
ADVOCATE ALLEY

Volume 5, Issue 4

April 2011

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.” -Dr. Seuss

Greeting advocates,

Thanks to all who participated in our annual Lighting the Way fundraiser this past weekend. It was a great success for our favorite cause- and it seems everyone had a pretty darn great time in the process!

For continuing education this month, we have a special class called “My Kid is Going to Emancipate- What do I Do!?!” this Thursday, April 7th from 6pm to 8pm at the CASA office. Facilitated by Ray Gonzalez from DSES as well as some of the California Youth Connection speakers, this class will be incredibly valuable for all advocates working with teens. The class is filling up fast, so please RSVP as soon as possible to michelle@casamonterey.org.

There is another very exciting and new continuing education opportunity coming up quickly that we wanted to share. Engaging Families for Permanency focuses on the importance of simultaneously and continuously searching for and engaging relatives, family and fictive kin as a necessary precursor for establishing permanency. Research shows that youth (adopted or not) long for connections to their biological family to develop their own sense of identity. Research also shows that children placed with relatives have fewer behavioral problems, are more likely to remain in school and will experience fewer placement moves in foster care.

As we expand our program to include family finding, you will be provided with more and more continuing education opportunities on this topic. DSES will be hosting this training on April 12th. Participants may select the morning or afternoon session to attend and must RSVP by April 6th to Mickaela Good (mickaelagood@yahoo.com or 650-438-4968). There is no cost to participate. If you do register, please notify our Program Specialist, Edna Chinn at edna@casamonterey.org. Additionally, if you have questions about the new family finding program CASA is launching, Edna can answer all your questions. Now is a great time to get involved!

With gratitude,
Michelle Arnold
Program Manager

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Our advocates are our best recruiters!

If you know of any interested potential advocates, please send them our way. We're trying hard to get out in the South County community, so spread the word to anyone you know in the area!

Our next informational mixer is:

Wednesday, April 27th
5:30pm to 6:30pm
Eden Valley Care Center
612 Main Street in Soledad

Please feel free to join us at any of our mixers and share your experience. We'd love to have you!

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DEADLINE EXTENDED!!!

2011 Scholarship Notice and Application Information

Application Due Date: April 30, 2011

Scholarship Awarded by May 30, 2011

The Junior League of Monterey County, Inc. (JLMC) will award a scholarship(s) to a woman/women residing in Monterey County. Past award amounts have been up to \$5000, and the amount might increase this year.

The scholarship is designed to assist women 18 years of age or older who want to improve their career opportunities by furthering their education.

The applicants must have specific degrees or training goals in mind and demonstrate community involvement. The scholarship recipient(s) shall be selected by the JLMC Scholarship Committee. Finalists will be required to participate in an interview process. Scholarship applications are due on Friday, April 8, 2011. Awards will be announced by Monday, May 2, 2011. All decisions made by the JLMC Scholarship Committee are final.

Applicants must be currently enrolled at a two- or four-year college or at a vocational school that has been approved and accredited by the State of California. Applicants must be registered for a minimum of nine semester units, or the equivalent. Applicants must be residents of Monterey County and must be a minimum of 18 years of age by January 1, 2011. Applicants must be citizens or legal residents of the United States and may be required to show proof of citizenship status with proper documentation.

Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Community Involvement
2. Personal essay – content and quality
3. Past academic performance and future goals
4. Personal interview (top five finalists only will interview)

The scholarship award is to be allocated for tuition, books, and student fees. Scholarship amounts of up to \$5000 have been awarded in the past. Checks will be sent by the JLMC to the recipient's chosen school upon receipt of written verification of enrollment/registration for the following school year.

Applications are available by request. Please contact Michelle if interested. Please call JLMC's Scholarship Committee Chair, Kelley Carpenter, at 831.915.3057 with any questions or visit the JLMC web site at www.jlmontereycounty.org for more information about the JLMC Scholarship program.

Applications are due on Saturday, April 30, 2011 and should be sent by U.S. mail or dropped off at the Junior League of Monterey County Headquarters Tuesday – Friday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Please note that the Headquarters is not open on Mondays.

Advocate Avenue



We would like to wish the following advocates a very happy birthday during the month of April...

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Denise Torres | 4/1 |
| Kim Snowden | 4/2 |
| Robin Ramsey | 4/4 |
| David Olsen | 4/8 |
| Melissa Johnson | 4/9 |
| Beverly Bean | 4/14 |
| Sheryl Merrill | 4/16 |
| Janna Aldrete | 4/20 |
| Jane Foley | 4/20 |
| Jackie Steakley | 4/20 |
| Sherli Muir | 4/25 |
| Anais Mora | 4/26 |
| Kylie Kelly | 4/27 |
| Cathy Estrella-Dannels | 4/29 |
| Marian Lujan | 4/30 |

Presented by



Wednesday
May 4, 2011
6:15-8:00pm

Space generously
provided by
Maya Cinemas in
Oldtown Salinas
153 S. Main St.



Free event at Maya Cinemas:

Foster Youth Digital Stories



May is Foster Care Awareness Month! This event features short documentaries created entirely by current and former foster youth, followed by a Q&A panel including some of the authors.

Free, no tickets required! Please consider making a voluntary donation at the event toward a scholarship for foster youth .

For information about the event, foster care, or Family to Family contact Erin McLaughlin at 831-757-7915 x 202 or visit <http://f2fmc.org/>.

Rancho Cielo Drummond Culinary Academy is now open every Friday night for dinner!

Dine in the casual elegance of the Academy Dining Room and enjoy expansive views of the Salinas Valley while supporting the youth of Rancho Cielo.

Reservations Required
831-444-3521

www.ranchocieloyc.org

GERRY GARIBALDI

“Nobody Gets Married Any More, Mister”

Welcome to our urban high schools, where kids have kids and learning dies

In my short time as a teacher in Connecticut, I have muddled through President Bush’s No Child Left Behind act, which tied federal funding of schools to various reforms, and through President Obama’s Race to the Top initiative, which does much the same thing, though with different benchmarks. Thanks to the feds, urban schools like mine—already entitled to substantial federal largesse under Title I, which provides funds to public schools with large low-income populations—are swimming in money. At my school, we pay five teachers to tutor kids after school and on Saturdays. They sit in classrooms waiting for kids who never show up. We don’t want for books—or for any of the cutting-edge gizmos that non-Title I schools can’t afford: computerized whiteboards, Elmo projectors, the works. Our facility is state-of-the-art, thanks to a recent \$40 million face-lift, with gleaming new hallways and bathrooms and a fully computerized library.

Here’s my prediction: the money, the reforms, the gleaming porcelain, the hopeful rhetoric about saving our children—all of it will have a limited impact, at best, on most city schoolchildren. Urban teachers face an intractable problem, one that we cannot spend or even teach our way out of: teen pregnancy. This year, all of my favorite girls are pregnant, four in all, future unwed mothers every one. There will be no innovation in this quarter, no race to the top. Personal moral accountability is the electrified rail that no politician wants to touch.

My first encounter with teen pregnancy was a girl named Nicole, a pretty 15-year-old who had rings on every finger and great looped earrings and a red pen with fluffy pink feathers and a heart that lit up when she wrote with it. Hearts seemed to be on everything—in her signature, on her binder; there was often a little plastic heart barrette in her hair, which she had dyed in bright hues recalling a Siamese fighting fish. She was enrolled in two of my classes: English and journalism.

My main gripe with Nicole was that she fell asleep in class. Each morning—bang!—her head hit the desk. Waking her was like waking a badger. Nicole’s unmarried mother, it turned out, worked nights, so Nicole would slip out with friends every evening, sometimes staying out until 3 AM, and then show up in class exhausted, surly, and hungry.

After a dozen calls home, her mother finally got back to me. Your daughter is staying out late, I reported. The voice at the other end of the phone sounded abashed and bone-weary. “I know, I know, I’m sorry,” she repeated over and over. “I’ll talk to her. I’m sorry.”

For a short time, things got better. Nicole’s grades started to improve. Encouraged, I hectored and cajoled and praised her every small effort. She was an innately bright girl who might, if I dragged her by the heels, eventually survive the rigors of a community college.

Then one morning, her head dropped again. I rapped my knuckles on her desk. “Leave me alone, mister,” she said. “I feel sick.” There was a sly exchange of looks among the other girls in class, a giggle or two, and then one of them said: “She’s pregnant, Mr. Garibaldi.”

She lifted her face and smiled at her friends, then dropped her head back down. I picked up my grimy metal garbage can and set it beside her desk, just in case. A moment later she vomited, and I dispatched her to the nurse. In the years since, I’ve escorted girls whose water has just broken, their legs trembling and wobbly, to the principal’s office, where their condition barely raises an eyebrow.

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Within my lifetime, single parenthood has been transformed from shame to saintliness. In our society, perversely, we celebrate the unwed mother as a heroic figure, like a fireman or a police officer. During the last presidential election, much was made of Obama's mother, who was a single parent. Movie stars and pop singers flaunt their daddy-less babies like fishing trophies.

None of this is lost on my students. In today's urban high school, there is no shame or social ostracism when girls become pregnant. Other girls in school want to pat their stomachs. Their friends throw baby showers at which meager little gifts are given. After delivery, the girls return to school with baby pictures on their cell phones or slipped into their binders, which they eagerly share with me. Often they sit together in my classes, sharing insights into parenting, discussing the taste of Pedialite or the exhaustion that goes with the job. On my way home at night, I often see my students in the projects that surround our school, pushing their strollers or hanging out on their stoops instead of doing their homework.

Connecticut is among the most generous of the states to out-of-wedlock mothers. Teenage girls like Nicole qualify for a vast array of welfare benefits from the state and federal governments: medical coverage when they become pregnant (called "Healthy Start"); later, medical insurance for the family ("Husky"); child care ("Care 4 Kids"); Section 8 housing subsidies; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; cash assistance. If you need to get to an appointment, state-sponsored dial-a-ride is available. If that appointment is college-related, no sweat: education grants for single mothers are available, too. Nicole didn't have to worry about finishing the school year; the state sent a \$35-an-hour tutor directly to her home halfway into her final trimester and for six weeks after the baby arrived.

In theory, this provision of services is humane and defensible, an essential safety net for the most vulnerable—children who have children. What it amounts to in practice is a monolithic public endorsement of single motherhood—one that has turned our urban high schools into puppy mills. The safety net has become a hammock.

The young father almost always greets the pregnancy with adolescent excitement, as if a baby were a new Xbox game. In Nicole's case, the father's name was David. David manfully walked Nicole to class each morning and gave her a kiss at the door. I had him in homeroom and asked if he planned to marry her. "No" was his frank answer. But he did have plans to help out. David himself lived with his mother. His dad had served a short sentence in prison for drug possession and ran a motorcycle-repair shop somewhere upstate. One afternoon, David proudly opened his father's website to show me the customized motorcycles he built. There he was, the spit and image of his son, smiling atop a gleaming vintage Harley, not a care in the world.

Boys without fathers, like David, cultivate an overweening bravado to overcome a deeper sense of vulnerability and male confusion. They strut, swear, and swagger. There's a he-man thing to getting a girl pregnant that marks you as an adult in the eyes of your equally unmoored peers. But a boy's interest in his child quickly vanishes. When I ask girls if the father is helping out with the baby, they shrug. "I don't care if he does or not," I've heard too often.

As for girls without fathers, they are often among my most disruptive students. You walk on eggshells with them. You broker remarks, you negotiate insults, all the while trying to pull them along on a slender thread. Their anger toward male authority can be lacerating. They view trips to the principal's office like victory laps.

With Nicole, I dug in. In journalism class, I brought up the subject of teen pregnancy and suggested that she and a friend of hers, Maria, write a piece together about their experiences. They hesitated; I pressed the matter. "Do you think getting pregnant when you're a teenager is a good thing or a bad thing?"

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“Depends,” Nicole replied caustically, glancing at Maria and another friend, Shanice, for support. They knew this was coming and went on the defensive.

“On what?”

“My mom and my grandma both got pregnant when they were teens, and they’re good mothers.”

“Nobody gets married any more, mister,” Shanice and Maria chime in. “You’re just picking on us because we have kids.”

At this point, my “picking” has only just begun. It’s partly for their benefit, but mostly for the other girls in the room, who haven’t said a word. As much as Nicole is aware of her mother’s sacrifices, she is equally proud of her mother’s choice to keep her. It’s locked away in her heart like a cameo. They’re best friends, she offers. The talk turns to her mother’s loyalty and love, and soon the class rises in a choir to mom’s defense.

“Fine,” I say, glowering like Heath Ledger’s Joker. “If that’s your position, like any good journalist, you have to back up your arguments with facts and statistics.”

As do most of my 11th-graders, Nicole reads at a fifth-grade level, which means I must peruse the articles and statistics along with her, side by side. She groans each time I pick out a long article and counts the number of pages before she reads. With my persistent nudging, she and Maria begin to pull out the statistics for the children of single parents. From the FBI: 63 percent of all suicides are individuals from single-parent households. From the Centers for Disease Control: 75 percent of adolescents in chemical-dependency hospitals come from single-parent households. From the Children’s Defense Fund: more than half of all youths incarcerated for criminal acts come from single-parent households. And so on.

“I don’t want to write about this!” Nicole complains. “I’ve changed my mind.”

“Why?”

“Nobody wants to read it.”

I point out that they committed to it. If they don’t complete the essay by the due date, they know I will give them an F.

Their first drafts are little more than two scribbled paragraphs, which they toss to me as a completed assignment and I toss back. Maria, in particular, rebels. She wants to recast the article in a rosier vein and talk about how happy her son makes her. It’s in these light skirmishes that we have our richest discussions. When the girls open up, their vague doubts come to the surface, and my flinty-eyed circuit preacher melts away. A father myself, I understand a parent’s love. Our talk turns more sweetly to teething cures, diaper rashes, and solid food. Nicole listens to us with tender interest. It’s in these moments that I feel most effective as a teacher. I suggest ways of incorporating that love into the piece, while also hoping that some of these grim statistics have gotten through to them.

As morbid as it sounds, the students take an interest in obituary writing. I have them write their own obits, fictional biographies that foretell the arc of their lives. From Nicole’s, I learn that her mother was 16 when she had Nicole; her father, 14. After high school, the fictional Nicole went on to have four more kids—with strangely concocted names, all beginning with M—whom she loved dearly and who loved her dearly. She also left six grandchildren. She died of old age in her bed.

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“Nicole, you never got married?” I remarked.

“No,” she responded with a note of obstinacy in her voice.

“I think you would make a wonderful wife for someone.”

“I *would* make a good wife,” she replied. “I know a lot of stuff. But I’m not going to get married.” She was speaking to a hard fate that she was accepting as her future. She was slipping away.

As Nicole entered her third trimester, she had a minor complication with her pregnancy and disappeared for nearly two weeks. She returned, pale and far behind in my classes. She no longer had to report to two classes: physical education and a science lab where strong chemicals were used. The administration didn’t want her to be alone during those periods, and since my schedule coincided with the vacant spots, I was asked to be her chaperone. For five weeks, Nicole became my shadow. If I had cafeteria duty, she’d happily trot along. I’d buy her a candy bar and she’d plop down in the seat beside me. I’d also escort her to her restroom runs, which were frequent, and wait for her outside the door. She carried a grainy sonogram picture of the baby, framed in a pink card with a stork on the front. Gazing at it with a smile, I felt my duplicity and the ragged trap of my convictions.

Her paleness and fatigue alarmed me. I carried Vitamin C drops in my pocket and slipped her a constant supply. A second private concern began to nag at me: the father in me wanted to be protective and kind, but Nicole was becoming too connected with me. She blew off assignments regularly now. When I admonished her, she only giggled and promised to get them done. She trusted me and would never think that falling behind in my classes would result in a failing grade. Life had allowed her to slide before, through every year of her education, as others in her life had slid—starting with her father, whom she barely recalled.

I felt that I was being drawn into this undertow. A simple D would ease everyone’s load, particularly mine, and Nicole wouldn’t register yet another betrayal of trust. More than anything, she wanted a buoy in her choppy sea. Nicole failed both my classes, which meant summer school. When she returned the following year, she was in good spirits. The birth of her son had gone well. She had a heart-adorned album full of photos of her boy. Things were settled, she said. She was going to work hard this year; she felt motivated, even eager. And by year’s end, her reading level had indeed risen nearly two grades—but it was still far below what she would need to score as proficient on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, one of the yardsticks for accountability in Title I schools.

The path for young, unwed mothers—and for their children—can be brutal. Consider how often girls get molested in their own homes after Mom has decided to let her boyfriend move in. The boyfriend splits the rent and the food bill, but he often sees his girlfriend’s teenage daughter as fair game. Teachers whisper their suspicions in the lunchroom or in the hallways when they notice that one of their students has become suddenly emotional, that her grades have inexplicably dropped, or that she stays late after school to hang out in her teacher’s classroom or begins sleeping over at a friend’s house several nights a week. Sometimes she simply disappears.

And there are other dangers. I once had a student named Jasmine, who had given birth over the summer. She did just enough to earn Ds in my class. One day, I observed her staring off mulishly into space for nearly the entire period, not hearing a word I said and ignoring her assignment. At the end of class, I took her aside and asked, with some irritation, what the matter was.

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Her eyes welled with tears. "I gave my son to his father to look after yesterday. When I picked him up, he had bruises on his head and a cut." Her son was six months old.

Honestly? I just wanted that day to go by. But we have a duty to our students, both moral and legal. "You have to be a brave mama and report him," I said. I led her to the office and to the school social worker, and I tipped off the campus trooper. Even with that support, she backed off from filing a complaint and shortly afterward dropped out of school to be with her baby.

My students often become curious about my personal life. The question most frequently asked is, "Do you have kids?"

"Two," I say.

The next question is always heartbreaking.

"Do they live with you?"

Every fall, new education theories arrive, born like orchids in the hothouses of big-time university education departments. Urban teachers are always first in line for each new bloom. We've been retrofitted as teachers a dozen times over. This year's innovation is the Data Wall, a strategy in which teachers must test endlessly in order to produce data about students' progress. The Obama administration has spent lavishly to ensure that professional consultants monitor its implementation.

Every year, the national statistics summon a fresh chorus of outrage at the failure of urban public schools. Next year, I fear, will be little different.

Continuing Education Opportunity- Coming to a DVR near you!

Having problems making it to the CE classes offered throughout the year? Now you can earn hours in the comfort of your own home. "Bringing Ashley Home" the story of Libba Phillips who founded the "Outpost for Hope" website when her sister disappeared and became homeless is being featured on Lifetime Network on April 16th.

Thanks to new trainee Joanne Juarez for letting us know about this opportunity... Also, as a side note, there are always lots of great options to earn your CE hours at home. Come check out our CE library anytime and stock up on great books and movies!

Thanks to Advocate Yesenia Guzman for sharing this great resource!

www.getonthebus.us

Get on the bus is something I heard about in SW410 class and I want to pass on the information in case any of you can contribute to this very important effort. Get on the bus is a non profit that unites children with their incarcerated parent in the state of California. On March 18th, the CSUMB MSW office (Beach Hall) is taking donations of any new art supplies, board games, stamps, envelopes, stationary, pens, and pencils. Donations can be dropped off into the purple bins in their office.

All of this, why?

-60% of parents in the state prison report being held over 100 miles from their children, Get on the bus provides a free visit including transportation, breakfast, lunch and dinner, a family photo and activities throughout the day. This year hundreds of kids will be united with their fathers at the Salinas Valley State Prison and Correctional Training facility in Soledad.

For more information please contact jessica@getonthebus.us or visit www.getonthebus.us

