Hoyas' Helping Hands

July 1, 2000 By Kai Wright

Thor Cheston, 21, calls them his "little covert operations." He's got all of these condoms donated to his new nonprofit organization, and his Jesuit college—Georgetown U. in Washington, DC—bans on-campus distribution. So...

"I run into the boys' bathrooms and put up manila envelopes stuffed with condoms," Cheston says. "I tape 'em up, then run out."

His co-conspirators Stephen Sobhani and Danielle Hurley—both 22 and, like Cheston, over 6'3" and ready-made for an Abercrombie & Fitch ad—love it. But Sobhani's ready for the next step: a condom- delivery business for the dorms. No, too much hassle, Cheston shoots back; maybe just fill all the campus sinks with condoms—kind of a utilitarian protest of the no-condom policy. The ideas fly.

This is how It's for the Kids was born—with a brainstorm and a nudge from the White House. In December 1998, Sobhani and Cheston went to a party that a Georgetown Medical Center pediatrician throws every year for kids with HIV. They had no driving interest in the epidemic, but the doctor was a friend's mom so they figured why not lend a hand. They were blown away by the gratitude. "I didn't do anything," Sobhani says. "I mean barely anything. But we made such a huge impact with these kids—in one moment. It was a rush—we wanted to do more."

Then last spring, Hurley—who plays basketball for Georgetown—proposed a cross-country bike trip for the three of them. Sobhani saw it as a chance to raise money for pediatric AIDS. "We said, 'Let's do it for those kids.' And that's where the name came from," he explains. "So we started writing letters."

Daniel Montoya at the White House Office of National AIDS Policy responded, inviting the group in last summer. He encouraged the project, then egged them on to do more. Weeks later, the trio began setting up a nonprofit. Since then, they've created a pen-pal program that links children from Grandma's House—a DC-based group that helps families with HIV positive kids—with peers in 13 different communities nationwide. They've brought Georgetown ball players to a barbecue for positive children and started a volunteer network of college students. They also threw the annual holiday party that originally inspired them.

"I didn't know these kids existed until we saw them," Cheston says. "And once we did—" He breaks off. "It's not right! For whatever financial reasons, they can't be kids. And on top of that,

they have to take drug cocktails everyday, and inhalers—ugh!—and see a doctor all the time."

The ride, set to begin just after finals on June 1, starts in San Francisco and ends at the university's gates on July 4. The group hopes to raise $100,000 to be donated to local charities. They drove the 3,000-mile bike route during spring break, and the 10 riders are now training. Stoic Hurley is unfazed: "I love to bike," she says nonchalantly. Sobhani and Cheston, for once, have less swagger.

What they are certain of is that they're sick of being asked what a bunch of college kids are doing starting a nonprofit for children. "That's exactly the problem we ran into trying to recruit students to form a board and do stuff," Cheston says, annoyed. "They were like, 'What do I say? They're not going to take me seriously. What do I wear?' I guess they were afraid of their image—they should be out playing Frisbee."

"There's really no excuse not to," Sobhani adds. "I go to movies, out on dates—I can sacrifice some of that. We have the resources…and it's kind of like, 'Well, shit, let's do it.'"

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