

For the Sake of Our Children

South Bay Organization Trains Youth Advocates

BY TRACY SPURLIN The oft-quoted African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," holds as much truth now as it did in the past. This was the philosophy of our elders who took pride in keeping neighborhood children on the straight and narrow when their parents were not around. Today, we continue to bear the responsibility of helping our children, especially those without the advantage of a stable home environment.

Child Advocates of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties is a nonprofit organization that provides us with a great opportunity to help a child. For 19 years, they have trained adults to become volunteer mentors and court-appointed special advocates (CASAs) for foster children who have been taken out of their original homes due to abuse and neglect. Volunteers begin by committing to a year of spending time with a child for two to three hours a week. Most volunteers, in seeing how their presence helps the children, choose to go above and beyond the time commitments.

Child Advocates currently serves 58 percent of the foster children in both counties. Four hundred children are currently on the agency's waiting list. Eleven percent of the children being served by Child Advocates are black. Most of the CASAs that serve them are middle-aged white women. There are very few black CASAs and this is something the agency is working to change. Executive Director Gisela Bushey says, "One of our

goals is to provide ethnically diverse and culturally appropriate matches for our kids." While having a caring adult in a child's life is the priority, having an adult who looks like them can help the child develop a healthy self-identity.

Tawanda McIntosh, 28, a former Child Advocates child, had permanent foster parents who were white. Although they were wonderful, there were some issues that they could not understand as well as her black and female CASA could. For instance, McIntosh explains that, "[My CASA] could understand that black hair such as mine needs special care. She made sure I went to the right salons so I could feel good about my hair." Her CASA also encouraged her to reach for the stars. As a result, McIntosh is now a confident college graduate. Her mentor is still in her life. "She was in my wedding and with me in the delivery room!" says McIntosh.

Mary Bedford-Carter, a five-year Child Advocates Volunteer says, "I can relate to the kids' struggle as an African American and I help them identify with their culture." One of her former "children" Tamika Williams says: "Child Advocates changed my life tremendously by giving me Mary who showed me I could succeed in life." Williams is now a college student with plans to become a social worker.

Advocate Volunteers enrich their lives by mentoring children. Sylvia Head, a volunteer says "My experience volun-



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- Tamika Williams

teering has helped me professionally by allowing me to learn more about the court and school systems. It has also given me the rewarding challenge of showing my 'child' a healthier side of life."

The consistent presence of an adult can crack a child's tough exterior. Grace Gumbs, a CASA, explains that a child may exhibit behavioral problems because "People [are] constantly in and out of these kids' lives without providing a permanent basis to support and love them." Gumbs, who has mentored a challenging teen, said that the teen surprised her one day by saying, "I know you think I don't listen to you, but I really do." Child Advocates has proven that every child can beat the odds with understanding and support. **cf**

To learn more about Child Advocates, please call (408)416-0400 or email: info@cadvocates.org.

BY KEVIN L. NICHOLS

OAKLAND - When many people think of Oakland, the epicenter of the East Bay, they often think of the increasing murder rate, lack of quality education, crime, drug addiction, and violence. The mainstream news media neglects to publicize uplifting activities, especially those involving urban black youth. One particular event that the media remained comatose about was the Wall Street Wizards' "A Day on Wall Street."

The Wall Street Wizards program is part of the Wall Street West Financial Literacy Fund (WSWFLF). The Literacy Fund provides urban youth with the opportunity to observe, learn and participate in the world of financial markets. It also serves as a platform to educate urban youth about career opportunities in finance. Black youth are often discouraged to pursue careers in business and finance because of their emphasis on academic performance in mathematics and science—subjects that are challenging for most. Lack of knowledge in terms of professional appearance, proper conduct, and networking abilities also play a significant role in urban youths' non-pursuit of careers in the financial industry. Urban youth are often stereotyped as having apathy for academic achievement; poor behavior in public; and a threatening physical appearance. Wall Street Wizards seeks to reform those stereotypes.

Wall Street Wizards was founded by William "Bill" Thomason, President and CEO of Thomason Capital Management LLC. Mr. Thomason is a hedge fund manager and the author of a soon-to-be released new book set. The program's objectives are to help urban youth understand the importance of personal money management through financial literacy and to expose youth to careers that offer

Wall Street Wizards

Not Your Typical Day On Wall Street For Urban Black Youth



high-pay and high-growth opportunities in the world of finance.

Last month, the Wall Street Wizards had "A Day on Wall Street" in San Francisco. Over 25 black high school students were transported from WSWFLF's headquarters, located at Frank H. Ogawa Plaza in Oakland, to the Federal Reserve Bank. There they were given distinct black jerseys somewhat resembling the Negro Baseball League with "Wall Street Wiz-

ards" on the front and "05" on the back. The students embarked on a full day that included a tour of the history of money and learned about how the Feds collect money, starting from colonial times to the present. They also met the San Francisco Bank's Chief Economist for a question and answer period.

The Wizards also visited the E*Trade building and met Relationship Manager, Bryan Lubwama who discussed how to open

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- Bill Thomason, President and CEO of Thomason Capital Management LLC

brokerage accounts and provided information on educational IRA's and what brokerage firms actually do. For the eager and attentive youth, the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange was next on the agenda, which allowed the students to observe the traders and the television monitors in action.

The final two activities included a lunch with representatives of the African American employees' organization of Bank of America, which afforded the youth an opportunity to attend panel sessions where careers in finance and investment were described at length. Last but certainly not least, the Wizards concluded their day at the Bloomberg offices where they were given a project that involved researching various companies, as they learned about careers in journalism and financial news reporting.

Wall Street Wizards is a phenomenal program. It is difficult to imagine high school youth, let alone urban black youth, having the unrestricted access to the financial markets that Wall Street Wizards provides. The young men and women who participated in the program represented themselves with the utmost dignity and respect, placing them on the right path to eradicating the stereotypes that exist in Oakland regarding urban black youth. When asked what his desired outcome of "A Day on Wall Street" is, Bill Thomason replied, "To expose children of color to the world of finance and investing. The majority of these kids would never have this opportunity to know that this world even exists much less have any exposure to investing, banking, money management, trading, mergers, and acquisitions or venture capital." In his opinion and by the enthusiasm of the young attendees, his desired outcome was definitely achieved. **cf**