

TRUANCY DIVERSION PROGRAM

There is no other volunteer project that I have worked on as important as this one. I also feel very privileged to have been able to participate. I can also say how sad it was to sit and witness, just exactly how funding affects all of these Clark County student's well being and future. Although I am not trying to turn this into a political piece, I feel that anyone who was involved in this program, would whole heartedly agree that public school funding has a direct effect on many of the "activities" that these children are involved in, or those that they could be and are not.

Nevada is ranked 33 in the nation for school drop out rates. http://kidscount.unlv.edu/2009/data-summary_2009.pdf(2011). The Clark County school district is the 5th largest school district in the United States. According to the Nevada Department of Education in February 2011, the average number of pupils per school is 957, and the graduation rate is 68%, and 20 students per teacher. <http://www.doe.nv.gov/Resources/QuickSTATS.pdf> (Feb. 2011). This translates to a high number of pupils and low graduation rates. Finally, Nevada's average expenditures per pupil was about \$7,615, this is compared to the national average of \$10,190, this is a shortage of \$2,575 in comparison to the National Average. *Id.*

The Truancy Diversion Program (TDP) was started by Judge Gerry Hardcastle about 10 years ago. The purpose of the program was to avoid the children becoming legally truant under NRS 392.040, NRS 392.130, and NRS 392.210. Currently, TDP coordinator is Debbie Rose, and Judge Jennifer Elliot. Attorney's donate their time as judges, mentors, friends, and positive role models, for children who may have a lack of positive role models in their life. The attorney's who participated in the program were not paid, and do not receive any form of monetary compensation. However, the compensation actually received was more valuable than any form of monetary compensation. I learned a great deal from my students, more than they ever did from me. The children are handicapped by grades and number of absences, the children's parents are encouraged to attend.

Basically, if a child is found to be a habitual truant the parent or guardian can be guilty of a misdemeanor crime. The TDP was created to avoid the legal ramifications that may occur for a habitual truant. But the TDP is much more than this, the most important function is to assist children with the extra attention that they may not be receiving at home, and to attempt to notice any "problems" that the child may be experiencing at home. I was fortunate enough to finally see some of the children smile about something, even though they were frowns when they were first placed in TDP.

The adolescence school curriculum was not much different than my own in high school, but it did seem to me that there was a great deal more second chances. For example, I recall from my own public education, that when an assignment was due, it was due. In this case, the assignment could be turned in at any time, for some classes. I began to think, this could be to compensate for no parents in the home to assist with homework.

Each and every Thursday morning I awoke bright and early (5am) grabbed a large coffee and headed to the school. Each student would then meet with me, and the school social worker in the auditorium, one on one. We would go over their grades, attendance, attitude, missing assignments, and other issues. I found out a lot of personal information about some of the demons that these particular children had to deal with on a daily basis with little to no support from their family.

The school that I was responsible for started with about twelve children, and then ended with about 6. The age group of the children ranged from 14 to 18. Of my students that dropped out of

the program, one was taken from her parents by CPS, when she was beaten with an electrical cord, and escaped her parents residence. This particular student was forced to escape her “parents” because she not allowed to attend school, she was supposed to take care of her many younger siblings while her parents were working, she was 13. The sad fact is this is not the only student I encountered who was missing school to care for siblings at home, there were many.

One of the most profound days that I experienced, was when one of my students started discussing with me how he was the product of a bitter custody battle and divorce. He was just an innocent victim caught in between two people who were being incredibly selfish, and he was stressed to the point where it was affecting his grades and attendance. He was also incredibly angry, so it was rewarding as we progressed through the process and he acted more chipper. Being a divorce attorney myself, it was extremely upsetting for me to work all week in my various custodial disputes and then see the product of same every Thursday morning.

There were also children affiliated with the wrong crowd, drugs, and victims of the economic crisis. I relay these particular instances not as shock value but to make the general public and legal community aware of the real problems that some of these children experience, and the need for programs like Project SOAR, which was a boot camp that the National guard assisted with until funding was cut and the program was cancelled until further notice. Also “A life of Crime and keep it real” was also cut due to funding, this was a program in North Las Vegas and Henderson.

There were also a handful of parents that were at the end of their ropes completely, and I really felt for them. They utilized whatever services and resources that they could for their child’s education, but the programs available are few and far between. With the consistent cancellation of programs, those who are not fiscally fortunate are required to look for programs that they can place their children in at a cost to them. But when it comes to putting food on the table, or setting the troubled youth up in a costly program most parents have to choose the latter.

In the end I did help three young adolescence better their grades, smile a little more often, and approve their attendance in school. I will continue to watch over them this next year, until they eventually graduate. My students were all given my email in the event they needed to talk to someone, and of course I personally rewarded them out of mine own pocket when they did a good job. For some of these students, it was the only rewards they ever received. Some would say that only helping three, was not a great accomplishment, but this is not my opinion. As attorney’s and being more fortunate than others, we should give back. If all of us could help, just one, we could save many students.

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