

SUMMER 2008

A TIDES FAMILY SERVICES QUARTERLY PUBLICATION

theWave

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TIDES HELPS SET A LIFE-CHANGING COURSE

IT WAS A TIME OF CONFUSION FOR AARON – those years between 12 and 15. Despite a loving mother who set strict boundaries, Aaron struggled between going to school and hanging out on the street. The street won. “I was in and out of trouble, mostly skipping school to hang out with my friends” the now 25-year-old Aaron said.

As a youngster growing up in Central Falls, and with his older brothers in the Armed Forces – Aaron was left adrift without a positive role model to emulate. His heroes became the drug dealers who roamed the streets where he lived.

When he was 16, and after educators at Central Falls High School had exhausted their efforts to keep him in school, Aaron was given a choice: The training school, prison or Tides Family Services.

He chose Tides.



TOM GIRARD, Audi foreman at InSkip, (left) gives Aaron auto maintenance pointers. Part of Aaron's learning experience in the auto industry is shadowing a certified auto technician.

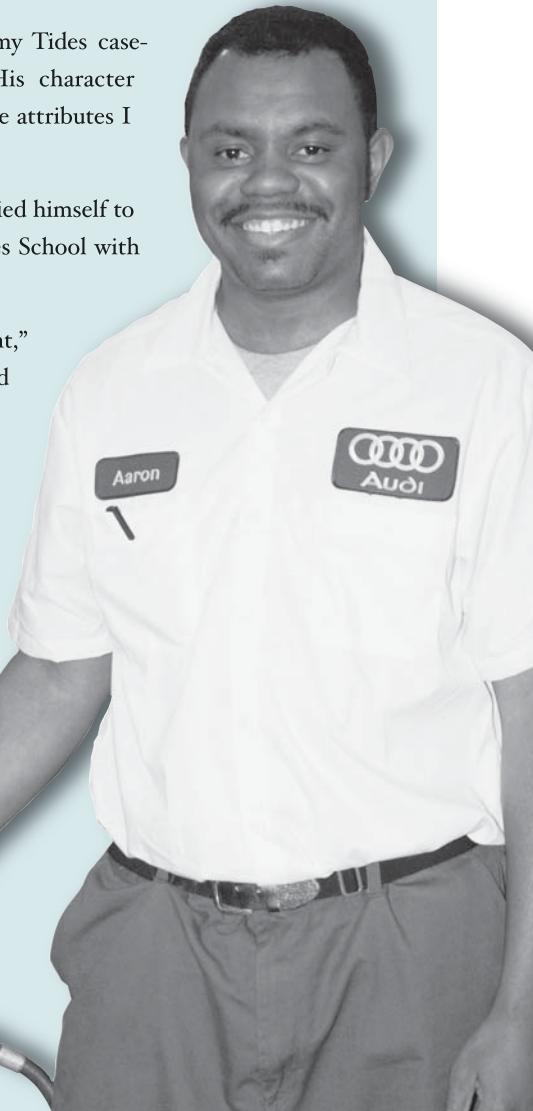
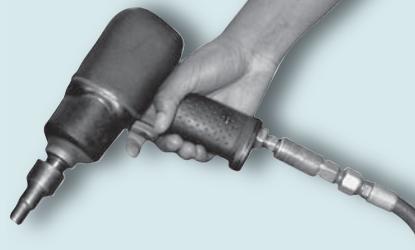
“Everything changed when I met my Tides case-worker, Dominic,” Aaron said. “His character and attitude brought out the positive attributes I always wanted.”

For the next three years, Aaron applied himself to his studies and graduated from Tides School with his high school diploma.

“Tides was crucial in my development,” Aaron said. “They showed me I could be a better person and not just by talking, but by being on my side. Tides helped me to see what I could do with my life.”

Intimidated by the idea of college, and resistant to returning to Tides for counseling, Aaron drifted from one low paying job to another until one day, he said, “I woke up.”

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TIDES FAMILY SERVICES

OUR MISSION

is to provide high-risk youth with comprehensive, preventive services that promote personal growth and better connect them with their families and communities.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

• BR. MICHAEL REIS



I'M CONCERNED ABOUT THE ADDITIONAL graduation requirements that the State Board of Regents is proposing, which will make it doubly difficult — and in some cases impossible — for the youth served by Tides Family Services to earn high school diplomas.

Tides serves 460 youth living in Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Warwick, West Warwick and Coventry of which the vast majority live in poverty. Many of these youngsters have had some involvement with the juvenile justice system and are struggling to avoid the lure of the streets.

Our staff work day and night to encourage them to stay in school and to get a high school diploma so they can rise above the level of poverty that threatens to drown them with the false promises of easy money found in a life of crime. With the new and stringent standards that would apply to all students, our kids will be doomed to failure.

While I agree with the Board of Regents in its attempt to increase standards, I'm opposed to any public policy that establishes the kind of two-tier system that separates the haves from the have-nots. Rhode Island's plan, which mandates a college preparatory education for everyone, is unrealistic for youngsters who are ill equipped to master these difficult courses. Unfortunately, our youngsters are even having difficulty accessing vocational programs because of their difficulty achieving these new standards. A case in point is the story of Joseph (see facing page), who has a third-grade level of math and yet is forced to take Algebra as his math requirement.

The Board of Regents should take a look at New York's requirements for a Regents or high school diploma. Here is a tiered system that takes into account the varied abilities of its students.

Everyone agrees that education is the key to success for our youth. Countless studies show that teens that drop out of school are more likely to commit crimes, be stuck in low-paying jobs, live in poor neighborhoods and are at an increased risk of needing public assistance as adults.

Has the state considered the cost in tax dollars that will be needed to support these youths' educational needs and the potential cost of such large numbers who will fail to achieve a high school diploma? What will be the impact on the social service network, welfare, juvenile and criminal justice systems?

I urge the Board of Regents to institute a plan of action that will take into account the educational needs of all our students, not just those that are college bound. We can't treat all kids the same, because they are not all the same. They learn at different speeds, have different interests and abilities, but all deserve to earn the high school diploma that puts them on the road to success.

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High school diplomas for Tides kids out of reach under Board of Regents new guidelines

AT A TIME WHEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS are dropping out at alarming rates, the Board of Regents has issued stricter graduation requirements, making it nearly impossible for youngsters who teeter on the edge of choosing the streets or school.

Fourteen-year-old Joseph is a ninth grader in a local high school. Under the new guidelines, Joseph is required to take two years of algebra; despite his understanding of math is that of a third grader.

Not only is Joseph failing math, he is failing his other subjects.

"It's very frustrating," his sister Angie said. "When they tell me what he needs to graduate, I ask how can he ever do that when he can't even do simple math? There ought to be another way he can learn the skills he needs to survive."

What kind of future can Joseph look forward to without a high school diploma? The statistics are grim. It is likely he will join the 2,000 students who drop out of Rhode Island schools every year. It is also likely that he will end up in a low-paying, dead-end job, be unemployed, or in prison.

According to CEO Brother Michael Reis, approximately 66 percent of the 460 youths served daily by Tides receive special services and 53 percent have repeated grades at least once in their school history. To varying degrees, many of these youngsters live in poverty and many have had some involvement with the juvenile justice system.

"My concern centers on the inability of many of our youth to meet these new standards and achieve the minimum credentials necessary for a chance at a successful future," Br. Michael said. "We are dealing with school systems that are simply telling parents that their youngsters can't meet the standards and encouraging that they leave school and pursue a GED program. Some are agreeing without knowing the process or difficulties involved, and others are dropping out of school."

A study by the John Hopkins University for the Associated Press called the worst performing schools "dropout factories." Included on the list were Providence and West Warwick high schools – both within the areas served by Tides.

"The group of youngsters we work with," said Br. Michael, "are, for the most part, unable to achieve a college preparatory diploma, the only option under these new guidelines.

"As public policy, the state needs to weigh the amount of taxpayer dollars needed to support these youths' educational needs against the potential impact on the social service system, juvenile and criminal justice systems with such large numbers of youngsters unable to achieve a college preparatory diploma."

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A NEW COURSE FOR AARON

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"I got fed up with myself and the way life was going and I could see the disappointment in my mother's eyes. I joined a church and found new role models; strong men with jobs and families and I wanted what they had."

Always fascinated by cars, last year Aaron enrolled in an automotive course at the New England Technical School. When he completes the course he will be a hold an associate's degree in automotive technology – the first step, he said, in crafting a career in the automotive industry.

In the meantime, he is getting on-the-job training at InSkip's Audi dealership, where he shadows a technician, as well as working as a parking attendant.

"Without Tides, I doubt if I ever would have woke up," he said. "Tides taps into a child's gift or talent and makes them feel good about themselves. They give you every opportunity to succeed."

CHRISTOPHER S. GONTARZ RECEIVES 2008 DOROTHY LOHMAN COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD



CHRISTOPHER S. GONTARZ, ESQ., (center) receives the Rhode Island Bar Association's 2008 Dorothy Lohmann Community Service Award from Bar Association President Marcia McGair Ippolito, Esq. At left is Tides CEO Br. Michael Reis. Mr. Gontarz is a member of Tides Board of Directors. PHOTO: BRIAN MCDONALD, RI BAR JOURNAL

THE RHODE ISLAND BAR ASSOCIATION AWARDED ATTORNEY CHRISTOPHER S. GONTARZ with the 2008 Dorothy Lohmann Community Service Award for his work on behalf of Tides Family Services.

A member of Tides Board of Trustees since 2006, Mr. Gontarz is the chairman of the advocacy and outreach committee. A tireless advocate for Tides, his legal skills and advice are an incalculable resource to Tides' CEO Brother Michael Reis, as well as the Board of Trustees.

"Chris' contributions on behalf of Tides' kids are found in every aspect of our program," Br. Michael said. "His efforts expended on behalf of "Gap Kids" (youth between the ages of 17 and 21) resulted in the adjudication of offenses without the stigma of a criminal record. His impact on furthering the vision and goals of Tides will be felt for decades to come."

The Rhode Island Bar Association Dorothy Lohmann Community Service Award recognizes Rhode Island attorneys who donate their time and legal expertise for charitable work. It is given to those whose efforts most closely reflect those of Dorothy Lohmann; a skillful attorney, who employed her talents to help the poor and to bring justice to people who suffered injustices.

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