

STRONG FUTURES



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Strong Futures is a Supportive Transitional Housing Program located in Hudson County. The goal of Strong Futures is to establish long-term alternatives for homeless youth needing preparation for independent living due to a lack of family resources. Strong Futures' programming is based on the philosophy that all youth have inner strengths and natural healing resources embedded in a tendency towards positive growth. Youth are assisted in reaching their potential through services that provide creative, strength-based, family-focused, unconditional care. Strong Futures is designed for youth who are 16 to 21 years old and in need of a supportive housing plan as a final step prior to living independently.

MULTICULTURALISM AT STRONG FUTURES

Strong Futures offers a transforming experience at a personal as well as at a professional level to all staff, residents, and visitors. Throughout the years, Strong Futures has become a learning environment where diversity is celebrated as a valuable asset. In fact, current residents come from different backgrounds bringing their own talents and set of values. Fortunately, through guidance at Strong Futures, residents' stories, can serve as testimony that perseverance is effective in terms of overcoming challenges and achieving one's maximum potential by creating a full and productive life. At this program, each individual is being encouraged to use his/her experience, especially experience as an immigrant, in the process of gaining understanding that diversity is an important part in our society. This is because, through our interactions with others, we should take into consideration the ethnic and cultural context of their environments.

Our youngest resident, was born in Brazil, South America. In addition to being Brazilian, he brings fascinating memories about growing in Bolivia. He spends time conversing about humble beginnings in which he did not have the luxuries that he has today such as having a refrigerator, for example. As a result, he ate whatever his grandmother cooked on the same day, no left overs! He has shown pride in his culture by wearing the Brazilian flag during the 2010 Soccer World Cup and listening to music in his native language, Portuguese, while doing his chores. He also enjoys sharing how his Christian principles, which are deeply rooted in his culture, have been useful when facing hardship. As a result of his diverse background, he is currently fluent in three languages, English, Portuguese and Spanish.

For our veteran resident, it is his cultural legacy that is the foundation of his life force. It is his Haitian history that has empowered and instructed him in his daily life. He attributes simple things such as the way he wears his hair and some of his biases to his culture. He has expressed that his favorite subject at school is History. He is knowledgeable about Haiti's history, politics, and the *immigration experience*. He is fully aware that Haitian Americans have experienced racial prejudice and cultural bias, both in Haiti and in the United States. He also realizes the need for a voice at an international level that would advocate for the rights of Haitian people and articulate why they should be proud of their roots, particularly in the face of their many struggles.

Our college student, is a reflection of his Korean culture that places a high value on hak-bul, academic credentials. In fact, approximately "...51% of Koreans have college or graduate degrees, either from Korea or the United States. The remaining 49% have high school and/or trade school diplomas" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). He is working toward obtaining a degree in culinary arts and opening his own restaurant in the near future.

Upcoming Events

- ◆ On December 22, 2010 Visit to the Rockefeller Center in New York
- ◆ On December 24, 2010 Christmas Brunch & unwrapping of X-Mas gifts at noon



Special thanks to someone who celebrates multiculturalism in cooking:

Ms. Brittina (Tina)



Cooking is not only the process of preparing food for Ms. Tina, but a symbol of love, connection and communication. Ms. Tina always makes sure that her cooking techniques and ingredients vary from week to week reflecting different cultural traditions. For instance, Ms. Tina has assisted residents when frying empanadas and tacos. She has taken the opportunity of meal preparation to talk and to listen to what residents have to say without noticing that while putting salt on food, she is seasoning someone's soul, and when sprinkling pepper she is spicing the atmosphere at Strong Futures. As the chemical properties of the ingredients change the flavor, texture, and appearance of her food, so are the faces of those around her in the kitchen changing. They cannot resist the smell of her food, thereby paving the way for an opportunity to have quality time around the dinner table.

THANKSGIVING DINNER:

This dinner provided the opportunity for fostering unity, trust, and a setting for discussions that reflected each individual's values. This particular meal time encouraged communication skills, such as patient listening and expressing opinions respectfully. This was also a time to reinforce Strong Futures' traditions (e.g. celebrating each of the residents' birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas etc.). Studies have shown that adolescents who frequently sat down to family meals had better grades, less depression, and were less likely to drink alcohol, smoke, or use marijuana than kids who ate with others in their social unit (family) less than twice a week (Journal of Nutrition, 2000).

Staff and all the residents were present at our 2010 Thanksgiving Dinner. Emmanuel served as the D.J., Ms. Tina was the chef, and Han and Mr. John (caseworker) had a competition about who would eat the most. The champion was Mr. John who calmly ate two full plates (*back to back*) full of rice, mashed potatoes, ham, turkey, and vegetables. In addition, he ate dessert. After sweating for a little while trying to eat the second plate, Han took a break and finished the race moments later.