

CAMPAIGN FOR  
**YOUTH JUSTICE**

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

## **GET ORGANIZED**

**A Monthly Column by Grace Bauer – August/September 2010**

### **Support and Information Network for Families**

Grace Bauer

This column is dedicated to families of children incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system or at risk of becoming involved in this nation's irrevocably broken criminal justice system. Why, one might ask? I would reply, "Families, across the country, are struggling to figure out how to help their children, in systems that likely do not provide a way for families to do the one thing that comes naturally to them, help your child when he/she is in trouble." Instead, families find themselves trying to navigate legal systems with no legal skills, understand criminal justice systems when few, if any, do, all while the criminal justice system and others treat us as the problem and leave us unable to help our child.

I offer my shoulder to the Grandmother in Indiana, whose 15-year-old grandson has spent over a year in an adult jail awaiting trial. A few weeks ago this boy was found guilty and sentenced to 60 years, despite the fact the family sold their home to secure legal defense and are now raiding other assets to pay for the appeal attorneys. Sadly, all of this takes place simultaneously to her son's 6 year old murder case coming to trial. I have a hard time imagining how incredibly difficult her life is at this time. A grandson in prison, possibly wrongly convicted, a child with a low IQ that keeps asking his Grandmother when he will get to come home and having to sit day after day in your son's murder trial. Stop for just a moment and put yourself in her place and imagine this to be your child or grandchild.

I offer my ear to the mother in Oregon whose son is expected to take a plea for 89 months without any sense of what zealous legal defense means. Turn off, for a minute, the defense mechanism you may have inside your mind that says "He deserves it or he must have done something horrible to be in this position." He doesn't and he hasn't! He is a young man, with serious mental health problems that has been accused of a crime. At the worst, he may indeed be guilty but we will never know one way or another because he will not get adequate legal defense, let alone "zealous" defense. He will do as hundreds of thousands of others have done before him, he will accept the plea offered because he has been threatened and made to be rightly afraid of being a child of color in a racist criminal justice system.

Do others who don't have children housed in prisons, understand the everyday efforts made by families to remain in touch and helpful to their own child? From the for-profit prison telephone industry, the attorney that doesn't consider you to be the client and therefore feels as if he/she can do a poor job because the child doesn't have the capacity to make good

decisions on their own behalf, the prison policies that subject young people to unimaginable fear, brutality and neglect to the Department of Corrections policies that house children hours from the only family they have, the law makers who allow our children to be treated as adults while they are children, all to appear "tough" on crime and lastly, the leaders of government that sanction and feeds this country's addiction to incarceration, through our tax dollars.

The Campaign offers all families a place to come together and seek information, understanding and support through the National Parent Caucus. The National Parent Caucus (NPC) stands ready to hear from those who, in one tragic moment, find themselves and their children ensconced in a system and it's far reaching tentacles of imprisonment, legal defense and laws and policies that, to most, make no sense. The families that belong to the NPC have hard won experience to share with others who now labor under the burdens of the criminal justice system.

Do you know a family that could benefit from the support of other families? Does your reform effort need families to make it stronger and more sustainable? Do you receive calls and letters from families and are unsure of how to help them? Please contact Grace Bauer at [Familiescantwait@yahoo.com](mailto:Familiescantwait@yahoo.com) so we can offer them the support and information they are seeking.