11th Annual March for Children right around the corner

For the second straight year, organizers of the March for Children have teamed up with Casa de los Niños for National Child Abuse Prevention Month. The 11th Annual March for Children event and the Family Fiesta are scheduled for Saturday, April 11th at Reid Park.

For more details, see Page 5.

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Re-engagement center offers youth myriad of opportunities

Seventeen-year-old Delisa knows what it’s like to struggle. At 15, she had a baby girl and has been working hard to provide a decent life for herself and her daughter. She is one of the lucky ones though.

Delisa found the Goodwill of Arizona’s Metro program. The program helps kids get back into school, provides tutoring, explores careers possibilities with them and assists them in developing the skills they need to enter the work force. It also provides them with clothing vouchers for job interviews, bus passes and food through the Community Food Bank.

Delisa is so grateful for the help she received, she leapt at the opportunity to get involved in an initiative that will provide the same sort of assistance, but on a much grander scale.

“I want to be a role model for others,” Delisa said. “I want people to know there is a place where people are going to help them, that there are alternatives. So many of my friends don’t trust people. They have anger issues and they don’t want people to know too much about them.”

Currently in Pima County there are 19,000 young people between 16 and 24-year-old who aren’t enrolled in school or participating in the work force. They are among 7 million nationally who are thought of as “opportunity youth.”

Dismayed by the numbers, the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona was more than willing to take on a challenge presented to them by the Aspen Institute two years ago. (Contd. Page 3)
Back in 2013, the Aspen Institute announced it was prepared to award grants to 21 communities that wanted to enhance or launch programs designed to help opportunity youth get back into school or find work.

The United Way was invited to submit a proposal and from there an unprecedented collaborative was born.

Forty educational, governmental, faith-based, non-profit and business organizations came together to study the issue and to create a program to help these youth, many of whom are homeless, court-involved or foster children.

Delisa and a handful of other youths were also asked for their input.

In the end, “Youth on the Rise” submitted a proposal for a re-engagement center called “The Rec” and received a total of $150,000 in grant money. The initiative is also supported by Helios Education Foundation and The San Francisco Foundation.

The Rec, which is located at Wakefield Middle School, held its grand opening March 24.

At The Rec, young people can get help pursuing their diploma or GED, tutoring, transitioning to college, exploring careers or preparing for the work force. Under the same roof, they’ll also be able to get help with food, housing, clothing, counseling and life skills.

The collaborative discovered there are a whole lot of young people out there who are interested in pursuing an education and work, but they don’t know where to begin, Garza Chavez said.

(Contd. Page 4)
Now, they only need to find their way to one brick-and-mortar building.

The initiative is also ground-breaking in other ways, Garza Chavez said.

Because so many organizations are involved in the initiative, existing gaps in service will be filled, data will be collected to help determine which programs are effective, and communication among service providers will be vastly improved, Garza Chavez said.

The six-member Youth Leadership Council is also a unique aspect of the collaborative. They not only provided insight into the struggles of their peers, but they played a major role in writing the bylaws and codes of ethics.

On a lighter note, they designed The Rec’s logo and painted the facility in colors of their own choosing.

“ Their contribution is tremendous,” said Robert Clark, youth leadership coordinator. “They run their own monthly meetings, make their own decisions and send them to the collaborative. They’re very well-spoken and have great ideas. They have disagreements during their meetings, but they always come to a consensus.”

One member of the council, Obed, went out on his own and obtained donations for The Rec, Clark said. He’ll also be representing the collaborative at a national Aspen Institute conference in New Orleans in May.

One of the most important things the collaborative learned from the Youth Leadership Council was the need for peer support, Garza Chavez said.

“These youth want to talk to someone who has been in their same situation and once they do get engaged, they want to talk to an adult professional who knows the system,” Garza Chavez said.

As a result, one of the first people they will meet will be a “peer navigator,” someone who was once in their shoes who can lead them through the process, Garza Chavez said. The peer navigators will have their work cut out for them when it comes to earning people’s trust, but she is hopeful, Delisa said.

“I like the people here and I have a lot of fun,” Delisa said. “I feel proud of myself now. I think this is going to open doors for me and lead to other things.”

Obed, who grew up in the foster care system, is positive The Rec will be a huge success.

“I know they will buy into The Rec,” Obed said. “I feel it in my heart.”

Ideally, there will be three re-engagement centers spread throughout the city within the next three years, Garza Chavez said.

For more information, call (520) 622-1425.
Sometimes it seems as though hardly a week goes by when the media isn’t reporting on a horrific case of child abuse and raising questions about how such a thing can occur.

With newspapers shrinking and dying, 24-hour news cycles and the never-ending battle for Internet clicks and viral videos, positive news rarely seems to get reported anymore.

We don’t often hear about the foster parents who gladly welcome children into their family who are permanently damaged in utero by drugs and alcohol, the case managers who work tirelessly to make sure the kids on their case load get the services they need or the Court Appointed Special Advocates who donate dozens of hours every month to support and advocate for their assigned child.

Well, on Saturday, April 11, several child advocacy groups are coming together to publically honor those people who go above-and-beyond every single day to help abused and neglected children in our community.

They will be handing out the Keith Smith Foster Parent of the Year Award, the Resilient Family of the Year, the Individual of the Year and the Agency, Program or Business of the Year award at the 11th Annual March for Children.

Eleven years ago, Pima County was experiencing a sudden surge in the number of children being abused and neglected. Three members of the Child Abuse Prevention Council decided they needed to do something to promote April as Child Abuse Prevention Month and the people who work to help abused children. (Contd. Page 6)
Sam Dyer, Chris Swenson-Smith and the late Keith Smith went to Hector Campoy, then the presiding judge of Pima County Juvenile Court.

That April, the first ever March for Children was held. In 2006, the Child Abuse Prevention Awards were added to the event.

Over the years, the march has changed locations and sponsors a couple of times. Nowadays, the event is held at Reid Park and is sponsored by AVIVA Children’s Services, CASA of Pima County and the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona.

The event has also expanded exponentially thanks to a newly-formed partnership with Casa de los Niños.

Last year, March sponsors accepted an invitation from Casa de los Niños to combine the March with their annual Family Fiesta and car show event, which is attended by more than 2,500 people.

The Family Fiesta features children’s performing groups, games and activities for the kids, safety and wellness tips and displays and plenty of food and drinks.

Swenson-Smith said her late husband would be thrilled to see how the event has grown and changed.

While April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, our community needs to remember that there are reports of child abuse or neglect every day of the year, Swenson-Smith said.

“Child welfare professionals, foster parents, CASA advocates, judges, attorneys, court staff, and treatment providers are at work every day, trying to stem the tide,” Swenson-Smith said. “The March for Children gives us a chance to recognize both.”

Registration for this year’s March will begin at 9:30 a.m. at the Reid Park band shell. The one-mile March will start at 10 a.m. with the awards ceremony and Family Fiesta to follow.
Mediation program gives power back to crime victims

Shock, fear, disgust, anger, powerless. These are just some of the words people use to describe how they feel after becoming the victim of a crime.

Adam Glaser has spent the last 20 years helping such people give voice to those feelings – directly to the person who caused them such angst.

Glaser is a mediator with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office and he heads up the Victim Offender Mediation Program, also known as VOMP.

This little-known program allows people who have been victimized by kids to meet with them in private to discuss the physical, emotional and financial impact the crime has had on them.

The hope is victims will be empowered and begin to heal. Secondarily, officials hope youths will be less inclined to commit additional offenses.

Glaser recently spent two hours at the court’s training center to discuss VOMP with court employees.

The dynamics of the meeting are different than most mediation sessions because the parties aren’t trying to reach a settlement and one party – the victim – has more power than the other party, Glaser said.

“There’s a natural imbalance of power,” Glaser said. “The victim is going to start getting the power they lost back.”

Pima County Juvenile Court was the first county in the state to offer VOMP and is only one of two counties that continue to offer it 20 years later, Glaser said.

John Schow, Pima County Juvenile Court’s director of Juvenile Court Services and chief probation officer, is a big proponent of VOMP.

(Contd. Page 8)
“It is important to note that as we move through the process of implementing evidence-based probation services, we hold true to our belief in restorative justice,” Schow said. “VOMP fits in well with this model by incorporating accountability, competency development and community protection.”

“VOMP and Accountability Conferencing are two programs we have used in the past with great results,” Schow said. “We need to bring these types of programs back into our array of services we can offer victims and offenders – they help reduce the likelihood of future victimization.”

Typically, the people who use VOMP are victims of property crimes, graffiti, assaults and family conflicts. They are told about the program by probation officers, prosecutors, judges, Teen Court and Community Justice Boards.

If a judge orders a youth to participate in VOMP, it’s in addition to any other consequences they’ve been given, Glaser said.

Once victims ask to participate, Glaser said he sits down with the victim and the offender separately to explain the process, discuss the impact of the crime and what they would like to say to one another.

“The mediator develops trust with the parties ahead of time so there are no surprises,” Glaser said. “We certainly don’t want to re-victimize the victim.”

The meeting is then scheduled in a safe, confidential setting.

The program isn’t for every victim or offender, Glaser said. Some victims aren’t ready to let go of their anger and some offenders aren’t ready to accept responsibility.

The program is beneficial for those who are ready for it, Schow said.

“When victims are open to participation in VOMP, the healing process can begin immediately,” Schow said. “I have seen cases where victim mediation has worked out agreements with the victim and juvenile offender that I never thought possible, avoiding long drawn out probation periods due to restitution.”

During Glaser’s presentation he showed clips of three different mediation sessions from across the nation. In two, family members met with their loved ones’ killer. In a third, a former high school teacher met with the teen that beat him so badly he lost an eye and his career.

In each case, the parties on both sides reported feeling more at peace following the sessions.

Unfortunately, some mediation sessions don’t end so well, Glaser said.

“Some victims don’t care about an apology, they only want the offender to know the impact they had on them,” Glaser said. “The mediator has to take the victim’s lead and make sure ahead of time that they’ll be OK if they don’t get what they want. It doesn’t always go perfect. It doesn’t always end with a group hug. Sometimes it just ends.”

For more information, call Glaser at (520) 628-6782.
Tragedy leads P.O. to mediation program, understanding

With less than a week to go before Christmas, Sheila Pessinguia was pretty excited. Her mom and stepdad were flying in from Seattle and it was going to be a nice family holiday.

It wasn’t her mom who knocked on Pessinguia’s door on Dec. 20, 2001, though. It was a police officer. Her mother and stepdad had been killed instantly the night before when a 21-year-old woman high on methamphetamine blew through a red light while being chased by police at 100 miles an hour and flipped their car over.

The driver, Michelle Gunderson pleaded guilty to one count of second-degree murder and was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

During the sentencing hearing, Pessinguia, a probation officer supervisor with Pima County Juvenile Court, was able to address Gunderson, but she left the court feeling dissatisfied. She had so many unanswered questions about the night of the crash and what led up to that moment in time for Gunderson.

The only person who could answer those questions was Gunderson. So when the civil suit filed as a result of the case was over, Pessinguia contacted a victim’s advocate in Seattle and told him she wanted to talk to Gunderson.

Eventually, Pessinguia and Gunderson became the first people in Washington State to participate in the state’s Victim Offender Mediation Program. Their VOMP program works much like Pima County Juvenile Court’s program (See Page 7)

At long last, Pessinguia learned who the real Michelle Gunderson is and she discovered something else. She discovered Gunderson had taken to heart what Pessinguia had told her during her sentencing hearing.

“I had told her ‘Don’t let my mom and step-dad’s lives be lost for nothing. Become a better person before you get out,’” Pessinguia said.

With two years left on her sentence, Gunderson has earned her general equivalency diploma, taken some college courses and become a certified Braille translator. She hopes to use her certificate to obtain a job upon her release. (Contd. Page 10)
Pessinguia will never forget their first meeting.

“T...
Every year, thousands of kids are arrested for domestic violence across the U.S, many of them over and over again. The question is why do they continue to engage in the same behavior and what can be done to help them change?

Pima County Juvenile Court is working with University of Massachusetts researchers and other courts to find the answers, said Beverly Tobiason, the court’s clinical director.

In 2013, the PCJCC became part of an on-going, national study that is collecting data on kids coming into the detention center on domestic violence charges and testing a new risk assessment tool.

Those involved in the study want to identify common characteristics of these kids’ family dynamics and incidents of violence in order to improve the services they receive and the way their cases are handled, Tobiason said.

Right now, many kids across the country who are accused of domestic violence are often treated the same as adult offenders. Only relatively recently have people begun to accept that the human brain isn’t fully developed until people are in their mid-20s. In fact, the last portion of the brain to develop is the one that governs our impulsivity.

In addition, there are limited treatment options for these offenders and what is available is often ineffective. Many youths are assigned anger management classes, which only treat a symptom of domestic violence, not the cause, Tobiason noted.

As a result, their recidivism rates are high.

Experts agree youthful offender treatment providers ought to take into consideration such things as the mental health of the youth, family dynamics and brain science.

When treating youth, doctors need to know if the family has a history of substance abuse, mental health issues, criminal activity and domestic violence, Tobiason said. The whole family needs to be treated.

Once the court agreed to participate in the project, mental health staff began asking incoming youth a wide-variety of questions, including what triggers their outbursts and their attitudes toward violence and change.

In June 2014, researchers began to compare our data with data collected in courts in Illinois, Texas, Ohio and Connecticut. They found kids arrested for domestic violence likely fall into one of several categories.

For example, some kids engage in violence only when they are defending themselves. Others act out only when under undue stress. Many have chaotic family lives and the youth and their family members engage in mutual combat. Some kids experiment with power and control through domestic violence and some are chronic batterers.

The researchers and participating courts are expected to meet sometime this spring to discuss the results more in-depth and to determine what their next step should be.

“Hopefully, due to our research participation with the rest of the country, we will have a better tool,” Tobiason said. “Right now we’re all struggling. There is no risk assessment tool that specifically looks at adolescent domestic violence and the family. This will likely give us a better way to identify cases, choose a way to process those cases and find the right treatment services.”
Upcoming Career Day opens up possibilities for teens

Imagine being a teenager today picturing your future. If you live in an average, middle-class family, the idea of attending and paying for college is probably pretty daunting. Now imagine being a foster child and hearing only 50 percent of foster children graduate from high school and less than 3 percent graduate from college.

The numbers maybe frightening, but there are people who want teenagers in Pima County to know there is hope.

Thursday, April 9 is Youth Career Day at Pima Community College’s downtown campus.

For three hours the teens will get to tour campus and learn about financial aid, scholarships, child care and healthcare and the many, many educational and recreational programs at PCC.

Stops on the tour include the student art gallery, the automotive technology, building and construction technology, the computer-aided drafting area and the biology department.

“We want to provide young people with the opportunity to see what their options are,” said Sandra Paulick, the counseling services coordinator for the downtown campus. “We want them to see the direct connection between college and a career. Community colleges belong to the community and these young people are part of the community.”

The event is open to all teens, but special efforts have been made to reach children in the foster care system and on probation. The event is sponsored by Pima Community College, Arizona Department of Child Safety, the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education and Pima County Juvenile Court.

More than 500 young people have participated in Youth Career Day since its inception in 2006, said Nandi Muhammad, the court’s educational consultant.

Many of them had never set foot on a college campus before, Muhammad said. “Some of our foster children or court-involved children don’t feel that college will ever be a possibility for them, but this event opens the door for them,” Muhammad said. “They can see what college is like and learn that it’s not as intimidating as they think.”

For more information on the event, contact Muhammad at (520)724-9293.
Odds & Ends

Milestones

Wayne Yehling, 5 years, judicial
Terrance Hopkins, 10 years, probation
Ebenezer Ajaja, 15 years, probation
Alejandro Meranza, 15 years, detention
Courtney Haymore, 15 years, detention
Mary Roberts, 15 years, IT
Brenda Johnson, 20 years, probation

Upcoming Events

4/7 — Arizona Gives Day
4/9 — PCC Career Day
4/11 — YARDS Graduation
4/11 — March for Children
4/16 — CASA Recognition Lunch
4/19 — Natl. Crime Victims’ Rights Week

By the way...

The Pima County Juvenile Court now has 342 followers on Twitter and 184 Facebook “Likes.” Please check us out:

Twitter: Pima County Juvenile@PCJuvenileCourt
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/PimaCountyJuvenileCourt

Please call 724-2060 to find out more about becoming a Court Appointed Special Advocate. Or visit http://pimacountycasa.org/
Did You Know?

On March 13, the Pima County/Tucson Women’s Commission honored 17 women at the Women in Government luncheon at the Tucson Convention Center. Among those nominated for the county’s leadership award were Judge Sally Simmons, who presides over Pima County Superior Court and Judge Kathleen Quigley, who presides over Pima County Juvenile Court.

Below are just some of the things that were included in their nomination letters:

“Judge Simmons has devoted time to the development of new judicial officers, presiding over the youngest bench in several years. She serves on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and works tirelessly with her fellow Council members to collaborate and identify new ideas for improving the criminal justice system in Pima County while implementing new cost savings measures. She has collaborated extensively with the Pima County Attorney’s Office to support initiatives to fund and expand programs including the Drug Treatment Alternative to Prison and the initiation of the Behavioral Health Collaborative.

“Judge Simmons leads by example. She does not expect anyone to do anything that she would not do herself. She sets the tone for what is expected. Judge Simmons always makes time for people and goes the extra mile to solve problems. She works tirelessly to improve the court system in Pima County, often dedicating lunch hours and evenings.”

“Working with Judge Quigley is a privilege and an honor. She is fair and knowledgeable, and works incredibly hard to improve the lives of the families she serves. She proves every day how much she genuinely cares about each child who comes through our courthouse. She also has a great deal of respect for everyone who works here and in her role as Presiding Judge, she has fostered a spirit of collaboration among all divisions at Juvenile Court. Judge Quigley leads with kindness, concern, and an open mind. She has served the Juvenile Court for approximately 12 years: 6 as a hearing officer, 3 as a commissioner, and 3 as an appointed Judge. Judge Quigley, a devoted mother of 4, is also the chair of multiple committees and has extensive community involvement, including volunteer work with her children's schools. Judge Quigley balances her challenging caseload and her administrative responsibilities seamlessly, all while being an exemplary mother. She rises to any challenge and is a constant example of excellence in public service.”
Voices

Since the PCJCC is here to help strengthen kids and families, it seems only appropriate the kids in our Detention Center have a platform from which to speak. We’ll be asking them questions periodically and printing some of their unedited answers here.

How do you feel when you do something kind?

Doing something kind for others makes me feel proud and accomplished. Helping anyone with even the smallest amount of effort brings me joy because its something we should all do but forget to because of our daily occupations. Being kind is something you learn when you’re in grade school. The golden rule is the most forgotten rule and most definitly the most important. Doing kind and being kind can help others while helping yourself. What goes around comes around. - N.C.

When I do something kind for another person I feel helpful and good about myself. I feel like if I do something kind for people maybe someone would do the same for me. That’s how I feel when I do something kind for another person. - Anonymous

I feel great. I feel like I accomplished a goal. I also feel as if I do something kind to someone who is having a bad day or going through hard times that one kind deed could help change their day or help them have a more positive outlook on life. - A.M.

When I help people by either giving money or giving advice I feel happy that yeah I can though I can’t help myself but I’m helping others making others day. I feel happy knowing that I made one less person feel sad, mad, worthless. Just know I made someones day makes my day, makes me happy. I feel my heart get full when someone says thank you, smiles at me or saying God bless you cause it lets me know I’m not all bad, that there’s people grateful for the little things I do. Knowing I make someone smile makes me feel like the worlds smiling and that I’m not worthless cause I can make someone happy. - F.

How I feel when I do something kind for another person is I feel like I made that person’s day just a little bit better, because who knows maybe that person got laid off at their job or their car got towed away. You never know what a person is going through so its helpful to make that person feel good about themselves. When you tell a woman their pretty maybe that’s just what they need to help get them through the day or ask your parents how their day at work was, maybe they need someone to talk about how awful it was, you never know. When I do something kind for someone I feel weird because I usually only do things for myself and the people I care about but if it’s a stranger I feel genuinely good. - J.D.

When I do something kind for someone I feel a sense of accomplishment, even something as small as holding the door open for someone and being able to see the appreciation. Like riding the bus and giving up my seat for an elder when there is no more seats available. When I do kind things for others I feel like they will be done back to me. - Z

When I do something kind for another person I just get that super good feeling inside. Mostly because I just love helping or making another person feel good. Being helpful is the best gift anyone can ask for and give. - J.M.
Kay, a Recovery Support Specialist, was just one of many who praised a Family Drug Court participant during a recent graduation ceremony. Despite a rocky start, the graduate completed the program, reunited with her child and had her dependency case closed.

Probation officer Shirley D’Souza receives a hug from a recent Youth Recovery Court graduate.

On March 17, PCJCC staff gathered to say goodbye to Ron Overholt, who served as our interim Deputy Court Administrator for nearly a year. He is now back at Pima County Superior Court.
Universal Truth No. 1 – Children succeed when they are surrounded by adults who believe they can succeed, NO EXCEPTIONS.

Universal Truth No. 2 – Children succeed when they have meaningful and sustainable relationships with caring adults.

Universal Truth No. 3 – Children succeed when they can articulate their future in more than one destination. (Home & Family, Community & Service, Hobbies & Recreation, Education & Career)