The Gault Decision

In 1966 Gerald Gault was arrested for making prank calls to his neighbors, in the state of Arizona. After the complaint got filed, Gault was arrested and his parents were not notified. The only reason they found out is because one of Gerald’s friends notified the parents. The standard trial procedures were not followed with Gerald Gault. There was no legal or parental representation, Gault was sentenced to 6 years of industrial school—6 years. When an adult charged with the same charge would be sentenced 2 months maximum and a $50 fine. Gault got a lawyer and filed a writ of habeas corpus, mutual fee was denied by both Superior Court and Arizona Supreme Court. Eventually the case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. The courts found in favor of Gault, because juveniles are entitled to due process under the 14th amendment. The supreme court did not give very specific guidelines what situations quality.

This brings me to the situation today. I am familiar with the child welfare system in Washington state. A study in Washington was just released by the National Bar Association; It gives grades to states assessing the legal representation provided to children who have been neglected and abused, and these are cases in which children might be removed from their families. Washington state received an F which is actually very disappointing. If you cannot represent yourself in the court of law, you cannot represent others.

Rainier Scholars

and the director of the program is Calvin Lyons, whom I was lucky enough to interview. In my interview with Mr. Lyons, I learned he is very committed to his position. I asked him, “What do you do as a director and what do you do to help the scholars?” He responded, “I am responsible for overall leadership and organization. I set the direction to support resource development. For example, I make sure that the staff team is well satisfied. They’re the best team!”

I asked him, “Why did you want to become a director for this program?” Mr. Lyons wanted a chance to serve, a chance to work with very talented, compassionate...very hard working and caring people.

My next question was, “If you don’t get any grants from the governor then where does the program get its funding?” 60% of the funding comes from foundations and 40% of the funding comes from individual contributions and corporations. Mr. Lyons replied, “I interviewed a 10th grade named Gar Lee in the program and the responses I got were incredible. I asked him, “What are you getting out of this program?” “I feel more academically mature and learned some learning skills.” I then asked, “What do you like about this program?” He said, “I like the good sense of community and lots of support; it sort of feels like a second family.” Then I asked, “Will you be prepared for college when you complete this program?” “Definitely” was Gar’s response.

I was very surprised at his responses, because before I toured Aki Kurose Middle School, a Rainier Scholars site, I had thought it was just a tutoring program but I guess this program does a lot for youth of color who want to achieve more then others thought they would be able to. This program also helps students after they graduate from high school by assigning them one-on-one counselors to help them academically in college. Therefore, if you think that this program does just a little or a little bit of nothing to help students who want to achieve, well check again. Drop by or give them a call, get your kid involved in something that is not just socially fun but is also good for them academically.
Dear Mockingbird Society Youth & Naja Morris,

I want to thank you and, in particular, Sam and Janica for participating in a youth panel at our Regional Management Team Meeting in Port Townsend. Sam and Janica’s honest, heartfelt discussion of their experiences in child welfare helped the management team understand why we are doing what we are doing and invigorated us to do better. To see two individuals begin to realize their vast potential, against the odds and understand what has helped them to achieve that, is invaluable as we try to create a better system. They are change agents and have become a part of the reform effort at becoming better about meeting the needs of the young people involved. My hat’s off to them.

I look forward to voting for Sam in the 2013 presidential election, and I look forward to seeing Janica continuing to make our system better as she raises a family and pursues her goals of becoming a social worker. They both have already made a significant impact.

Thank you and these wonderful youth for making a difference.

Bruce Wood, MSW
Program Consultant, Region 6
I am writing to try to speak to the ocean of experience that runway, homeless and foster care youth go through on a daily, annual and hourly basis. I am writing this for my friend who has been through over 200 placements; I am writing this on behalf of all of the “aged out” foster care youth who got booted to the streets and died along the way. I am writing this for seventeen year olds I’ve met who used to get thrown down stairs and beaten for being queer. I am writing this for me, because I have been on and off of these cold streets since I was thirteen and need to seize this opportunity to advocate for the voiceless, the silent, and the oppressed youth of this nation.

Street youth and cops are intrinsically connected, like poverty and the class system or cancer and the immune system. Let me put it this way: when you do not sufficiently educate a young person, put them in sometimes devastating and starving poverty, and then stick a lot of people just out of their reach or budget, what do you expect them to do? You have essentially just created a criminal by denying this person their inalienable rights to food, shelter, health and then punished them for being under-educated, hungry and stealing for survival.

This is not to say that each and every person should be held accountable for their actions; actually, just the opposite. I am turning the mirror around to society and showing them that youth homelessness, suicide and drug abuse is a symptom of a sick society. We need to change our ways, suicide and drug abuse is a symptom and showing them that youth homelessness is turning the mirror around to society and their actions; actually, just the opposite. I believe in freedom and equality and values towards humanity, education and the oppressed youth of this nation.

I believe that a punishment should be only as harsh as the crime that was committed. We need more comprehensive and understanding laws that address cultural, gender and class differences. I believe we should focus on providing solutions more than punishing people for problems in our own society. I believe in freedom and equality and happiness for all people. I know that I am speaking for the majority of the youth that I’ve met when I speak these truths and I want to thank you for listening! “Thank you for all of the work that you do every day to improve the lives of marginalized young people.” This is the voice of youth and... these are our truths.

Foster Youth Need You
Will you give them a safe home?

Foster Our Future is a contractor with Washington State Children’s Administration. An experienced foster parent will answer your questions and mentor you through the foster care licensing process.

Some children need a home for a day; others will need a family forever.

2007 Legislative Successes
During the 2007 Washington State legislative session, the following legislation passed on behalf of foster youth in Washington State:

HB 1201:
The Department of Social and Health Services will continue health coverage for foster children from their 18th birthday through their 21st birthday.

HB 1922:
Creates the Independent Youth Housing Program within the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development to provide housing stipends and case management services to young adults ages 18-23 who were once dependents of the state.

EHSB1311:
• Provides outreach and information to youth foster care regarding opportunities for higher education, including financial aid that may be available.
• Provides scholarships to assist eligible former foster youth with the costs of higher education for up to five consecutive years.
• Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to contract with at least one non-governmental entity to develop and implement a plan to help foster youth with planning and transitioning into higher education.
• Requires the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to evaluate the pilot program and report to the Legislature by December 2012.

HB 1472:
• Directs the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services to convene an advisory committee to analyze and make recommendations regarding the disproportionate representation of children of color in the state’s child welfare system.
• Requires development of a remediation plan and an annual progress report for reducing and eliminating racial disproportionality and disparity in the state’s child welfare system.

For more information on these and other legislation please visit www.leg.wa.gov/Legislature/
The Ego of Power

by Blue McKeon

The ego of power
Trampled all the flowers
Not understanding on both ends
Don’t know why each other acts like this.
But the flowers pulled together
After harsh winters
After depressing falls
And burned up summers of tormenting hate
Strangers that doted
Strangers that stare
Strangers that would pull them apart
Pick at them until they were pissed off

Enough was enough from the ego power
So the help from their roots
The flowers rose tall
Chanting in color
Enough is enough

However the unbeatable rhythm
Had only just begun
And the end of this fight wouldn’t come
until much later
But they kept on fighting even after being weathered down

Cheerios

by Amber Clark

It was an accident I’m confident
But I forgot to tell you
A serving size of moral lies is running through my system
To tell the truth all he said was
Don’t look back I’m leaving no witnesses
Don’t be mad I just don’t love you
I wish you had a tiny bit of empathy.

I Wish I Would Have Known You Better

by Jinky Bae

I wish I would have known you better
I wish I would have seen you that same day
The day you passed away
But I didn’t
I was told about your funeral
Did I go?
No
But I wish I did
Instead I was stubborn
I refused to go
I couldn’t bare it
I wish I would have gone that day to pay my respects
But I didn’t
Still today
It’s been a year
I still haven’t paid my respects
I believe that after I write this to you that my respects will have been paid.
I love you Grandpa Bob!

Silence

by Katie Harmon

Silence is okay sometimes,
that’s what is needed more in some places.
It’s as if dark clouds bring it more,
shadowing a big city or a small town.
Silence makes things seem nice,
you can think more deeply.
Thoughts you can’t seem to think of while its loud and noisy,
it can also bring up memories.
Good ones or bad ones.
either way you’re still thinking.
Filling your head with almost everything,
that’s why silence is okay sometimes.

Walking the Distance

by Vanessa Hunt

Natasha Grossman never thought that the Walk a Mile Program would go this far or last this long. When I was on the phone interviewing her, she still seemed in awe that Walk a Mile has lasted 13 years and continues to grow massively each year. She felt very passionate about the way that bills were made and passed without any type of testimonial from people that were going to be affected by the bill’s outcome was. It was time to let the policy makers see who these people really were and how their lives were compared to theirs.

In 1994, the program was designed to setup policy makers with low-income families. It was later changed to match Foster Care or former Foster Care youth. The reason for this program is so that the policy makers can really see how the “other half” live. The pair talks on the phone for about a month and go to functions that both participants go to like important meetings, etc.

The program gained huge media interest and Walk a Mile was catapulted into this amazing program that everyone wanted to be involved with. Different cities all over the country wanted to be involved in a program that makes such a difference to people.

People were responding like crazy to Natasha’s program that seemed to change lives and give such awareness to policy makers and even open even the most stubborn of minds. However, money was needed to train people by those who were skilled in the program of Walk a Mile. Natasha then decided she was going to need grants to make all of these cities have such an amazing program. Through the Motto Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Walk a Mile training program was used to create Walk a Mile programs all over the country.

Washington State House Representa- tive Eric Pettigrew did Walk a Mile last year. Natasha Grossman asked him to do this because she thought he would like to get involved. He did indeed. That is why he is doing it again this year. Eric Pettigrew worked with a youth named Carneisha Grace. They first started out having coffee and getting to know each other’s back- grounds and to find out what the program was about and what they both wanted to get out of it.

Afterwards, they went to a meeting at City Hall. The meeting was about homelessness in Seattle, and Carneisha spoke about how she was basically homeless and had to get all of her housing set up before she had aged out of foster care so that she wasn’t homeless. Her talk helped to start a bill for housing in Seattle for homeless people. Eric Pettigrew said that Car- neisha speaking to those people at the meeting helped get the bill into motion and really helped to increase of housing in Seattle.

This is really instrumental as it shows one of the major reasons why Walk a Mile was started in the first place. Natasha Grossman had been outraged that bills were passed without any input from the people that these bills truly affected. Carmen’s help broke the mold of how bills were passed because they got the point of view from someone that the bill really did affect.

It is not easy when a fostered youth is aged out. Most of the time it really depends on how dedicated the caseworker is and how much help you get. Eric Pettigrew said he learned a lot about what happens when the youth age out and how they struggle. It really opened his eyes to see how they survived out in the “real” world and really getting to know a fostered youth.

As of right now, 36 states have participated in the Walk a Mile program and more than 1500 pairs of legislative members and youth have met. I believe that this will start the change that our state, and the country as a whole, needs so that everyone can be compassionate and empathic for people that aren’t as fortunate as others. I also believe Walk a Mile will get more amazing with each passing year thanks to Natasha Grossman and the people who get involved.

I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

~ Booker T. Washington

Walking the Distance

by Annie E. Casey Foundation

The walk a mile program was used to create Walk a Mile programs all over the country.

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