

SGA LIFE

Improving the lives of Chicago's youth since 1911

News from SGA Youth & Family Services

Fall 2008



Photo by Susan McMillen

Family Life and Teen Parenting Services

Facing and Overcoming Tough Challenges

Confident, driven, and selfless, 19-year-old Katina is the epitome of a successful young woman who has overcome adversity to not only survive, but flourish. Indeed, as a joyful, personable university sophomore, Katina doesn't show a hint of the tougher challenges she's faced, including teenage pregnancy and post-partum depression.

Katina learned that she was pregnant at age 15 while a student in high school.

She moved out of her parent's home to live with the father of her child, although she remained in the neighborhood. Katina was referred to one of SGA's **Early Advantage** social workers for support during her pregnancy and after her child's birth. In addition to at-school therapy sessions and home visits from her SGA social worker, Katina attended weekly peer-support group meetings.

"I followed their advice," Katina says, "and walked, swam, drank water, ate lots of fruits and vegetables. I think that's why [the pregnancy] was so easy."

In the spring of 2005, Katina gave birth to a beautiful baby girl: Marie Elena or Leni as she would affectionately be nicknamed. When asked about Leni, Katina's face lights up.

"She's my everything," Katina beams. "She's so happy, always smiling and laughing. And she's so smart. Sometimes she does things, and I wonder, how did she think of that? I couldn't even think of that!"

It wasn't always so easy. When Leni was first born, Katina stayed at home while Leni's father went to work from eight in the morning to ten at night, essentially leaving Katina as Leni's sole caretaker. Katina went through post-partum depression, unable to breast-feed

or sometimes even hold her baby. Katina's mother quit her job to help care for Leni. With her mother's help and intensive therapy from her SGA clinicians, Katina was able to pull through her depression.

"After I got through it, I just wanted to hold her all the time," Katina says. "I didn't even want anyone else to carry her, just me!"

Katina soon returned to high school, leaving Leni in her mother's care during the day. She dove headfirst into the extracurricular and academic life she had missed for months. As a junior, she played varsity soccer, practicing before and after school. In her senior year, Katina became president of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters club, joined the senior-event planning committee, acted and sang in the Drama Club's production of "Little Shop of Horrors," and was treasurer of the Student Council.

She took mainly Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes, both college-level classifications, her junior and senior years. She graduated in the top 20 of her class at Kelly High—an outstanding achievement at a school with over 3,400 students.

Katina encountered difficulties in applying to colleges, especially for financial aid, but with the help of one of her teachers, Katina was accepted and enrolled in college in fall 2007. Although finding financial aid continues to be a struggle, Katina perseveres in her pursuit of higher education.

On top of meeting the demands of parenting and attending college, Katina also finds time to volunteer with SGA's Brighton Park Drug Free Coalition. At a recent town-hall meeting on alcohol awareness, Katina not only attended, but brought her entire family.

With her family's love, the support of her SGA social workers and peer group, and her own strong resolve, Katina's story shines with success and promise.

Brighton Park: Snapshot of a Community in Need

SGA Helps Close Service Gap There

SGA Youth & Family Services' work in Brighton Park puts the agency in the right place at the right time.

The Brighton Park community area, located on Chicago's southwest side, has undergone sweeping demographic changes over the last 15 years. What was once a largely white population has become predominantly Latino. Latino residents—many of whom were born in another country—now make up almost 80 percent of the community.

From 1990 to 2005, Brighton Park experienced one of the city's highest growth rates in child and youth population, and at the same time, the community also experienced one of the city's largest increases in children living in poverty.

Brighton Park Facts

- **Population: 45,000 (77 percent Latino).**
- **More than one-third of Brighton Park's population are children under the age of 18.**
- **Nearly one-third of Brighton park's children live in poverty.**
- **Of Brighton Park's Spanish-speaking households, 20 percent are linguistically isolated, meaning household members age 14 years or older have limited English proficiency.**
- **Kelly High School's graduation rate has declined every year since 1997, going from 80 percent to 63.4 percent in 2003.**
- **From January to December 2006, violent crimes increased by 6.6% in Brighton Park, while the rest of the city saw an average decrease in crime of 2.5%.**

Sources: *Chicago Police Department Annual Report 2006* and *Chicago Children and Youth 1990–2010: Changing Population Trends and Their Implications for Services.*



David Pintor, SGA's Substance Abuse Prevention Community Organizer, speaking at a recent event at Burroughs Elementary—co-sponsored by SGA and Brighton Park Neighborhood Council.

The burgeoning youth population has strained local educational resources. Most of the community's elementary schools are overcrowded. Brighton Park's only public high school, Kelly High School, is one of the largest in Chicago and operates at 174% its capacity with an enrollment of 3,400.

Sources both within and outside the community have identified other challenges that affect the area's young people. In 2002, the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC) conducted a community needs assessment in which community residents cited gang and drug activity among the major threats to community safety. Quality of parenting classes and lack of youth programs made it to residents' list of top community concerns. A recent study by University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children, *Chicago Children and Youth 1990–2010*, found Brighton Park underserved in the area of child and youth programming, particularly with respect to after-school services and day care.

Over the last six years, SGA has systematically built its support to Brighton Park, providing service to 650 clients and 1,500 community members annually. SGA currently offers assistance to area youth and their families in all four of the agency's services groups:

- School-Based Services
- Juvenile Justice Services
- Substance Abuse Prevention Services
- Family Life and Teen Parenting Services

Kelly High School and each of the community's elementary schools benefit from the full range of SGA programs.

A longtime partner with the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, SGA has strengthened its service network in Brighton Park through collaboration with BPNC on the Drug Free Community Coalition project and, most recently, the Safety Net Works Initiative—a violence prevention program.

BPNC Executive Director Patrick Brosnan notes success, "The partnership between SGA and BPNC has been powerful in addressing the youth services gap here."

From the Executive Director/President, Susana Marotta, PhD



Welcome to the Fall edition of *SGA LIFE*. This issue focuses on Chicago's Brighton Park community, presenting a sample of the programs that SGA Youth & Family Services offers to at-risk teens, children, and young adults there. You will find a case study from each of the

organization's four service groups: School-Based Services; Juvenile Justice Services; Substance Abuse Prevention Services; and Family Life and Teen Parenting Services. Each is a story of personal triumph and the positive influence that SGA is able to provide thanks to your support. Client's names and other details have been changed to protect confidentiality. If you have questions about any of our services or feedback on the newsletter, please e-mail us—admin@sga-youth.org.

Please note that the Donor List of SGA supporters for fiscal year 2008 will appear in our new Annual Report, scheduled for publication in late November. To request a copy, email us at the above address.

Donor Profile: Joseph Pedott

When Joe Pedott talks about SGA Youth & Family Services, he speaks with a note of authority. His passion about SGA and the many ways the organization helps young people springs from a unique perspective.

Joe is a former client of the agency—as a young man growing up in Chicago, he was the recipient of support and a scholarship from SGA.

In his 20s, Joe moved to San Francisco where he eventually found success. His company's products are sold across America and around the world. One of them, the Chia Pet, has even been placed in the archives at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

But Joe has never forgotten the help he received from SGA as a teenager. Today, he is one of SGA's most loyal supporters and advocates.

In 2007, he established the Joseph Pedott Perpetual Endowment Trust and SGA received the very first grant—a \$50,000 gift to the Madelaine Foreman Fund within SGA's endowment. Annual income from the endowment helps support the charitable work of SGA across the city of Chicago.



Joseph Pedott addresses the crowd at SGA's 2008 Benefit Dinner where he pledged his continued support.

Substance Abuse Prevention Services

From Drugs to Diploma: Avenues for Success Program Turns Teen in the Right Direction

When he started **Avenues for Success**, Daniel abused alcohol and marijuana and was at high risk for dropping out of school. But two years later, with support from his SGA social worker, Daniel graduated from high school free of drugs.

Avenues for Success is an SGA program that provides group and individual counseling, prevention workshops, adventure-based education, and referral and follow-up to teens who abuse alcohol or drugs or who are at-risk for such behavior. Substance abuse carries heavy costs, particularly for young people. The leading causes of death among adolescents are accidents, homicides, and suicides—all of which are associated with alcohol and drug use. Substance abuse is also linked with increased risk of school dropout.

School staff referred 16-year-old Daniel to Avenues for Success because he attended school while intoxicated. His SGA social worker described him as “bright, articulate, honest and forthright about his involvement [with drugs].” He learned that Daniel abused alcohol and marijuana “to deal with what was happening around him.”

In the Avenues for Success peer group sessions, members discuss their substance use histories, as well as fears, hopes, and life plans. Daniel became a leader in his group, promoting positive discussion among his peers. His social worker saw that Daniel was



Photo by Susan McMillen

Students attending school face many challenges as they prepare for their future.

gaining a strong sense of self, “knowing who he was, where he had been, and where he wanted to go, despite the hurdles around and in front of him.” He became a source of inspiration for his group members and classmates.

During his senior year, Daniel improved his attendance and academic record, while many of his friends dropped out of school or were expelled or arrested. Together with his social worker, Daniel began to develop goals for after high school, focusing on career and family aspirations. He is now looking to attend a mechanical technician training program at a local college. Avenues for Success helped Daniel confront substance abuse and discover the opportunities that lie before him.

Juvenile Justice Services

Programs Steer At-Risk Youth Away from Trouble

Gang activity is a growing problem in many lower-income Chicago communities, including Brighton Park.

For young people growing up in these neighborhoods, it is virtually impossible to avoid contact with gang members.

Like many parents, Ricky’s mother and father were deeply concerned about the daily presence of gangs and the negative influence they appeared to have on their 13-year-old son.

Ricky was missing school regularly and his grades were falling. He was also involved in several altercations with other boys at school and had even made threats against teachers. All of these factors indicated he was at high risk for delinquency and involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Then known gang members began showing up outside the family’s home and Ricky’s parents feared that their son was being recruited or—worse—had already joined a gang.

Lisa, one of the counselors in SGA’s Juvenile Justice programs, began weekly counseling sessions with Ricky and also met regularly with the parents.

The mother and father made a number of changes in an attempt to limit their son’s contact with the gang members. But despite their efforts, Ricky’s dangerous behavior continued escalating. A turning point came shortly after the holiday season when Ricky was arrested as he attempted to bring a knife into school.

The resulting involvement with the police and juvenile courts seemed to be a wake-up call for Ricky. He told the counselor that he didn’t want to go to juvenile detention and he would do whatever he could to change the direction of his life.

Through discussions with Ricky’s probation officer and his parents, the counselor developed a plan to help the teen. She arranged for an interview with a residential school that specialized in students with behavioral issues. If accepted, Ricky would move away from his home and the influence of neighborhood gangs.

After visiting the campus, Ricky was enthusiastic about the plan and the counselor was able to arrange for a scholarship to help the family pay for this new school.

Ricky was ultimately accepted into the program. He moved to the campus in early summer to take remedial classes so that he could begin ninth grade this fall. (Ricky had failed to complete his eighth grade studies in public school.)

While it was difficult for Ricky’s parents to see their son move away from home, they knew it was the best choice for him. The counselor keeps in touch with Ricky and school officials and, by all accounts, he is doing well.

But moving vulnerable children away from gangs is not an option for most families. That is why prevention programs that work with young people right in their schools and communities are so vitally important. SGA’s Juvenile Justice Services target youth who have been arrested or are at-risk of committing crime. They help young people make positive choices and change the direction of their lives.



Photo by Susan McMillen

Youth attending a peer group session led by SGA clinician, Calvin Bond, (left). [Subject in photo is not the client profiled in article.]

SGA Staff Notes

Les Inch, PhD, joined the staff of SGA in September as the new Vice President for Performance Planning and Policy. He is responsible for program evaluation, quality assurance, strategic planning, and SGA’s advocacy initiative.

He comes to SGA from Children’s Home + Aid, where most recently he was Regional Vice President for Metro Chicago. A licensed clinical social worker, his career spans both direct services and program administration.

He joins the other vice presidents on SGA’s senior management team: Daniel L. Dever (Development & Communications), Martha Guerrero (Contracts & Grants), Ron Migalski (Clinical Programs), and William Seeley (Finance).

School-Based Services

Road to Hopefulness: SGA Program Brings Positive Change to Young Lives

SGA's programs aim to be life changing, but sometimes they can even be life *saving*. That was the case for Teresa, an adolescent who was helped by SGA's School-Based services after expressing thoughts of suicide to a classmate.

The SGA social worker responded immediately with a crisis intervention—which led to hospitalization, a diagnosis of depression and psychiatric treatment. Once Teresa was out of the hospital and back in school, the social worker met with the 14-year-old twice a week for intensive counseling.

Through these sessions, Teresa revealed a number of issues she was struggling with, including domestic violence in her home and an untreated learning disability that had contributed to poor performance in school (Teresa was failing in nearly every subject).

To address issues at home, SGA's social worker began working with the entire family. Also, she made certain that Teresa was assessed for special education needs.

Life began to look up for Teresa by the end of the school year, thanks to her own commitment to change and the dedication of the SGA social worker.

The violence at home has stopped and Teresa's family is even having fun together. Also, her grades are improving due, in part, to new eyewear to correct a vision problem.

Perhaps the best indicator of improvement comes from Teresa herself who told her social worker she had "found hope again."

SGA's School-Based programs help students deal with a variety of emotional and behavioral issues every day. SGA has a presence in five Chicago Public Schools in the Brighton Park area.

Community Violence Prevention Initiative launched

SGA Youth & Family Services is collaborating with the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority to form the Brighton Park Safety Net Works Coalition. This youth centered program will focus on reducing gang-related violence and gender-based violence in the southwest side community.

As a major partner, SGA will provide counseling, parent workshops, and support groups, and leadership development for 400 at-risk students and their families. Approximately 125 of the students will receive individual therapy.

The project will utilize evidence-based strategies to address a wide range of youth, family and community factors that contribute to violence and prevent young people from reaching their potential.

SGA's services will be based in three public schools: Burroughs Elementary, Shields Elementary, and Kelly High School. Through other coalition partners, the overall project will reach nine schools in the Brighton Park community.



Photo by Susan McMillen

Members of the SGA Partners steering committee attend the volunteer group's first event held at Rock Bottom in Chicago. From left: [standing] Evan Rouillard, Amy Quick, Graham Beatty, Brian Guarraci, and Mary Gwen Evans; [seated] Carrie Bowen and Sarah Konsky. Mary Gwen and Carrie took the lead in planning the August 27 function with other committee members.

SGA Partners Off and Running

SGA Partners hosted their first function—a networking event that drew more than 50 attendees. The August 27 gathering, held at Rock Bottom in Chicago, kicked off the new volunteer group and its mission to recruit young professionals in raising funds and awareness for SGA. Fall plans include a service project and holiday donation drive to help SGA client families. For more information about SGA Partners, contact Kathy Chuckas, Associate Director of Development and Special Events: phone 312-447-4353; email kchuckas@sga-youth.org



Photo by Susan McMillen

Amy Wynne, Jim Simpson and Brian Guarraci discuss future service projects for the new young professional volunteer initiative, SGA Partners. Amy and Brian are members of the steering committee.

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SGA gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of our clients in preparing this publication. A special thanks to those who have allowed their photographs to be used and their stories told. To protect confidentiality, the section in which a client's photo appears is not necessarily associated with the particular program or service described. All client names were also changed.

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Photo by Dan Rest

Members of the 2008 Benefit Committee responsible for planning and organizing the record-setting fundraiser, from left: Jean Meltzer, Vicki Noonan (Committee Co-Chair), Jeff Seaman (Committee Co-Chair), Marianne Bamonte, and Susan Fisher-Yellen. All are members of the SGA Board of Directors. Not pictured: Vicki's husband, Robert Noonan, who also served on the committee.



Photo by Dan Rest

SGA Executive Director Susana Marotta (left) welcomes Jim Forhan, SGA Board Chair, and his wife, Maureen, to the May 21 Benefit. Jim is a partner at KPMG, a Leadership Sponsor of the event.

“Reach For Dreams, Art of Giving” Benefit Nets \$205,000

The 2008 Benefit Dinner supporting SGA Youth & Family Services set a new record in net proceeds. The annual event, held May 21 at the beautiful River East Art Center in Chicago, netted more than \$205,000 to help fund SGA's programs serving at-risk youth.

A crowd of 250 guests enjoyed a memorable evening of jazz music and delectable food provided by Jewell Events Catering. There was also an array of sumptuous auction items donated by local retailers and supporters.

The event was financially supported by more than two dozen Chicago-area companies, plus private contributions from individuals, families and foundations.

“Money raised at the May 21 Benefit will allow us to continue offering vital mental health and supportive services at no cost to thousands of Chicago adolescents,” said Susana Marotta, PhD, SGA Executive Director.



Photo by Dan Rest

SGA Board member James Hill III poses with Susana Marotta, SGA Executive Director.



Photo by Dan Rest

ABC 7 weekend news anchor Kevin Roy, who served as emcee for the evening, greets the crowd of 250 guests.



Photo by Dan Rest



Photo by Dan Rest

[Above, Left] Gary Metzner, Vice President of Sothebys Midwest, donated his services as auctioneer. Live auction highlights included a vacation package at the exclusive Las Ventanas al Paraiso resort in Cabo, Mexico and a Lake Michigan private yacht cruise with dinner for 25. The travel item was donated by SGA Board member Don Belgrad; the cruise package was contributed by the yacht owner and Jewell Events Catering.

[Above, Right] Longtime SGA supporters Betty and Stanley Weinberger arrive at the May 21 Benefit.



Photo by Dan Rest

Enjoying the pre-dinner music at the May 21 event—SGA Board members Yolanda Ridley Scheunemann (left) and Dan Luchins, MD, along with Dan's wife, Catherine Meyer Luchins, MD. Music was performed by the Jazz Links Student Ensemble from the Jazz Institute.

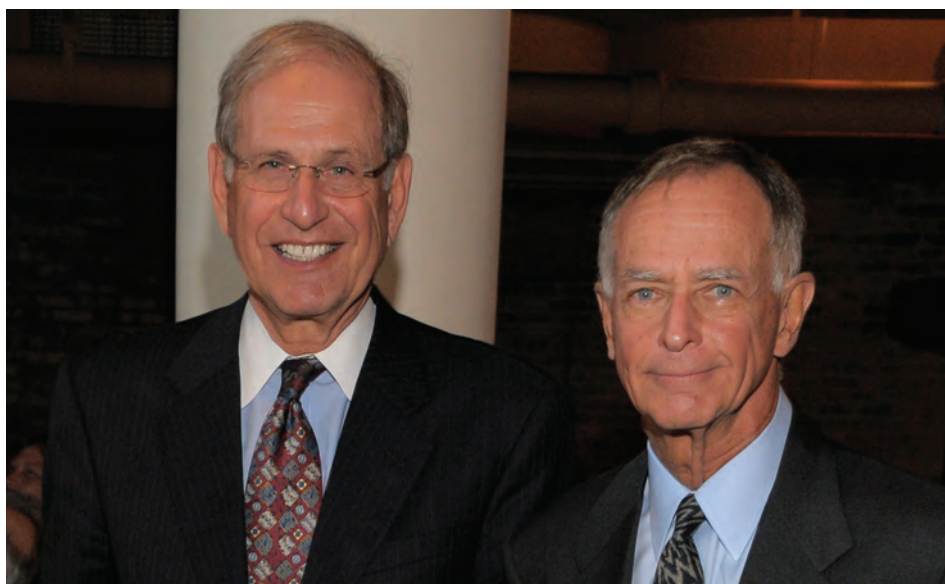


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SGA Board member Don Belgrad (left) thanks Jon Mills for a Leadership contribution from the Mills Family Charitable Foundation.

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Studley Landlord Golf Challenge Nets \$130,000 for SGA

Thirty-six teams of golfers from Chicago's landlord community signed on for the third annual Studley Landlord Golf Challenge, scheduled for September 8 at the Oak Park Country Club.

Unfortunately, heavy rains on the day of the event prevented play. But inclement weather did not dampen golfers' enthusiasm for helping a worthy cause. Individual participants and the businesses they represent came through with contributions and raffle proceeds totaling \$130,000 in net revenue.

All of the money raised will benefit SGA Youth & Family Services, which was selected as the charity recipient of the 2008 event. A portion of the revenue will be earmarked to support Operation BIG Hug, SGA's initiative promoting early detection of autism in preschool age children born to young, low-income parents.

Organized by commercial real estate services firm Studley, the one-day golf outing challenges Chicago's landlord community to raise funds for a charitable organization, while competing for trophies and bragging rights.

SGA thanks all of those who played a part in making the 2008 Studley Challenge a resounding success, with a special thank you to the employees of Studley for choosing SGA as your charity partner.



Photo by Susan McMillen

Studley employees who organized the third annual Studley Landlord Golf Challenge proudly display a check representing funds raised at the charity event. Pictured, from left, Front Row: Peggy Conway, John Goodman (Studley Executive Vice President and SGA Board member) and Maria Jens-Kerr. Back Row: John Conerty, Robert Sevim, Terry Mostrom and Jon Azulay. Additional members of the charity committee not pictured: Jason Volpe, Joe Learner, Lisa Davidson, Geoff Adair, Eric Feinberg, Liz Porter, and Valarie Dolenga.

Studley Golf Outing Donors

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SGA MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to support the emotional and social development of Chicago area adolescents and young adults by providing therapy, prevention and other support services for individuals and their families.

Formerly known as Scholarship and Guidance Association, SGA Youth & Family Services has been dedicated to improving the lives of Chicago youth since its founding in 1911. SGA specializes in mental health, case management and prevention programs to help young people avoid risks and overcome obstacles so they can reach their fullest potential. Our services strengthen families, improve communities and help children grow to become contributing members of society.



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