

Student Overcomes to Graduate

SMP Senior Bernard Draper (Urban Lutheran H.S.) has always had difficulties with his eyes. Bernard's mother is blind and he inherited the visual difficulties which led to her blindness. As a young child, Bernard suffered a detached retina in one eye. Surgery was able to re-attach it and he was able to see again in both eyes. But in grade eight, the retina in his other eye detached and he underwent multiple surgeries and missed a great deal of school. He had another eye surgery in grade nine, and, although the retina was re-attached, the vision in that eye remains poor.

Bernard and his twin sister Breneé, also an SMP senior at DUL, lost their father to cancer in 2003, but their mother, with the financial support of the Freedom Fund, managed to keep her youngest two children in a private faith-based school.

When it came time for high school, however, with the Freedom Fund no longer available, Mrs. Draper was worried about sending the twins to a public school. "I couldn't send them to a private school without financial help and I didn't want them to go to a public school. God was right on time," she added: the principal at their middle school told her about Student Mentor Partners.

Acceptance into the SMP program made

it financially possible for Mrs. Draper to send her twins to Detroit Urban Lutheran High School. Bernard says he was



Bernard Draper and mentor Greg Leslie at the SMP summer picnic.

surprised to learn there was any organization that would "put up a significant portion of my tuition and provide a mentor besides." For Bernard, the "whole experience has been so inspiring!"

Bernard's mentor, Greg Leslie, "has become like a father to me.

Truthfully, I always find

Greg's advice to be very genuine and for that reason I rely on him for a lot for guidance." Bernard's mother is similarly enthusiastic: "Greg is the greatest; he and Bernard became very close."

"Greg motivates me to do my best academically and in life," Bernard says. "On one school progress report, Greg pointed out that my grades were lower than usual. He urged me to work harder and suggested ways I might study more efficiently."

Bernard has also enjoyed the many activities that SMP organizes for the students and mentors, even the community service projects. "We make it a mission of ours," Bernard says, "to attend almost every event that is offered by SMP, because we really enjoy them.

Bernard has been accepted at more than one college. He will decide in light of his planned pharmacy major.

**Save
the
Date:**

**Student
Mentor
Partners
2010
Annual
Founders'
Dinner**

**Thursday
May 13,
2010**

**The Ark
at
St. Ambrose**

Student Receives Award

For the past year, SMP student Rachel Von Pagels (grade 11, St. Frances Cabrini H.S.) has volunteered three hours every Thursday evening at the Westland Youth Assistance Program, working with 14- to 17-year-olds as a peer facilitator. At the end of January, at a dinner for participants and supporters, Westland Youth Assistance Program Director Paul Motz and city representatives awarded Rachel “Westland Female Youth of the Year 2009.”

In addition to the plaque naming her as awardee, Rachel also received certificates from Mayor

William R. Wild of Westland and from State Senator Glenn Anderson and a Wayne County Resolution honoring her. After receiving her awards, Rachel thanked Motz and her family. “I thank



Paul [Motz] for instilling in me the idea of being all that I can be. I appreciate the support of the entire Youth Assistance Program,” she said. “My family has always been there. I wouldn't be the person I am today without their unconditional love and encouragement.”

The youth that Rachel works with have gotten in trouble with the law and chose to participate in the program rather than receive other sanctions. Along with an adult leader, Rachel facilitates the youth classes.

SMP Partner High Schools

Academy of the Sacred Heart, Bloomfield Hills
 Bishop Foley, Madison Heights
 DeLaSalle Collegiate, Warren
 Detroit Cristo Rey, Detroit
 Detroit Urban Lutheran, Detroit
 Loyola, Detroit
 Mercy, Farmington Hills
 Regina, Warren
 St. Frances Cabrini, Allen Park
 Shrine, Royal Oak
 U of D Jesuit, Detroit

Janet's Corner:

“Blessed to be part of it . . .”

In March I will celebrate my first year with Student Mentor Partners and naturally I am reflecting on this year. The last executive director, Tom Sklut, has been a good friend for years so I was well aware of SMP before I came on board. But it is one thing to ‘know’ and another thing to make it all work. I have been so impressed with our staff—Janelle and Jessica—they are caring and wise beyond their years. And when called for, they can be very tough.



Janet Eckhoff

In the office we go from one thing to the next. We recruited 25 new students and new mentors last spring and summer. We had a great Kick Off picnic on Belle Isle and the new school year began. We have an event each month along with mentor roundtables and student training. And already we are recruiting new students for next year.

We have had more students than in recent years, students who are doing very well at school and getting good grades. Suzie is class president, many are in sports and also keeping up with their church volunteer work. And the new mentor/student relationships are coalescing and working.

One surprising thing to me is how much the mentors help us. They not only do a great job with their SMP student, but many of them volunteer to help with newsletters, organize the holiday party and help us raise funds to keep the program running. I have been to many a Rotary Club meeting to tell our story with one of our mentors, who arranged the presentation, giving his or her perspective on why it works so well.

And there are always student issues—grades, family issues, school issues—and we get involved in crafting solutions that will work for our students.

This year we will graduate five more students, bringing our total graduates to 84 with 83 of them going on to college.

My biggest takeaway this year? SMP changes lives and I have been blessed to be part of it.

—Janet Eckhoff, Executive Director

How Often Do You Search the Net?

We have an interesting way for you to help raise funds for Student Mentor Partners. And it won't cost you a dime! SMP is one of the non-profit organizations listed with GoodSearch.com. We urge you to use this search engine instead of Google whenever you search the Internet. Sister Canice Johnson, one of SMP's Board members, has been using GoodSearch for many months and finds it every bit as good as Google or Yahoo. It is, in fact, powered by Yahoo, so it has Yahoo's excellent search capability.

The next time you do a search, open www.goodsearch.com and add it to your Favorites. Then, on the GoodSearch page, enter your search item in the box. Just below that box, you will find the question, "Who do you GoodSearch for?" In the box below that question, type in "Student Mentor Partners" and then click "Verify." Once this is done, click on "Search" next to your item to be searched.

Use GoodSearch every time you do a search. After the first time, "Student Mentor Partners (St. Clair Shores)" will be in your "Who do you GoodSearch for?" box, unless you empty the cookies from your computer, at which point you would need to enter "Student Mentor Partners" again.

For every time you GoodSearch, SMP will receive 1¢. That may not sound like much, but think how many computer searches you do in a day or a week. If we can get A LOT OF PEOPLE to search the Internet regularly on behalf of Student Mentor Partners, it will amount to \$1,000 or more over the course of a year. So ask your friends, neighbors, relatives, people at work, school or church, acquaintances, anyone you can think of--to use GoodSearch for Student Mentor Partners. SMP could do a lot of GOOD with the \$1,000 or more!

**SMP is on Facebook.
Become a Facebook fan of
Student Mentor Partners.
And check out our website,
www.studentmentorpartners.org**

Coordinator Enjoys Students and Mentors

Jessica Johnson, SMP Mentor Coordinator, has been with SMP since October. As an AmeriCorps Member, she is providing year-long service to SMP, for which she receives a stipend and loan repayment funding for her college studies. "I love my Detroit community and therefore I enjoy working with a non-profit organization" that serves the community.



Jessica Johnson

Jessica works closely with Janelle Tricoli, Program Manager, in the case management process for each SMP student.

Jessica says she loves her work with SMP, especially the interactions with the students and mentors that she talks with at least once a month. She sees her work as helping the mentors and their students with building and maintaining the relationships that are so important to the SMP process. Her greatest challenge when she first began her work with SMP was to build trust with students, mentors, and parents. She was able to do so by conveying the attitude that "I am only here to help."

In her work, Jessica uses social media to connect with the students. For example, she periodically sends a Facebook message, asking the students to report back on how things are going with their mentors, how often they have communicated over the past few weeks and what activities they have shared. Sometimes the Facebook messages encourage the students to make use of helpful information, such as the website www.FastWeb.com, which provides information on college scholarships.

Jessica is the oldest of three girls in her family. In her spare time, Jessica enjoys outdoor activities, like horseback riding, camping, and canoeing. She especially loves anything that has to do with water, even snow.

Student Mentor Partners



*Investing in the future
one student at a time*

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We're on the web!

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Address Service Requested

In August 2010, SMP will admit **30** new SMP students, bringing our total number to 60.

Spread the word to friends and neighbors who might want their youth to participate in SMP.

Have them call 586-445-6295 regarding Parent Information Meetings.

Founders' Dinner 2010

Sponsors Sought for Fundraiser

The 2010 Founders' Dinner will take place on May 13 at The Ark in Grosse Pointe. The event is SMP's main fundraiser of the year. The number of students the program will accept for next year is dependent on its success. More information will come, but save the date now.

SMP Board members and others are seeking organizations or individuals to become sponsors for this important event.

As in prior years at the dinner, our graduating seniors will share their reflections on their SMP experience.

High Grades Recognized at SMP Party



The six SMP students with the highest grade point average at the last marking period were honored at the holiday party in January. They are from left to right: Kourree Johnson, Suzie McClellan, Logan Quinn, Haley Hulan, Thomas Kwiatkowski, and Erica Rollins.