



**YOUTH
OPPORTUNITY
CENTER**
INCORPORATED
Muncie, Indiana

Why the YOC?...the **KIDS**. That's why!

RICK ROWRAY IS THE PROUD AND LONG-SERVING CEO OF THE YOUTH OPPORTUNITY CENTER. BELOW ARE HIS COMMENTS FROM THE SHAFER GIVING SOCIETY LUNCHEON, WHICH WAS HELD THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6TH 2016:

Thank you all for attending today. Each of you are friends of the YOC and we are very grateful for your support. For those of you who attend this event each year, we remain appreciative of your on-going connection with our Mission, and hope that you never tire of our utilizing this event to say thank you, as we look to the deep and abiding legacy of support for the YOC blazed by the late Phyllis and Hamer Shafer.

Today there are many new faces - even a few Foundation representatives and a number of guests from places outside of Delaware County. Thank you for your efforts to attend. I'd like to express my appreciation to our friend Jim Smyth from Carmel for all his efforts on behalf of the YOC related to giving. I'd also like to thank Jim for connecting us to individuals and couples who share our values and want to help troubled kids.

Also with us today are 3 elected Officials that have played a key role in the efforts of the YOC: Circuit Court Judges Kim Dowling and Tom Cannon, and Prosecutor Jeff Arnold. The YOC along with our entire community are fortunate to have you in your respective roles.

Next, I would like to express appreciation to retired Department of Child Services Administrator and current YOC Board member Marilyn Scales, and long-time attorney for the YOC, Steve Murphy. For all of your guidance and support since before the inception of the YOC and continuing today, thank you.

Finally, I would like to recognize retired Judge Steven Caldemeyer. It goes way too often without saying but without you, none of this happens. So for your vision and for your tenacity, we all are so very grateful. This event has your ultimate motive written all over it!

Last year at this event I challenged us to get real! Real about the kids we serve, real about what our kids have experienced, real about what our kid's behavior is like, real about what it might be like to try and grow up in their shoes, and real about our role in their lives. I gave in very raw terms what we see in our kids and the great risks involved, yet I concluded with our kid's worthiness of our investing in their futures and their potential.

Today I want to get real about something else, but before I do that I have a confession to make. This confession will not surprise the majority of people here. It will definitely not surprise the YOC staff in the crowd today or the YOC Board of Directors. In fact, it may be a surprise to only one person here today.

The YOC often receives notes and letters and communications from former residents and/or their families, or from placing agents, judges, teachers and others in the lives of these kids. We have stacks of these letters -

numerous communications giving heartfelt thanks for changing the course of young lives and making a difference when no one else could.

Now the confession: Not one of these letters, not a single note, card or email ever says, “My life is different because the YOC has a great CEO.” Not one. Not ever. Not a single one! (Sorry Mom, the gig is up!)

So today I want you, our friends and supporters, to join me in getting real about our staff - the staff referenced in all those notes, emails and letters - the staff directly involved in the lives of our kids. In YOC lingo, the staff involved with “life in the milieu.”

The staff that are getting kids up in the morning, dealing with clothing and teeth brushing, assisting with school work, helping with laundry, clothes, meal time, bed time and bad dreams twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. So mix this role with last year’s information on our kids, such as severe emotional, psychological and behavioral problems. All of our staff are dealing with examples of the worst traumas life has to offer. They are really “in the milieu.”

Staff are engaging kids that often times are very, very unstable. Kids go between appropriate to out-of-control in a split second. Our kids will bombard staff with profanity. They will be aggressive and violent. They will spit, yell, and break and destroy. They will act out sexually. If you have never been in the same room with a person emotionally out of control, it’s hard to describe. The room changes. It feels like all the air has been sucked out of the environment and replaced by an emotionally charged negative energy that staff are trained to try and see through. We ran a training simulation regarding this for our Board one year and I believe they never saw the work of our staff the same way again.

Unlike almost any other role in any other job, the Direct Care YOC Staff must go between defending and protecting themselves in order to keep kids safe to nurturing, supporting and teaching, serving, and being vulnerable to the very child that just was out of control. So to be real about our Direct Care Staff and their role, I can say that it is very tough work. It is typically a calling - a gifting - and not just a job. It’s emotionally draining and physically risky. It requires one thousand split second responses that are highly scrutinized, documented, and second guessed. These responses at times can mean life or death.

Our goal today was to express a very sincere thank you for your support, as well as to connect you to FACES of the people doing the work. Not just the staff’s faces, but to their heart, their purpose, and the character of these Direct Care Staff.

I am not sure I know what the definition of a hero is today, but I do know what sacrifice looks like, and I know what dedication looks like. I know what commitment looks like, and I know what caring looks like.

Behind closed doors at the YOC, we have 3 informal tests we use when making decisions. One of those tests is the “light of day test.” When a decision is communicated in every way possible, will we be proud of it? Is it defensible? Does it pass common sense scrutiny above other options? A second test is the “what if it were your kid test.” This one speaks for itself: Would you make this decision if its effects were directed toward your own

child? The third test, the one I am focusing on today, is named after one of our most respected staff that works directly with our kids. We call it the “Darrick Ayres test.” How would this decision affect Darrick? What would Darrick think about this decision? Would this decision help Darrick or someone like him do their job better? I mention Darrick not to embarrass him or put in place some type of performance hierarchy. I mention Darrick to help put a face on the work and to communicate the very deep and abiding respect that I have for him.

To get even more real about our staff, I asked Darrick if he had anything that he wanted you to know today, beyond his thank you and that your giving matters very much. Darrick told me that he shows up every day for the kids and for his teammates. He feels a great responsibility to them both. If not me, then who will help them? He wants you to know that he feels he is placed at YOC to use his God-gifted traits of crisis reaction, calm, and strength in times of trouble. He believes that he could have been one of the kids here. Any of us could have been one of them. And finally, he sees little things and small steps in these kids making a big difference. This is the reality of our staff - the reality of Darrick.

Darrick is married to Cecile. They have five kids (12 years to 5 months). He has worked at the YOC in some capacity for about 20 years. We also have invited a few other of our amazing staff that work directly with our kids to this event.

The kids we serve have significant problems that our wonderful staff lean into every day, but these kids have a resiliency and desire for purpose. They have unmeasurable value and this latent potential that we see glimpses’ of all the time.