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Jeni Garber

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Introduction: Conversations with Youth

Jeni Garber[1]

In March 2009, Street Youth Legal Advocates of Washington's Seattle University chapter (SYLAW-SU)[2] and Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS)[3] collaborated with the *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* (SJSJ) to facilitate a discussion among homeless youth about the issues homeless youth face and the topics raised by authors in SJSJ's homeless youth and the law symposium issue.

Joe Ciok, a member of the PSKS Lasting Employment Advancement Program (LEAP), recruited homeless, at-risk, and transitioning youth older than eighteen years from across Seattle to participate in the discussion. With the guidance of Ruvin Munden,[4] keynote speaker at the National Homeless Youth and the Law Conference, himself a former street youth, the participating youths spoke candidly about their thoughts and experiences.

The group included eleven amazing youth—Joe, Emma, Shauna, Zach, Elaina, Chloe, Holly, Jacqueline, Garth, Richard, and Noah—and the Executive Director and co-founder of PSKS, Elaine Simons. Their thoughts, ideas, and stories have been transcribed and interspersed throughout this issue. A podcast of the entire discussion can also be found on the SJSJ website[5].

Across state legislatures and nonprofit organizations, so much valuable work is done to create programs and policies *on behalf of* homeless youth. Through this dialogue, SYLAW-SU, PSKS, and the *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* hope to give these eleven youth a platform to speak for themselves.

[1] SYLAW-SU copresident and cofounder.

[2] More information on SYLAW can be found at http://www.sylaw.org. In September 2008, students at Seattle University School of Law spearheaded a new chapter of SYLAW—SYLAW-SU. This new chapter conducts two weekly drop-in legal information and referral clinics at local homeless and at-risk youth centers in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle: PSKS (www.psks.org) and Orion Center (http://www.youthcare.org/index.php/services/orion).

In 2009, SYLAW-SU participated in the development of the new Juvenile Records Sealing Clinic in Snohomish County, Washington, and will be partnering with Lawyers Fostering Independence[2] and the Mockingbird Society[2] to conduct a know-your-rights training for youth who are in foster care. In addition, SYLAW-SU has been recognized by Seattle University School of Law's Access to Justice Institute with the second annual Justice in the Community Award, which recognizes and honors students and student organizations who have consistently engaged in social justice work by serving marginalized or underserved individuals or communities through direct advocacy, community education, inspiring others to take action, or facilitating collaboration.

[3] More information on PSKS can be found at http://www.psks.org/.

[4] Ruvin Munden is thirty-six years old and graduated cum laude with a BA in public administration from Seattle University. He currently works for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound doing advocacy and community engagement. Additionally, he is a program coordinator for a local community center that serves people and families recovering from addiction. He also serves on the King County Alcoholism & Substance Administrative Abuse Board and speaks nationally to help improve the lives of at-risk youth.

[5] To listen to the podcast, please go to http://law.seattleu.edu/sjsj.