Homeless No More: How Alumnus Jonathan Overcame Mighty Obstacles

When he first set foot on Hanna Boys Center’s campus at age 15, Jonathan Wieland had been living out of his backpack and managing on his own for years.

Life was exhausting and dangerous for Jonathan, who had been homeless and on his own since age 12, but somehow he managed to find food, maintain proper hygiene and stay safe—all without parents or family. Hardworking and dedicated, he maintained a rigorous schedule so that he could bike to school, stay in classes the whole year, and even be involved in sports like football.

At the urging of a friendly probation officer he met through his brother, Jonathan finally agreed to give Hanna Boys Center a try, but his intent was to stay just long enough to save some money and get a little rest so he could head back out on his own. At this point in his life, Jonathan was fully independent and didn’t trust many people.

Once he settled in at Hanna, however, something changed. Jonathan sums it up in one word: seconds. He discovered that all he needed to do was ask and he could have second helpings. Or thirds. Or as much food as he wanted. On top of not being hungry all the time, he wasn’t cold anymore. Plus, he didn’t have to worry about where he was going to sleep at night. All this flooded him with a huge sense of relief, which led to a breakthrough.

Instead of worrying about his basic needs, Jonathan was able to focus on his intellectual well-being and future. He shifted his energy to two things—making money and doing well at school. He got six jobs (in the kitchen and off campus) in his first two months at Hanna and began working so hard that the staff barely knew where he was. With stellar grades and a little bit of luck, he was able to pursue a new chapter in his life and achieve academic success at Sonoma High School while living at Hanna.

Continued on inside
TRANSFORMING LIVES: DONOR MICHAEL BENNETT’S STORY

When Michael Bennett was a young boy, his mother was unable to properly care for him for a short time, and he was placed in a residential children’s facility.

Now in his retirement, Michael still remembers how tough it was to be in that facility and how happy he was to return home. But his firsthand traumatic experience is what made Michael want to become a strong supporter for Hanna Boys Center.

WHY HANNA?

“Hanna is so very special. It’s nothing like the place that I remember going to as a young boy,” says Michael. “When I toured Hanna, I was so impressed with all the wonderful facilities and opportunities the boys have here. It’s a place where you can see the boys are taken care of, educated and encouraged to be the best they can be.”

As a former aviator, Michael is thrilled that Hanna is providing youth with practical opportunities to gain entry-level jobs in the field. Most interesting to him are the vocational programs such as carpentry and welding and the expansion of the culinary arts program.

A former Bay Area resident, Michael still has roots here through his children (he and his wife now reside in Oregon and Florida). While he supports many organizations that help those in need, Michael has a strong tie to Hanna because of our compassionate work to improve the lives of children.

WAYS TO GIVE

There are many ways donors can support Hanna, and Michael chose to help by issuing a distribution from his IRA account. This tax-deductible gift was issued directly through his broker to Hanna with a quick phone call and a small amount of paperwork. According to Michael, “I give to Hanna in the hopes that there continue to be places like this that take care of these young men, giving them encouragement to face their futures while learning how to make good choices.”

We are also thrilled to add a dean of students to our administration team, a crucial role that will be filled by 18-year Hanna veteran Courtney Jackson. As he manages school discipline and works to improve campus culture and communication, Courtney will continue to teach and coach during his transition.

Finally, we have launched a new partnership with the Sonoma Valley Community Health Center, which is now staffing and operating Hanna’s Health Center, improving the health services we provide our boys.

We hope you enjoy reading about the latest developments as we continue to progress forward. Thank you for helping us build and continue to progress forward.

"The first time Irene, my wife, and I set foot on the Hanna campus, we knew it was someplace special," Bob recalls. "The boys were really happy there. You felt at home being there. It was a comfortable space, inviting and warm. Our daughter loved working there, as did our son-in-law whom she met there.”

As general manager of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, Bob was able to leverage much of his strategic and operations experience as a Hanna trustee. “Long-range, strategic planning was the Board’s greatest contribution,” Bob says. “We provided for the Hanna of that day with thoughtful fundraising and guidance, but really took care to plan for the Hanna of tomorrow—what was needed next in terms of facility usage, programming, capital needs and recreation. It’s such a pleasure to see how, in addition to helping the boys, the whole community is now benefiting from that work.”

These days, Bob spends much of his time helping care for his wife Irene, as she struggles with Alzheimer’s disease. "Hanna will always have a place in our hearts," he says. While Bob and Irene can no longer attend events or visit the campus, they chose to include Hanna in their estate plans and are now proud members of Hanna’s Legacy Society.

To learn more about ways to give stock or mutual funds, or transfer a distribution from an IRA account, please contact Beth Fox at 707.933.2588 or bfox@hannacenter.org.

Hanna Boys Center

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE ARMED FORCES

U.S. ARMY

Julius Alvarez
Jeremy Barrow
Danny Brambila
Jarrod Compton
Jason Coughlin-Brown
Jeremy Ridken
Tim Frech
Austin Smith
Philip Hodges
Zack Jones

U.S. NAVY

Tyler Curson
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ALL IN THE FAMILY: DONOR BOB WILHELM’S STORY

One day in the early ’80s, Bob Wilhelm and his wife got an excited phone call from their youngest daughter who had just started her first job.

But they became a little alarmed when she told them she would be “living in a cottage with 10 teenage boys out in the country, providing therapy for at-risk kids who needed help their families couldn’t or wouldn’t provide.” They quickly arranged a visit “out to the country” to investigate.

Now, more than three decades later, Bob is grateful to Hanna for launching his daughter’s career, for his future son-in-law, for the opportunity to serve Hanna as a trustee, and for being introduced to such a wonderful organization. “The first time Irene, my wife, and I set foot on the Hanna campus, we knew it was someplace special,” Bob says. “The boys were really happy there. You felt at home being there. It was a comfortable space, inviting and warm. Our daughter loved working there, as did our son-in-law whom she met there.”

According to Bob, supporting Hanna is an important legacy for them both. “I’m old school. I believe in doing my civic duty and helping the community. If you have a chance to visit Hanna, see the impact they are having and the difference they are making, I think you would support them too. If you could hear the boys talk about their backgrounds and the hardships they are overcoming, you would know why every dollar you give to Hanna matters.”

Continued from front page

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God bless you,

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I put my head down when I got to Hanna and just focused on getting to the next goal, then the next, then the next. I was relentless. I never stopped. I wasn’t used to having resources or any kind of support network, and I suddenly had so much. I wasn’t going to waste a second of it.

At graduation, Jonathan was honored as Student of the Year at Sonoma High (the first Hanna boy to ever receive that honor) and Student of the Year at Archbishop Hanna High School (the first to ever receive both honors at the same time). After he left Hanna, he was accepted at Feather River College and became the first of his 18 siblings to graduate from college, with an AA in Outdoor Recreation Leadership.

Fast-forward a few years and Jonathan was able to set a course for a new adventure—one that would have him soaring through the trees by zip line, crashing through fierce white water, and taming the ferociousness of toddlers. By then he was living in the beautiful Rockies of Colorado, where he started off as a zip line adventure and raft guide and then became a children’s ski instructor in Vail.

Recently, Jonathan came back to visit Hanna with dreams that transcend even his teaching aspirations. He now hopes to help solve the global problem of homelessness.

If anyone can do this, it’s Jonathan. He hopes to construct a community of Earthships—ecofriendly, off-the-grid shelters—for homeless families and veterans and anyone else in need. The ultimate in green buildings, these solar houses are made of recycled materials, such as car tires. Having studied these structures at the Earthship Biotecture Academy in May 2016, Jonathan has built and lived in them as well.

“There aren’t enough words to say what Hanna Boys Center did for me,” Jonathan says. “I guess when it comes right down to it, Hanna gave me something I never truly had — a home.”