

# Best of the NETWORKER

## Feature Articles from Past Issues

The Northwest Youth Networker; newsletter of the [Northwest Network for Youth](#), edited by [Jerry Fest](#) of the [InterNetwork for Youth](#)

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I thought this week I'd share another one of my favorite poems, this being the week after Thanksgiving and all. Among the many things I'm thankful for are adults who are able to interact with children as the second grade teacher does in this poem.

The poem was written by Alexis Rotella; a poet, haiku writer and author, ordained minister, and acupuncturist who describes herself as a health-oriented life coach and educator. You can learn more about her [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). The poem "Purple" first appeared in East West Journal in 1980 and has since appeared in many other publications, including the first edition of Chicken Soup for the Soul -- and now in *the Northwest Youth Networker*.

### Purple

By Alexis Rotella

In first grade Mrs. Lohr said my purple teepee wasn't realistic enough,  
that purple was no color for a tent,  
that purple was a color for people who died,  
that my drawing wasn't good enough to hang with the others.

I walked back to my seat counting the swish, swish, swishes of my baggy corduroy trousers.  
With a black crayon nightfall came to my purple tent in the middle of an afternoon.

In second grade Mr. Barta said draw anything; he didn't care what.  
I left my paper blank  
and when he came around to my desk my heart beat like a tom tom.  
He touched my head with his big hand and in a soft voice said  
the snowfall  
how clean  
and white  
and beautiful



### National RHY Conference St Louis, November 18-21, 2008

By Galen Phipps

The first annual National RHY conference was held in St Louis, MO. This seems appropriate since November is National Runaway Prevention Month. More than 450 people attended from around the country from more than 360 different programs. A number of workshops were available offering in-depth training on pertinent topics ranging from State Capacity Building-Advocacy,

Disproportionality, Effective Peer Education, PYD, Trauma Informed services, Human Trafficking, Street Outreach strategies, learning disabilities, and commercial sexual exploitation of youth to name a few.

Several key note speakers gave informative and emotional presentations. Ruvin Munden from Seattle and Sohail Jouya from Missouri gave uplifting speeches of their lives and what made a difference for them through the services they received from RHY programs. Joan Ohl the outgoing Commissioner of ACF gave an overview of the accomplishments of the last 8 years. Alfonso Wyatt, Vice President of Fund for the city of New York gave a rousing speech on the potential of young people when given the opportunity to follow their dreams. Federal staff was in attendance and available for consultation and networking.

The National Runaway Switchboard and the National Network for Youth, in partnership with other prominent national organizations, announce the seventh annual National Runaway Prevention Month for November. The goals for 2008 are 1) to raise awareness of the issues facing runaway youth, and 2) to educate the public about solutions and the role they can play in preventing youth from running away. A few years ago, the Huckleberry House initiated the Green Light Project in Ohio to promote National Runaway Prevention Month. Given their success, they approached NRS to take the Green Light Project national, which happened last year. This November, porch lights across the country glowed green during November to raise awareness and show support for runaway youth.

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### ...But Only if You Use it ...



The Northwest Youth Networker is designed to serve many purposes, one of which is to provide an editorial forum for readers. Thomas Paine said; *I do not believe that any two [people] ... think alike, who think at all.* It is only by sharing our different perspectives that we discover common ground. To that end, we invite submissions of brief articles for publication in this newsletter (see guidelines below). We are also introducing a new weekly feature: **Your2Bucks\***. Each week a new question will appear in the Networker. Readers are invited to submit a short (50 words or less) reply for publication the following week. The idea is to get as many

different perspectives on the question as possible. When submitting your reply, please include your name, City, and State.

So, without further ado ...



This week's **Your2Bucks\*** Question:

*\* because your opinion is worth more than two cents!*

**What is the greatest challenge you (or your agency) face(s) as you implement Positive Youth Development in practice?**

Click on the **Y2B** logo above to submit your 50 word or less response. Please include your name (or anonymous), city, and state.

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## SIZE MATTERS (IN EDUCATION)

By Gary Hammons

After more than thirty years as an “educator” at the elementary, secondary, and university level, while ten years removed, I am perplexed and amused that there is such a wide spread belief that bigger schools are better. Football and wrestling teams are the only elements of high schools that are likely to be aided by bigger enrollments, as the more bodies there are assures bigger and smaller subgroups. Physical size matters in both sports.

Economy of scale does not apply very well to schools except for allowing for a comprehensive curriculum, and this does not bear up well upon closer inspection. Very simply, smaller schools are better when considering all the factors. Most teachers and administrators can get to know 300 to 400 kids personally in a school year. This factor is extremely important as the quality of interaction between students and staff changes dramatically when they know each other. By keeping schools small, the otherwise impersonal aspects of education are diminished and the synergy of learning communities can be more easily attained.

In working with young people, it quickly becomes clear that our schools can readily do great harm to self-esteem, physical well-being and preparation for life challenges. Very few kids who are in juvenile detention, foster care, or homeless/runaway situations have successful school experiences. Not surprising for these kids, alternative schools often have far more success than traditional campuses; as their smaller size and sense of community transcend the prior negative aspects of their education.



I am preparing a paper that expands on my many years of working with challenged kids in a variety of settings (I observed that my public school career concluded primarily with my role trying to get kids who did not want to be there in schools that did not want them). I noted many of the factors that have diminished school effectiveness and have identified a number of ways for improvement. If you would like a draft of the paper or would like to comment, please email me at [gary@nwny.org](mailto:gary@nwny.org).

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### **AmeriCorps as a Transitional Experience**

By Oliver Kroner



High School left me with lots of ideas, but little direction. According to my counselors and the majority of society, college was the obvious next step, but I didn't buy it. I didn't know what I wanted to do in school, which I believe is true for most incoming freshmen, so rather than blow thousands of bucks on time to make these career decisions, I found an alternative. I had three objectives; have time to do some thinking about my future, make some money to help pay for school, and to have an adventure as a reward to myself for completing high school.

Amazingly enough there's a program called AmeriCorps, which is basically a package plan containing everything I sought. AmeriCorps programs offer an educational award in exchange for your community service (up to \$4,725 for college), and are located throughout the country, so you can find the excitement I desired by picking a cool place. And, needless to say, it would offer plenty of time to find a focus for next year.

So last September, I wished my hometown of Cincinnati farewell and shipped off to Taos, New Mexico. I'd applied and been accepted to work with the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, just one of the hundreds of AmeriCorps programs. I flew out with my dad, who accompanied me in case I needed a cosigner on a lease. I'd read a little bit about Taos, and I'd seen photographs, but it was nothing like the place I had anticipated. I would describe it to you, but then you would just create the false images just the same as I did. I became immediately very overwhelmed, as the severity of my impending independence sunk in. I was abandoning everyone I'd ever met, my family, my friends, and my girlfriend, leaving my home, my room, betraying the Reds and the Bengals. Giving it all up for a small town, which I apparently knew nothing about. No matter how hard I tried to stay

caught up in excitement, memories would drag me back into my personal terrors. I felt like Bambi. But, determined to prove myself fully capable of complete independence I pioneered ahead.

Finding a place was proving far more difficult than I had ever imagined. Due to a driving record that was wrecked itself, I figured my bike would be my only feasible form of personal transportation, so I had to find a place close to everything I might need. But, prices were out of reach, and the affordable options were miles outside of town, impossibly too far out to pull off with only a bike. Dad and I called everyone, but as soon as I told them my price range the conversation ended. Finally, the day prior to Dad's departure and the beginning of my total solitude, we found her.

I immediately moved into my new home, a 1974 CAM Trailer Home smack dab in the middle of Taos. It was raw; gum in the carpets and on the walls, broken windows, and wood-paneling galore. But I was surrounded by the Rocky Mountains and I thought it would be a fun project to fix it.

It was fun for a good two weeks, until it became outright overwhelming. I was living without gas, thus no heat and no hot water. I tried to cope. It dropped into the teens at night, allowing me to test out my sleeping bag. I took bucket baths with cold water, and took showers at friends' houses. I even ended up in the emergency room after a Carbon Monoxide scare. Independence turned out to be hell!

But, in a short amount of time things were looking up. The trailer was functioning, and I found a deal on a futon. I replaced some nasty carpeting, and I painted some walls. I was learning to cook. I had plenty of privacy. I could play my guitar as loud as I wanted, at any hour of the night. Riding my bike became a pastime rather than a chore, and whipped me into great shape

Work with the Youth Corps was even better than I had imagined. The program was designed to maximize on as many opportunities as you could in a one-year time-span. My crew laid in trails, put up fences, helped reduce forest fire fuels, and many other random odd jobs. They lined up internships for us, and taught us to use heavy machinery, like a bobcat, and a backhoe and a tamper. They even gave us first aid/CPR training. We got to help out, and be helped out simultaneously.

I don't think Cat Stevens ever came to Taos, because I think you really could "get by just upon a smile." The people in Taos are incredibly friendly, and so many of the people I've met have really bent over backwards to help me out. My neighbor Jake, who I admit initially terrified me, ended up helping me redo all of my busted plumbing, and even got me a deal on a brand-new water heater. The guy at the carpet place across the street took a liking to me and gave me a bargain price on some carpet and installation tools. The lady with the fruit stand down the road just gave me a big old bag of apples for nothing. And my coworkers are some of the most loyal people I've ever met.

AmeriCorps offers the opportunity to get your life on track in many different ways. It helps in developing your work skills to improve your employability. It encourages you to further your education with the Educational Award, which can be used to attend just about any school. And it's a guarantee that you'll be trying things you've never done before, which is good for anyone. Anyone who feels like they need some direction in their life really ought to look into it.

At the moment, I'm about two-thirds the way through the program. Time has revealed the weaknesses of the Youth Corps, Taos and my trailer, but none of which are hardly worth mentioning. I'm trying to save some money, but I'm failing miserably (\$14 in my checking account.) But, I have that Educational Award to back me up. Next year I'm enrolling at Northeastern University in Boston, and I intend to major in Environmental Science. So, if I can stay on track and everything works out as planned, I'd say my mission this year has been a complete success. It's definitely been an adventure!

Oliver is the son of Mark Kroner, director of the [Lighthouse](#) Independent Living Program in Cincinnati.

**Your2Bucks: What is the greatest challenge you (or your agency) face(s) as you implement Positive Youth Development in practice?**

Elaine Simons - Seattle, WA:

Implementing Positive Youth Development continues to be a challenge. Many homeless and runaway youth/young adults are used to a drop in setting where they come in to get something to eat and be "warehoused." So when their voice is validated they are not so sure what to make of it!

Gary Hammons - Seattle, WA:

The challenge for me is patience in promoting progressive youth development. I enjoy discourse and involvement with young people, but I find it hard to not inundate them with my vast experience and wisdom. The result, of course, is that I frequently shut them down.

Laura Hamilton - Edmonds, WA:

We may be tempted with the current state of the economy, to hunker down, protecting focus and finances. Working together in a collaborative fashion around the strengths of each agency, to sustain addressing the important needs of youth, is the path I hope we can continue.

Eric Van Houten - Eugene, OR:

The greatest challenge is the lack of an operating definition of PYD; that important link in language and actions that offers opportunity and support to youth and staff. Folks hide behind PYD avoiding implementation of key steps because it is difficult/costly, forgetting that little steps lead to more effective programming.



**This week's Your2Bucks\* Question:**

*\* because your opinion is worth more than two cents!*

**What motivates you to work in the field of youth services?**

Click on the **Y2B** logo above to submit your 50 word or less response. Please include your name (or anonymous), city, and state.