

Teri's Update — February 2006

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS:

Pedro comes for drop-in tutoring every day after school. He lives up the street. His mother, Maria, does not speak English and wants someone to read with him and help him write about his reading in English. He is in the second grade.

Melat and Michiyes come for similar reasons. They are from Ethiopia. While their father, Damtew, speaks quite good English, he wishes his children to have as many opportunities as possible, and he feels that with native speakers helping them with their writing, they will thrive. Apparently they are: He reports that their school work has significantly improved since coming to 826 Seattle

Safiye's father, a lovely man from Turkey, stopped in the other night to pick up his daughter. Safiye is home-schooled and we are her "writing program." She comes to 826 Seattle, and we give her writing projects and feedback. Her father is a boisterous man who owns a hot dog business downtown. "You have a miracle program here!," he said. "I cannot believe it! I invite you to come for hot dogs!" Safiye, at 14, seemed a bit embarrassed by her father, but as a hot dog fan I'm happy he came by and fully intend to take him up on his offer.

We are having some fun at 826 Seattle these days.

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OUR PROGRESS:

I am an impatient person. Last July, after we signed our lease, I wanted the remodel done in three days and the halls of 826 Seattle full of kids by September 1st. I have this great executive director coach, Julie Burman, whose primary job is to keep me realistic. (She, like just about everyone involved with 826, is a volunteer. She's got tons of executive director, management, and raising-gobs-of-dough experience – a pile of wisdom she is generously imparting to me.)

So Julie, sensing my unrealistic goals of immediate success, suggested I take a deep breath and write up where I would like 826 Seattle to be as an organization by the end of February, seal the envelope, and not open it until the end of February. So I did.

Here is what I wrote (I couldn't wait until the end of February to read it):

Remodel: It is done, furniture in place. We are comfortable.

Programs: A rhythm is set up for homework help and regular workshops. We are preparing to expand our programming. Our first anthology is being readied for publication.

Personnel: Heidi: full time. Rob: half time. Two work-study students, interns!

Personal Stuff: I want one day a week off. I want to be sleeping through the night.

So, [drum roll] I'm sure you are on the edge of your computer chair, wondering....how has 826 Seattle done?

Remodel is essentially done -- although don't overlook our wish list at the end of this letter.

On a related note, our renovated Web site is almost ready to launch, and a grant from the Jackson Foundation is covering the cost of a brochure, also almost done. (In the meantime, visit our current Web site, www.826seattle.org.)

Programs: We have an average of about 15 students a day for drop-in tutoring. I am proud that they represent all ages, a lot of ethnicities, and most socio-economic groups. But, what I am most proud of is that they keep coming back.

We have piloted our first Story Telling/Bookmaking workshop, a feat of theater and improv magic. Created by our fellow chapter 826 Valencia, the two-hour workshop uses eight to 10 volunteers and results in 30 students leaving 826 Seattle with a book in hand that each one wrote. Feedback from our pilot group, Ms. Dunker's Greenwood Elementary School 5th graders, went along the lines of: "This field trip was perfect. I want to come back to 826 very, very much." Or, from Ms. Dunker herself: "...every one of my students left 826 today feeling like a successful writer."

Next week we start working on the older-student equivalent of this field trip: a screenwriting workshop in which a class writes a screenplay together and professional actors perform it all in two hours!

Next week we are also conducting volunteer training for our John Marshall High School essay project. Fifteen 826 Seattle tutors will work with John Marshall students to write essays on the topic of family — essays that we will publish. (We're also collecting pieces for another publishing project, an anthology of student work.)

Lots of workshops are happening: SAT Prep, a short story workshop, food reviewing ...check out the calendar on our Web site, www.826seattle.org.

Personnel: Heidi Broadhead has left us as Operations Manager and is now concentrating on writing grants for us on a freelance basis. Alex Webb has joined us to fill Heidi's shoes. Because Alex has volunteered with us for months, and because she worked for 11 years as Accounts Manager at Accoutrements (aka Archie McPhee), we are feeling pretty good about her coming on board.

Rob Lightner is still our Volunteer Coordinator, and we have Lina, a work-study student, helping with accounting, plus FOUR INTERNS!

Julia is our design intern and makes about 75 great flyers a week. Melody is a volunteer intern helping Rob organize the (growing) volunteer list — 450 at last count! Sahar is my programming intern. She has been collecting stories for the anthology and delivering flyers and making mailboxes for the students and looking great in her black wig. Hunter comes to us from Center High School and is receiving his Careers credit by helping us out with library organization, workshop assistance, and eventually blog writing.

And there are TONS of other volunteers doing just about everything imaginable, including running our store The Greenwood Space Travel Supply Co., re-doing our database, keeping our records up to snuff, writing letters for free beer for fundraising events, and other essential tasks.

In other words, 826 Seattle is thriving.

Personal Stuff: No, I do not always have one day off a week, and I do not always sleep through the night, but the big stuff, the reason we started this project, is happening and, simply put, it's great.

And, again simply put, 826 Seattle is thriving because of the generosity of this community. This sounds schmaltzy. But it is true. Many people receiving this update were at our first house party one year ago. We had absolutely nothing to show folks except a pile of good ideas, and they still gave so generously that night.

And look what happened: There are several young people in Seattle who write better now than they used to, thanks to you. And there are hundreds, maybe even thousands, more in our future.

So thank you,

Teri