



INVITATION TO SUPPORT ***The World As It Could Be is Within REACH***

A Rite-of-Passage to Welcome, Initiate and Celebrate Youth of the REACH Ashland Youth Center
as Vital Members of the Community

The World As It Could Be Human Rights Education Program (TWAICB), a project of the Alameda County Deputy Sheriffs' Activities League (DSAL), is an outgrowth of a series of successful initiatives carried out since 2006 to educate and inspire youth and adults to further human rights for all people. These initiatives have used the creative arts and a celebratory culminating presentation to deepen learning about and commitment to the tenets of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR); they give participating youth the voice to teach their peers and adults about the importance of the UDHR principles.

Extending the positive impact of TWAICB work, we are implementing an exciting initiative in collaboration with DSAL: A community-led rite-of-passage for youth of the REACH Ashland Youth Center, which serves the Eden Area of Alameda County. Through nine months of guided study, activities and community service, the 20 participating youth will have the opportunity to learn about, experience and reflect on what makes a community healthy and vibrant, as well as their essential role as engaged members of such a community. At their public culminating celebration in May 2015, the youth will convey, through their creative expressions, what they have learned, and then be welcomed and celebrated by their peers, teachers, families, business and political leaders as vital members of the community.

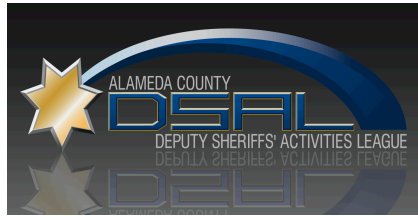
Context for Developing and Carrying out the Rite-of-Passage at REACH

The Eden Area, an unincorporated area of Alameda County, is comprised of Ashland, Cherryland, San Lorenzo, and Castro Valley. This is one of the most diverse regions in the county. According to U.S. Census data, of the 123,290 unincorporated Eden Area residents, 16,798 are youth between the ages of 10 and 19. The largest ethnic group among residents is Latino (35%), followed by white (31%), African American (16%) and Asian/ Pacific Islander (13%). There are many strengths in the community including a strong public school system, many family owned businesses, and access to the greater Bay Area. However, the region has high unemployment and the challenges that face communities that live in poverty. Forty percent (40%) of the households have incomes below \$30,000. Per capita income is \$17,652, or 19% below the county average. Forty-three percent (43%) speak a language other than English at home, indicating recent immigration status. Many adults work multiple low-wage, no-benefit jobs to support their families. Of the county's 22,000-plus re-entering adult and juvenile ex-offenders, the Sheriff's Department estimates that at least 8,000 live in or within three miles of Ashland/Cherryland. The community has the highest teen pregnancy rates in the county with 58.8 births per 1000 girls; this is twice the county average.

In June 2013, the \$24 million REACH Ashland Youth Center opened its doors to serve youth of the Eden Area, ages 11-24. This opening was the culmination of nine years of work by youth, mobilized as the Ashland Youth Leadership Council, in collaboration with county officials and community leaders, all seeking to improve the individual and social conditions of the area, address social and economic inequities,

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16335 E. 14th Street
San Leandro, CA 94578
Fed ID #83-041537**

Sandy Sohcot, Director
Tel: 415-987-8573
info@theworldasitcouldbe.org
www.theworldasitcouldbe.org



strengthen community connections, and prevent violence, crime and negative, risky social behaviors. REACH represents what was paramount to this effort's success, so clearly articulated by the youth during their tireless advocacy: having a safe, supportive environment for youth as not only a place to connect and socialize, but also to help them generate new, life-affirming practices to guide them toward sustainable, successful achievement of their goals.

In March 2013, TWAICB presented a program, bringing together teachers, school administrators, students and leaders of non-profit organizations, including DSAL, to consider how to deepen the work of TWAICB to address the increasing incidence of violence, reflected not only as the real-life experiences that students dramatized as part of their human rights culminating presentations, but also as headline news of such tragedies as the December 2012 shooting in Newtown, CT. The program included a presentation by Frederick Marx, internationally acclaimed, Oscar and Emmy nominated producer/director popularly known for his film *Hoop Dreams*, on his current documentary film *Rites of Passage- Mentoring the Future* (working title), about the importance of rites-of-passage that initiate youth into their communities. Referring to an African proverb, "*If we do not initiate the young, they will burn the village down to feel the heat,*" Frederick explained, "An estimated \$500 billion is spent yearly on teen dysfunctions in the U.S. alone: drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and STDs, school dropouts and expulsions, gang and property crimes, traffic accidents, ADD, ADHD, depression and violence." He went on to note that for hundreds of years, indigenous cultures, as well as religious and other cultural communities have initiated their young, with immediate familiar examples being the Jewish Bar or Bat Mitzvah, or the Quinceañera. Frederick noted the importance of creating these types of rites-of-passage in our current communities to positively guide youth, and that it was optimal these initiations be created by the "elders" of the community. [Here is a link](#) to the write-up and video segments of that event for additional reference.

The REACH Ashland Youth Center, which stands for **R**ecreation, **E**ducation, **A**rts, **C**areer and **H**ealth, is governed by county agencies and non-profit organizations representing each component, with, for example, DSAL leading the Recreation component, and the San Lorenzo Unified School District representing Education. With its vision and collaborative community agency/organization structure, REACH provides the ideal environment to develop a community/elder-led rite-of-passage initiation process for youth that can be a national model for mentoring youth and creating a thriving human rights culture.

The World As It Could Be Program has been connected to DSAL and Arroyo High School of the San Lorenzo Unified School District since 2007. Arroyo High School has been actively using TWAICB curriculum, with classes from their Future Leaders of Social Change Academy presenting compelling culminating presentations about the significance of the UDHR every year since 2009.

The Rite-of-Passage Process

The Process will begin in May 2014, anticipating having our first class of 20 youth, aged 14-24 take part in their orientation, with their families, in the beginning of June. We will provide summer team building activities, and then begin the nine-month rite-of-passage process in September, with a public culminating

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presentation taking place at REACH in May 2015. The process will include one month of study for each vital element of a healthy community, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to be taught, in part, by Arroyo High School students, followed by Recreation, Education, Arts, Career, and Health, with a month of community service and preparation for the culminating presentation. We seek as optimal outcomes of the process that the participating youth will:

- Gain greater clarity and understanding of the qualities of a healthy, strong and vibrant community, as well as the different dimensions of community, including family, schools, surrounding county, region, state, country, and global neighbors;
- Know the history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and its relevance to their personal lives and the health of their communities;
- Understand the value of Recreation, Education/Literacy, Arts, Career and Health to a strong, vibrant community;
- Have a sense of responsibility about contributing to a strong, vibrant community;
- Have a sense of accomplishment about their efforts, along with a deep sense of belonging and being cared for;
- Recognize their importance to their immediate, local, regional and global communities
- Have continuing leadership roles in their community, applying what they learn during their rite-of-passage process;
- Grasp that being healthy themselves helps lead to a healthy community.

As part of the Process, we seek to provide each of the 20 youth with \$500 savings accounts. We not only want to reward the youth for their accomplishments, we also want to give them a sense of financial connection to the community. We will be including, as a thread through the nine months of study, the importance of understanding the role of money in accessing opportunities as well as in supporting the community. We will be asking the youth to include, as part of their culminating presentation, how they plan to build their savings and use the money over time. We will also be encouraging the parents and extended families to add to these savings accounts as part of recognizing the accomplishments of their youth.

Importance of Community Involvement as Financial Contributors and Mentors

Integral to the Rite-of-Passage process is having the participating youth experience an authentic, deep connection to their immediate community. As part of their studies, the youth will be exploring and meeting with local entities representing each REACH component, to see and better grasp how the people working in these service areas connect to their lives, and are examples of roles they can take on as they mature. Simultaneously, we seek to have the business, political and non-profit leaders recognize their importance as mentors and role models, as well as to experience positive relationships with the youth. Additionally, by contributing financially to support the Rite-of-Passage implementation, community entities have a direct investment in the health of their community's youth, and ultimately that of the community as a whole. When all participants come together at the culminating presentation, they will be generating the essence of a strong, vibrant community that supports, celebrates and welcomes its youth.

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