

Excelsior!news

EXCELSIOR YOUTH CENTER FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH FALL 2004
The Largest Residential Treatment Center in the Country for High Risk, Troubled GIRLS, AGES 11-18.

Jail Cell to Graduation

From sharing a jail cell to soon sharing a high school graduation stage, two girls are turning around their lives. Kristy and Jen met in a California jail in 2002. Now, both girls will be receiving their high school diplomas at Excelsior's winter graduation.

"Pressure and jealousy" were two of the factors that caused Jen to spiral down the wrong path, she says. The daughter of a doctor, Jen's childhood started off relatively normal. "But when my half sister was born, I felt replaced. My Dad is a genius and so is my mom and I couldn't handle the pressure. I started hanging with the wrong crowd and stopped doing the right thing."

Jen began to experiment with drugs and a "full blown drug addiction to crack cocaine" followed. Jen's drug addiction led to a life of stealing, truancy and working the streets. "I was so gone. I just didn't care. I thought I was untouchable." Jen was able to stay under the radar until a drug case landed her in jail. Ultimately, Jen would get another chance to change her life at Excelsior.

"I was envious and cruel. I couldn't compete with my mentally and physically challenged brother. He required all of my mom's time," explains Kristy. At age 14, Kristy decided to look for attention somewhere else and began running away. "I liked to run away because my mom would worry and that felt like she cared." Kristy continued down a path of self-destruction. She started self-abusing, using crystal methamphetamines, overdosing on pills and participating in other self-destructive behaviors. As a result, she was in and out of mental hospitals and group homes. "I hated the world but I hated myself even more." Kristy's dangerous life style finally caught up with her and she ended up in jail. "No one in California wanted me - they thought I couldn't be rehabilitated. So, I was sent to Excelsior."

Jen and Kristy arrived at Excelsior with serious drug addictions, out of control behaviors and hardly any school credits. The turning point for both girls was hitting 'rock bottom.' "I didn't like who I'd become," says Jen. "I couldn't put my family through anymore pain," says Kristy. With the help of staff and family who refused to give up on the girls, Jen and Kristy finally started to work through their problems and began to heal. Now both girls are very active in school. Jen is the captain of the volleyball team and Kristy is part of student government and both girls are members of the Excelsior Step Team. "You have to love yourself before you can love anyone else," says Kristy. She says she hopes to become an actress and wants to attend New York University. "I am going to win an Oscar."

"I am continuing to work on myself," says Jen. "I plan on going to college and I may even follow in the footsteps of my father and become a doctor."

Jen and Kristy have been clean and sober for 8 months, and both girls will be receiving their high school diplomas in December ... a long way from their California detention center.



Excelsior Reflections:

"Thank you for believing in me. I will try my best to succeed with all my graduate classes," writes Angela, a former Excelsior student who earned her BA in Psychology and is now working in California on her MA in Counseling Psychology on an Excelsior Lawton Scholarship. Angela spoke at the May 2004 Excelsior graduation and she writes: "It was a great privilege to speak and very meaningful to meet the Lawtons and reconnect with Excelsior and all the extraordinary staff that still works there! Thank you."

Angela, former student.

"I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for being there for all those girls. I lived at Excelsior from 1976-77 and the emotional and mental growth and life skills were awesome and have benefited me countless times. After I left there I still had a hard road but I always remembered Excelsior and when I saw the public service announcement on tv, I had to go to the website and see. Today I have four children, am clean and sober and am an administrative assistant at a Colorado elementary school. Thanks, again, and I'm so glad Excelsior still exists!"

Angie, former student

"My life may have been very different had I not been sent to Excelsior. Stubborn as I was, I couldn't see it at the time but thankfully, time provided me with clarity and the ability to accept the gifts I have been given. Excelsior literally saved my life, changed my perceptions and my realities. It provided me a safe place, one where I felt cared about and important. I learned how to deal with things appropriately, although it was a struggle!"

Chris, Excelsior student in 1982, now a grocery store manager supervising 100 people in Salt Lake City.



Dick Jones, beloved founder and continuing benefactor, is memorialized with a bronze sculpture located at the entrance to Excelsior Youth Center. Renowned sculptor, Rhonda Vickers, was commis-

sioned to create the life-like bust. Dick and his wife, Julie, both of whom helped create Excelsior 31 years ago, both remain actively involved with Excelsior today.

Board Challenge:

You have the power to help deeply troubled girls live up to their potential through your contribution to our annual giving campaign, the **Excelsior Board Challenge**. A way to double your gift's impact – members of our Board of Directors will personally match community donations up to a total of \$20,000. Will you help us meet this Board Challenge and maximize the funds available to help our girls?

Colorado allows taxpayers to offset their Colorado income tax liabilities with credits when they contribute money to promote child care in Colorado before December 31, 2004. The amount of the credit is equal to 50 percent of the total amount of money contributed. Excelsior now qualifies for this tax credit program. If you want to participate, your entire donation will support child care (before and after school) provided for our youngest clients at Excelsior. Please use the enclosed giving envelopes. Questions? Call Kathy Graveley at 303-693-1550x226. Thank You!

**Many thanks to
Excelsior's donors since
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(Please forgive any omissions)**

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Speaker's Bureau

*Excelsior loves to share its hopeful
message with civic clubs, church and
school groups. Please contact the
Development office at 693-1550x311
to plan a facility tour or schedule a
speaker for your group.*

Planned Giving

Please consider leaving your legacy to Excelsior Youth Center to support our overwhelmingly successful treatment program for adolescent girls. Giving through your estate, life insurance, retirement plan or life income arrangements through a Charitable Gift Annuity can be an economical way to leave your legacy to Excelsior without reducing your present income. For further information, please call Kathy Graveley at 303-693-1550x226.

What Can Brown Do for You? Chinchilla Transport?

A unique partnership between United Parcel Service, UPS, and Excelsior resulted in the delivery of a baby female chinchilla to a deserving Excelsior student returning to her California home in September. Uh? Yes, UPS 'delivered' by sending Masha a wrapped package with a gift certificate enclosed for the purchase of the baby chinchilla.

Masha, 17 years old, arrived at Excelsior last year drug-addicted, suicidal and depressed in her adopted California family. She tells of the lingering effects of a horrid early childhood in a Russian orphanage. Despite her American adoption at age 11, Masha says by adolescence her lack of trust in people resulted in drug addictions and other self-destructive behaviors. Only at Excelsior did she begin to trust people, she said. After a year's treatment and education, Masha returned to her Southern California home and public school and "things are going well and she is easing back into school," writes her Mom. "I am very proud of her and I know she is going to make it. She seems able to cope with whatever is going on. Thank you again, Excelsior, for all you have done. I see so much growth in her."



But what's with the UPS connection?

Melody Horton and others from the UPS Foundation, listened to Masha's story on a site visit for a grant proposal. Enthralled, impressed and motivated to action by Masha's journey and her beloved chinchilla collection, Melody contacted the local Pet Palace to purchase the newborn female chinchilla that Masha had voluntarily "played with and socialized" at the nearby store. "We heard how attached she was to that baby chinchilla at the pet store she visited daily and I was determined to purchase and ship it to her," explains Horton. "Despite my finest efforts, I resolved that UPS cannot ship live animals so we had to settle on a gift certificate. We hope to stay in touch with Masha as we were so moved by her story and her astounding recovery and positive, hopeful attitude despite her dreadful past."

Masha is thrilled with the new chinchilla so she can begin breeding them. Future? She says she will graduate from high school next year and then intends to study architecture at the University of Southern California to "bring grand Russian architecture to America!"

"DREAMS"

An exciting Creative Expression Group featuring 40 girls from Genesis and Shalom cottages explored a variety of mediums this summer through this unique form of art therapy integrated with multicultural components and music.

"DREAMS" was the overall theme with projects such as mobiles, scented dream pillows, mandalas, masks, dream boxes, body collages, feeling boxes and quilt squares (featured right).

The girls progressed through 27 sessions and developed greater awareness of different cultures, music, symbols, coping skills, relaxation, affirmations, body awareness, boundaries, sensory input and team building. "The girls responded with amazing creativity, insight and an increased awareness of how to build positive relationships with their peers," said Colleen McKernan, staff coordinator.



Ever Upward, Excelsior's annual fundraising gala, generated over \$100,000 last April to serve the therapeutic and educational needs of our young clients. Rhonda and Tommy Vickers of Castle Pines Village served as Honorary Chairs of the event.

"These Excelsior girls act like they are wanted because Excelsior makes them know they're wanted," says Rhonda Vickers.

"This is the most impressive organization for young women I've ever seen. Tommy and I are honored to be a part of this fine program."



A committee, co-chaired by Molly Ross and Bill Lane, is busily preparing next year's event slated for Friday, May 13, 2005 at the Wild Life Experience Museum. The Vickers have graciously agreed to again serve as Honorary Chairs. Amy and John Lawton will be honored for their 10-year commitment to underwrite Excelsior's higher education scholarship program. Grateful past recipients will share their personal, emotional testimonials. The exciting Step Team will again perform for the guests. Mark your calendars and don't miss this wonderful evening of celebration.

Excelsior!

Excelsior Youth Centers
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Did you know? ...

☺ *Excelsior's Step Team, now 13 strong, continues to win honors and applause wherever they appear. Recently, the team won 2nd place among 100's of groups in the 38th annual Gateway to the Rockies Parade in Original Aurora. Reggie McDaniel, radio personality, successfully assisted the Team's efforts to raise funds for new uniforms. Thanks, Reggie!*

☺ *Our recreation program needs strong, reliable ping pong tables, on wheels, in good condition. Please call Sheila Stanley, 303-693-1550, if you can help. Thank you.*

☺ *Strings, 1700 Humboldt, graciously hosted a 'get-to-know-you' reception for Excelsior last June. Following the reception, guests stayed for dinner and a percentage of the evening's dinner receipts were contributed to Excelsior. Thank you, Strings!*

☺ *More than 50 people celebrated Excelsior's bi-annual picnic reunion in August. Former students arrived from throughout the country to reminisce and show their former rooms and campus to their families ... so many stories!*

☺ *Denver Nuggets' Coach Jeff Bzdelik's high school friends contributed \$1,000 recently to Excelsior in honor of Nina and Jeff. GO NUGGETS! (Nina told them this is one of her favorite charities!) Thank you, Nina and Jeff*

☺ *Kyle Svanda and Christian Lewis of the House of Blues have generously donated over 300 concert tickets this past summer to Excelsior. Concerts included a variety of musical styles ranging from oldies like Styx, and KISS, to Hip Hop favorites. They enjoyed jazz specialists George Benson, Al Green and Diana Krall. They also learned that the Colorado Symphony Orchestra "can make beautiful music when playing Led Zeppelin tunes," says an Excelsior client. Thanks, House of Blues!*

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Mission: Excelsior Youth Center is committed to the treatment and education of young females to enhance their successful re-integration into their families and their communities. As the largest residential treatment center for girls in the country, Excelsior has been providing a home, structure, treatment and education for young women, ages 11-18, for 31 years on its 33-acre Aurora campus. Newsletter published three times annually by Development Department.

Excelsior Youth Center is accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, Inc. (COA), which attests that an organization meets the highest national standards in programming, services and safety.

