

# Overcoming Obstacles



## Finally home

Frances Egeler (left) stands with her mother, Ms. Julie Egeler, in front of their new home, the former Lucretia Mott School building. Frances holds the plaque presented to her for winning the national LeTendre scholarship. Photo by Jesse Roller.

## Senior excels after fight against the odds to break her own cycle of homelessness

by **Tori Updike**  
Student Life Editor

Senior Frances Egeler has kept her eye on the prize throughout her 12 years of school. She worked. She studied. She focused.

She was determined to go to college.

She worked despite her family's financial fears. She studied even when she lost her home. She focused while living in every friend's house and every shelter. She was determined even when she didn't know how she would study that night, even when she wasn't sure where her family would go once their time in this shelter was up.

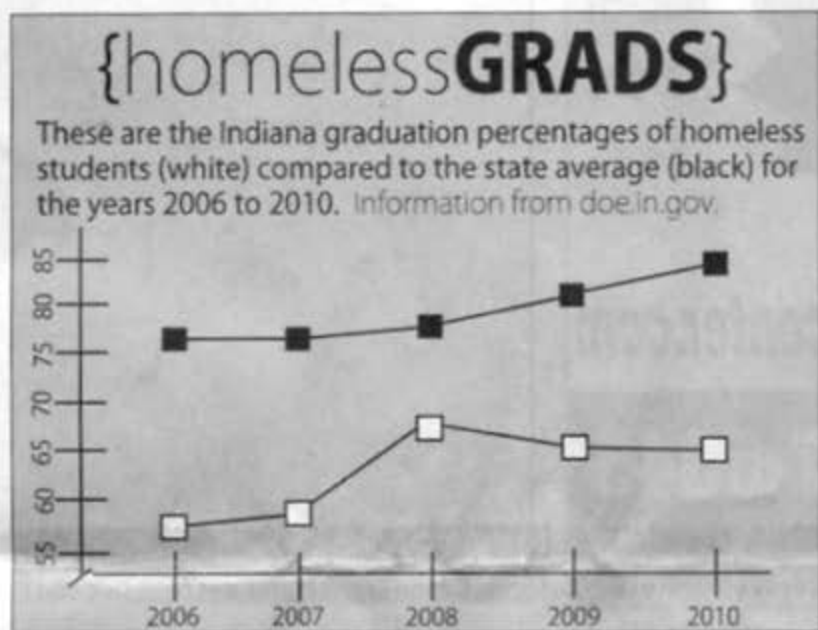
Until September, Frances and her family were homeless for 14 months.

So, when she returned to Interfaith Hospitality Network after school one day and received an unexpected phone call, her prayers were answered. Her dream was that much closer.

Frances is one winner of the LeTendre scholarship through the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, the first from Indiana. The phone call that day was from the scholarship committee, and it congratulated and surprised her with an all-expense paid trip to Atlanta, Georgia, to receive her award and meet other scholars in her situation.

"I was so excited," Frances said. "For me, the main barrier for getting into college is the financial part. (The scholarship) is only \$2,000, but it will help."

Frances' mother, Ms. Julie Egeler, suffers from an array of chronic physical conditions, and she



struggles to maintain a job. Because the family was relying solely on child support payments (which they were not receiving), they were financially unstable and became homeless in the summer of 2012, right before Frances' junior year.

Social worker Ms. Jorie Oskay was alerted of the Egelers' situation when they requested help for transportation to Perry Township from their current shelter. Julie had realized that if they stayed where they were, both Frances and her little brother Zane (now a freshman at Southport) would have to go to an IPS school. They found accommodations at a friend's home in Perry just before the cutoff date for enrollment.

Oskay helped arrange transport for the two kids so they could come to Southport, which was to be Frances' fourteenth school during her life.

"Four to six months of educational progress is lost with each disruption in a school year. So, by

that logic, Frances has missed years of school," Oskay said. "But throughout all of this, she has maintained perfect attendance. A honor roll and NHS. The odds have never really been in her favor, but she did so well in school."

Frances took advantage of study areas in the shelters to excel in her schoolwork. Despite having to worry about relocation deadlines and basic needs such as clothing and food, she stayed focused.

"Most people who experience this let it get the best of them, but she will make the most of it," Frances' Spanish teacher Miss Christine Powell said. "She's not using it as an excuse not to succeed."

This past September, Frances and her family moved into a downtown apartment through a government program designed to help those with chronic disability and homelessness, such as her mother. The stability has aided Frances as she makes her college decisions, which include elementary special education. She will be the first person in her family to graduate high school and go to college.

"As I apply for more scholarships, I feel that fear start to go away," Frances said. "I see education as the key to my future. I want to break this cycle of poverty, and I know that my education and grades are going to get me there."

## Burmese immigrant excels here

Thawng recounts the trial of fleeing home country Myanmar and coming to Indy

by **Britton Whitlock**  
Reporter

Senior vice president Van Bawi Tha Thawng came to America at the age of 16, without knowing hardly any English. Thawng and his older brother's parents passed away when the boys were young, so they were all each other had.

Thawng was put into a child development program where his older brother and his wife stepped in as parents for him.

"My brother is my hero for that," Thawng said.

He illegally fled Myanmar when he was only 12 years old because Christianity, his religion, was not accepted in Myanmar, and it was dangerous for them to stay there.

"I know it's not a great country for my life and education, but it's where I grew up," Thawng said. "It's my home, so I felt like I was leaving everything and losing everything, but nothing really changed because my God never changes."

Leaving Myanmar was incredibly risky. They didn't have much to eat or drink, and sometimes they would walk for five hours if they weren't on a boat. According to Thawng, the whole experience was extremely scary.

When they finally got to Malaysia, they were there illegally.

"I was so lucky," Thawng said. "I never got arrested, but (the police) always stopped me. I would say God was really good to me."

He lived in Malaysia for three years after leaving Myanmar and went to a refugee school where he learned to speak English.

Thawng and his brother later took a flight to America that they thought was going to Indiana. They actually had a connecting flight with a lay-over in Salt Lake City, Utah. Neither of the brothers could speak fluent English, and they weren't sure what to do and got lost in the airport.

"I had no idea what was wrong," Thawng said. "Eventually someone explained to me what was going on. When we got to Indianapolis, everything was great."



**Van Bawi Tha Thawng,**  
Senior



**Mrs. Amy Peddie,**  
EL teacher