

Homeless students face setbacks, staff shows support

By Max Nevins

The students who travel through Grady's halls are renowned for their individuality, each one noticeable in their own way. An overlooked group at the school, however, is the school's approximately 50 homeless students.

"When people think you are going home, you don't know where you're going to sleep, you don't know where you're going to stay, [or] even if you're going to eat," freshman Asha Carter said. "Those are the things I have to deal with every single day."

Since she moved in with her father in April, Carter has been homeless, constantly moving between shelters, hotels and rentals, often sleeping in his van. Because of her dad's time in prison, it has been difficult for them to find shelters that will accept them or for him to get a sustainable job. To earn income for herself and father, Carter often sells chips, candy and water, which earns more money than his weekend security job.

As a homeless student, getting to school on time has been a challenge and sometimes even impossible for Carter. She often has to collect enough money for MARTA and after multiple stops, may even have to run to class. On some days, Carter is unable to get to school if she cannot arrange transportation. When she does arrive, it is often late.

"Most of my teachers just assume I'm being late," Carter said. "They don't really understand why. They just think it's a teenager making excuses."

Even though some students enroll as homeless, teachers are not always aware. Usually, teachers find out which

students are homeless if an issue such as tardiness comes up, prompting the school to notify the teacher.

Social Studies teacher Susan Salvesen has had a number of homeless students in her 11 years at Grady.

"Most of the time, I find out through the students," Salvesen said of students' homeless status. "They come to me with an issue or a problem,

sort of stressful situation."

Although one teacher has been especially understanding of Carter's circumstances, the majority of her teachers are unaware. During her classes, she often is frustrated because of issues outside of school. Carter has taken her anger out on her teachers, which she instantly regrets.

"If your teacher makes you

homework because they didn't feel like doing it, when a lot of times, it's an indication of something else going on," Salvesen said.

School social worker Adelia Johnson is the most direct contact and source of help for homeless students. She keeps an open-door policy where any student can approach her for help.

"It is my role to make sure

favorable positions or situations," Johnson said. "They have a very supportive staff, and even the students have shown great support. I have never seen anything like it."

In the Grady community and Atlanta area, homelessness is a prevalent issue faced by schools and private organizations. Parent Karen Kelly works with homeless youth at St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Peachtree Street.

"It's a very hard population to serve," Kelly said. "The kids have frequently been through a lot of trauma, either caused by stress just because they're homeless or the trauma that caused them to be homeless in the first place."

There are differing opinions as to what should be the first priority when helping the homeless. Kelly believes shelter is the primary need.

"The most important thing when you're trying to solve homelessness is getting in housing first," Kelly said. "[People] think you should get them a job, but if they don't have someplace stable to stay, then the other pieces are pretty hard to put into place for families."

While Johnson agrees that shelter is important, she first tries to provide "non-judgemental help" to homeless students.

"[Getting a homeless person a place to stay] is the most ideal thing, but that's not always the quickest thing," Johnson said. "I think [the first step is] just insuring that student or that family is in a good mental place." □

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According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, 1 in 50 children experience homelessness each year.



and then as I'm trying to help them through it, they'll reveal that they're homeless."

When students indicate they are homeless, Salvesen tries to help by giving extra time on assignments, trying to figure out what they need and filling out a social worker referral form.

"I wish students would come to us earlier when there's something going on rather than later," Salvesen said. "I think that if they just let us know, the teachers at Grady are, for the most part, willing to work with students when they know that they're under some

feel a certain way and you feel uncomfortable, it's going to be hard to go to them. If I feel comfortable, I'll speak, but at the same time, if you notice that I'm good, and then out of nowhere, I'm just slowly going down, at least try to talk to me and maybe we can figure something out," Carter said. "Then, I might speak up."

Before a teacher realizes that a student is homeless, the student is often struggling in class.

"A lot of times as a teacher you just think 'oh, they're not interested in my class' or 'they didn't do their

they have resources in place for anything that may impede on their education," Johnson said. "I'll arrange transportation or order them school supplies, coats or clothes. I keep food here [in my office], so they know they can always come by if they need to eat."

When teachers suspect that a student may be homeless, they can contact Johnson, who will then reach out to the parent for permission to work with the student.

"Being at Grady has been phenomenal with regards to resources for students who may be in less

Student stands up to broken bathrooms with a drill

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Either the locks don't close, don't line up or are nonexistent. Before Colburn-Stanger installed locks, the bathroom in the music hall didn't have a single stall that closed.

"I hate having to hold the bathroom doors with my foot or leg or have someone else hold the door for me, so I just decided to fix the bathroom doors in the music hall myself," Colburn-Stanger said.

Because of dysfunctional locks, lines of people form to use the restrooms between classes only to wind up confused when the lock and the socket of the stall doors are an inch apart. Solutions for this problem primarily consist of pressing a foot up against the door or having someone else hold it closed. However, until recently, no one took action to fix the broken locks.

"I really admire Bradley for doing that," sophomore Sarah Anderson said. "I watched her fix the lock and it was pretty cool. She was upset the doors did not close and were ignored, so she decided to act on it. I definitely admire that."

Colburn-Stanger is concerned about how the upkeep of Grady bathrooms are generally neglected.

"The bathrooms are forgotten," Colburn-Stanger said.

"When you go into any of the bathrooms, there is a good chance it's out of toilet paper or the toilet is clogged. The fact that students have to fix these problems, which shouldn't even be problems in the first place, is annoying. I think the people who put [the doors] up in the first place just wanted to get it done."

Dr. David Propst, assistant principal, defends the administration. According to Dr. Propst, maintenance problems are solved through the process of filing a complaint, requesting a work order and are then addressed properly.

"If something doesn't work, all you have to do is tell someone to fix it," Dr. Propst said.

In 2012, Dr. Propst orchestrated a fundraiser to fix the maintenance problems in the school. Starbucks, The Home Depot and Sherwin-Williams were some of the companies that helped with the project. Project Grady, as it was called, collected \$250,000 to update bathrooms, the courtyard and hallways. Five years after the fundraiser, complaints are resurfacing.

The broken stalls mean longer lines for the bathrooms that do work. Sophomore Emily Brown often finds herself late for class after waiting in lines for the restrooms.

"You need [a partner] to hold the stall door, so if you don't have one then you are stuck waiting in line

for on stall that works and isn't clogged," Brown said.

However, some people disagree with the idea that these problems should be blamed on the maintenance staff.

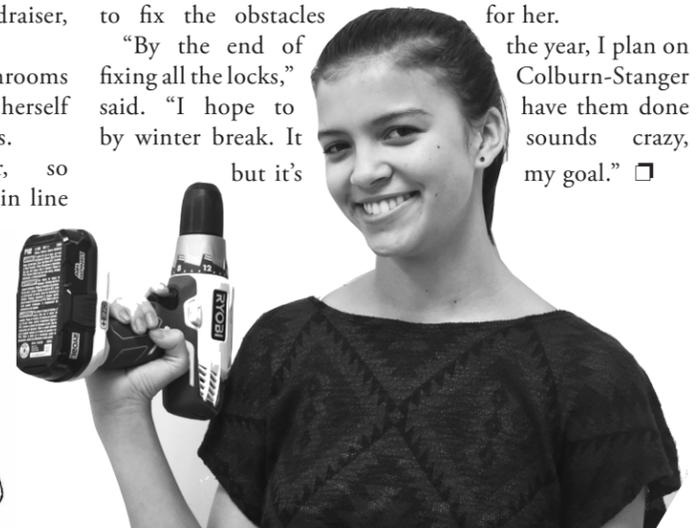
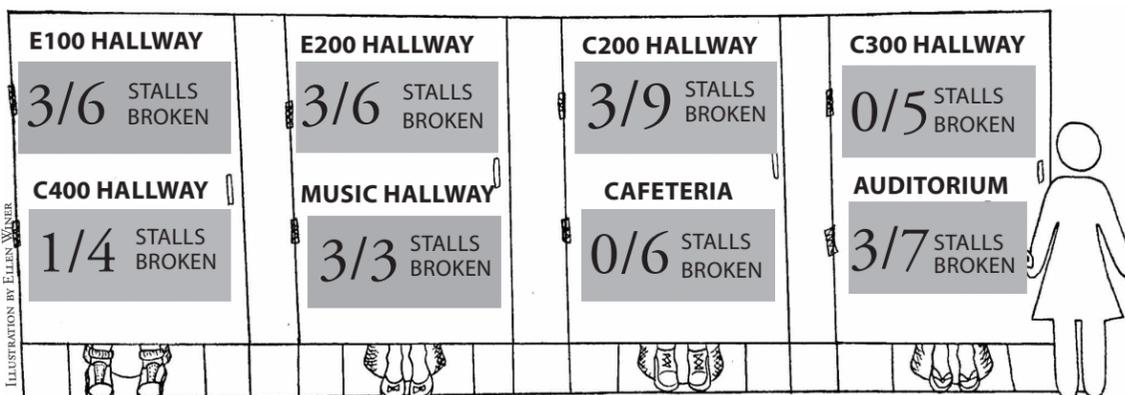
"It's not really a matter of negligence and more of a student abuse issue," art teacher John Brandhorst said. "Our maintenance crew moves as fast as they can to get to problems and broken fixtures. Students hang out in the bathrooms, sit on the sinks, write comments and scratch the mirrors. It only take a few people bent on damage to really screw up a room."

Colburn-Stanger agrees that the students play a role in the bathroom maintenance.

"I think [the students] shouldn't pull on the locks," said Colburn-Stanger. "I just wish that people would respect the things in this school that people worked hard on and not break things just because they can."

No matter who is responsible for the faulty faculties, Colburn-Stanger isn't going to sit and wait for someone to fix the obstacles for her.

"By the end of fixing all the locks," said. "I hope to by winter break. It but it's the year, I plan on Colburn-Stanger have them done sounds crazy, my goal." □



BADLY BROKEN BATHROOMS: (Pictured above) Sophomore Bradley Colburn-Stanger, fed up with the lack of girl bathrooms that were in useable condition, took matters into her own hands — literally.