

Protecting Child Refugees

The Texas Appleseed Board of Directors recently voted to work on systemic ways to help child refugees who are coming to the U.S. for safety. More than 57,000 children this year—mainly from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala—took dangerous



Photo: Eugenio del Bosque

journeys to escape extreme violence in their home countries. As refugees, they deserve humane treatment and the protection of domestic and international law.

Some officials have called for expedited return of these children to their home countries in the same way that Mexican children are repatriated, but we know this model does not work. We don't want that same failing treatment extended to child refugees from Central America.

Additionally, some local jurisdictions are passing anti-refugee resolutions in response to these children coming to our borders for help. In July, League City passed a resolution that effectively banned unauthorized immigrants, particularly child refugees, from its jurisdiction. In response, Texas Appleseed and MALDEF filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to challenge the resolution.

To offer insight into the historical and current protection of all children, we issued a report with Appleseed national called *Core Principles: Child Refugees in the United States*, which is available on our website.

Youth In Court Videos



Our video series features this introductory video, plus offense-specific educational videos—all in English and Spanish.

Texas youth who are charged with a Class C Misdemeanor now have a new tool to help them understand the court process and how to defend themselves. We joined Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. (TRLA) to produce a new, free video series in English and Spanish called *Youth In Court*. The content, based on TRLA's handbooks for parents and children, is focused on the rights of children who have been charged with a Class C Misdemeanor for a school-based criminal offense. The videos explain how youth can plead, the potential outcomes of various pleas, and how to prepare a defense, among other court-related information. The videos, produced with the financial support of the Texas Bar Foundation, can be viewed on our website at our School-to-Prison Pipeline project page.



Travis County Judge Yvonne M. Williams appears in our video.



From the Executive Director's Desk

BY REBECCA LIGHTSEY

Hackathon Helps Foster Kids

Is there such a thing as hacking for a good cause? Yes; and I presented our challenge to developers, coders and programmers who combine their skills for the greater good at Austin's Hack for Change. Our challenge: **How can we help children who "age out" of foster care access their important documents?**

Many young adults from functioning families can get important documents from their parents. Children in the foster care system have a bigger hurdle in keeping track of key items such as birth certificates, Social Security cards and medical records. The developers and designers created a prototype for a cloud-based storage solution to allow these youth to securely store and access vital documents. Our next step is to vet this prototype with stakeholders to turn it into a live, practical solution for this tough issue.

Mental Health: Forensic Commitments

The Texas Department of State Health Services reports that more than 40 percent of the inpatient beds in our state mental hospitals are forensic commitments, defendants who have been found incompetent to stand trial due to mental illness and individuals who have been found not guilty by reason of insanity.

Many of these individuals could benefit from alternative treatments, rather than hospitalization. These alternatives may include outpatient treatment from a doctor or inpatient treatment in a less-restrictive facility. The benefits of these alternatives include lower costs, reduced likelihood of recidivism, better-supported transition into the community, and freeing up beds in state hospitals for people in mental health crisis with the highest level of need.

Texas Appleseed is looking at current court practices and the promising alternative programs that many counties are undertaking to provide the most appropriate treatment. With our lead pro bono partner, **Norton Rose Fulbright**, we are conducting interviews with judges, defense attorneys and prosecutors in the forensic commitment and diversion process in eight Texas counties. We plan to issue our findings in a report to provide effective and appropriate options for these individuals.

THE LATEST...

PEOPLE

■ Our Board of Directors is pleased to welcome **Courtney Stewart** to the board. Courtney is an attorney at DLA Piper (US) in Austin, where she concentrates on civil trial practice in federal courts. Courtney has been a longtime supporter of Texas Appleseed, and through her efforts at DLA, she has been helping us with truancy litigation.

■ We are deeply grateful for the work over the past 11 years of our former Communications

Director **Janis Monger**. Upon her retirement, we were pleased to invite **Kelli Johnson** to join us. Kelli has 15 years of experience in public relations, and she has executed PR campaigns locally and nationwide. **Jamie Tegeler-Sauer** also joined our team as our new development associate who assists with our fundraising efforts. Jamie is an experienced project manager and marketing coordinator, having spent more than nine years managing business development initiatives.

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(1915-2014)

* affiliations listed for identification only

Fair Housing Opportunities & Disaster Recovery

Hurricane-damaged rental housing for low-income families is being rebuilt in safer, lower-poverty, and less segregated neighborhoods with access to better schools, in part because of our efforts to see that federal disaster rebuilding funds are distributed fairly. We are also showing groups across the country how fair housing opportunities can attack poverty and increase equal opportunity.

There are also new successes for the City of Houston. Led by Mayor Annise Parker and Houston's Housing and Community Development Department's Neal Rackleff, the city has chosen to focus some of its federal disaster funds in three Community Revitalization Areas where Hurricane Ike left significant damage. These areas were selected because they can become stable, economically and racially integrated neighborhoods in a reasonable amount of time by leveraging private market forces with a long-term strategic investment of public funds. Houston has also committed to assuring that current residents are not displaced and that historic African-American and Latino communities are not eradicated by gentrification.

Additionally, we are receiving greatly needed pro bono assistance from **Mayer Brown LLP**. They are evaluating whether jurisdictions are complying with written commitments to fair housing activities.

Lights. Camera. Action.

Senior Policy Analyst Ann Baddour is featured in *Spent: Looking for Change*, a documentary that brings awareness to the financial struggles that many Americans face. Watch it online here: spentmovie.com



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WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

7 Million+ The number of Texans protected from usurious payday and auto title loans through the unified ordinance.

18 The number of Texas cities that passed the unified ordinance, including the newest city—Midland.

42% The percent of payday and auto title loan locations in the state covered by the new ordinance.

70% Approximate percent reduction in student ticketing in Texas as a result of Senate Bills 393 & 1114.

30% The approximate percent reduction in the number of students expelled from class in Texas.

Numbers accurate as of July 14, 2014

Payday & Auto Title Lending Reform

Midland took a huge step on June 17. They passed Texas' unified ordinance, which sets basic affordability standards for payday and auto title loans and helps borrowers avoid a never-ending cycle of debt. While marketed as short-term loans for unexpected expenses, payday and auto title loans often last longer than anticipated. National and statewide research reveals that payday borrowers are trapped in debt for an average of five months of the year. Borrowers are also more likely to seek a loan to cover recurring expenses, such as food and rent, versus one for unexpected emergencies. In Texas, these loans often carry rates of 500 percent APR or higher.

"By passing the unified ordinance, cities across the state are boldly saying, we will do what we can to promote prosperity for our citizens and local economies. We will no longer stand on the sidelines and allow this abusive lending to proliferate in our communities."

- **Dallas City Council Member Jerry Allen**

"Our state has some of the most lax oversight of payday and auto title lending in the country, and as a result, Texans are paying nearly twice the fees of borrowers in some other states. I commend the cities that are providing relief to struggling families."

- **State Rep. Tom Craddick**

GOOD APPLE DINNER

Now is the time to secure a table at our biggest event of the year. The Good Apple Dinner, occurring Nov. 20, is the opportunity to honor leaders in the legal profession for their contributions, while also getting to see old friends, make new connections and promote justice for all Texans.

The Texas Appleseed Board of Directors has named former **Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson** as our 2014 Good Apple, who will receive our J. Chrys Dougherty Good Apple Award. Chief Justice Jefferson has been an unwavering advocate in seeking justice for all Texans, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

George Brothers Kincaid & Horton, L.L.P. will receive our 2014 Pro Bono Leadership Award. The firm has spearheaded vital work on the issue of payday and auto title lending reform.

Vinson & Elkins LLP and **The Vernon Law Group, PLLC** will be recognized for their pro bono work on truancy cases in Texas for children without hope of receiving representation. **The State Bar of Texas** will be recognized for their support in training attorneys who represent some of the state's most vulnerable children—children in the foster care system.

The Good Apple Dinner is dedicated to the legacy of **J. Chrys Dougherty III**.

For more information, click on "Good Apple Dinner" under the "Get Involved" section of our website.



Thursday, November 20, 2014

FOUR SEASONS - AUSTIN

Pacesetter Reception: 6:00 PM

Pre-Dinner Cocktails: 6:30 PM

Dinner: 7:00 PM

Contact Susan Harry for table sponsorships:
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SEE INSIDE: Protecting Child Refugees / Fair Housing Updates / Helping Foster Kids / Other News

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