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SPOTLIGHT

THE

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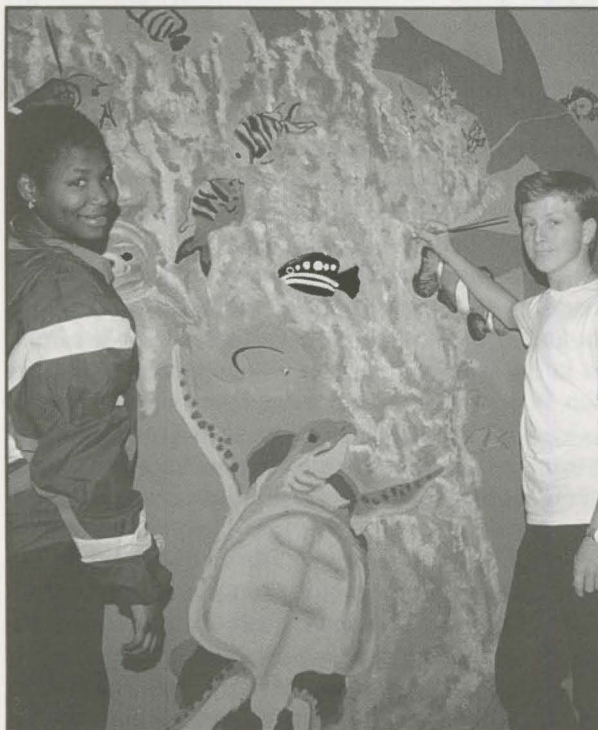
Wil Lou Gray Staff Completes Three Fruitful Years of Restructuring

Target 2000 funds enabled Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School (WLGOS) to undertake an ambitious restructuring initiative three years ago. Both the structure and the student body, taken as a whole, presented a unique opportunity to experiment with the latest thinking in education and management. Throughout the project, the school simultaneously examined, experimented and evaluated what we were doing in our classrooms and dormitories with youngsters, as well as why we were doing it that way.

From the beginning, the project was designed to fully include staff on the front lines who traditionally took their marching orders from the top. We sought to break that mold by drawing upon the expertise of all staff working with students. Their ideas, buttressed by support from outside experts, led to new structures, new ways of teaching and learning, and ultimately to newly found success and self esteem for students.

A school based management system know as CORE (Create, Organize, Recommend and Evaluate) was successfully implemented. CORE has become institutionalized as a decision-making mechanism for the school that includes staff from every department ranging from the agency director's office to the kitchen and maintenance. Teachers, dorm counselors, guidance personnel, nursing and administrators now meet regularly and shape much of the daily operation of the school through decisions made by the group with input from colleagues. The changes resulting from this project are structural in the sense that we modified the way we do things with our students in a systematic and comprehensive manner.

One major effort of the project was to breathe new life into the case management system already in place at WLGOS. The project enabled CORE to put fresh attention and resources into this system which now monitors objectives for each student in the academic, behavioral and social skills areas. Each student is assigned to a case management team comprised of teachers, dorm counselors, and guidance counselors. Through CORE we redirected our priorities and resources with an emphasis on accountability for each student's progress. Like CORE, the case management system is firmly institutionalized within our school structure. We see that as a major benefit to students and their families.



"Each school, district, or state-operated program must tailor their change efforts to meet unique needs and circumstances. We are proud of the way we went through the process at Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School and most willing to share the positives and pitfalls we encountered."

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STATE DOCUMENTS

Restructuring continues -

Another change is the Project Adventure component added to the total curriculum. The Project is a hands-on learning initiative that combines outdoor activities with affective education to reach students who, by their histories, are risk takers. A ropes course and other outdoor adventures are the media for the teaching and learning activities that emphasize self-reliance and safe alternatives to the exciting but self destructive risks that many teens take.

An additional major effect of the project was the creation of the cluster concept which enables teachers to extend their teaching beyond the traditional schedule and class setting. This initiative emerged from CORE discussions. The cluster concept promotes teamwork among teachers as they develop innovative lesson plans using cooperative learning activities, hands-on art projects and an interdisciplinary approach to teaching students.

Our results show that students who experience much academic frustration respond enthusiastically to classes that allow them to work in small groups on meaningful projects that incorporate the same concepts in traditional curricula. Further, the cluster classes have been the site for application of higher order thinking skills activities that are the result of staff development afforded by this project.

What were the significant achievements for all this effort? One is that by the third year of the grant nearly all students who began the year in a position to graduate or complete a program did so. The one exception was a student pursuing a high school diploma but who had an incorrect distribution of credits. The project provided the impetus for an agency initiative to collect data on outcomes for students who leave the program prior to completing their objectives. As an example, during the third year of the grant we had a tally of where students had gone and the reasons why they left the program "prematurely." We have begun to systematically track this and other data which will provide good feedback for review and revision of programs.

Significant progress was made in the passing rate on the Exit Exam. In the baseline year, Spring 1990, saw a range of twenty-nine to forty-five percent of students passing parts of the Exit Exam. In the first year of the project this range became forty to sixty-three percent. In 1993, all students who were otherwise eligible did meet standards on the Exit Exam and received their diplomas.

Other schools can benefit from our experience with this project in two major ways. One is that we have products to share as a result of the grant. The case management system, CORE, Project Adventure, the cluster classes, an innovative arts program, a professional quality video and curriculum guide, and a Student Work Apprentice Program (SWAP) all emerged from the seeds of the project. We have materials that explain most of these endeavors and staff who can articulate the goals, objectives, and inner workings of the models to their colleagues in other schools.

A second way to spread the benefits of this project is to share the process. Each school, district, or state-operated program must tailor their change efforts to meet unique needs and circumstances. We are proud of the way we went through the process at WLGS and most willing to share the positives and pitfalls we encountered. We are very grateful to the South Carolina Department of Education for giving us the opportunity to enhance our mission to serve young people — our most precious endangered species.

Wil Lou Gray Produces New Recruiting Video

The Wil Lou Gray message and mission has to be told throughout the state of South Carolina. How else can students and their families know that there is a place created especially for them to have a second chance, a fresh start and new hope for an education?

Over recent years, that has been accomplished through a video about the school produced by ETV. Unfortunately, video productions eventually become outdated. Toward the end of last school year work began on a new video and was completed this summer. Now the new and updated version is on the road being shown from the smallest in the home setting to large group gatherings. Mr. George Smith, Development Officer, uses this new video on a small loop playback machine when making home visits, provides copies of the video to institutions who refer students, and uses the video at various exhibits designed to assist professionals in making referrals to the school.

While the school encourages visits to campus for tours by prospective students, often the first contact with the school is through this opportunity to get an idea about the school by watching the video. Mr. Smith can be reached by calling the school at 822-5480, extension 21. You are encouraged to take a new look at the school through video.

What Young Adolescents Need

- *Strong family structure
- *After school programs/adult supervision
- *Development of self-esteem
- *Community involvement and service opportunities
- *Adult mentors/role models
- *Training in healthy lifestyles
- *Strong peer groups
- *Supervised social and recreational activities
- *Access to counseling
- *Academic enrichment

Taken from: Turning Points, Carnegie Corporation

Special Projects For Drug And Alcohol Abuse Funded At Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School

Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School has received funding for two special programs designed to address the needs of targeted population groups. The Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services has funded two WLGOS programs which address the needs of adolescents in South Carolina.

The first program targets students at Wil Lou Gray during the regular school year. Since students are drawn from throughout South Carolina, these programs can truly be said to have a statewide focus. The referral mechanism is the existing case management system and the new Student Assistance Program process.

Students will be involved in classes, workshops, field trips and adventure-based counseling. A total of four groups of ten students each will be formed during the school year. These students will be taught positive leisure skills and provided incentives to become or remain drug-free. Drug education will be infused throughout the program. Careful follow-up of these students will occur in order to determine their progress in school, including achievement and attendance, and their attitudes toward drug use.

A second program will take place during a summer camp program for youth at the school as well as young people enrolled in at-risk programs around the state. The summer camp will use the adventure-based counseling model to address the high risk behaviors of these youth. Alternative, drug-free activities will be provided by staff and peer counselors who are trained in outdoor education and drug abuse prevention. The camp is planned for forty to fifty students with follow-up mini retreats held to investigate campers' progress in behavior and attitude change.

These prevention programs are based upon earlier programs developed by the Wil Lou Gray staff and directed at youth who are highly at risk for school failure and drug abuse.

An uncertain sense of self combined with a lack of experience in positive leisure skills leads to an increased probability of experimentation with drug use among adolescents.

Second Annual Benefit Auction And Dinner Scheduled For November 12, 1993

The Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School Foundation is sponsoring the second annual benefit auction on Friday, November 12, 1993 beginning at 6:00 p.m. This event will be held at the National Guard Armory behind the Columbia Airport on Platt Springs Road. The auction will be even bigger and better than the event last year which raised \$6,000.00 for student scholarships. Proceeds were also used for library materials and items for the health room at the school.

A \$12.50 ticket buys a delicious dinner featuring roasted quail, steamed oysters, and a pig pickin' along with the trimmings. Additionally, all ticket holders are entitled to bid in the live auction on a range of exciting items including original art, celebrity memorabilia, furniture, weekend getaways, a deep sea fishing trip, a brand new fishing boat and much more!

Tickets are now on sale for the event. Please clip the coupon in this issue and mail along with your check payable to Wil Lou Gray Foundation for the number of tickets requested. Mr. Smith can be reached at 822-5480, extension 21 for more information or to donate auction items. Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School is a non-profit organization and contributions are tax deductible.

**The Wil Lou Gray Foundation
Second Annual Benefit Auction
(803) 822-5480**

Yes, I want to contribute a cash donation.

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$250

\$500 \$1000 Other

Yes, I want to contribute to the auction.

Item to donate _____

Yes, I wish to purchase _____ tickets at \$12.50 each.

Return to: Mr. George M. Smith, Wil Lou Gray Foundation
West Campus Road, West Columbia, S. C. 29170

Donations Are Tax Deductible

Mrs. Dorothy Turner Awarded Order Of The Palmetto



Governor Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. recognized Mrs. Dorothy C. Turner with the Order of the Palmetto. Mrs. Turner, a teacher at Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School for the past 32 years, recently completed her 50th year of teaching.

Mrs. Turner, known to all of her colleagues as "Cappie", has no plans to stop teaching. She states simply, "I'll keep on as long as I feel I can help someone." Mrs. Turner teaches business education subjects to Wil Lou Gray students.

Her long tenure at Wil Lou Gray has allowed her to serve many different students from throughout South Carolina. The students have presented many different needs from adults who had missed the chance to receive an education, to students with various physical handicaps and now students who are young adolescents in need of alternate educational approaches. Always, Mrs. Turner has skillfully met the needs of her students.

Both students and staff as well as the community hold Mrs. Turner in high esteem for her major contributions through her teaching. We are proud to have one of the Palmetto State's finest among us.

THE SPOTLIGHT is a quarterly publication of WLGOS Research & Training Center. Inquires about Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School may be directed to Ms. Brenda S. Rawl, Associate Editor, Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School, West Campus Road, West Columbia, South Carolina 29170, (803) 822-5480.

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Superintendent
Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School*

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