

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

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A Monthly Column by Grace Bauer – June 2010

CFYJ Hosts First Leadership Institute for Families

Grace Bauer

In May, the Campaign for Youth Justice had the pleasure of hosting 17 family and community members from 11 states in Baltimore for the first Leadership Institute for Families. This was a unique and unforgettable gathering of knowledge, wisdom and passion!

Originally, CFYJ believed the Institute would teach families and community members about the oppression of the juvenile and criminal justice systems, how oppression impacts our communities, and how to reform these systems and affect change. Instead, it was CFYJ that walked away with lessons learned and renewed energy. It seems we see over and over again that there is much to be learned from the families and community members that are directly affected by our country's addiction to incarceration.

Xochitl Bervera, previously Co-Director of Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children, created the curriculum and served as the lead trainer for the Leadership Institute for Families. Xochitl's extraordinary talents in working with those most affected helped to create an ideal environment for learning from one another and sharing the experiences that led people to apply for the Institute. During the two-day Institute, participants examined successful campaigns on behalf of children involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, learned about how oppression affects all of us in varying degrees, and how together we can bring change.

The Campaign feels fortunate to have had such wonderful teachers and is thankful to all who participated in the Leadership Institute for Families. The success of the Institute is best described by its participants, some of whose comments are below.

Those interested in the wisdom of the Leadership Institute for Families should connect with the National Parent Caucus (NPC). The NPC hosts monthly calls for parents, families and allies to share information about the juvenile justice system and the reform efforts. NPC's July call will take place on July 1 at 5:00 PM EST, 4:00 PM CST and 2:00 PM PST. Anyone interested in participating should call 866.524.0621 and use code 7831935097. Please contact Grace Bauer at Familiescantwait@yahoo.com for more information on the NPC and the Leadership Institute for Families.

Here is what several participants had to say about the Leadership Institute for Families:

Ernest Johnson, father of a son charged as an adult in New Orleans and a Community Organizer for Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children says, "The room was filled with energy. Everyone gave so much of themselves! It provided me with an urgency and understanding that these systems must come down.... We must continue to use the information we learned from the Institute to develop a force that demands change for our youth."

Pete Shevlino, father of a son charged as an adult in Charleston, South Carolina reflected by saying, "It is difficult to find folks who understand the many facets of child imprisonment. The dedicated attendees not only understand the effects of child imprisonment, they shape the discussion and direction of the movement to reduce crime and violence through improved treatment of juvenile offenders.... Without the Campaign's organizing efforts, I fear that American children will increasingly suffer and the country will become increasingly more violent year after year. Learning from such a wide range of activists has not only provided examples for me to follow but lifted my spirit and provided much needed energy to continue."

Sadric Bonner, a mother from Greensboro, North Carolina comments, "Out of all the workshops I have attended, this one left me with the thought of a village atmosphere of brothers and sisters born to collectively support one another and impact lives, leaving a legacy of trailblazers to follow."

Sheila Montgomery, mother of son tried and incarcerated as an adult in Portland, Oregon says, "Often times the family voice is not heard when dealing with the system.... The training gave me tools that I will be able to use ... in Oregon to try to make changes to our unjust system. Words cannot even begin to say how thankful I was and am for having this opportunity.... The group quickly connected from the beginning and bonded so much that when it was down to our last time to speak many of us were in tears."

Grace Warren, from Chicago, Illinois and mother of incarcerated son, says, "I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to attend the training class at the Leadership Institute. By learning the background of the juvenile justice system it has motivated me to move forward in action. Before the class I felt I was fighting a losing battle, [but] now I feel like I can make a difference. With the awareness and education I received at the Institute I am capable of organizing a group of families and friends ... for a cause [through] a tactful strategy. "