



CHARITY

Rewriting the Script

A former *Wire* actress is helping out kids like her.

BY JESSICA LESHNOFF

“Grin and bear it.”

That was Sonja Sohn’s motto growing up. First there was violence in the home, then the hardships she endured in her impoverished Newport News, VA, community, including abuse outside the home. “I just gotta grin and bear this,” she would tell herself. “For me, there was no way out. My whole neighborhood was trauma.”

Somehow, Sohn, best known for playing Detective Shakima “Kima” Greggs on the acclaimed Baltimore-based HBO crime

drama *The Wire*, did manage to grin and bear it, performing well in school as a student, athlete, and cheerleader. But somewhere along the way, she stopped caring. She started drinking and doing drugs as an adolescent, and soon was selling drugs in the hallways of her school.

This summer, backed by her *Wire* castmates, Sohn founded and launched reWired for Life, a nonprofit after-school program designed to help Baltimore youth—aged 14-24, mostly from the city’s poorest neigh-

borhoods—break cycles of crime through education in responsible decision-making, self-expression, and self-esteem.

They’re taught to express themselves through creative means, such as poetry—Sohn’s longtime passion and entrance into the world of acting. (It was her powerful on-stage New York City readings that led to a starring role in the award-winning poetry-themed 1998 movie *Slam*, which she also cowrote.) Episodes of *The Wire* are used as teaching tools, with Sohn and her two program facilitators leading discussions about what characters could have done differently, and how their decisions affected others.

Sean Hawkins, 21, attended reWired’s summer pilot program and says the positive messages and the unconditional love he received changed his life.

“The program showed me that I don’t have to be out here selling crack, or that the only way out is with a basketball or a football,” Hawkins says.

Sohn envisions launching the program nationally, even worldwide, but Baltimore takes first priority. “The face of Baltimore is all over what we do,” she says.

In the meantime, there’s no halfway with Sohn and her facilitators. They’re in it for the long haul, with an open-door policy that keeps her cell phone ringing at odd hours.

“They have 24-hour access to me,” she says of participants and their families. “It doesn’t work if you’re going to be peripherally involved. You have to invest personally. You can’t just pat them on the back and push them out the door.”



Mayor Sheila Dixon reached a plea agreement and is resigning February 4. As part of the agreement, Dixon will pay \$45,000 to the Bea Gaddy Foundation.



A survey by Central Connecticut State University ranked Baltimore number 26 out of the nation’s 75 most-literate cities, based on education, Internet use, newspaper circulation, and library services.

City officials announced that the much-debated location of the Frank Zappa statue is outside of the Southeast Anchor Library in Highlandtown, and declared that December 21 is officially “Frank Zappa Day.”



CRAB-O-METER

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Maryland residential property values dropped 19.7 percent over the past three years, in what officials say is the largest decline in the state assessment office’s history.



In late December, the City created designated bus and bicycle lanes on Lombard and Pratt Streets in an effort to shorten wait time for bus passengers and ease routes for bicyclists.



LEFT TO RIGHT: DAVID COLWELL, SHUTTERSTOCK(2)