

Victoria Noble receives Tomorrow's Woman Award for 2010

by Kim James

Victoria Noble is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Tomorrow's Woman Award, given for achieving high marks in high school and showing promise of future leadership by making a contribution to her community.

She used her passion for art and heart to make a difference in Houston's homeless community.

Tracy Burnett, executive director of Cathedral Health and Outreach Ministries, nominated Noble.

Burnett said, "Victoria is energetic, faithful, proactive, has vision and makes things happen. She thinks about things beyond herself. She really thinks about the community and helping other people."

In 2009, it was time for 17-year-old Noble, a Girl Scout, to plan and complete a Gold Award Project. The Girl Scout Gold Award Project "should fulfill a need within a girl's community, create change and, hopefully, become ongoing."

Noble was put in touch with Burnett, who in turn connected her with an art therapist and other individuals who were excited about helping Victoria's vision become reality.

The Beacon, an arm of Cathedral Health and Outreach Ministries, is a day center that provides hot meals, clothing, private shower and lavatory facilities, laundry services and case management to people living on the streets of Houston. And, at the end of June 2009, The Beacon (thanks to Noble) provided its clients with a creative outlet — two days of art classes.

"I picked the homeless, because they don't get the opportunity to do art, to be exposed to this kind of thing," Noble says. "I wanted to give them the opportunity to experience something everybody else gets to do."

Each of The Beacon's clients was given a folder, paper and pencils. Noble arranged for Coley Jones, an art therapist, to speak to the group about how art can bolster esteem. She also had an artist show the group the different mediums they could work in, different types of art they could do. The group then went outside to a garden area and designed masterpieces on wooden plaques. Some clients took them with them, while others left theirs behind. Today, their work hangs in The Beacon's dining hall.

"On the very first day Victoria was there doing the project," Burnett says, "one of the clients came to me and said, 'We're not offered opportunities like this to create with our hands and heart and soul. As an addict, this is something that I need.'"

After observing and interacting with the clients, Jones told Chris Noble, Victoria's aunt and owner of Marnoble Computer Sales & Service, that she would be willing to teach art classes at The Beacon every month. In turn, Chris asked Jones to tell her what was needed to make that happen and she would fund it. The art class at The Beacon has been taught by Jones every month since.

When asked why she thought it important that this class continues, Chris remembers seeing two women waiting in the line to shower. She could tell they were professional people who, for some reason or another, were down on their luck and found themselves homeless or very close to it. The art class gives them a chance to take their mind off their situation, an opportunity to feel "normal."

"I could tell that the whole event meant something to them," Chris said, "I could tell it made a difference in their world."

Since the class has become ongoing, Burnett has had several clients make positive decisions not to use drugs the day or night before, knowing they have the art program to go to.

"I want things for our clients that are beyond the essential services," Burnett says. "I have always wanted a creative piece to our program, but because of budget and time constraints, it never quite came together. Victoria made that happen. She's fulfilled a dream for me, and I'm forever thankful."

Last year, clients decorated Christmas ornaments that were hung on The Beacon's Christmas tree. The project was very successful, so much so that community volunteers and others were practically begging to buy the ornaments off the tree. This year, the art students will make more ornaments to be sold, hopefully to become The Beacon's trademark thing – homeless art.

Through her project, "Undiscovered Artist," Noble reports learning "there are so many people who are talented but not known." Her project has empowered them and brought awareness of the talent of the homeless people of our city to others.

"A lot of times these people are overlooked and don't think they can be someone," Noble said, "but they really are."

Noble will be a freshman at Texas Christian University in the fall.

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.