speaking with him he informed us that his litter sister (4 years old) stepped on his glasses on purpose. He became angry and hit her in the face giving her a black eye. Christopher felt so bad about what he did that he would leave the home early in the morning. He slept outside behind the mental health facility in Merrillville the first night and then slept in the recycling bin at the library. He felt terrible about what he did to his sister and could not face her or his parents so he ran away. His father was contacted and said that he would come in for counseling and pick up his son. His dad was happy to see him and informed

Christopher that he is not alone. The met with the counselor and the reunion went well. Counseling services were offered to the family and a future appointment was set. Christopher admitted to leaving the home because he was overcome with guilt and he thought his family would be better off without him. His father stated that he was needed to make their family complete. The family hugged and Christopher went home. Dad thanked us for keeping his son safe and off the streets for another night.

Nikki Wielgos

Safe Place & Event Coordinator

Crisis Center, Inc.

Gary, IN

A safe place is one free of disgrace
A warm bed in which you can rest your head
A place where you can rest
Where everyone does their best
A place of peace in everything a person sees
People would do what they need to do
And it all comes back to you
It is where people are kind
And you are free to speak your mind
Without punishment or hate
You can always commiserate
Be at ease
People are pleased
Appreciation is there
People act and things are fair
There is often felt joy
Girls can be girls and boys can be boys.
Things are quiet and tranquil
There's a green grassy hill
There are three meals a day
People take awhile to pass away
People are free of pain
There is lucidity brought by rain
There's a loving atmosphere
Things are done, life lived in the
now and here

People are honest and true
You'll hardly ever be blue
Friends, etc. are loyal
It makes you feel royal
Those bells of peace do ring
On other people, people don't swing
And you'll really feel like a king
Everything is all right
You'll be surrounded by light
And blissful darkness at night
The temperatures are warm and cool
You'll never feel like a fool
Everything is lucid
And things, they are blessed
There is no absence of crime
Your feelings will be sublime
There is of course affection
You'll feel a connection
When you enter a room
You won't feel impending doom
Flowers bloom colorful and bright
And there's rarely a fight.

*Sean, 16
Salt Lake County Youth Services
Salt Lake, UT*

SAFE STATION

A place to come, a place to share
A place where everyone shows care
When you are lost you will be found
We keep you up when you are down

You deserve a better place
Your welcome here, we'll keep you safe
Away from harm, away from fear
And Safe Station is always here

We're here for all, who think and do
But most of all, we're here for you.

*Kiera, 15
Youth Service Bureau Safe Station
South Bend, IN*

FIREFIGHTER ENGINE HOUSE 13

"The heat of this world rests upon your shoulders." TYK

You possess an essence of dignity,
Making saving lives appear effortlessly.
Forsaking your very own offspring,

To save mine,
In the form of heroic acts,
Trading fatherhood for time,
Time to complete the circle of brotherhood,
Often taken advantage of and misunderstood.

A brotherhood built on sweat,
Humility,
And tears,

Whether on the team
Two, twenty or fifty years.
Thank you for sharing a glimpse
Of your world

With a community,
A community of harvested seeds,
entrusted to me.

Tridgett Kent
Site Director
Youth In Need
St. Louis, MO

Away from the Noise

If you need a place to get away from the noise
Where you know you could come and meet girls and boys
You could come to a place called Safe Station
A place where you could meet new relation

Come to a Safe Station, even if you hurt
Come, come, we won't leave you in the dirt
We are people who would like to help you
We are people who also love you

Come to Safe Station, don't be alone
Come to a place you could call home
Don't worry our staff won't bite
But we will leave on the light

If it's pretty hard at home
And you have problems but you don't know who to phone
Phone us, the people who can help
Go on and ask the people we help

We will solve your problems
And we'll even help you solve them
We'll always be here
The people you are near

Cornelius, 16
Youth Service Bureau Safe Station
South Bend, IN



Trent, 16
With Friends, Inc.
Gastonia, NC

Tammy's Story: McDonald's employee offers understanding, connection to help

It was a Tuesday afternoon in November, the temperature hovering around 38 degrees. A call came to the YMCA Safe Place Services crisis hotline from a McDonald's restaurant. The McDonald's manager reported that a 13-year old girl, "Tammy," was in the women's bathroom sitting on the floor crying. A worker had found the girl crying, dressed only in a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. She whimpered that she had run away from home two days earlier.

It is hard to imagine but this 13-year-old had spent the night in a doghouse several blocks away from home the cold evening before. She later explained that fortunately the dog was there to help keep her warm.

Tammy remembered learning from a school presentation that she could go to a Safe Place if she needed help. However, when she arrived at the McDonald's, she hesitated to immediately ask for help and panicked, running into the bathroom. She knew that all she had to do was ask and she would be safe.

The McDonald's employee, who discovered Tammy, brought her to her manager's office and assured her that Safe Place could help. This employee could say this with certainty because, at age 12, she herself had been helped 15 years earlier by Safe Place's YMCA Shelter House. The manager then contacted the Safe Place Hotline and made certain the young teen got something to eat as she began to get warm.

When the Safe Place volunteer arrived, she thanked the McDonald's staff and took Tammy to talk with the staff professionals at YMCA Safe Place Services. There the staff determined the horrible circumstances with which Tammy was trying to deal. Tammy was in the custodial care of her uncle and step aunt. She never knew her biological father and her mother gave her up at 14 months because she was not capable of raising her. Before leaving home, Tammy overheard her aunt tell her uncle that if their "niece" did not get out of the house, she would have to take a knife to her. With that information

and past experiences, she knew she had to get out.

Tammy stayed at our YMCA Shelter House for nearly two weeks. Every member of her family was brought to the shelter for counseling. These were all very difficult sessions with each family member pitting one against the other. Tammy was referred to an agency that was able to provide specialized psychological treatment. She even spent a brief period in the hospital battling her intense depression. She went back in school and weekly meetings her therapist.

The diamond-shaped Safe Place sign at the McDonald's signaled that help was available to Tammy and thousands of other teens in our community and across the country.

Eric Tadatada
Outreach Director
YMCA Safe Place Services
Louisville, KY

Silent

She made me cry and most of the time I knew why
I was a bad child and completely wild
Out of control but, still I never told
I keep quiet an silent for years
And just let go all my tears
She put me down and pushed me around
I just wanted the chance to say,
"It's not right, you treating me this way."
At night I cried asking myself, "why?"
Why am I the one to blame?
Am I the reason she acts this way?
Why am I the one she uses like a mop?

Why can't I just tell her to stop?
So I know why she yells
And I know why she hits
And at this point I have but one wish
I wish there was a place where someone
won't always be on my case
Where no one would tell me I'm not
good enough or think they can always play rough
Where I wouldn't have to fear taking a
Step in her house
Where I would never feel a tear or
a drop of blood on my blouse

Lacey, 14
Children's Aid Society of West Texas, Inc.
Wichita Falls, TX

NEW BEGINNING

I HOPE I GO HOME TODAY SO THAT I CAN FEEL LIKE I'M FREE

I HOPE I GO TO THE PLACE WHERE I CAN BE ME

I KNOW I MESSED UP BUT IM TRYING 2 MAKE IT RIGHT

FIRST I SAW DARKNESS, BUT GOD DIRECTED ME 2 LIGHT

I KNOW I PUT MYSELF IN THIS HERE SITUATION

THAT'S WHY I'M SO CONFUSED, AND MIND FULL OF FRUSTRATION

GOD PUT ME HERE FOR A REASON, TO LEARN A LESSON, WHICH I DID ACHIEVE

AND NOW THAT THE LESSON IS LEARNED, ALL I HAVE TO DO NOW IS BELIEVE THIS
MADE ME STRONGER AND STRONGER

THERES NO REASON 2 BE WEAK

THE PROMISES THAT I MAKE ARE THE THINGS THAT I HAVE TO KEEP

I'M READY TO START A NEW LIFE, AND STOP ALL THE SINNING

ALTHOUGH THEY ARE 4 GIVEN

I CAN TRULY SAY NOW THAT FOR ME THIS IS A NEW BEGINNING

Essie, 16
Our House Shelter
Jackson, MS

What is Safe Place

- Safe Place provides immediate help and safety for youth at locations displaying the yellow and black, diamond-shaped sign.
- Safe Place is a network of thousands of businesses and community locations that connect kids looking for help with a youth service agency.
- Safe Place connects youth and families to support services.
- Safe Place offers an opportunity for youth to get help sooner, minimizing crisis situations.
- Safe Place often helps reduce unnecessary placements in juvenile facilities.
- Safe Place offers numerous volunteer opportunities through youth-serving agencies.
- Safe Place gives many segments of the community an opportunity to keep kids safe.
- Safe Place is where kids get help...FAST.

For more information, visit www.nationalsafeplace.org





National Safe Place
2411 Bowman Avenue
Louisville, KY 40217
Toll Free: (888) 290-7233
Fax: (502) 635-3678
www.nationalsafeplace.org

Heart of the Matter