



November 18, 2010

To whom it may concern:

The Juvenile Justice Project of LA and Young Adults Striving for Success have been partners to John Richie, Scrub Brush Productions, and Crescent City Connections in their production of “Murder Through the Eyes of a Child,” a documentary that examines the extremely high murder rate that plagues New Orleans from the perspective of the teenagers who are disproportionately affected. As the film moves toward release, we continue to support it and ask others to lend support in whatever way possible.

Started in 1997 to respond to the horrific conditions youth were facing in juvenile prisons throughout the state of Louisiana, the Juvenile Justice Project of LA’s mission is to transform the state’s juvenile justice system into one that builds on the strengths of young people, families, and communities to ensure children are given the greatest opportunities to grow and thrive. Specifically, we seek to improve prison conditions, increase funding for and access to alternative to incarceration programs for youth, and build the power of those most affected by the system. In order to do so, we use a campaign model that combines media strategy, policy advocacy, litigation, and youth organizing. In sharing the stories of the youth we work with, JJPL is often challenged to explain what it is like for youth growing up in violent neighborhoods and dealing with difficult choices related to their futures to people who do not come from their same communities. We believe this film will aid us in our media advocacy and stakeholder education by truly depicting the challenges our youth face everyday and the ways in which they fall into situations that lead to their incarceration, or worse yet, their deaths.

In 2008, four plaintiffs in JJPL’s lawsuit against the Youth Study Center, Orleans Parish’s unfit and dangerous juvenile detention center, established Young Adults Striving for Success, or YASS, a New Orleans-based youth group housed at JJPL that is made up of youth ages 13-24 dedicated to providing an open and positive space that allows youth to reach their full potential. The mission of YASS is to foster leadership skills, bring awareness toward issues within young people’s communities, and work as a collective internally and externally to bring about change on those issues. The filmmakers have spoken with YASS members about the project and shown them the trailer. YASS members have shared that they believe the film has the potential to really show the daily struggles they face in living in the murder capital of the world.

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In March 2010, YASS hosted The New Orleans Regional Youth Summit, which convened youth from LA, MS, AL, and GA to discuss issues of violence, drugs, poverty, and oppression in their communities and to learn about the school to prison pipeline, the criminalization of LGBTQ youth, civic engagement, effective communication between youth and adults, and other topics. Scrub Brush Productions and their youth group attended and filmed some of the workshops while also sharing information about their upcoming film with the more than 240 people in attendance.

JJPL and YASS believe “Murder Through the Eyes of a Child” is a great service to the social justice and youth development movements, a long-awaited depiction of the real lives of at-risk youth in New Orleans, and a valuable opportunity to move our own work forward. We thank Scrub Brush for their dedication to telling this story and willingness to share this resource with local organizations fighting on behalf of New Orleans youth. We ask for your support for the film, as we support it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dana Kaplan', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Dana Kaplan
Executive Director
Juvenile Justice Project of LA