



# Sisters

AT THE CENTER

## The Center for Young Women's Development

**MISSION:** Our mission is to empower and inspire young women who have been involved with the juvenile justice system and/or the underground street economy to create positive change in their lives and communities.

**VISION:** We envision a world in which self-determination and sisterhood are the means by which culturally diverse young women in crisis are supported and healed with care and compassion so they can proactively resist the impacts of all forms of oppression.

### CYWD KEEPS GROWING

We have moved out of our adolescence and into our womanhood. We are building our capacity so that we can do business smarter, more effectively, with better systems that will allow us to be more sustainable and healthy. A year after my transition into the Executive Director role, we have successfully implemented our three year strategic plan, created an exceptional website and recreated our logo so that young women can easily identify with CYWD. Even more exciting, we expanded our board, bringing on 5 new members and hired a new staff that is dedicated to empowering young women. 98% of our new team is made up of competent young women who have come up through our programs. They are a testament to the leadership model and skills young women are developing here at CYWD.

Our successes have been many. We have employed 25 young women this year alone, 8 young



women passed the high school proficiency test, 12 are enrolled in college for the fall semester, and 6 young women who were previously homeless are now in stable housing.

With many successes come many challenges. Our communities are in the midst of ongoing violence and many of us are facing uncertainty as our sisters and brothers are experiencing pain and loss. Here at CYWD, we are working toward personal and community transformation and healing. We are developing leadership amongst a cadre of young women who are "in risk" and fighting against the stigma of having been incarcerated. They leave our programs with self-confidence and a variety of skills that will help them proactively confront any obstacles that lie ahead.

Our programs work because we are the young women we are working for. We are providing meaningful opportunities and safe spaces where young women can heal and grow. We need your help to continue providing meaningful programs and employment for young women who are determined to turn their lives around.

MARLENE SANCHEZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### WORDS THAT INSPIRE

*Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.*

*Without them humanity*

*cannot survive.*

~DALAI LAMA

### Inside this Issue

- CYWD's Education component proves successful as more young women get on the educational track
- CYWD's Sisters Rising Prepare for Graduation
- Ford Foundation tells local folks why they support CYWD

### RECEIVE E-NEWS

To save paper and valuable resources, we will begin sending our biannual newsletter through email. To help us in our efforts please email [tamaya@cywd.org](mailto:tamaya@cywd.org) or call 415.703.8800 ext. 1029 to give us your email address. We apologize if you have received this newsletter more than once. Please let us know so we can clear up the problem.



*"The Center for Young Women's Development helps young women who have been locked up. Most importantly, CYWD provides a supportive community for young women to change their ways and stay out of the system."*

TERRY THOMAS, 17  
CYWD COMMUNITY ORGANIZER



## Executive Director Receives “Unsung Heroes of Compassion” Award from His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Nearly 15 years ago, Marlene Sanchez came to the Center for Young Women’s Development looking for a way out of the juvenile justice system. The Center helped her reshape her life, offering support, employment and a chance to exercise her passion—working with young women and girls involved in the juvenile justice system.

Last year, Marlene’s dedication to her cause and the Center’s mission of empowering young women captured the attention of his Holiness the Dalai Lama, who acknowledges Marlene as one of 48 Unsung Heroes of Compassion. Along with other “highly compassionate individuals” from around the world—including Ethiopia, India, Thailand and Burma—Marlene was honored at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in San Francisco, California on, Sunday, November 6, 2005. Her father, who had once been in prison, accompanied her to the luncheon, his face beaming with pride.

Other honorees included Bogaletch Gebre, the founder of Women’s Self-Help Center in Kembatta, Ethiopia; Donal Murphy, whose work has led to reconciliation between Irish Catholic and Protestant youth and adults in Ireland; and Lotay Tshering, the only General Surgeon in a rural hospital that cares for nearly one third of the six hundred thousand citizens of Bhutan.

“These individuals have been selected as representatives of the tens of thousands of people worldwide who quietly serve the disenfranchised and work to improve our communities through their personal efforts,” said event chair Dick Grace, founder of Grace Family Vineyards and board chair of Wisdom in Action, the organization hosting the celebration. “We don’t see them or hear about them in the daily news, but they exemplify a humanism and heroism to which we must each aspire.”

BILEN MESFIN, CYWD BOARD MEMBER

## YOUTH ORGANIZING: CYWD is Awarded Youth Empowerment Fund!

CYWD recently celebrated becoming one of seven grantees of the Youth Empowerment Fund. The fund, which is run by San Francisco’s Office of Children, Youth and their Families, grants youth organizations \$50,000 to embark on youth-led initiatives and campaigns to find solutions to issues that are affecting their communities. Writing the proposal for the fund was a collective effort shared by CYWD’s development director and program participants. Sisters Rising Organizer’s, Marcelina Rodriguez and Latrice Phillips, wrote a significant section of the proposal and facilitated an issue and campaign identification workshop with staff and program participants. In the end, 12 issues were identified and the group came to a consensus to work with Stacy Kono, a dynamic community organizer that will lead Sisters Rising through their chosen campaign.



The young women are excited to lead the organizing efforts from the beginning until the end. “*This was the first time I was part of a grant writing process and it was so cool to see how an idea is turned into a project that gets funded*”, said Marcelina Rodriguez about her experience.

KREA GOMEZ, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

## LIFE, LOVE & JUSTICE— SISTERS RISING 2006

The Sisters Rising employment program is nearing the end of another cycle. We have had the pleasure of working with 23 amazing young women who are some of the tightest organizers to come through CYWD yet!

As the Sister Rising Organizers worked to deepen their skills they have completed trainings on political education, public

speaking, outreach, job skills and creative expression. They have embraced opportunities to utilize their skills by participating in various community efforts. They worked with *The Books Not Bars*’ campaign to close down the brutal California Youth Authority. They also co-sponsored a summit with Bay Area Police Watch to bring a day of *Know Your Rights* trainings to young people in the Bay Area.

The young women have been open to the process of healing and self-empowerment. After exploring how people of color interact with different social and political systems, we began the work of telling our stories as a form of social biography. In this workshop, we drew from the context of our lives and were able to place ourselves and our communities into a larger context. The workshop helped young women open up and understand the oppressive mechanisms that operate in low-income communities of color. By exploring and learning about these issues together the young women were able to build bonds of sisterhood that continue to help them through crisis and hard times.

The most exciting news is that our experiences and accomplishments have been captured and incorporated into a collaborative film project between Sisters Rising and San Francisco State University film students, dom Brassey and Joe Golling. Recently completed, the short film, aptly titled *Sister Rise*, chronicles the misconceptions that exist about poor young women of color. The film will be used as an outreach tool to open up dialogue focused on creating social change. The young women participated in the process learning the ins and outs of cinematography and how to use professional media equipment.

They are now looking forward to graduation and the opportunities that await them. Please come show your love and support as the young women graduate from Sisters Rising on June 22. Call our office for event details.

MELANIE WILLINGHAM-JAGGERS



## YOUNG WOMEN RETURN TO SCHOOL

In 2003, The Center For Young Women's Development partnered with PACT, Inc, an organization that promotes community empowerment by increasing access to higher education for low-income youth and young adults. Together, we are working to increase high-school graduation rates and college enrollment rates for low-income young women. Many of the young women we work with have given up hope and have abandoned the idea of ever attending college. This collaboration is our answer to change young women's educational outlooks and encourage them to strive for more.

Since the beginning of our partnership we have witnessed a rise in the number of young women who complete their educational programs and apply to college. This year we have assisted three young women in enrolling back in school after being out of school for over a year and all of the young women who are in high school successfully passed the California High School Exit Exam. In December of 2005, we took our young women on their first college tour and a majority of them reported feeling uninterested in college because they had not been exposed to that environment. They left the college tour excited and eager to learn more about what they needed to do in order to go to college.



Young women come through our doors feeling like they can't go to college and that changes when they participate in educational activities and are provided with a strong support system. They start to feel like they can graduate from high school and successfully attend college, even though society is telling them that they can't. We are building a path for young women to walk down, while providing the encouragement needed to keep them motivated to reach their educational goals. The program has been successful and we are working hard to secure funds so that this program may continue.

It is absolutely necessary that we continue to promote education as a key to our own success.

NADIYAH SHEREFF, EDUCATION ADVISOR

## Being the Change She Wants to See in the World

The moment I heard of *The Center for Young Women's Development* I was in The California Youth Authority (CYA) serving a 7-year sentence. They came to CYA offering me a job when I got out. CYWD partnered with the *Girls Justice Initiative* to visit young women in CYA once a month. We all looked forward to these visits because most of us did not receive visits from family members. CYWD felt like the closest thing to family.



The very first day I reentered the community, I went straight to CYWD where I applied for a 9-month internship for the *Sisters Rising* program. I got the position and had no idea how much this was going to change my life. It was in this internship that I learned how to advocate for other young women going through what I went through in the juvenile justice system. I graduated from the *Sisters Rising* program in 2005 and was hired as a Coordinator for the *Girls Detention Advocacy Project* (GDAP). As a GDAP coordinator, my job is to go into juvenile hall and host weekly workshops around self-advocacy, leadership development, court accompaniment, and political education. Looking back on how things were for me, I see no difference between myself and the young women I host workshops for. I strongly believe that every young woman has the capacity to become a leader if she has a community that is supporting her.

I believe I was sent here for a reason, and that reason is to be here for these young women. If I made it this far, they can too.

TAILUA MAPU  
COORDINATOR FOR THE GIRLS DETENTION  
ADVOCACY PROJECT

## MEET OUR NEW DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR— TAMAYA GARCIA



I got to know "The Center" while volunteering with the Girls Detention

Advocacy Project at juvenile hall, passing out Know Justice Handbooks and other materials to young people awaiting their court hearings. I did this work alongside the always inspiring young women of CYWD, whose life stories and kind spirits kept me coming back.

Believing that everything is connected, I've come to understand that my commitment to the Center is part of my life long journey and search to see my family, my community and myself in a new light. Since I was very young until today, I've watched my family negotiate the criminal justice system. I watched the people I looked up to taken from me at the hands of angry judges who broke families apart, increased our lack of necessities and forced separation of loved ones instead of rehabilitation. I am one of the few who survived the hardships the system forced on my family, not unwounded, but strong and committed to make change.

Once I graduated from San Francisco State University in 2005 with a degree in Cultural Anthropology, I became the first in my family to boast a college degree. With my college education in hand and an intense drive to see our communities healed, I joined CYWD as the Development Director. Since November 2005, I have been writing proposals, meeting the wonderful folks who support our work and learning the best fund development strategies to help our work grow. I am honored and excited to be here!

TAMAYA GARCIA  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

## Ford Foundation Helps CYWD Garner Local Support

In February, we held our first ever Funder's Round table. In collaboration with Loren Harris of the Ford Foundation, we brought together funders, community members and young women to discuss the future needs of girls in the system. It was a great turnout and everybody, especially the young women, walked away feeling empowered and most of all, inspired. Funders who were already supporting our work recommitted themselves to supporting the growth of CYWD, and new funders were convinced that our programs are creating real and lasting change in San Francisco communities and beyond.

The young women spent the day sharing their experience and expertise on their lives and the systems that they have been a part of. This was a day of intimate and frank discussion between two parties who usually never meet: young people from the streets and program officers from various foundations.

*"CYWD is actively engaged in addressing the changing needs of their constituency. The Ford Foundation will continue to support CYWD in making a difference in young women's lives."*

Loren Harris, Ford Foundation

## MORE THAN EVER, WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

This month marks the end of our fiscal year and we are proud to announce that we have reached our fundraising goal. We have

been fortunate to have the support of a diverse array of foundations and city funding however, we realize that a healthy funding stream must also include a strong individual donor base. To meet this challenge we are embarking on an individual donor campaign beginning in September. You can help us reach our fundraising goals by hosting a small fundraising event for CYWD or by making a donation to support the following programs and projects.

• **Record Expungement** – Help a young woman who has successfully completed probation clear her criminal record

• **The Girls Detention Advocacy Project** – Support healing and self-empowerment programs for young women in lock-up facilities

• **Education Services** – Help low-income young women get the resources they need to achieve academic success

• **Cultural History Trips** – Help CYWD send young women of color to destinations where their cultural history is vibrant

• **Emergency Housing Fund** – Assist a young woman who is ready to get off the streets and into stable housing

## PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TODAY!

Call Tamaya Garcia at 415.703.8800 ext.1029 to find out how you can organize a fundraiser for The Center for Young Women's Development.



Thank you to all the folks who have given their time, resources, and love to help CYWD flourish!

### In-Kind Donors

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