



Committed to Excellence

The Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) Biweekly Newsletter.

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DYRS Youth Council Visits the Hill

By Marcy Mistrett, Guest Writer, CEO of Campaign for Youth Justice

As a leader for Campaign for Youth Justice, a national advocacy program that fights to remove youth from the adult correctional system, I spend considerable time getting adults and young people ready to testify or educate policymakers on issues related to youth justice reform. We know how influential personal stories can be to an issue, since many policymakers haven't been touched personally by the criminal justice system.

This past week, I had the honor of working with the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) Youth Council and their awesome staff leads, Nataly Del Valle and Mark Timberlake. We started with a quick training on the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA), the federal law that gives states grants for complying with four (4) core protections for youth in custody - including the deinstitutionalization of status offenders, the removal of delinquent youth from adult jails and sight/sound separation for the rare exceptions this might be allowed, and tracking disproportionate treatment of youth of color across the system. I was impressed with how quickly the Youth Council members were able to tie their own experiences to this federal act and how excited they were to participate on Capitol Hill.

Our job was to drop off hundreds of postcards that had been collected from constituents around the country in support of improving and reauthorizing the JJJPA. We were focusing on the US Senate, and planned on visiting 20-25 offices. The eight members of the DYRS Youth Council who joined us over two days were phenomenal!!! Special shout out to DYRS for making sure the Youth Council members were dressed professionally—they came dressed to impress!

BELOW ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE VISITS:

S. and C. sat down with Legislative Counsel, Matt Spikes, from Senator Cardin's (D-MD) office. S. shared why it was important to support the JJJPA, focusing on the importance of not locking up young people who are running away from home or skipping school - because incarceration just leads to less school and less

time at home. We learned that Matt was a DC native - he grew up on New Jersey and R Streets, NW and eventually graduated from Georgetown Law School where he worked at the Juvenile Law Clinic with Kris Henning. Matt was so impressed with the Youth Council members that he told them about the Senate Page program, and encouraged them to apply.

D., C. and R. had the opportunity to share with other young advocates who were on the Hill. The group learned about the Dream Act (DACA) from youth who were advocating for its authorization, and then shared their own stories about why they felt the JJJPA to be critical as well.



V., D. and C. spent a full hour with Senator Grassley's (R-IA) senior staff, which co-authored the reauthorization. Scheduled for only 15 minutes, these young women engaged this staffer so deeply that she took out a pen and paper and started writing down their ideas. They talked about the over-medication in residential treatment, the difficulty of sharing your personal histories when therapists change, the critical need for safe and permanent housing after commitment, the frustration when educational credits earned in commitment or residential don't follow you back to your home community, the struggles of being LGBTQ and part of the system. They could share, with pride, what it meant to be part of the Youth Council, and how DYRS support beyond age 21 helped to provide college, job training, and crisis support. They shared personal stories that

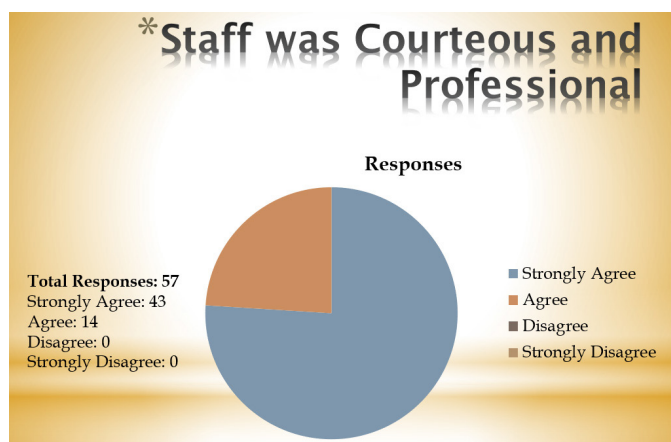
reignited urgency in this staffer to get the bill finished.

J. and S. had a great meeting with staff from Senator Sherrod Brown's (D-OH) office. The staff listened intently as J. and S. shared why it's so important to provide youth with the support they need instead of locking them up. When talking about status offenses like running away from home or skipping school, J. and S. explained how, often, young people who commit status offenses might be going through difficult times and just need a little support. At the end of the meeting, we left knowing we had an ally in the fight to get the JJJPA across the finish line.

C. & R. met with staff from Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA) and shared why the JJJPA is important to them. They talked about the need for second chances and how much they had benefited from getting a second chance of their own. They highlighted the importance of the JJJPA for young people and why the program needs to be reauthorized. Youth Council members also talked with pride about: How important they felt when they can give back to their community; how it's hard to see one of your peers sleeping on the streets and not taking help that is offered; how sharing resources and contacts to adult allies can be helpful in keeping you on track; how never giving up on education is important to your future; and how members of the Youth Council help to build each other up and stay positive. It was a few days, but they will remain with me forever. In just a few hours, Youth Council members went from thinking we were in a courthouse, to understanding the difference between the Senate and House of Representatives. They learned the power of their own voices, and the importance of knowing your Congressmen. They were angry to learn that there was no one in DC for them to visit (who had a vote). They went from anxiously waiting behind me to leading me through the doors of the next office. They affirmed each other and gave positive feedback. I hope to come back and keep volunteering with the Youth Council to find other ways for them to help shape a broader narrative on who DYRS young people really are - young leaders, parents, advocates, and policymakers!

Event Calendar

- JAN 31** SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM REGISTRATION, MLK AC, 2101 MLK JR. AVE. SE, 5-7 PM
- FEB 1** SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM REGISTRATION, 450 AC, 450 H ST. NW, 5-7 PM
- FEB 7** HEALTH & WELLNESS FAIR, 450 ACHIEVEMENT CENTER, 3-7 PM



When Maintenance Meets Math Class

When DYRS Maintenance Manager Carl Mathews showed a New Beginnings youth a survey he distributed over the course of a year to help bolster agency operations, he had no idea that the young man would help elevate his study with statistics. Youth Q. involuntarily (but welcomingly) used his learnings from his Maya Angelou Academy math class to draft a PowerPoint presentation for Mr. Matthews, complete with an analysis and recommended next steps. The final answer?

U[^]TH (R) > W / < 3
(YOUTH ARE GREATER WITH LOVE)

OVERACHIEVERS

Congratulations to New Beginnings Youth Development Center Superintendent Mack McGhee, who Georgetown University chose to serve as an Expert Panelist for its Center for Juvenile Justice Reform "Youth in Custody Certificate Program!"

*Data Interpretation

Individuals are happy with their experience and interactions with maintenance team. 99% of responses were either "strongly agree" or "agree".

Response time had lowest response rate of "strongly agree", therefore response time could be improved.

Save the Date



The DYRS Office of Human Resources (OHR) will host a "A Week of Love" from Monday February 12 through Friday, February 16. Look out for more information soon!

Have a question before then? Connect with them directly at dysr.hr@dc.gov or by calling the new HR Hotline at (202) 299-3592.

Emmanuel Jal visits YSC



On Thursday, January 18, former Sudanese child soldier turned political activist Emmanuel Jal visited with youth at the Youth Services Center (YSC). Jal's message to the young people stemmed from his journey and spirituality, and he challenged youth to lower any barriers that would prevent them from receiving his simple message – "there comes a time in everyone's life where we must learn to program and reprogram our minds."

Mr. Jal cited Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech as he spoke with youth about what it's like to "have a dream." "When you dream, what happens is your dreams create a vibration and a higher energy that will take you to a different situation," he said. When one young person asked him how he found his purpose, he replied "find your passion, never give up, and never give in."

Jal left the youth with one final sentiment - "the battle is fought in the mind, but won in the heart" - resonating with DYRS' belief of love in action.

A Warm Welcome...



to our new DYRS employees!

- Takoywa Slater, Social Services Assistant
- Adrienne Haynes, Case Manager
- Reginald Black, Supervisory Education & Workforce Development Specialist
- Angelo Carter, Management Liaison Specialist
- Jodelle LeFranc, Management Liaison Specialist
- Terry Law, Case Manager
- Allison Fax, Program Analyst
- Lawrence Martin, Maintenance Worker
- Jason Gregory, Maintenance Mechanic Leader

Please introduce yourself if you see them around the agency!



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Journey Continues

On Monday, January 15, DYRS' "Journey Beyond" girls dance ensemble - accompanied by dance instructor Saudia Jenkins and several DYRS employees - took part in DC's 12th Annual MLK Peace Walk and Parade. It seemed as though the young women barely noticed the extraordinarily crisp Monday morning as they marched and breezed through their dance moves, showcasing their energetic personalities. Spectators cheered excitedly as the girls' liveliness made it easy to forget the below freezing temperature! #TeamDYRS celebrated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with DYRS Director Clinton Lacey and a host of staff who joined to march in the parade. The agency also represented with two vehicles beautifully adorned in black and gold balloons and a matching DYRS banner. One of vehicles read "I'm So DC", while the other sported the DYRS logo and the latest gull wing doors - a huge hit with young people who had come to watch the parade. As the parade came to a close, the Journey girls joined in on an impromptu dance off, receiving a warm reception from onlookers near the Barry Farm Recreational Center at the end of the parade route. #TeamDYRS applauds all those who braved the cold to join march in memory of the man who performed the ultimate march. And what a journey it's been.



Rebuilding Society through At-Risk Youth

Reimagining Justice as Love - By Mack McGhee

To reimagine justice for young people, we must rethink justice as an intervention, and interventions as justice. Last week, I argued that in believing in the "young people we serve, as the makers of a new, more just, healthier world, our work becomes more than justice." As care providers, it is important for us to reflect on care; for to care for someone, one has to care about themselves. As we shift our framework from one of punishment to restoration, we practice a justice that is not done TO but FOR the young people in our care, and for their families and communities.

Rethinking justice as love starts with three themes. Youth interactions with justice systems should be rare, fair, and beneficial. Youth interactions with the justice system should be rare because there are multiple levels and layers of care and support that can and must be employed to empower a young person to choose a better life path.

Consider the facts: more than 50% of youth detained are detained for non-person offenses. Data shows that multi-tiered programs of therapeutic, family-centered interventions are seven (7) times more cost-effective than detention in restoring young people to healthy life, and on average therapeutic interventions are a third of the cost of detention. Too many kids are in detention centers who can benefit from much earlier and much more effective interventions. We have to work to build programs that make youth encounters with justice systems rare.

Also consider that Black youth are five times more likely to be detained than White youth. Black youth are disproportionately punished, from exclusionary school discipline, to police contact, to judicial decisions on criminal status. The only thing worse than a broken justice system is a morally corrupt one that targets sections of young people for traumatic experiences. We must activate policy to make youth encounters with justice systems fair.

Lastly, making our contact with young people beneficial to them will break cycles of detention. The single most influential predictor of youth incarceration - more than poverty, familial dysfunction, or psychological illness - is prior detention. Many are first introduced to violent criminal networks in confinement, because young people are facing detention at increasingly early ages. By detaining children as young as 11 years old for non-person offenses too often, we introduce them to new traumas and dangers and incorporate them into a cycle and system of mass incarceration.

When justice is grounded in love, we not only seek healing for people wronged by misguided youth; we make it our mission to seek healing for the young people in our care, and for their families and communities. We must intervene in vicious cycles of neglect and punishment. We will be the seeds of restoration. We can be - for our young people and society at large - a new beginning.

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Email Brenda Padavil, Communications Director at brenda.padavil@dc.gov with questions or submissions for future issues.

