

CAMPAIGN FOR
YOUTH  JUSTICE

BECAUSE THE CONSEQUENCES AREN'T MINOR

GET ORGANIZED

A Monthly Column by Grace Bauer – March 2010

Where are the Leaders?

Grace Bauer

"Salvation for a race, nation or class must come from within. Freedom is never granted; it is won. Justice is never given; it is exacted and the struggle must be continuous for freedom is never a final fact, but a continuing evolving process to higher and higher levels of human, social, economic, political and religious relationship."
~A. Phillip Randolph

This quote comes from a man many of us don't even remember when we think about the history lessons of our childhood. I was fortunate to have a brilliant friend share this with me some years ago. At the time, I believed we would see significant changes to juvenile and criminal justice policies in the deep rural South simply because the time was right and it was the right thing to do. Yet, when the day was over, nothing had changed. She quietly said, "Freedom is never granted; it is won."

All the research and evidence shows that it isn't smart to treat children as adults, especially in the adult criminal justice system. We know that it creates more problems than it solves. We know that it puts these children at great risk, physically and emotionally. Charging, trying and sentencing children as adults destroys the lives of the children involved and their families as well as the communities they hail from. The policy affects youth of color disproportionately and continues to erode the frail infrastructures of communities of color. These are facts with well-documented processes and outcomes. Educated people in positions of authority and influence understand this. Why, then, do these policies remain the same?

"Justice is never given; it is exacted and the struggle must be continuous for freedom is never a final act, but a continuing evolving process...." For justice to be had for our children, particularly for poor and/or children of color, there must a struggle for freedom. There must be public education that leads to public outrage and public outcry. Ultimately, there must be leaders to embrace the struggle and organize the outrage and transform it into a movement that can bring change.

Leaders come with the paper and pencils and talk about what to do next to stop the problem. Leaders seek out the strengths of those in the room and empower them to use their skills in the struggle for freedom. Leaders speak out when others remain silent. Leaders bring forth the truth of those they lead and look for solutions and ways to serve needs in a better and changing world. The greatest leaders I have known are the ones that

never stop calling for something better for all of us.

The time for juvenile justice reform and change is here. The evidence is in, but without leaders, this time will pass as many others have. Where are the leaders? When will they step forward? Are you a leader? Do any of the tasks in the above paragraph represent something you are doing today? If so, then perhaps you should stop looking for a leader and stand up, for "Salvation for a race, nation or class must come from within."

As the families most affected by transfer policies, we want things to change, we expect better for our children and communities. Yet, we continue to expect it to change without us or with us sitting on the sidelines. As time progresses, it may well change but will it change for the better? I believe the answer to this question is "no." We must stand up, let our truths and experiences be heard far and wide, and bring our stories to people that would rather we remain silent. We must demand better for our children and hold those in authority accountable for the future of our children and communities. If you choose to stay out of the struggle, let others fight for you, and hope for the best, then I too will say quietly "Freedom is never granted; it is won."