



The Alliance for Children's Rights

Spring | 2012

Then & Now...

This year marks our 20th anniversary serving LA County's most vulnerable children. To celebrate, we have taken a moment to revisit a few of our inspiring clients to see where they are today.

Angela

In 2006, Angela Villegas was a 19-year-old attending community college when tragedy struck her family. Her mother lost her battle with cancer, leaving Angela to care for her five siblings ranging in age from five to fifteen, including Fernando who has Down Syndrome.

Angela called The Alliance for Children's Rights terrified the children were going to be split up and sent into various foster homes. Despite the drastic changes this meant in her life and the need to postpone her own goals, Angela was determined to keep her family together. The Alliance helped Angela obtain legal guardianship of her siblings as well as housing assistance so that the family of six could move to an apartment in a safer neighborhood with good schools. We then connected the children to medical and dental providers, as well as grief counseling and on-going therapy. We also advocated for Fernando to obtain special education services. Through the years, we have linked the family with an array of services and have introduced Angela to caring volunteers who have provided ongoing assistance and friendship to her family.



The Villegas family celebrates Danny's graduation from high school and acceptance to college in June 2011

As the "parent" of five children, Angela has never stopped emphasizing the importance of education. After several years of struggling to care for 5 children and putting her own life on hold, Angela was able to transfer to Cal State Los Angeles. Her brother Danny is now a freshman at Loyola Marymount University. Her younger siblings are doing well in school, including Fernando who is thriving in a special private school suited to his needs.

Angela's family has faced many challenges and taken on responsibilities that most children don't assume until adulthood. The Alliance for Children's Rights has been proud to help them obtain the services, support and resources they needed to stay together as one family and pursue their dreams as individuals.

Continued on page six.



Annual Dinner Raises \$1.2 million

Honoring Kevin Reilly, President of Entertainment at Fox Broadcasting Company, and Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, LLC, (See page 8)

Pictured left to right: Seth MacFarlane, Kevin Reilly, Zoey Deschanel and Jane Lynch





Message from the CEO Janis Spire and Board Chair Bart Williams

This year, we celebrate 20 years and the lives of more than 100,000 children. You have enabled us to make a significant difference in the lives of our LA neighbors who are often invisible: the children and youth who live in poverty, those without a stable place to call home, sick children who lack medical care, and those who can't exercise their right to an equitable education.

As a board member, I (Bart) have been proud to represent and serve the Alliance for the last 13 years. And as the Alliance CEO for the last ten years, I (Janis) wake up every day motivated to come into the office and witness the tireless work that our staff, *pro bono* attorneys and other volunteers do to ensure that kids have the stability and access to the consistent services all kids need and deserve.

We all know that economic times are tough. We have seen the budgets of our schools and critical public programs slashed and an increase in poverty among some of Los Angeles' most vulnerable children. Despite these cutbacks, The Alliance has been able to reinforce our services in response to the growing demand. We are the phone call that always gets answered as the needs of our kids increase.

It has been so moving to look back on the lives of some of the families we have helped over the years. We hope you will enjoy reading about a few of them beginning on page 1 and take heart knowing the part you have played in their journey.

We would like to thank each and every one of our supporters for helping us accomplish all that we do and for your continued support as the phone continues to ring and our caseloads increase.

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The Alliance welcomes 2 new board members



Harriet S. Posner is a partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, LLP. A graduate of UCLA Law, her practice focuses on complex commercial litigation. Harriet serves on the board of the Center for Early Education, where she was elected president in 2011. She has also served on the board of the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles for the last 10 years.



Chris B. Walther is the Chief Legal Officer of Activision Blizzard, Inc. Previously he was General Counsel for The Proctor & Gamble Company's worldwide division. A graduate of the University of Kentucky College of Law, Chris has served on the Board of Trustees of the Mercantile Library in Cincinnati, as well as the Kobe Union Church Charitable Foundation in Japan.

3rd annual
the **RIGHT**
to **LAUGH**

JOIN US IN OUR SALUTE TO
The Second City

Check out our line-up at our website, www.kids-alliance.org

June 12th, 2012
The AVALON
in Hollywood

For information, call Marlene at 213-368-6010 ext. 108

Turning policy into practice



Alliance Policy Director, Angie Schwartz fields questions at a recent AB12 training

2012 marks the beginning of landmark changes to California's Child Welfare System! The Alliance co-sponsored California's Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB 12) which went into effect on January 1st and promises young people the right to stay in care until age 20. Instead of being kicked out of the system at 18, youth can choose to receive housing, support from a social worker and resources to help with school and employment.

Alliance Policy Director Angie Schwartz has chaired a number of implementation committees here in LA and in Sacramento. She and several Alliance attorneys have also lead a statewide training effort to ensure that accurate and timely information about the new law is reaching youth and providers directly.

Our NextSTEP Program has also broadened its scope to incorporate the changes brought by AB12. As young people turn 18 and are able to extend their stay in foster care, we will help them make an informed decision and access housing and other resources to better prepare them for adulthood, such as assistance with high school completion, help enrolling in college and connections to employment programs.

We don't expect our own kids to live independently at 18 and now foster kids finally get a few more years to prepare for their own independence.

AB 12 Case Review

Name: Jennifer

Age: 17

Case Summary: Jennifer was about to turn 18 and wanted her case closed! She was miserable in her foster home and felt ready to be on her own. She wanted to move out, live with a friend and finish up high school. Once she graduated, she was going to enroll in college.

We have seen this numerous times over the years. Young people think they are ready to live on their own and believe they can juggle work and school. Then one crisis hits and the entire plan falls apart. The Alliance helped Jennifer understand how the benefits of AB 12 could give her a safety net to accomplish her goals as well as independence.

We discussed an AB 12 housing option with her. A Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) allows youth, who prove that they are ready to live on their own, to find independent housing.

This can include an apartment, a room in a house or a college dorm. Instead of being totally alone, however, these youth still meet with a counselor monthly and provide progress reports to the court on their education or employment goals.

Outcome: With The Alliance as her advocate, Jennifer petitioned for a SILP evaluation. She was approved and moved into her own apartment, one of LA County's first SILPs!



Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP: Spotlight on Ed Lodgen

Attorneys from Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP have demonstrated a longstanding commitment to Alliance youth by representing clients across our programs. In 2005, Ed Lodgen, a partner at the firm, was key in helping start The Alliance’s new NextSTEP Program for youth “aging out” of foster care. Ed and his colleagues continue to provide one-on-one representation for these clients, often presenting at legal clinics and assisting them with sealing their juvenile records, identity theft or consumer fraud issues.

Ed has made it his mission to improve the future of our transitioning youth. When he noticed that most of these unemployed young clients could not maintain cell phone accounts, he wondered how they would ever obtain jobs. Ed’s attention to this circular problem led The Alliance to partner with another agency that now provides former foster youth free voicemail services. Today even without their own phones, our clients can hand out a number that will allow people to reach them.

Most recently, Ed helped organize The Alliance’s First Annual “Survival Saturday” – a skill-building event for former foster youth that offered car maintenance, interviewing techniques, money management, and basic cooking. This was led by the Friends of the Alliance, a group that Ed co-chairs.

Thank you, Ed, and everyone from Robins, Kaplan, Miller, Ciresi, LLP!



Ed Lodgen helps run a car maintenance class for former foster youth with a volunteer from PepBoys.



The Alliance welcomes Ted Farley, new Pro Bono Manager



A recent New York transplant, Ted joins The Alliance with a recognized commitment to social justice. A George Washington University graduate, Ted coordinated media campaigns for Children’s Rights in New York to publicize the organization’s national child welfare reform and litigation efforts. That experience inspired his enrollment at Brooklyn Law School and subsequent employment with the Urban Justice Center. There he represented survivors of domestic violence and worked in tandem with the child welfare system to address the needs of at-risk children in those situations.

Ted founded the Center’s Domestic Violence Project’s LGBTQ Initiative in recognition of this population’s disparate legal treatment. For this effort he received the “Courage Award” for outstanding service to the LGBTQ population.

“I have always maintained an interest in returning to child advocacy. I’m thrilled by the opportunity to join the staff at The Alliance for Children’s Rights and to work in partnership with the exceptional pro bono attorneys who are so essential to the work we do.”—Ted

The security of a forever family



For every "security blanket" purchased at our dinner, a child receives a "pocket buddy" to take home after their adoption. Here the American Idol judges sign "pocket buddies"

Michelle celebrates her adoption with her new mom, Trina



Sisters Mimi and Isabel with their "pocket buddies"

Judge Amy Pellman's Southwest Law Students get courtroom experience working alongside attorneys from Dickstein Shapiro, LLP



Thanks to the generous support of donors who purchased "security blankets" at our recent annual dinner, The Alliance and our *pro bono* attorneys were able to finalize 70 children's adoptions on April 13th.

With Mikey we are a family

Ian Smith and Ted Peterson adopted their son Mikey, now age 3½, on National Adoption Day in November 2010. They hope to inspire others to adopt from foster care by dispelling some of the myths that prohibit people from considering this path towards parenthood.

Myth: Same sex couples cannot adopt.

Fact: It's just not true. California's laws are very clear. Foster care adoption is open to gay couples, and for us, it was our first choice.

The route we took towards adoption was no different than opposite sex couples, from the initial home study to waiting for that first phone call matching us with a child.

Myth: Foster children can be taken away from you at any time, even after you've bonded with them.

Fact: It's important to be honest about this. California does everything it can to reunify children with their birth parents, but they must adhere to a specific timeframe. In the early months there is a 50/50 chance of reunification. You know this upfront and no one sugarcoats it.

If reunification is not possible, the court moves ahead and terminates parental rights, legally freeing a child for adoption. Children **CANNOT** be taken away from their new parents once an adoption is final.

Mikey was our third child; we had two before him who were reunited with their birth parents. As heartbreaking as it was, we were in it for the long run and we knew our child would eventually find us.

Myth: Foster children are "damaged goods."

Fact: Mikey was classified as a "problem child" because he was still non-verbal and hardly smiled when he came to live with us at 20 months old. We did not give up, we were proactive. We set play dates with other children to help him socialize, we received specialized services thanks to The Alliance's help, and we did everything else we could to help him thrive.

At our next meeting with his social worker, he ran through the door giggling and smiling. The social worker started crying and said, "This is not the same child I saw two months ago."

Many children in foster care have physical or mental health needs. But the "damage" is often not permanent. They've been through so much at such a young age! It's pretty amazing what love and attention can do for a child who has known neither.

For more information on adopting from foster care, please visit www.kids-alliance.org or www.childwelfare.gov/adoption or call The Alliance at (213) 368-6010.



Ted and Ian with Mikey on the day of his adoption.

Upcoming Adoption Dates: June 15th and August 3rd, 2012.

Then & Now: 20 Years of Alliance Families

Perry Family

Twenty years ago, Dona and Jim Perry had raised three children and were planning the next chapter of their lives. They decided that instead of traveling, they'd have a different kind of adventure. They became foster parents for kids with special needs. Their first child, Shawn, was a beautiful infant with Down Syndrome.

He was so easy that when the County called four weeks later they took home Roberta who weighted one pound, 9 ounces at birth. They slept in shifts to take care of her all night. When she smiled at 6 months they opened a bottle of champagne.

The Perrys eventually had six special needs foster children in their home. They were coping with fetal alcohol syndrome, prenatal exposure to crack, deafness, sexual abuse and brain injury. They learned how to deal with learning disabilities, ADHD, uncontrollable rages, abandonment and anger issues. Despite their many disabilities, the Perry kids thrived.

Soon the Perrys' outgrew their house and moved to Camarillo. The state initially agreed to continue to provide the kids with their mandated benefits. But instead it cut off support. That's



The growing Perry family on the day of their adoptions in June 1999

when The Alliance and our *pro bono* partner Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher became the Perrys' advocates.

Dona says, "The Alliance allowed me to be the mother I needed to be. And by the magic of Gibson Dunn, we won the case. If they had not been with us we would not have won. Gibson scared the bejeezus out of the County."

Then, The Alliance provided Dona and Jim the legal support they needed to adopt their six foster kids, who today, are all grown up.

Azeal, who is deaf, just graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology with a degree in psychology. Roberta works

at the local YMCA. Myia works full-time at a nursery school. Kimba is in cosmetology school. Shawn was the most popular kid in his high school. And Rick, who was diagnosed with autism, is a super athlete and waiting to hear from colleges.

The Perrys are a remarkable example of how real families can be born from the foster care system. Now their nine children, many from different biological parents, call each other "brother" and "sister" and know Dona and Jim as "mom" and "dad."



A recent family photo of the Perrys

Trayvon



At 19 Trayvon exited the foster care system, his "home" since the age of 2. Trayvon actually lived in more than twenty different foster and group homes and changed schools countless times along the way. When he acted out, doctors prescribed psychotropic medications to manage his behavior instead of working on the root cause of his problems. The drugs left Trayvon heavily medicated and years of his adolescence are a blur.

Trayvon found his way to The Alliance shortly after we started our NextSTEP Program for transitioning youth in 2005. He was struggling to find housing and was desperately trying to stay in contact with his siblings, who were still in the system in homes across LA County. The Alliance was able to establish sibling visitations with his five brothers and sisters. That was just the beginning.

Trayvon had no safety net and as he hit one obstacle after the next, The Alliance continued to assist him with everything from obtaining medical care to securing

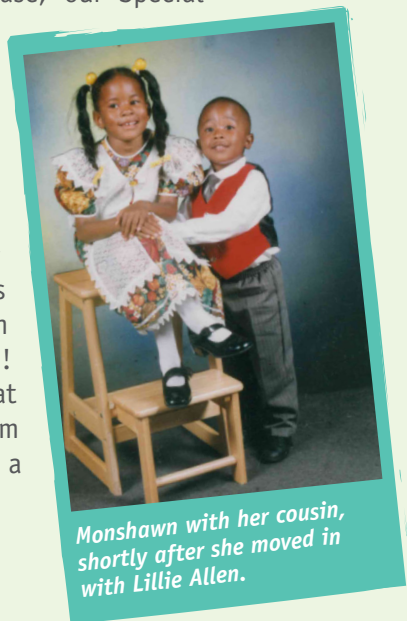
Monshawn

Monshawn entered foster care when she was 4½ years old after years of neglect. She arrived at the home of Lillie Allen, her paternal great aunt, dehydrated and starved. Monshawn was still in diapers and drinking from a bottle. She was not speaking. Doctors diagnosed her with mild mental retardation.

Lillie Allen was determined to see Monshawn develop and reach her potential regardless of any diagnosis. They spent that first summer together learning – colors, the alphabet, numbers.

Struggling to receive the right level of benefits to provide for Monshawn's special needs, Lillie Allen contacted The Alliance through our Public Health Nurse, Sherry Rendel. Upon evaluation of the case, our Special Education Program also got involved.

Like Lillie Allen, we were convinced that Monshawn's capabilities could surpass her original diagnosis and requested a new evaluation. Monshawn's mental retardation diagnosis was reversed! The new tests showed that while she was on the autism spectrum, Monshawn had a



Monshawn with her cousin, shortly after she moved in with Lillie Allen.

stable housing and resolving an identity theft issue. **"The Alliance is like a one-stop shop where youth can get multiple services. If there is something they can't help you with, they find you someone or some place that can,"** says Trayvon.

For the past several years, Trayvon has been an active member of The Alliance Youth Council and participated in our documentary project. There he found his voice. He directed a short film on his time in care, focusing on the overuse of medication to treat his "problems."

Today, in addition to being a college student, he speaks on panels at an array of venues for law students, doctors and congressional members where the documentaries are screened. Trayvon now uses his difficult childhood memories to benefit those still in foster care.



Monshawn celebrates her graduation with Alliance Public Health Nurse, Sherry Rendel.

great capacity for learning. Lillie Allen, overjoyed with the outcome, enrolled Monshawn in their local school and requested that she be mainstreamed with her peers.

Despite her disorder, Monshawn has thrived personally and academically. She graduated from high school on time in 2011, which is a remarkable testament to Lillie Allen's dedication to her education. Monshawn is attending community college where she is doing very well. She is president of the youth leadership group at her church and will travel to Atlanta this summer to speak on behalf of her congregation at a national conference.

These stories remind us that it often takes more than just a quick fix to make a permanent impact in the lives of the children and youth we serve. They come to us with one legal issue but as the case unravels, it becomes clear that so many more services are needed to make a real change.

In twenty years we have served over 100,000 children and youth. We could not have done this work alone. It takes committed staff and hundreds of *pro bono* attorneys, donors and volunteers dedicated to leveling the playing field for children throughout all of LA County. Thank you - our successes are your successes.



Kevin Reilly and his wife Cristan attend with their three sons



Dinner co-chairs Leslie & Cliff Gilbert-Lurie and Sue Naegle welcome guests



Alliance Board Chair Bart Williams, with Board Member Jim Clark, Honoree Scott Edelman and Board Member Steve Marenberg



Dinner co-chairs Toni Schulman, Leslie Gilbert-Lurie and Susan Friedman, with fellow Board Members Nancy de Brier and Susan Simon

Alliance's 20th Anniversary Gala

The stars came out in force to support The Alliance's 20th Anniversary Dinner, which honored Kevin Reilly, President of Entertainment at Fox Broadcasting Company, as recipient of the National Champion for Children Award. Seth MacFarlane, creator of "Family Guy," presented Kevin the award for his commitment to the health and well-being of underserved families.



Alliance Youth Council strikes a pose surrounding Mentor Director, Vinny D'Averso

Jane Lynch, star of Fox's "Glee," emceed the evening and "New Girl" star Zooey Deschanel gave a captivating musical performance.

The Francis M. Wheat Community Service Award was given to the law firm Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, LLP for their unparalleled contributions

to The Alliance over the last 20 years, and the award was received by Gibson Dunn Partner and National Pro Bono Chair, Scott Edelman.

The evening served as a living timeline of The Alliance's two decades of service. A number of clients took to the stage to share their stories of hardship and triumph, like Dona and Jim Perry, one of the first families helped by The Alliance's Benefits Program.

The dinner was co-chaired by Board Members Susan Friedman, Leslie and Cliff Gilbert-Laurie, Sue Naegle and Toni Schulman who were proud to share the evening's success with 1000 generous supporters and clients.



New Girl cast Jake Johnson, Max Greenfield, Hannah Simone, Lamome Morris and Zoey Deschanel



Chris Chase, Kate Walsh, Les Firestein and Gwyn Lurie



Tina Wolfson and Robert Ahdoot



Nicole & Sean Perry, Amy Hawkes, Ed Begley, Jr and Rachele Carson



Martha Plimpton with Jane Lynch



Jim Gianopoulos congratulates honoree, Kevin Reilly



Greg Meidel and Gary Newman



Alliance Board Chair Bart Williams, Lizzy Thomas and Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky



Oren and Katie Aviv

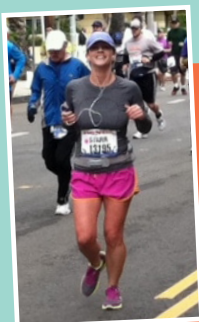


The Alliance "Goes the Distance for Kids"

Team Alliance raised \$70,000 in this year's Honda LA Big 5 and Marathon, sponsored by Dickstein Shapiro, LLP and Rebecca Malamed, M.D.

Marathon co-chairs Laird Malamed (USC) and Kirk Pasich (Dickstein Shapiro, LLP) led 72 runners that included Alliance donors, staff, Youth Council members and former clients like Alexis Ortiz, pictured right.

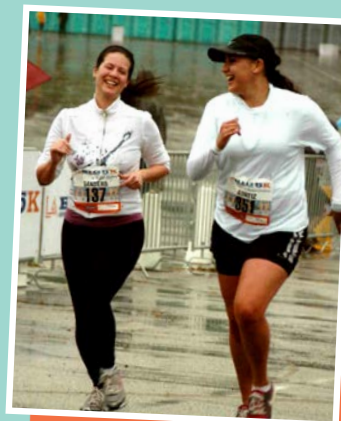
Thanks to all the runners who trained for months and solicited donations from friends and family in order to cross the finish line despite the unpredictable weather in support of LA's impoverished children!



Marathon Runner, Starr Silver-Baker



Co-Chairs and runners, Kirk Pasich and Laird Malamed



Pro Bono Attorney Rachel Sanders runs alongside Alliance Youth Council Member Alexis Ortiz

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Your generosity and commitment enable us to protect the health and well-being of children.

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