

# Montcalm

M E S S E N G E R

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS & FRIENDS OF MONTCALM STUDENTS WINTER 2009

## HOME

### Montcalm School for Boys

The following essays were written by young men at Montcalm School for Boys in Albion, Michigan. The students were



asked to explain what "home" means to them; how being at Montcalm is alike or different from home and how they can apply back home what they are learning while at Montcalm.

*What does home mean to me? It's not just a place where I may sleep or eat. It's more than that. It's a place where I can be loved and grow as a kid. Montcalm is not a home as much as it is a tool to help me be successful whenever I do return home. Montcalm helped me realize what problems I may cause in my home and helped me to fix them so that when I return, I can be a positive influence in my home.*

– Mike

*What home means to me is being with a family who cares about me and helps me with my problems. The difference between Montcalm and home is that I cannot be in a regular school, I am not with my friends, and I cannot see my family members as often. My stay so far at Montcalm has helped me by teaching me to express my emotions and not bottle them up inside of me. Montcalm has been a very helpful program to me.*

– Aaron



## Learning to Sew Mends Souls

This past summer, a new recreational activity was added to the schedule at Montcalm School for Girls. It wasn't known whether or not the students would like the activity. Little did we know that the women from the local Van Wert area Sewing Guild would bring great satisfaction to the lives of the young women at Montcalm.

"We could not have predicted that the girls would become immersed in learning how to use a sewing machine, thread a needle and cut out patterns," said Sarah Hueve, staff member at Montcalm School for Girls. "We could not have predicted that many of the students would want to work even more on their projects back at the cottage. The girls have a great sense of accomplishment and pride after completing their projects."

The Sewing Guild has given the girls so much to look forward to. Every week they ask the staff, "When are we sewing again?" The staff recalls the days when the girls seemed a little less comfortable with the idea. They seemed to think, "this is something my Grandma does."

However, when they realized on the first day all that they could make – that it wasn't just "old lady blankets" – the group became very excited. They saw that they could make anything from clothes to pillows to handbags, which happen to be a very hot item among teenage girls. The group really seemed to have a renewed focus and it didn't have to be on a specific treatment issue. They could just create something that was all theirs.

The group also has been given the opportunity to have fun, the kind of fun teenagers have. The group learned a new coping skill, a healthy coping skill that is useful to them beyond Montcalm. This coping mechanism also allows them to once again have fun without harming themselves or others. This is a creative outlet that has spawned potential career opportunities for girls who did not really care too much about their futures. Girls that did not find education important have now learned to sew and are considering futures in fashion design.

The girls also no longer see their clothing as disposable items. A missing button or broken zipper is no longer a garment's death sentence. Many of these young women have been fortunate in their lives and would have thought nothing of getting rid of clothing because a button fell off. Now these same ladies are armed with the tools and skills to see the possibilities and can appropriately fix the problems presented to them. *(continued inside)*

## HOME *(continued)*

To me, home means a safe environment with a bed, a bathroom and food. Montcalm has all of those things. Also, I think home is a place where you can go out whenever you want. The difference between Montcalm and home is that at Montcalm you don't get all the privacy you want. But I understand that is for my safety. Montcalm is helping me with my anger, so when I get home I can have a better home life.

– Steven

Home means a lot to me. Home is a place of peace where you can always go if you are tired or just really bored. At home there is always something that you like to do and you can just about do anything you want as long as it is allowed. I haven't been at Montcalm too long, but I have been at other programs also. Montcalm has and will teach me and help me to be able to understand rules better so I don't end up in trouble at home. This will definitely help me with life afterward so I know the boundaries whether it be the law or just common house rules, I won't disregard them.

– Nick

Home to me means where there are people who care about me and love me. And where I can be safe and not feel lonely or hopeless. Home to me is where I can live safely loved and respected. Home means also that I can live with people that I love and care for. Montcalm could be home if I could be with my family, but I don't complain because there are people who do love you here, and at home it's not safe for me to be there so I'd rather call Montcalm home then to be back home. Montcalm is a very helpful place to stay at, and I'm thankful to every staff that helped me through my struggles.

– Marco

## MEET OUR STAFF

### Nathan Westfall

*Director of Admissions, Montcalm Schools*

Montcalm Admission Department welcomes Nathan Westfall as Director of Admissions. Nathan has been serving Starr Commonwealth and Montcalm Schools for nearly two years. In this new position, Nathan will be responsible for supporting Montcalm School for Girls by serving Educational Consultants and families looking for solutions for struggling young women.

Though Starr/Montcalm treatment philosophies remain consistent for both boys and girls, each program has its own unique benefits. Nathan will be available to answer questions and guide families through the admissions process in Van Wert. "I'm very excited to have the opportunity to work with such a great group of treatment experts and contribute to the growth and development of the girls program."

Nathan has 10 years of college student recruitment experience and is very qualified to answer any questions you may have.

To contact Nathan, please call 517-629-5591 ext. 2594 or email him at [westfalln@starr.org](mailto:westfalln@starr.org).



## Student Success Story



I have been at Starr for 10 months. For the past two months I have been living at the Gauss house which is part of the Structured Transitional Living program here at Montcalm School for Boys. When I first came to Montcalm I was placed at Reynolds Cottage. I made almost all of my changes at Reynolds with the help of my staff, Mr. Sharrar, Mr. Pierce, Ms. Jones, Mr. Eash, Mr. Codde, Ms. Miller and others. They helped me become what I am today. I came to Starr Commonwealth with a substance abuse issue and anger problems. It was challenging being here at first. The environment was completely different than where I was before and the people here really wanted to help me change. With this new environment, and the help from my staff and other staff I was able to control my anger and stop it before it got the best of me. I also accomplished a huge goal by achieving sobriety and have been sober now for nearly a year. I have learned that anger is not a bad thing, in fact it is normal but how you control it is what makes the difference. I have also learned that in order for me to stay sober I must change my environment and make sure that I am keeping myself busy. I learned that helping others sometimes is more meaningful than just helping you. But, most of all I have learned how to have fun sober and make meaningful positive relationships with my former group members and staff. That is what has been most important to me. I am going to miss a lot of the people here and definitely plan on keeping in touch. – Andrew

## HOME

### Montcalm School for Girls

The following essays were written by young women at Montcalm School for Girls in Van Wert, Ohio. The students were asked to explain what "home" means to them; how being at Montcalm is alike or different from home and how they can apply back home what they are learning while at Montcalm.

To me, home means that people I am with are people I care about and love. This is where my heart is in accordance with other people and myself. This is where my things are and how they are put together. The most important thing about home is it is where I am most comfortable, and the people I am most comfortable with live.

– Caitlin

Home is a place where I can get some good food, sleep, and just chill with really close family and friends. Home is a place where I can be myself and do as I please. Home is a lot different from Montcalm by all the different things we do. I have learned here at Montcalm that I can build better relationships with family by verbalizing my emotions.

– Marianne

The word home means happiness. You feel warm when you walk in your home and hear your family laughing and having fun. You feel like you belong there, and that's where you are supposed to be. It's comforting when you have people there for you and loving you. They want to take care of you when times get rough. When you walk through the door you feel invited from all the happiness and laughter. You also feel the excitement that everybody is having and being joyful. When I'm feeling down and out, that's where I can hang my hat up. I can say that I

(continued on back)

## MEET OUR STAFF

### Kelley Jones

Executive Director, Van Wert



Starr Commonwealth and Montcalm School for Girls welcomes Kelley Jones as Van Wert's newly appointed Executive Director. Jones brings 14 years of Starr treatment experience and leadership to her new position. In addition to a rich Starr resume, she brings a little something extra to Montcalm School for Girls: Girl Power.

It's no secret that the needs of teenage girls are different from the challenges faced by boys.

"I can't imagine being a teenage girl today with pressure to grow up in such a hurry in this fast-paced world – it's no wonder that we're seeing our girls struggle. Having an opportunity to become part of a long-term solution for young women here at Montcalm is really a blessing in many ways," says Jones.

Van Wert is not new to Jones as it's where she began her career with Starr back in the 90s. "My first Starr position was as a Youth Specialist right here on this campus. So accepting this position is really a homecoming for me," she says with a smile.

Expanding Montcalm for Girls is a challenge that Jones welcomes with open arms.

"I look forward to nurturing this fantastic program and the wonderful staff so that Montcalm becomes the number one therapeutic school for young women nationwide."

The strong treatment background Jones offers is an edge that will certainly help pave the way for implementing specialized therapies for teenage girls.

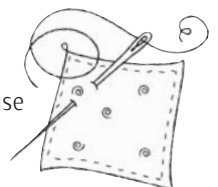
"We're pursuing specific program plans to really serve these young women – especially in the areas of Reactive Attachment Disorder (adoption), spectrum disorders (PDD, Asperger's Syndrome), depression and self injurious tendencies," says Jones.

Jones made the move to Van Wert with her husband Scott, who serves Starr in the Maintenance Department and with their two young daughters Jensen, 8 and Jaylyn, 5. The girls are both attending Lincolnview Elementary and are adjusting well to the change. "It's been a smooth transition," explains Jones, "and it's nice to have the opportunity to raise our girls in Van Wert – they'll certainly have no shortage of sisters, right?"

To contact Kelley about Montcalm School for Girls, please email her at [jonesk@starr.org](mailto:jonesk@starr.org) or call 419-238-4051, ext. 6104.

(Learning to Sew Mends Souls continued)

"In a way, the Sewing Guild has become a metaphor for what we try to teach," Hueve said. "We try to teach them that problems are opportunities. Just because a little part of you may feel broken it doesn't make you less valuable. Perhaps you don't know how to fix it now, but we will guide you how to work the machine. We will teach you to thread the needle. We will help you cut the pattern and piece it together. And with hard work and determination, you will turn out to be a work of art."



## HOME (continued)

need one of my family members to talk to or someone to just hang out with and enjoy myself, so I can get my mind off of the things that are going on in my life. It's so comforting when you can lie in your own bed and feel like you're flying.

– Kayla

Well, to me home is a very complex word. It could be a place where the people you care about most live, such as your family and friends. It could also be a place where you feel you belong. It could even be a place that you feel fully relaxed in. Maybe your parents, your siblings, your other relatives, or even your friends live in the place you call home. Home might not just be your house, but it could be your town or state and maybe even your country. However, home could be a smaller place too, such as your house. It could even be as small as your room. Home can be pretty much anywhere! To me, I definitely feel that I belong when I'm at home. Sometimes when I'm not home, I feel awkward and like I don't belong. Here at Montcalm, I don't quite feel like I belong because it's not like being at home. It's actually completely different! I'm not with my family every night, but instead I'm with a bunch of girls.

– Rachael

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY CALENDAR

### BOYS ACTIVITIES

Bowling Club (February tournament)  
Montcalm Basketball Team Games  
Pistons game  
Sledding  
Snow Boarding  
Movie Nights  
Interfaith Shelter (Service learning)  
Blood Drive (Service Learning)  
Animal Shelter (Service Learning)  
Snow Removal (Service Learning)  
Game Nights  
Hygiene Shopping  
Life Skills (Off-campus  
Money management classes)  
Cooking Lessons  
Grocery Shopping



### GIRLS ACTIVITIES

Help Me Grow  
All Starr Choir  
Special Olympics  
basketball team  
coaching  
Movie nights  
Sewing  
Trip to Mad River Mountain  
(weather permitting) for sledding  
and tubing in the snow



**Thanks!** We wish to show our gratitude to all the Montcalm families and friends who made generous donations in 2008 in support of our school and students. From Wii game systems, fresh produce, bricks in honor of your students and monetary contributions, every gift is truly appreciated. We especially would like to thank the Mayle family for their heartfelt contribution, and in doing so, share with you the letter they sent in December along with their gifts.

*Dear Montcalm staff,*

*Each year at our annual brother and sister Christmas party, rather than exchanging gifts with one another, we donate a nominal amount to someone's choice of a worthy cause. This year it was our turn to designate the recipient. We chose Montcalm in appreciation of the opportunity you provided our grandson, Christopher, last summer. Enclosed are nine checks from my brothers and sisters to use as you see fit. God bless your school and the entire staff for the wonderful work you do with these troubled young boys.*

*Gratefully yours, The Mayle Family*

*Montcalm*  
SCHOOL  
FOR BOYS

13725 Starr Commonwealth Rd.  
Albion, MI 49224  
PH 866.244.4321  
FX 517.629.4650  
montcalmschools.org

*Montcalm*  
SCHOOL  
FOR GIRLS

15145 Lincoln Highway  
Van Wert, OH 45891  
PH 866.244.4321  
FX 419.238.5571  
montcalmschools.org