

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

NEW PROGRAM PROVIDES PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH TO THRIVE

If you are or were the parent of a teenager, you know: They like to test limits. They push your buttons or act out in harmful ways, or both. We practically expect misbehavior as part of their development process.

But for youth of color, the consequences are disproportionately severe. They can become trapped in the justice system, well into their adult lives. Rather than contributing to society, they become a burden and an expense. For too long, that's been an acceptable outcome.

While we may casually discard our used coffee cups or old newspapers, should we also discard a young person who makes a bad decision and gets caught, then arrested? Often, these youth come from families lacking the resources that many of us take for granted. Their actions are driven by basic needs: to belong — or even to survive.

When we criminalize youth, we also ignore a physiological fact. Adolescence is an important time for brain development — a process that continues well into a person's 20s, according to

the National Institute of Mental Health. The prefrontal cortex is one of the last parts to mature; it also happens to be the area responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing and making good decisions.

For more than a decade, the National Conflict Resolution Center has been working to change outcomes for young people who take a wrong turn. Predictably, the punitive measures and systems we have come to rely on are ineffective for changing behavior. In eroding important connections — to family, teachers and friends — they only stoke the pipeline to prison.

On Oct. 1, NCRC began a new chapter of this work, with the launch of the Thrive program.

Thrive is a next important step for graduates of the Juvenile Diversion Initiative, a collaboration with the San Diego County District Attorney's Office that provides an alternative to traditional prosecution for youth who are arrested on misdemeanor or felony charges, while keeping them accountable for their ac-

tions. Participants have up to six months' time to complete the initiative; when they do, their arrest record is sealed.

Anwar Shariff directs the Thrive program. He has worked in education for the last 20 years, most recently at the San Diego State University Research Foundation. There, Shariff delivered college and career readiness training to students at Lincoln High School through a federal TRIO grant, which funds programs that motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Shariff is drawn to serving young Latino and Black males, like himself, who are "chronically marginalized" in working-class communities. He recognizes the entrenched forces making it difficult for them to succeed — and the difference that a single caring adult can make in their lives. For Shariff, that person was Doug Williams, a Black educator who helped him navigate unfamiliar systems to find a path forward, even as his friends succumbed to lives of crime, drugs and incarceration. Before

Williams, Shariff had never known someone who attended and graduated from college.

Shariff has taken a holistic approach to designing Thrive. The program begins with goal setting, which often centers on earning money. The conversations also reveal underlying needs, such as feelings of disconnection and a desire to belong. Young people gain new skills to achieve goals, build deeper connections and thrive, in each of four pathways: 1) Live (focusing on health and wellness), 2) Learn, 3) Earn and 4) Serve.

Shariff believes the service pathway differentiates Thrive. It gives young people an opportunity to step outside themselves and consider what they have to offer others.

They learn how service can bring a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives. For many, Shariff notes, it starts with their families: a commitment to graduate (not for myself, but for my mom) or a desire to be a role model for a younger sibling. Many, it is hoped, will become peer mentors and eventually,

engaged community leaders.

Each of the Thrive pathways will be fulfilled through a network of more than 20 service providers, including other nonprofit organizations, academic institutions and government agencies. Participants will be paired with a case manager who will serve as a primary point of contact, assisting with goal setting, coordination of services and progress assessment. To begin, the program will be available for up to one year from the initial Juvenile Diversion Initiative referral.

That may not sound like much time. But our experience tells us that investing in young people — and surrounding them with resources, at a critical moment in their lives — is the right and smart thing to do. They all deserve an opportunity to thrive.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncronline.com.

ANIMALS Investigator might still be hired

FROM B1
official nonprofit status or rescue designation. Several dozen of those were later returned to the Tucson shelter at its request.

Daugherty also confirmed that Colten Jones was linked to a reptile breeder in Phoenix called the Fertile Turtle, which breeds reptiles and sells "feeder animals" presumably for reptiles. The Fertile Turtle's social media accounts have since been deleted.

The Tucson organization's board of directors said last month that it had been in communication with the private group and been told the animals were placed in adoptive homes. The board "is aware of no evidence to the contrary" and "presently has no evidence indicating any animal was harmed."

However, details surrounding the transfer are still being investigated.

After months at odds, the San Diego Humane Society is now working with the



The San Diego Humane Society's Morgan Labadie (right) and Jennell Garza handle crated animals before they were shipped to Arizona in August.

Humane Society of Southern Arizona. In a joint statement released earlier this week, both organizations pledged to work together to investigate and pursue legal action.

Daugherty said the San Diego shelter is still likely to hire its own private investigator to work with the independent investigator the Tucson shelter hired but has yet to do so.

"In our best hopes, it would be that [the animals] are in homes, but if they're not, we want to know that as well," Daugherty said. "And we certainly want to then look at what options we have to hold folks accountable for what led to those outcomes."

Last Saturday, while protesters stood outside the San Diego shelter, Wee Companions — a local small ani-

mal rescue that took in some animals recovered from the Tucson shelter — held a candlelight vigil for those still unaccounted for.

Broadcasting on the rescue's social media channels, its president Fenella Speece, read off the names of each of the missing animals while a live video of a lit candle played. The virtual event was watched by nearly 3,200.

"This has been pretty

horrendous ... there's a lot of people hurting and upset," she said.

Speece also hopes the San Diego shelter will pursue legal action.

"We need to send a very strong message to the public that this is not tolerated, and it won't be done again," she said. "We want to see justice done for them."

San Diego resident Kelly Paolisso — who drove to Tucson last month and brought home dozens of the remaining transferred animals — was at the shelter protest Saturday, hoping simply to garner more awareness. "If it reached a handful of people who didn't know before, it was worth it," she said.

She has been among those working locally to find out what happened to the small animals — and one of the first to find out about the Jones family.

The small animal transfer was not the only issue raised by advocates, who were also protesting Petco Park's first San Diego Rodeo in January and the shelter's Community Cats program.

Organizers say the protest was held at the Fur Ball — a black-tie event that raised nearly \$1.5 million — specifically to ensure donors knew who they were supporting.

To Bryan Pease, director of Animal Protection and

Rescue League, the scandal surrounding the small-animal transport was indicative of an overall breakdown in public trust in the Humane Society.

"Their focus seems to be much more on statistics and clearing the shelter rather than actually being concerned where the animals end up," he said.

Daugherty says the San Diego Humane Society appreciates protesters' passion for animals. The nonprofit is looking to find ways to ensure animal welfare remains a transparent place where animals are protected.

Animal advocates hope changes will be made for the better — but also that the situation will bring to light the overpopulation of small pets.

"The community as a whole needs to take responsibility for this," Speece said. "People need to find good homes for their own pets and not have that expectation that the shelters, humane societies and rescues are going to welcome these animals in with open arms and take over the job of rehoming their animals. It's got to stop somewhere."

Visit sdhumane.org/transportupdate for updates about the San Diego Humane Society's efforts to learn more about these animals.

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CHAMBER Officials not saying what happened

FROM B1
turned. Board members were reluctant to talk about the situation, and some did not return phone calls or respond to emails.

One board member,

who asked not to be named, disputed some of the details in news stories about the layoffs and said, "Nobody got their facts right."

According to reports, the Chamber's financial records were unclear, and in recent months it was paying bills with a line of credit that ran out. With no money left for the payroll, the board voted this month to lay off the employees and rely instead on volunteers.

Rowten is no longer listed with the employees

on the Escondido Chamber's website and did not respond to an email requesting comments.

He reportedly removed all his personal items from his office last week before leaving on what was said to be a long-planned trip with his wife to Italy.

A news release by board Chair Deanna Smith published Oct. 5 in the online Escondido Times-Advocate said the Chamber was undergoing "a transformative reorganization," but mentioned nothing about

Rowten or new Chamber leadership.

"Together, let's embrace this opportunity for renewal and growth," Smith said in the release. "Our dedicated team of volunteers is committed to re-energizing the Chamber and ensuring it remains a dynamic and effective resource for local businesses."

Smith, who has been the board chair for about three months, did not return messages left at her business, Deanna's Gluten Free Bakery in Escondido.

Board member Jim Vander Spek deferred questions about the layoffs to Smith in an email Friday.

"Deanna Smith is the chair and speaks for the board," he said, and he spoke highly of Rowten.

"I miss 'JR' and have admired his tremendous work effort and the good he has done for the Chamber and the community," Vander Spek said. "He is missed."

Rowten was hired in 2019 after nine years as the Southern California corporate development manager

for KPBS, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Escondido police Lt. Suzanne Baeder said Thursday that other than news reporters no one has contacted the Police Department about any crimes, financial or otherwise, that may have occurred at the Chamber.

The Escondido Chamber was founded in 1895 and officially incorporated in 1919, according to the organization's website.

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Celebrations

The San Diego
Union-Tribune

HAPPY 98TH BIRTHDAY

Dr. Jacob "Jack" Morgan. Capt. (USN Ret.)

Happy 98th Birthday! We are so proud of you! You survived the great depression and have lived a life of accomplishments, honor, and generosity. You have served your country during WWII, Korea, and Vietnam, graduated medical school at the top of your class, developed a state-of-the-art cardiology department at Balboa Naval Hospital, and been given awards by foreign and military officials for your accomplishments in the field of cardiology, wrote 40 articles regarding your new discoveries in cardiology that were published in prestigious medical journals and prolonged the lives of millions of children. You were inducted into five different editions of Who's Who; been a professor of medicine and as a cardiologist used your skill to give free or low-cost treatment to many uninsured and under-insured San Diegans for over 25 years. A devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and uncle, you always found time during your busy schedule for your family. Life with you has been and continues to be wonderful! We all love you.



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