

CSUEB Former Foster Youth Honored

By Kemilyn Ibironke
Staff Writer

Cal State East Bay students who formerly were foster youth told their inspirational stories during a dinner held May 9 to commemorate the first year of the innovative Renaissance Scholar program.

As an audience of advisors, university administrators and donors listened intently, Renaissance Scholars were asked what the evening meant to them. Their responses were powerful.

"It really was like a dream come true to see so many people here to support foster youth, and I also saw how important it is for me to be a leader to the younger students," said Charvett Blincoe, senior, business administration major and Renaissance Scholar.

Most of the 20 students who attended the event said they found it helpful to hear the stories of their peers. They said it made them realize they are not alone in the struggle to obtain a college education against staggering odds.

Once they age out of the foster care system, young adults rarely have college on their minds. Before programs like the Renaissance

Scholars, former foster youth were basically cast out on their own with very few support systems in place.

In an effort to overcome the odds against them, the Renaissance Scholar program provides former foster youth with all the tools necessary to succeed, including housing, tuition, guidance and a support system that builds strength through mutual inspiration and support.

"This helped to encourage me and gave me the motivation I need to get through school, since I do not otherwise have someone to encourage me," said Paul Garcia, a Renaissance Scholar sophomore majoring in international studies.

The evening included the recital of a poem entitled "The Old Me Versus the New Me" by Renaissance Scholar Donte Rodgers, a freshman with an undecided major.

"This evening was a joyous event," said Rodgers. "I really like that I was given the opportunity to share my poem."

Through the generosity of donors who support the Renaissance Scholars program, young adults who become Renaissance Scholars are very likely to beat the odds.

Meeting the donors who fund

their education was very important to these young students.

"I can't believe how much these people really care," said Blincoe.

Other Renaissance Scholars expressed similar feelings.

"It was a wonderful experience meeting the donors," said Lalin Nhek, a Renaissance Scholar sophomore majoring in sociology.

Former foster youth who graduate college are informally known as "the one-percenters" because only one percent of the less than 10 percent of foster youth who actually enroll in college actually graduate.

Two of these special "one-percenters" expecting to graduate this spring are Kennisha Jones, a senior majoring in biology and ASI president Chantel Johnson, a senior majoring in sociology.

Many of the students are comforted by the fact that director of the Renaissance Scholar program, Kevin Bristow, was once a foster youth himself.

"Programs like these are essential for helping foster youth to overcome the barriers they face in obtaining a higher education," said Bristow. Pioneer Staff Writer Anne Cunningham contributed to this report.

Gas Prices Changing Students' Lives

By Rachael Nyrhila
and Tianti Phillips
Staff Writers

Gas prices are soaring, especially in the Bay Area, and some Cal State East Bay students are being forced to change their lifestyles in an effort to adapt.

The retail price of gasoline has been climbing steadily since the beginning of the year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Fuel costs in California are the highest in the nation, averaging \$3.43 a gallon this week, the DOE said.

On Monday, the American Automobile Association (AAA), a national auto club that monitors gasoline prices, reported that the average cost for one gallon of regular gas in Oakland was \$3.49, a full 40 cents higher than the national average.

New England, where gas was running about \$3 a gallon, was the cheapest place to buy fuel in the country.

There is no break in sight for gas consumers. Prices may continue to inch upwards as much as 30 cents a gallon in the next few weeks, AAA says.

"A switch from winter grade to summer grade fuels will show a continued increase in the prices for the next few weeks," says a message on the auto club's website.

Summer grade fuel burns cleaner than winter grade and costs more to produce. In addition, demand for gasoline increases during the summer months, when many drivers take vacation road trips. As demand goes up, availability goes down. Result: even higher gas prices.

For most students, any increase in costs can be a hardship, and gasoline is no exception.

"I can't afford for the prices to keep going up," said Leah Wilson, 19, who commutes from Oakland to Hayward at least three days a week. "I feel like I am always saving for something . . . If I want to go out, I can't. I don't have gas in my car, or I don't have any money."

Wilson drives a Pontiac G6 which she thinks gets "pretty good gas mileage," but she said she still spends nearly \$50 a week on gas.

Kevin Chao spends even more. "Well, I have an SUV," said Chao, a junior majoring in business administration who said he recalls spending substantially less on fuel only six

months ago. "I spend at least \$75 a week on gas."

That \$75 a week on gas adds up to nearly \$4,000 a year—almost \$1,000 more than Chao's annual fees at CSUEB.

Chao, who doesn't want to see the prices rise further, said he has actually considered purchasing a more fuel efficient vehicle if gas prices continue to rise.

However, some students have done more than merely consider a change in lifestyle.

to around \$160-\$200 dollars a month on gas.

"That sets me back because I'm going to school and I have to pay for expenses," she said.

The rising costs have affected students driving more efficient vehicles, too.

Eric Pheng, a sociology major who drives a Honda Accord, commutes from Oakland. He spends nearly \$200 a month on gas, but only buys premium gas from Chevron.

"I love my car," said Pheng, "but I will start taking public transportation once it reaches \$4 (a gallon)."

Others facing high gas prices are also considering the public transit route.

"I hate it (high gas prices), but you won't get to your destination unless you pay the price," said Michael Smith of Vallejo, who commutes to Hayward. "I have a job to get to, but sometimes

I think about commuting on BART because prices are too much."

The toll high gasoline prices take is even worse for those who must travel farther to get to school or work. Imagine driving from San Jose to San Francisco five days a week, a 100 mile round trip. For a car that gets 20 miles per gallon, that commute would cost about \$17 a day at today's gas prices. Commuting that distance five times a week would cost more than \$4,000 a year.

"I spend up to \$100 dollars a week on gas commuting to work," said Donovan White, of Oakland, who drives a Toyota truck and commutes to Livermore for his job.

"I was going to spontaneously combust when I found out that gas prices are much higher out here in the West Coast than in the East Coast. Since the refinery broke in Alaska, things seem to be going in the wrong direction."

Others are considering even more radical lifestyle changes to battle high gas prices. For example, Leah Wilson is considering moving to campus to save money.

Wilson spends an average of \$2,600 dollars on gas per year, which is almost half the amount it would cost for a year's room and a full meal plan in Pioneer Heights.

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Woman Awakens with Facial Paralysis

By Jeannie Maltez
Staff Writer

For Arabella Ablaza, a healthy 26-year-old woman, a recent Thursday was just like any other day. Until she noticed the left side of her face was frozen.

Ablaza woke her sister up and together they discovered that the muscles on the left side of Arabella's face were not working. She couldn't smile and the side of her face was numb.

She didn't know what was happening and immediately called her physician, Dr. Clark Williams. Williams diagnosed her with Bells Palsy and referred her to a neurologist who gave Ablaza more details about this strange disease.

Neurologist Dr. Ben Philo explained that Bells Palsy is a condition in which the facial muscles become weak and paralyzed. It's caused by trauma to the seventh cranial nerve. He told Ablaza she had contracted it through a virus. In reaction to the virus the facial nerve within the bony plate of the skull near the temple

swells, causing stress on the nerve in the bony canal that damages it.

Bells Palsy symptoms normally include a drooping or sagging mouth, facial pain, drooling, loss of taste, and the inability to close the eye, resulting in tearing and the need to wear an eye patch.

According to the Bells Palsy information site, Bells Palsy is not as uncommon as is generally believed. Worldwide statistics set the frequency at approximately .02 percent of the population, although there are some geographical variations in that rate. In other words, it can effect 1 of every 5,000 people, and about 40,000 Americans every year.

Viral and bacterial infections, as well as autoimmune disorders, seem to be the cause of Bells Palsy. It could happen to anyone, but the virus is not contagious. It is not clear why some people are affected by it.

Although the disease can affect anyone, it shows up three times more often in pregnant women than those who are not pregnant. It is also four times more likely to occur in diabet-

ics than the general population, and it is more common in the elderly than children.

Bells Palsy is not permanent but can take months to go away. This information left Ablaza depressed and worried. Philo reassured her that with the help of steroids and facial exercises, her face could recover sooner.

He told her always keeping her eye moist will help avoid paralysis of the facial nerve. He said she must pay considerable attention to maintaining a healthy eye, which requires a constant flow of tears.

Ablaza works as a make-up artist and is constantly in contact with people. She has taken some vacation time hoping that the Bells Palsy will go away.

"I feel like I can't go out of the house," said Ablaza. "I hate having to go through this. I wish this would have never happened to me."

"It's so weird I just woke up one day and now my face won't move," she said.

Additional information about the disease is available from the National Bells Palsy website at www.bells-palsy.com.

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