

Best of the NETWORKER

Feature Articles from Past Issues

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For 2010: A New Year Challenge

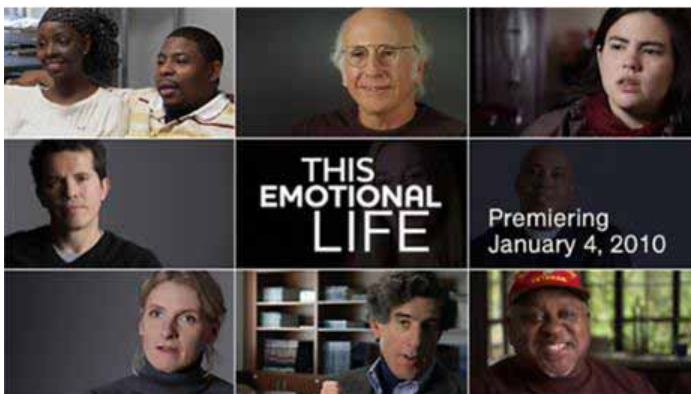
by Jerry Fest

There's a new way of donating that's being advocated through several different forums. It's a relatively easy and painless way to ensure that funds keep flowing to support agencies you believe in, despite the fact that we're all struggling through difficult financial times. It's a simple concept. All it requires you to do is keep a coin jar throughout the year. At the end of the year (in time to claim it on your tax returns), simply take the jar to the bank and write a check or cut a money order to your favorite charity. This is actually a little different from what most "coin jar" movements advocate. Usually the request is to anonymously leave the coin jar on the porch of a needy family or some similar idea ... but, assuming that many of you may be giving to homeless youth services, I can guarantee that while your donation would be appreciated, having to deal with large amounts of change during the busy holiday season would probably not be. So my recommendation is the check, but however you do it, consider the following ...

My personal change jar usually collects about \$150.00 a year. If everyone reading this newsletter starts a similar jar and accumulates a similar amount of coins, then we Networkers could be responsible for an extra \$75,000.00 being donated to help youth in need next December. Seems like a worthwhile goal to me, so let's make this a Formal Challenge: Ladies and Gentlemen ... start your coin jars! It's one way to guarantee that you end 2010 with a good feeling.

From all of us at the Northwest Network for Youth, we wish you a

HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR



PBS Scores a Hit With 'This Emotional Life'

by Jerry Fest

Actually, to be honest, I'm not sure whether the show was a hit or not. I haven't seen the ratings. But This Emotional Life, a 3-part series which aired this week, was certainly a hit with me ... and I highly recommend it for those of you working with runaway and homeless youth, even more so if you are following the national trend toward services that are based in Youth

Development principles and practices, and/or focusing more on an ecological/developmental perspective than a socio-economic perspective. Not that the series is focused on the RHY population (though it does touch on it at times), but the information is certainly relevant, transferable, and applicable to working with street youth. Of

particular interest to me was the support it provided to emphasizing social connectedness at least as much, if not more than, meeting physical needs.

But, as I said ... the series aired this week. Missed it? No problem ... you can watch it online. You can also purchase the series for about 35 bucks. If I was currently running an agency I'd be showing it in half hour segments at regularly scheduled meetings, followed by an exploration/discussion ... just an idea ;-)

To learn more about this excellent series: <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/>



HAITI
how you can help

Instead of an article this week, the Networker calls upon readers to do what they can to aid the victims of the earthquake in Haiti. Many of you have already pitched in. For those who would like to do more, this link to [USA TODAY](#) lists a variety of organizations that are helping.

For street kids in Haiti, the quake has made a bad situation worse. This [UNICEF article](#) describes what the situation was like before the quake and describes a center that is trying to help. One can only imagine the level of need at that center today.



***How You Draw the Line is as Important as
Where You Draw the Line***

By Jerry Fest

Young people need structure and boundaries, and we often judge the success of our efforts to create and teach boundaries by how well they work in a specific situation. But judging our efforts by situational success may not always be in the best interest of the child. A better yardstick may be the effect that our efforts have outside of the immediate situation; by how well it works with the child in the context of the child's life.

I have a friend who is a 3rd grade teacher who was telling me about some of the behavior challenges she faces in her classroom. The most interesting part of the conversation was when she told me that the young people who present the greatest challenge to her are the ones who get hit at home. That's not to say that there's a correlation between being hit and disruptive behavior (equally, that's not to say that there *isn't* one, but that's not the point being made here), it's simply an identification of what the child has learned to interpret as the boundary.

Here's the job description of the developing child: Find the boundaries, walk up to them, and stick your toe over the line ... see what happens. This is how we grow and learn; not by respecting boundaries, but by challenging them. And we learn to identify where the boundaries are by the responses of the adults in our life. Children who have found the boundaries by getting knocked upside the head have also learned to identify that they've hit the boundary by being hit. The reason why they present a greater challenge to my friend in her classroom is because, in this school, *they don't hit the kids*. Striking a child is neither a form of discipline available to the teachers, nor is it allowable as a form of communication to let the child know that they've gone as far as they can go and need to stop now. It's not that they are worse behaved than other children; it's simply that they are not as skilled at receiving other boundary messages. They don't know that they've gone too far until they get hit. Until then the message they get is that they have not yet reached the limit of acceptable behavior.

We spend a lot of time identifying where we should set boundaries with young people, but we should also realize that how we set boundaries is equally important ... and our method needs to be transferrable to other life domains. When boundaries are enforced by hitting, it may become the only way a child learns to recognize when a boundary has been reached.



PROSECUTING JUVENILES AS ADULTS REVISITED

By Gary Hammons

What is it with our society? Why do we persist in using punishment as the only intervention in response to the behavior of juveniles when research repeatedly confirms that they are ill-equipped to assess the consequences of their actions? Worse, prosecutors seem to take great pride in charging adolescents as adults and to send them to adult prison at the earliest opportunity.

This “get tough on juvenile crime” movement began in the early 1990s based on faulty data analysis, and it persists at a distressing level in many areas of our country to this day. A very evocative comparison of juvenile incarceration rates in Texas and California by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice was made for the period 1995 through 2006. In 1995 the incarceration rate in California was 2.2 times higher than Texas, but by the end of the study period the rate in Texas was 2.6 times higher than that of California. (www.cjcj.org, June 2007, Mike Males et al)

What happened? Not surprising to many youth workers, the crime rate in each state did not change. The deterrent effect of jail had/has little, if any, effect on juvenile crime. Remanding juveniles to the adult system (Texas is one of the leading states in this regard) compounds the problem. The US is first among developed nations in percentage of people in prison. Clearly our adult penal/criminal justice system is not working. Why then do we persist in putting juveniles into it? Worse, recidivism studies show that juveniles prosecuted as adults are almost guaranteed to be life long offenders.

While I surely do not advocate dismissing criminal behavior among young people, I am increasingly concerned that the many alternatives to detention are not being pursued in some communities. There have been encouraging changes in some communities that have coordinated efforts among family therapy, school completion, probation, anger management training and related services. Ironically, the economic mess in State budgets may hasten implementation of these alternatives, as it costs far more to incarcerate than to provide community based supports.

We must take the opportunity afforded by the poor economy to promote a much broader response to juvenile crime. By noting studies like the above and bringing these to the attention of policy makers and legislators, our young people and our communities will benefit in many ways. In demonstrating that it is both financially

advantageous and a better outcome to reduce detention in favor of increased community supports, we will be assuring a much improved outcome for many at-risk young people in our society.