

Child Advocates Quarterly

Current News for Friends of Child Advocates

SUMMER 2005

Beating the Odds: Q&A with David White, Former Advocate Youth

David White grew up in a home where Mom was constantly drunk or high and Dad was out of the picture. "My mother was an alcoholic for as long as I can remember," says David, "and would drown herself in booze to the point where she would physically abuse my siblings and me." By the time David entered high school, his mom's addictions were so out of control that she stopped paying rent and buying food. When David was 16, he entered the foster care system and, over the next two years, he moved in and out of three foster homes and a group home run by the Bill Wilson Center.

Now 19-years-old, David has been out of the foster care system for one year. The dismal statistics facing emancipated foster youth predicted that David would likely be a high school dropout, homeless, imprisoned or on welfare. Yet, David has managed to beat the odds and achieve what only a tiny fraction of foster youth accomplish. With both a Kiwanis Scholarship and a Youth Education Scholarship, David is currently pursuing a B.A. in sociology from Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo. Once he obtains



David White, now 19-years-old, with his former Advocate Linda Lewis

his undergraduate degree, David plans to continue on to graduate school and obtain a master's degree in counseling — a remarkable goal considering that David is the first in his family to even graduate from high school.

Child Advocates staff caught up with David and asked him about his ambitions, the role of his Advocate, and his advice for current foster children and Advocates.

What motivated you to finish high school and go to college?

I didn't want to be a dropout; I don't want to be living in places like my mom doing drugs. I want to be someone. In my head, I decided I'm going to do this. I'm going to graduate high school. I'm going to get my diploma. I want to go to college.

What was the role of your Advocate while you were in foster care?

I think every kid needs an Advocate. It just helped me so much. I wouldn't have been able

to be where I am and accomplish what I have without Linda. She's been my friend, chauffeur, even guardian at times.

She definitely kept me honest. She taught me moral values. The way she helped me and always offered to take me to ortho. and doctor's appointments — she even took me places at night. After my night school classes, she would be there to drive me home to the Bill Wilson Center. She would drive all the way from San Jose to Santa Clara and then all the way home, two nights a week.

At that time when I was in foster care, she was the best female mother figure that I had ever had. She's my mentor, friend, distant sister. She's amazing.

She was someone I could tell really cared about me. Not because [she] was court appointed, but because she heartfully cared. She was a true friend.

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David White's high school graduation photo

Advocating for Two Brothers Ages 6 and 8

By Dave Atkins, Advocate Volunteer since 2004



My advocate children are two brothers, ages six and eight, who have been in foster care for four years. They live with their aunt, a single mom with two sons of her own. I visit the boys weekly at their daycare and I “shadow” the older boy during lunch twice a week. I also supervise their birth parent visitations.

Advocacy for these boys consists largely in just being there. My regular presence helps reinforce

their sense of stability. I also do my best as a role model, showing them how to handle disputes and to cope with disappointment. I also console them when things go wrong, such as when one of their parents misses a visitation. My hope is that they understand that people do care about them.

I’m also a liaison among the boys’ foster mom, teachers and therapist, so that everyone stays informed of developments at home, school or therapy. By sharing information, I’ve helped the therapist create a behavioral plan for the older boy and Individualized Education Programs for both boys to address their behavioral issues at school.

In court, advocacy consists largely in bringing attention to particular issues. Of everyone at court, an Advocate spends by far the most time directly observing and interacting with the children, and an Advocate’s report is the most detailed assessment of the

children’s well-being. As such, the Advocate can best apprise the court of difficult issues. In my case, I helped draw the court’s attention to the eight-year-old’s need for behavioral therapy. The court ordered the therapy, and the boy now has more help addressing inappropriate behaviors.

“Advocacy for these boys consists largely in just being there.”

When I arrive at their daycare, both boys usually run outside to greet me and show me anything new they’ve learned, particularly tricks involving playground structures. The older boy taught me how to catch a football properly (“your hands make a diamond”). I’m glad that the boys feel relaxed with me and have developed the self-confidence to show me what they’re learning. I think they need approval from an adult male figure.

Being an Advocate has deepened my respect for how precious children are. I have a five-year-old son and a thirteen-year-old stepdaughter, and my advocate children show the same sense of curiosity, the same penchant for mischief and the same need for love and affection. This sameness, however, makes the effects of the neglect they suffered appear even more profound. As their Advocate, I’m helping them to grow and to develop a sense of hope that I believe all children should have.

Advocating for a 13-Year-Old Girl

By Karen Busch, Advocate Volunteer since 2003



Nestled in the middle of my binder containing monthly logs and court reports is a pencil drawing of tulips, tiny hearts and the words, “Thanks for being the best Advocate a girl can have.” Those hearts, flowers and words lie at the core of why we, as Advocates, do what we do.

April* is my 13-year-old advocate child. She is articulate, infinitely curious, garrulous and personable. April loves to write poetry and sing; she dreams of being a pediatrician or a lawyer and living in a big house one day. She is trying to

manage the transition from the little girl I met eight months ago to the young lady she will soon be. April wishes that visits with her mom were more frequent and talks about a dad she never sees.

Life is tumultuous for most children in the dependency system. For these children, the only constant player in their lives is a caring Advocate.

When I visit April, we enjoy all the Bay Area has to offer: we sit on a bench, feet dangling as a rainbow-colored kite soars overhead; we explore the Tech Museum and she transforms into a lab technician, inserting jelly fish DNA into bacteria; we attend the Nutcracker Ballet, and she enjoys it so much that she wants to see it again next year!

As her Court Appointed Special Advocate, my paramount role is to advocate for what is in her best interests. A recent example is when I was able to help April realize her dream: to play the guitar. This past June, with funds from Starfish Dreams that I applied for through Child Advocates, she and I purchased a guitar, case, tuner and a beginner’s book. She cried tears of joy and grinned from ear to ear when she realized it was really her own guitar.

Making a difference is real. After a 388 hearing, the judge stated in court, “In making my ruling, I gave great weight to the Advocate report.” April’s social worker stressed the need for Advocates for all her children, and told me, “I wish I could clone you!” I received an e-mail from April’s legal guardian, who wrote, “Thank you for all you do for [April].” But most important, I knew I was making a difference when I saw the paper stuck in the binder with April’s drawing of hearts, flowers and kind words.



*Name changed to protect the identity of the child.

Third Annual Birdhouse Bash - A Success!



Winner of the Wackiest Birdhouse Award: *Long, Long Trailer* by Robert Cooper.



Dottie Schaefer (second from left), Rachel Redelfs (third from left) and other guests check out birdhouses during the silent auction.



Young guests Ian (left) and his brother (right) watch as one of the performing parrots rollerskates.

Both children and adults had a ball at our Third Annual Birdhouse Bash, which was held on Saturday, May 21st. The event drew about 200 attendees who bid on over 120 birdhouses and other unique pieces of artwork, ranging from handmade quilts to bronze sculptures. In total, this fundraiser raised over \$42,000, which will be used to further aid abused and neglected children.

Held in the beautiful gardens of our newly-elected Board President Toni Cupal, the event boasted activities that everyone in attendance could enjoy. Along with the auctions, there were various child-friendly activities ranging from painting birdhouses to playing with parrots on roller skates. It should be noted that several adults were observed indulging their inner child during these activities!

Some of the most unique birdhouses and artwork we have ever seen were created especially for this affair, and eight awards were granted in categories ranging from Best of Show to Best Craftmanship.

This event received such great support and positive feedback that we can barely wait for next year's Bash. Newspapers such as the San Jose Mercury News, The Milpitas Post and The Daily News generously featured this event. Our

sponsors, birdhouse builders, volunteers, nest builders and guests helped make this event a great success. Thanks to all of you!

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Theta Breakers Run for the Children



Sun., Oct. 23, 2005, 9 a.m.
Stanford University, Palo Alto

Get out those running shoes! Hosted by Stanford's Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority, the 20th Annual Theta Breakers Run for the Children is a 5K/10K walk/run that takes place on Stanford's beautiful campus during Homecoming Weekend. This event attracts about 400 participants each year and all proceeds benefit Child Advocates. Theta Breakers is the most successful Greek philanthropic event in the nation, and raised \$20,000 last year and over \$75,000 during the past six years for Child Advocates!

Along with the professionally-timed walk/run, the event offers a variety of prizes, food and a complimentary t-shirt. Join in the fun!

For more information:

Contact Run Coordinators Stephanie Potter (sspotter@stanford.edu) or Karissa Hazy (khazy@stanford.edu).

Visit www.cadvocates.org/events.htm

Beating the Odds

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What advice would you give to children currently in the foster care system?

Don't give up. Don't settle for something that you don't feel is right. Go for what you think you're worth. Use the resources that are available. Definitely talk to the people who are there to help. This might sound corny, but I believe that if you can dream it, you can get it.

What advice would you give to Advocates?

When I first heard that I was going to get an Advocate, I was hesitant because here was another new person in your life. But when I met Linda, she was so friendly. Before you meet the kid, keep reading their folder so you know what's going on. If it doesn't seem like you're making a dent [in the child's life], try to go the extra level. Ask them how they're feeling, let them talk, listen well. Keep reminding them that you'll be there. Drop by and surprise them, like what Linda did. Don't only show up when you're supposed to.

Where do you see yourself in the future?

I want to go into counseling because I have a strong drive to help kids who go through what I went through. I want to help them. One day I can hopefully work at the Bill Wilson Center. I'll be able to relate [to the children] on a face-to-face, person-to-person basis.

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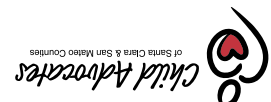
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