

West Valley View

The community newspaper of Avondale, Buckeye, Goodyear, Litchfield Park & Tolleson, AZ ♦ Phone (623) 535-8439

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'I thought I was the only 1...'

WV student shares story of homelessness

Emily McCann
staff writer

Reshard Johnson was living out of state two years ago when he learned his six younger siblings had been placed into custody of Child Protective Services.

He was 16 years old at the time, and rushed back to Arizona to be with his family.

"I decided to come out here just to be here for emotional support, but I started dealing with CPS," he said. "They told me I couldn't live with my mother because she isn't fit to be a parent."

Police had been called to the house and found his mother drunk, which led to the children being taken away. Johnson went to stay with an aunt, but she had plans to move out of state, he said.

A few months later, after his mother attended parenting classes, Johnson and his siblings returned home. However, it didn't take long for things to go south, he said.

"It just wasn't the same; something in my mom snapped," he said. "When she lost her children, she was just done with life. She was drinking as if she had lost something she was never getting back."

One day, they got into a big argument and Johnson called his caseworker. He was sent to a group home, where he spent a few months before starting to miss his family.

He tried going back to his mother, but was told by CPS that he couldn't leave the group home. So instead, he bounced between friends' houses while attending school for 12 hours a day to catch up on credits.

"It wasn't too big of a deal to my friends for me being there, because I was gone all day," he said. "I didn't want to be a burden and stay in one spot like I was living with them; I wanted to just be a



RESHARD JOHNSON, a homeless teen, stands outside the Homeless Youth Connection Nov. 17 in Goodyear. View photo by Michael Clawson



Fourth in a series

Homeless supplies drive

The *West Valley View's* third annual drive for homeless youths runs through November and will help benefit almost 1,700 children in the West Valley.

The items most needed are new or slightly used children and teen clothing, gift cards for food and clothing stores, disposable phones, thumb drives and composition notebooks.

Drop-off sites:

- Homeless Youth Connection - 15655 W. Roosevelt St., Suite 100 in Goodyear. 623-374-3747.
- *West Valley View* - 1050 E. Riley Drive in Avondale. 623-535-8439.

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temporary thing."

Reaching out

Eventually, Johnson told his school counselor that he was homeless and was put in contact with the Homeless Youth Connection, an organization that started in February 2010 to help teens on their own.

There, he found personal hygiene items, a bicycle to get around and even emotional support.

"It made me feel like they were always giving me the extra step I needed to get to where I needed to be," he said. "It made me feel like someone cared, because I didn't talk to my mother."

He then learned about another teen at his school who was in a similar situation when he read last year's homeless series in the *West Valley View*.

"I didn't think I was the only person in the world with problems, but I thought I was the only one at the school who was going through that situation," he said. "It was nice to see I wasn't the only one who was struggling, and someone else was getting help by the same person."

Johnson graduated high school in May and applied to join the Army, but needs to get a few things straightened out first, he said.

"I have made a few mistakes in my life and done some crazy things," he said.

In the meantime, he's trying to enroll at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

"I didn't know how to do the financial aid thing," he said. "Honestly, I don't think I was prepared to do college on my own or start the process of enrollment."

Last week, he met with a counselor at the campus who guided him through the process. Johnson wants to study criminal justice and become a detective.

"This is important for me, because I want to make something of myself," he said. "I don't want to fall into a category or become a statistic of a person who gave up or didn't try to do something better for themselves."

For now, he still stays with friends or anywhere he can.

"I can't be in one place for a long time; I have to move around," he said. "I feel like I can't settle down."

Emily McCann can be reached by email at emccann@westvalleyview.com or on Twitter @NewsbyEmily.



Reader Comments

Posted: Wednesday, November 23, 2011

Article comment by: **Nia Kimp**

Me and my friend are friends with Reshard and we haven't seen him in awhile. Then one day we saw him in the west valley view. We had no idea he was homeless he never seemed that way. So it was shocking to see this. We wish we could see him again. And we want to help him out as much as we can. We miss him :D

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