



# On Balance

A publication of Dane County Department of Human Services  
and the Dane County Juvenile Court Program

June 2009  
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## Changes on the Juvenile Bench

By John Bauman

There will be many changes coming this summer in the Juvenile Division of the Dane County Circuit Court. After more than 11 years on the bench, the last three in juvenile, Judge Stephen Ebert will be retiring. After two years in juvenile, Judge Foust will be moving to the Civil Division, Judge Hanrahan will be moving to the Criminal Division after a little more than two years, and after 6 years in juvenile, the Presiding Juvenile Judge John Albert will also be moving to Civil.

**The juvenile justice system and community are grateful for the years of service that the outgoing juvenile judges have provided. Judge Albert has gone above and beyond his role by participating in countless committees and workgroups to help improve the lives of youth in the**

**community, as well as other activities. Thank you to all four judges. They will be greatly missed and we wish them well.**

The incoming judges to the Juvenile Division were scheduled to be Judges Ebert, James Martin, Patrick Fiedler and David Flanagan, but with the summer retirement of Judge Martin, there will be an additional vacancy in the Division. Governor Doyle will be appointing two new Judges to the bench to replace Judges Ebert and Martin. They will begin their positions during the summer.

The incoming judges began to draw juvenile cases on June 1, but will likely not begin to see cases in their courtrooms until the end of June. By August 1, all new and existing juvenile cases will be with the new judges. Judge Flanagan will assume the caseload of Judge Albert and Judge Fiedler will assume the caseload of Judge Foust. The caseloads of Judges Ebert and Hanrahan will be assigned to the new appointed judges.

A future edition of On Balance will introduce readers to the appointed judges, but following is information on Judges Flanagan and Fiedler.

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## Juvenile Court Awards

By John Bauman

The Juvenile Court held its 11<sup>th</sup> annual Juvenile Court Awards ceremony on February 5. Presiding Juvenile Judge John Albert was again the master of ceremonies and Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson was the keynote speaker. All in attendance recognized the commitment and service that others have made with families and youth in Dane County and the achievement of the young people who received the awards. Recipients of the 2008 Juvenile Court Awards were:

### The Peter Rubin Award

Melissa Garecht

### The Ervin Bruner Award

Ben Gonring

### The George Northrup Award

Rhonda Voigt

### Outstanding Service

Kim and Joanne Mijal-White  
Rudy Dyer

### Outstanding Achievement

Briana Johnson  
Jordan Sharlow

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On the web @ [www.co.dane.wi.us/juvenilecourt](http://www.co.dane.wi.us/juvenilecourt)

[www.co.dane.wi.us/humanservices](http://www.co.dane.wi.us/humanservices)

## Madison School District Continues to Implement Positive Behavior Supports

By *Dennis Whitish, Madison Metropolitan School District*

Madison Metropolitan School District continues to reach out to schools in an effort to implement school-wide positive behavior supports. Currently all middle schools have staff who have been trained in all three phases of Positive Behavior Supports which includes school-wide universal training, and training in secondary interventions and tertiary interventions. As reported in the last issue of *On Balance*, middle schools utilize internal PBS coaches to facilitate the use of pro-active prevention strategies in their schools.

During the first week of summer vacation, up to 6 elementary schools will receive training in Positive Behavior Supports. Each building will bring a representative team to participate in universal training. Teams consist of the building principal, special and general education teachers, grade level representation, a social worker or psychologist, and other support staff.

Buildings will utilize a data collections system to collect and analyze discipline data. This data will be used at all universal team meetings for problem-solving and action planning. At the universal level, schools will establish school-wide expectations that will be posted throughout the school. Teams will develop systems for teaching expected behaviors. At the secondary level, teams will be created by each school in order to develop function-based interventions for students identified as needing more support than the universal system provides. The secondary team will utilize individual student data and de-

velop group or individual function-based interventions to support and encourage more appropriate student behavior.

Students with more complex emotional/behavioral needs or those requiring tertiary interventions will work with school social workers, counselors, school psychologists or other staff with behavioral training. During the summer training sessions, principals and special education staff typically review their current structures/processes in place for students at the tertiary level and create interventions that are missing. This training can provide a creative surge of energy to educators who see the old way of providing discipline as ineffective and outdated.

Throughout the current school year a few other elementary schools received PBS training. Response has been very positive as the District has come to embrace Positive Behavior Supports for students. As the PBS model is implemented across elementary, middle and high schools, students with high mobility will benefit from a consistent approach to school-wide behavior.

Wisconsin did not recognize Positive Behavior Supports until October 2008 when DPI announced a Positive Behavior Support initiative. DPI staff have attended MMSD Positive Behavior Support training sessions to become more familiar with the process.

## Wisconsin Offender Reentry Project Helps High-Risk Youth

By *Gretchen Kubinick*

The Wisconsin High-Risk Youth Offender Reentry Project addresses emerging problems associated with the reentry of juvenile sex offenders to the community. The current climate in Wisconsin at both the state legislative level and in local communities is understandably focused on community safety. However, some of the legal responses have resulted in more open identification of juvenile sex offenders, and new difficulties in reintegrating them in the community. These problems are addressed through a project design that focuses on more intensive reentry preparation at the local level with various outreach contacts to school officials, local governing boards and councils, and the general public.

The project targets about 80 juvenile sex offenders being treated in secure juvenile facilities and about 65 on state community supervision. All sex offenders are moved through a detailed three-phase reentry model designed to enhance the youth's likelihood of success in the community. The model includes steps to address current challenges being experienced by staff as they assist the youth in finding living arrangements, post-release treatment services, and employment opportunities in the community.

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## Mt. Zion Academic Learning Center: A Safe and Nurturing Place for Kids

By Sheri Gatts

Every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday during the school year about 15 youth in grades K-9 show up at the Academic Learning Center at Mt. Zion Baptist Church on Fisher Street. They are greeted by Ms. Chris Hodge, the Director of the Center, several adult volunteers and university students. The Center provides a safe and nurturing place for kids to go after school to do their homework and spend quality time with adults from the community. Ms. Hodge describes herself and the volunteers as “coaches, encouraging children to use their skills to the best of their ability.” We are not trying to replace their teachers; we are merely a part of the team.

The first order of business when the children arrive is snack time, with plenty of time for sharing news about their day with each other and with the adult volunteers. This is followed by materials and a game center. Some of the older students help tutor the younger ones. The goal of the program is to have enough adult

volunteers on hand for the students to get plenty of one-on-one support. This is the second year of operation for the Center. Ms. Hodge sees the current phase of the Center as lay-



Chris Hodge, Director

ing the foundation to eventually become a full-time school. The Center opens in September and runs through the following June. Youth are referred by parents, church members, teachers or community members.

When asked what she would like everyone to know about the Center, Ms. Hodge replied that she wants people to know that “my staff and I are dedicated and very passionate about the support and the service that we offer to the children we work with.” The entire operation runs on donations—any and all help is very much needed and appreciated. There is an emphasis on teaching the children “about rights and responsibilities, respect, manners, life skills, appropriate behaviors and building trusting relationships with adults.”

At the end of the school year there will be a parent night for those families already involved with the Center, and to hopefully attract new families for the coming school year. There are plans to add a parent component next year where parents can learn to advocate for their children to encourage success in the school setting and in the community. Quarterly parent meetings will give parents opportunities to meet each other and learn more about what is available in the community and what is happening at the Center.

Ms. Hodge began developing the Center while still employed full time, but soon found that there just wasn't enough time to do both. She retired about two years ago after 45 years in education with 38 years working with the Madison Metropolitan School

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## Changes

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*Judge Flanagan*

Judge Flanagan is married and has three children. He will be the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Division when the new rotation occurs. He earned his law degree in 1974 from UW-Madison and has been a Dane County Circuit Court Judge since 1999. He was in the Criminal Division for 7 years and Civil for three years. Prior to becoming a judge, he was an Assistant Attorney General, a Civil Litigator and a Criminal Prosecutor. In response to a question on working with juveniles and children, Judge Flanagan responded that he is looking for a chance to help a kid change and is hopeful that there is time for this change in the kids he sees in his courtroom. When asked what can be expected from his court, he responded that court will be on time, he will listen to all parties who have input and decisions will get done. He welcomes suggestions and is eager to take on the challenge of the juvenile court.

Judge Fiedler is married and has two children. He earned his law degree in 1980 from Marquette and has been a Dane County Circuit Court Judge since 1993. He was in the Criminal Division for 14 years and Civil for two years. Prior to becoming a judge, he was Secretary, Department of Corrections, a U.S. Attorney, a private practice Attorney and an Assistant District Attorney. Judge Fiedler believes that it is important to recognize that dealing with a juvenile is different than dealing with an adult. The juvenile justice system should try to offer them opportunities to improve themselves by encouraging pro-social activities and positive organizations. In his court, people will find that he is someone with an open mind who values others' opinions and he expects people to be prepared and on time for court. He also indicated that he loves the law, draws energy from his interactions with other people and is looking forward to serving in the Juvenile Division.



*Judge Fiedler*

Thank Judges Albert, Ebert, Hanrahan and Foust for their years of service and please welcome Judges Flanagan and Fiedler to the world of juvenile justice when you have the opportunity.

The 2008 Juvenile Court report is now available online at:

[http://www.countyofdane.com/juvenilecourt/annual\\_juvenile\\_court\\_report.htm](http://www.countyofdane.com/juvenilecourt/annual_juvenile_court_report.htm)

The recently released DMC report is also available through these two links:

[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/juvenileCourt/DMC\\_Workgroup\\_Report.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/juvenileCourt/DMC_Workgroup_Report.pdf)

[http://www.danecountyhumanservices.org/pdf/DMC\\_Workgroup\\_Report.pdf](http://www.danecountyhumanservices.org/pdf/DMC_Workgroup_Report.pdf)





## Spotlight on Staff - Tamiko Dixon

By Rhonda Voigt



*Tamiko Dixon, DCDHS Social Worker*

Tamiko Dixon has been working with teen girls at the Neighborhood Intervention Program (NIP) since she was a student intern in June 1997. She truly is our model Social Worker when it comes to working with female delinquents. Watching Tamiko in action with “my girls,” as she calls them, is a learning experience in and of itself. Tamiko is able to build trusting relationships with young ladies while also setting limits and expectations. She is a role model, a mother figure, a big sister and is able to hold youth responsible for their actions all at the same time. Tamiko states that her groups often

begin in the van during pickup and sometimes the girls do not want to leave at the end of the night. She is able to learn more about her group members and their families than most others who work with them. Tamiko identifies the other side of the coin being that she has had teens report they get new law violations so that they can remain

on NIP supervision. Tamiko’s girls often maintain contact with her long after she has closed their case at NIP.

Ms. Dixon sees her primary group goals as building positive character and self-esteem, teaching positive self-advocacy skills, self-identification of both short and long-term life goals, self-identification of strengths, learning positive communication skills, changing hopelessness into optimism, and developing healthy relationships. Tamiko is interested in curriculum development that meets her group’s needs. She

participates in committees including Disproportionate Minority Contact, Gang Squad, NIP Banquet Committee and others. Tamiko regularly has student interns and trains new workers.

Tamiko moved from Chicago to Delevan, WI in 6th grade. Prejudice there was a daily challenge. She participated in pre-college diversity programming at UW-Whitewater where in 1997 she completed her social work degree. While at Whitewater, Tamiko was a mentoring coordinator for two years. In June 1997, she became a student intern at NIP and eventually accepted a part-time permanent NIP position running Girls Groups on Simpson Street (now Lakepoint Drive). Tamiko then went directly into a full-time position at NIP where she continues to work with some of our most “difficult” females. Tamiko has two children: Aysjah, age 15, is a freshman at Memorial and Davion, age 9, is in 3rd grade at Chavez. Tamiko’s interests outside work are walking, writing poetry, spending time with her children and enjoying life.

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

*ON BALANCE catches up with ....*

## *Cheri Maples*

***1. You worked for the Madison Police Department for many years. Please give us a brief history of your career.***

In my 20 years with MPD, I started as a patrol officer working downtown. I also had extensive Team Leader- Facilitator training. Hence, from early on in my career, former Police Chief David Couper tapped me to lead or facilitate many different project teams. As a young police officer, I also facilitated all the management team meetings and retreats. Of course, this meant going back and forth between day and night hours so it was tough.

Seven years into my career, I was promoted to Sergeant and supervised a platoon of 12 officers on the night shift for three years.

10 years into my career, I was promoted to Lieutenant. As a Lieutenant, I served for my first year as the Officer-in-Charge of the Night Shift. Then I worked with Captain Luis Yudice out of the North District as a Patrol Lieutenant for 2 years and then as a Detective Lieutenant for 2 years. As a Detective Lieutenant, I was also the departmental liaison for the Sensitive Crimes function. While I was a Lieutenant, the department paid half my tuition to law school and I received a J.D. from UW-Madison.

I was then promoted to Captain and for the last five years of my career,

served as the Captain of Personnel & Training, where I was in charge of all the hiring and training of new police officers, overseeing the Police Recruit Academy, the on-going required training and in-services for all department police officers, and all personnel functions.

After retiring from the police department, Governor Doyle appointed me as the top Administrator of Community Corrections (Probation & Parole function) for the WI Dept. of Corrections. After doing that for a year, I was recruited by Attorney General Peg Lautenschlauger to work for her as an Assistant Attorney General, working on creative public safety projects, where I enjoyed serving until the current Attorney General took office and eliminated my job.

***2. Of all your accomplishments at MPD, of what are you most proud?***

I am most proud of the very thing that was hidden to most people: starting and developing a mindfulness practice as a police officer in the face of incredible odds. With time, that practice served as the ethical foundation for my work, my leadership as I was promoted up the chain of command, and for everything else I do.

As my practice matured, I learned to try to pick my battles, frame how I wanted to express things, but



advocate for equal access to justice for all and true community oriented policing. I think I did better at the end of my career as I matured and learned more wisdom about how to be heard and not alienate people with what I call immature, self-righteous indignation.

With respect to more concrete things, I was proud of both community service awards I received from the department and the award I received from the City of Madison for Anti-Harassment & Anti-Discrimination work. I was proud of the many creative initiatives I was a part of starting and participating in. I facilitated the team that worked on the first decentralized district, which was designed to be more creative and experimental in nature. I led the team that changed the MPD promotional process, which led to

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## Maples

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the start of leadership and investigative academies for those desiring promotion. I was happy to be a part of starting Safe Harbor and several other domestic violence and sensitive crimes initiatives.

During my last five years, I was able to have a great influence on the type of people MPD recruited to be officers and how they were trained. I started to realize we were doing a good job of teaching officers how to keep themselves and others physically safe, but we were losing them emotionally. I worked hard to try to develop new trainings for the Police Recruit Academy, the Leadership Academy, and required In-Service trainings such as ethics, health & wellness, leadership, and unconscious bias that I thought were important, and would also help officers understand and prevent some of the more debilitating effects the job had on them, their families, and the public.

### ***3. Since you've been retired, how do you spend your time?***

Having the privilege of collecting a retirement enables me to be selective and spend my time doing only the things that I really want to do—the things I believe in, the things that inspire other people to follow the path of their heart, and the things that water the seeds of joy in myself and others.

I am starting my own organization called “The Center for Mindfulness & Justice.” I lead mindfulness retreats, do spiritual life coaching, some pro-bono legal work for people with no place to turn and no other

resources and offer different classes (mindfulness) and groups (e.g., mindful and supportive parenting—maintaining your sanity and equilibrium when parenting challenging teenagers and young adults). I am also starting to write a book to document my own path and how I've worked with the many challenges that have been part of my own journey.

Currently, I am putting a lot of time into the “Coming Home” project, which is designed to bring mindfulness and meditation to two local prisons, as well as other classes such as healthy relationships and required competency skills for those close to release. The project is under the auspices of the Dane County Timebank; all of us – both providers and receivers of services – receive and spend time dollars for our participation.

For paid employment, I do organizational consulting on many different topics (Ethics, Diversity, etc.) and receive a lot of requests to do keynote speeches, plenary sessions, facilitation, days of mindfulness, and workshops.

### ***4. Any leisure time hobbies or activities?***

My two most enjoyable activities are spending time with my partner, sons, and my close friends that I count as family; and going to silent meditation retreats to support my own mindfulness practice, which is the foundation for everything else I do.

I'm a die-hard jock and although I've worn out most of my joints through participation in competitive sports, I still find many ways to

entertain myself such as running, biking, rollerblading, skate-skiing, boogie boarding the high ocean waves, hiking, and kayaking. I am in love with my golden retriever, Gracie, who goes everywhere with me whenever possible. I love water and beach vacations. I try to get to Mexico once every winter.

I also have spent a lot of time watering the seeds of joy with activities that I've taken up after the age of 50—tap dancing, two-stepping, line dancing, swing dancing, learning Spanish, learning bridge, and drumming. (I have two complete drum kits—one electronic so I don't wreck the tranquility of my neighborhood and one in a good friend's basement for jamming purposes). I've also started playing the trumpet again which I played as a kid.

I am a big sports fan. I love the Packers and the Badgers. However, MOST IMPORTANT, I AM A HUGE BASEBALL FAN. Although I am first and foremost a Brewers fan, I follow all the teams by playing fantasy baseball. Although I have been the only woman so far in the leagues I have played in, I take great pride in my ability to give trash talk right back to the guys, and that my sons invite me to play in their fantasy leagues. I also try to see a baseball game every summer in a stadium I have not seen yet (not many left).

### ***5. Is there anything else you want to comment on that ON BALANCE hasn't asked you?***

If anybody is interested in finding out more about what I am up to at any given time, please see my new web site at:  
[www.mindfulnessandjustice.org](http://www.mindfulnessandjustice.org).

## Subculture Corner

### Dane County Youth Gang Prevention Conference Draws Large Crowd

A capacity crowd of well over 300 social workers, law enforcement personnel, school staff, community youth workers and others attended the Dane County Youth Gang Prevention - Subcultures Conference last May 8<sup>th</sup>.

The conference morning address welcomed speakers, included Dane County Department of Human Services Director, Lynn Green, Madison Schools Superintendent, Daniel Nerad, and State Division of Corrections Administrator, Margaret Carpenter. Each gave their views on the importance of the conference and the work the attendees do every day. They also collectively spoke to their role in supporting efforts to combat youth gang growth.

Strategies for engaging and working with high-risk youth was the general focus of the 2009 conference. Among the highlights was Roberto Rivera’s dynamic and inspiring message. Rivera, from the Good Life organization in Chicago, urged listeners to help youth find positive ways to focus their energy and creativity to benefit all.

Participants also had the opportunity to attend workshops on a variety of topics: gender-specific programming for girls, intervention strategies with Latino youth, hip hop culture, a middle school approach to intervening with gang behavior, keeping track of youth on the internet, and more.

The Dane County Youth Gang Prevention Task force for the second year gave special recognition to system professionals whose contributions have impacted our community’s efforts to redirect young people away from youth gang involvement. The following individuals received awards:

### 2009 Youth Gang Prevention and Intervention Services Awards

#### Special Recognition

- Aimee DeHaven.....Social Worker, Dane County Department of Human Services
- Officer Greg Rosetti.....Madison Police Department
- Frank Rodriguez.....Behavior Coach, Madison Metropolitan School District
- Will Green.....Director/Mentor, Mentoring Positives, Inc.
- Karen Ciccarelli.....Social Worker, Dane County Department of Human Services
- Aaron Perry.....Program Leader, Dane County Neighborhood Intervention Program
- Detective Joel Wagner .....Dane County Sheriff Department
- Joe Gothard .....Principal, Madison Metropolitan School District
- Diana Miller.....High School Services Specialist, Madison School Community Recreation
- Jeff Ward.....Juvenile Court Worker Home Detention Program, Dane County Juvenile Court
- Gary Gable.....Supervisor, Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin
- Chris Mand.....Social Worker, Verona Area School District

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## Reentry

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The goals of the project are to:

1. Increase the skills of staff through specialized training to more effectively integrate and supervise youth in communities that have adopted restrictive living ordinances and/or child safety zones.
2. Raise the general public's understanding and awareness of the unique needs of juvenile sex offenders through a plan to meet, train and consult with local officials including school personnel, governmental officials (city councils, town and village boards), the media, and the general public.
3. Enhance direct services to youth as they move through the reentry phases, which include a structured 90-day Transition component, and an emphasis on further employment training and/or job placement of the targeted youth.
4. Enhance communication and build a strong support network between juvenile sex offenders and their families, DJC staff, and local community service providers through collaboration local meetings, Transition Team meetings, and specific case consultations.

Gretchen Kubnick, the Grant Director, oversees the project. In addition to supervising two staff positions, she ensures that all monitoring, data collection, performance measuring and reporting requirements are met. Re-entry Case Manager, Julie Bain, works in coordination with juvenile agents and county workers to provide case management services for participating youth participating in the grant. Chris Gomes is the Juvenile Sex Offender Specialist. He provides a broad range of technical assistance, educational and community outreach/trainings, and policy and procedure development and implementation in the area of juvenile sex offenders.

## Third Annual Restorative Justice Conference Held May 7 & 8 in Wisconsin Dells

*By Sheri Gatts*

The third joint Restorative Justice Conference - sponsored by the Wisconsin Association of Restitution Programs (WARP) and Wisconsin Restorative Justice Coalition (WRJC) – was a success again this year. Over 170 individuals attended the one and one-half day conference. Participants were from a variety of backgrounds, including education, probation, corrections, county government, state government, prosecution, social work, faith communities, and community based non-profits. This was the second year that the RJ Conference was held at the Kalahari Convention Center and Resort.

The keynote speaker for Day One was Kay Pranis, Restorative Justice consultant, educator and author from the state of Minnesota. Kay served the Minnesota Department of Corrections in the position of RJ Planner from 1994 to 2003. She kicked off the conference with a presentation on the Restorative Justice Movement. Kay also facilitated three workshops on the Introduction of the Peacemaking Circle Process. Other workshops at the conference included:

- Special Needs Youth and Restorative Justice
- Restitution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- Motivational Interviewing
- An RJ School Panel: Everything you Wanted to Know, But Didn't Know Who to Ask
- Jackson Correctional Institute Reality Program
- Treatment Courts
- The Adolescent Brain

The Keynote Speakers for Day Two were Deb Haglund and Charlotte Hockings, two Victim/Survivors who shared their personal stories of being victimized, and how that experience has changed their lives.

Evaluations of the conference and each workshop were very positive. Several of the conference attendees brought their families with them so they could make it an extended weekend family event. Traditionally the conference is held the first week of May each year.

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## Mt. Zion

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District. She started out as a teacher at Lowell Elementary, home school coordinator at Hawthorne Elementary, moved on to Assistant Principal at LaFollette High School, and was Principal at Frank Allis Elementary at the time of her retirement. When Reverend Rick Jones came to Mt. Zion Baptist Church about two years ago, they discovered that they shared the same passion and vision for working with children. “God gave me the ability to teach and lead and I believe that this is exactly where I am supposed to be at this time in my life,” she explained.

Ms. Hodge is the mother of two adult daughters and one adult son, and has three wonderful grandchildren (two boys and one girl). Her children grew up in the Mt. Zion Church Community and she feels that leading the Center is one way she can give back to the place that has been such a positive part of her family life. She doesn't have much spare time but when she does, she likes to spend time with her family, gardening, reading, exercising and cooking —especially desserts.

Her advice to others is “if you want to be happy for the rest of your life, reach out and help other people.”

Chris Hodge clearly practices that philosophy in her own life because she is modeling it for the children in her life every day. The best way to reach out and contact Ms. Hodge is by email at

[christin\\_hodge@sbcglobal.net](mailto:christin_hodge@sbcglobal.net).

## Subculture Corner

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### Bronze Award

First Award to be given in 2010

### Silver Award

Andre Johnson, Supervisor.....Dane Co Neighborhood Intervention Program  
Detective George Chavez.....Madison Police Department  
Officer Lester Moore.....Madison Police Department

### Gold Award

Sue Milch.....Conference Planning Chair, Staff Development Manager,  
Dane County Department of Human Services  
Luis Yudice.....Enhanced Gang Task Force Co-Chair, Safety Coordinator,  
Madison Metropolitan School District

### Previous Awards

Kathy Sorenson – Gold 2007

**Subculture Corner Gang Fact:** Mexican Mafia – Also Known as “La EME”; this prison gang began in late 1957 at the Deuel Vocational Institute in Tracy California. The group was originally known as the “Baby Mafia” and built its infrastructure based upon the Cosa Nostra. The primary objective of the group was to protect the Chicano inmates from other groups, later to control criminal enterprises within the prison, and later to control the action in the Varrios. The EME is a blood in, blood out organization, meaning you have to kill to get in and will die to get out. Members are called “carnales” or brothers of the family. (*Source - Varrio Warfare "Violence in the Latino Community" by Gabe Morales*)

## What's on Your Mind? - More than a Contest

By Veronica Hereford

**What does President Obama's election mean to you?** That was the question/topic that started the essay contest at the Neighborhood Intervention Program in January of this year. The contest seeks to inspire the youth we work with to think critically and creatively about relevant issues. Topics that have been addressed are: the presidential election, black history, women in history, the economy, and creating an ideal school environment.

The writing from most of the entries is rough but the content is heartfelt and honest. The purpose of the contest is to push our young people to take some time to think about what is happening and has happened in the world around them. It also gives them an incentive to practice something that is quickly becoming as ancient as the typewriter - writing. It pushes them to form an opinion that is their own. While some of the topics have required a minimal amount of research, the young people put up very little resistance. The contest awards prizes for first through fourth places. Prizes consist of mall gift cards and movie tickets.

### February Winning Essay Submitted by 16 Year Old:

If I could meet and talk to one African American person who made a difference in America, I would talk to Harriet Tubman (the Moses of her people). We would talk about her challenges and how she overcame them. Two, we would talk about the underground railroads. Last but not least, we would talk about the world today.

#### **Challenges**

Harriet Tubman faced a lot of challenges. Some of her challenges were her disability, fighting the civil war, carrying over slaves and taking the challenge and risk to come back every time to rescue more and more slaves. Harriet Tubman escaped from her master after his death and was put up for auction and then she decided to escape on September 17, 1849. I would like to talk to her about her disability and how she felt about the challenges and the change in her new behavior. Harriet Tubman suffered from seizures as a result of a head trauma caused when her slave master hit her in the head. Even though she had to deal with these health issues, she still became a nurse and a spy for the north during the civil war. This put her at great risk and she could have even died for her efforts. When Harriet was in the war in 1863 she was a spy/scout. Harriet Tubman looked for slaves in the South who wanted to join the union army.

#### **Rescuing Slaves**

Harriet Tubman was an outstanding lady. She was an abolitionist and a humanitarian. She was very motivated after escaping from Maryland in 1849, and took the risk of getting caught many times just because she cared about her fellow African Americans. If I could just ask her what motivated her and what her strategies were? What made it worth it? If I could, we would talk about her niece and how she felt about her almost being sold and how she kept leaving and never getting caught on a daily basis.

#### **The World Today**

The world today is so much different from the world Harriet Tubman lived in. She was going through slavery while now whites and blacks are combining. I would ask Harriet Tubman what she thinks about the fact that we now in 2009 have a black president. I would ask her did the idea of just stopping with the underground railroads and just build a life up north. I would also ask her what advice she could give young African Americans about overcoming their challenges.