



Director's Message

October 22, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

As the Director's Column mentions in this month's issue of Inside OYA, we had the privilege earlier this month of participating in Oregon's 2010 Juvenile Justice System Symposium in Eugene. The two-day event drew nearly 250 participants from throughout the state's juvenile justice and public safety communities.

During the Symposium we had the opportunity to meet with many partners and stakeholders and to learn more about their views and priorities. The most exciting aspect of the Symposium for us was that so many of the participants share OYA's goal of improving outcomes for at-risk youth.

At OYA, while preserving public safety, we hold youth accountable, encourage restitution, and teach empathy and pro-social thinking and attitudes, but we also – from the moment each youth enters our system – focus on giving youth the treatment, education and skills they need to succeed once they leave OYA. It is this focus on positive outcomes that makes all the difference for the youth in our care and custody and for those youth who transition back to the community.

We seek to engage youth in building better lives – not just to remain crime-free, but also to become positive contributors to their communities. This emphasis on positive outcomes can achieve impressive results, as four young adults demonstrated during a panel discussion the second day of the Symposium.

All of these young adults – three young men and one young woman – had gone through the juvenile justice system and been in OYA's custody. Today, they are success stories, and they credited much of their turn-around to their experiences while at OYA, and to our focus on helping them achieve positive outcomes.

They discussed what worked for them – being held accountable, being sanctioned when appropriate, making restitution, and learning new ways of thinking. Beyond that, they all talked about the importance of connecting with OYA staff who had faith in them, told them they could succeed, encouraged them to understand why they were being sanctioned, and stuck with them through difficult times. Over and over, they credited staff who had believed in them and encouraged them with making the key difference in their lives.

We work for OYA because we know that youth can change and can learn new, better ways of thinking and acting. Our job is to encourage that type of positive change and growth. And we do that primarily, as all four of the panelists pointed out, through our interactions with youth. It is so important that we treat the youth in our care and custody with respect and encouragement.

We must hold to our core values – integrity, professionalism, accountability and respect – in all that we do as we work with youth. It can be difficult and dangerous work when we are facing youth who are angry, resisting change, and acting out violently. But, even as we must be ever mindful of the need to ensure staff and youth safety, we also must continue to focus on the positive potential of the youth in our custody.

We frequently measure success by focusing on the measure of recidivism. Tracking recidivism is important, and we believe we need to expand our viewpoint and also look at ways to measure positive youth outcomes. This is a more difficult, complex process, but tracking short-term successes such as educational progress, skill development, positive peer relations and family connectivity, will give us important information about what is working right now in our treatment and education programs.

These are just some ideas for ways to measure success. We invite you to share with us your thoughts on how we can do a better job of measuring the positive outcomes we want for our youth.

And as always, we thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colan S. [unclear]". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, looping initial "C" and "S".

Colette S. Peters
Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fariborz Pakseresht". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Fariborz Pakseresht
Deputy Director