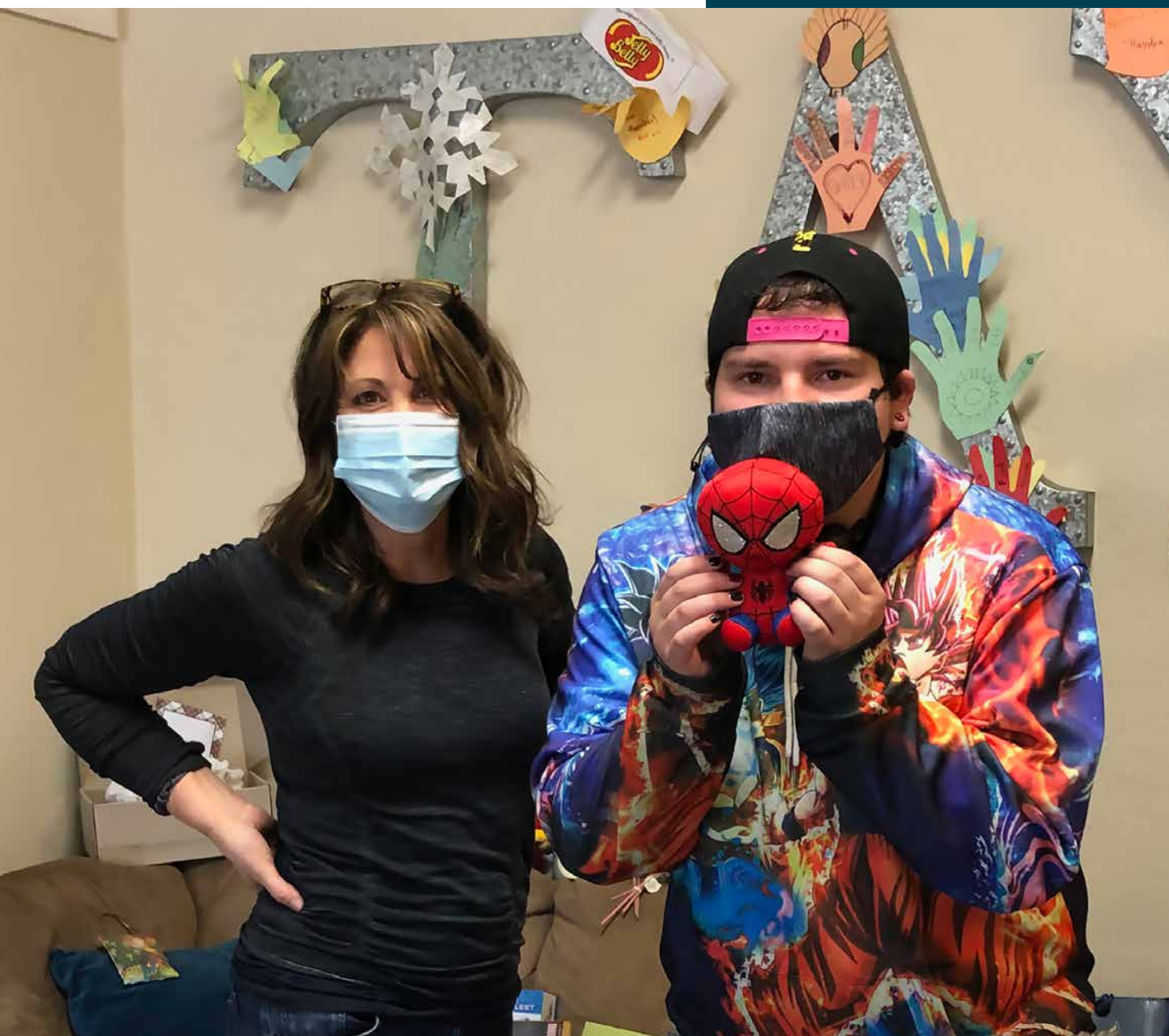


SUMMER 2021

SidebySideYouth.org



The mission of Side by Side is to walk with youth impacted by adversity toward a future with connection and meaning.



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On the cover: TAY Space Clinical Supervisor Erica Antonio and client

LETTER FROM MARY

Dear Friends,

With only a few short weeks left before I step down from the CEO role at Side by Side, I am filled with both nostalgia and hope. The past two decades with this organization working alongside remarkable colleagues have taught me so much and I know that the future for the agency is a bright one.

The CEO search process convened by our Board of Directors continues and they are interviewing a diverse pool of candidates with the goal of identifying my successor by the fall. Should the process take longer than anticipated, Side by Side's Chief Program Officer, Larry Woodland, has been tapped to step in as interim CEO on September 1 to lead the agency forward.

Following an immensely challenging year, Side by Side is emerging from the pandemic in a position of strength, ready to meet the needs of children and youth as they move beyond quarantines, masks, and shelter-in-place. New partnerships are forming and current ones are deepening – more information on those to come in the next newsletter! Referrals for our programs are strong and we are looking at options to expand incrementally in ways that meet the needs of our clients and continue to be revenue positive.

The Irene M. Hunt School expects to be back fully in-person in the fall (all but two of our students resumed in-person learning over the spring) and our TAY Space drop-in center re-opened in May. Our summer YouThrive workshops will be in-person rather than virtual, which will continue in the fall when school starts back up. Community Counseling services in both the East Bay and North Bay will remain a hybrid of telehealth and in-person sessions in accordance with client needs and wishes. The Real Alternatives transitional housing program is back to normal as well and Our Space's services are expected to be a hybrid of virtual and in-person options to maximize access opportunities for the queer and trans youth they serve.

Most importantly, our work continues to connect with our clients in unique and meaningful ways. I am delighted to share with you an in-depth look at how each of our programs support young people's development of self-advocacy and agency in their futures on pages 5 and 6. Looking back over the last two decades, I know the lives of so many young people have changed because of our incredible team at Side by Side and the support you have given them. My hope for their futures and possibilities is equally bright, because I know you will continue to walk side by side with them.

As I've said before, Side by Side will always be in my heart, and an important part of my life. I will miss all of you deeply, but I won't be far!

With my ongoing thanks,

Mary Denton, CEO



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AGENCY NEWS

NEW BOARD MEMBER

Side by Side welcomed Tim Myers to the agency's Board of Directors as of July 1. With over two decades of experience in finance and banking spanning small business, middle market, and corporate banking, Tim is currently President and Chief Operating Officer of Bank of Marin and has been a regular participant in Side by Side's Bank of Marin Golf Tournament. Tim earned his B.A. from Willamette University and a Master's in International Policy



Tim Myers (far left) at the 2021 Bank of Marin Golf Tournament with Taylor Lee, Leon Lee, and David Francke.

from Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. Past board service includes serving as Chairman of the Board of Edgewood Center for Children and Families.

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THE EVENT RAISED
OVER **\$145,000** FOR SIDE BY SIDE!
THANKS FOR A GREAT DAY ON THE LINKS!



WHOSE FUTURE IS IT ANYWAY?

SELF-ADVOCACY IS A SKILL WE ALL USE THROUGHOUT OUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIVES. SOME OF US MAY TAKE IT FOR GRANTED, BUT WITHOUT THAT SKILL, OTHERS MAY MAKE DECISIONS FOR US, WE DON'T GET WHAT WE NEED, AND WE OFTEN FEEL INVISIBLE AND UNIMPORTANT.

Many youth have not yet developed the skill of self-advocacy when they come to us. When foster youth get to Side by Side's **Real Alternatives** transitional housing program, it is often the first time they've had the opportunity to express and pursue their own interests, wants, and feelings. "They are constantly 'spoken for' by adults who are 'acting in their best interest' and their own voices are stifled," says Program Director Ahnjolique Haskins. Some say it's the first time they've ever been asked about what they want or care about. Self-advocacy becomes a critical independent living skill youth need to learn to find their way in an adult world. "We see how much this skill is needed when youth have to advocate for themselves with their county workers, probation officers, property managers, teachers, employers, family members, and peers," says Haskins.



YouThrive clients are 12-18-year-olds engaged in troubling behavior such as failing grades, truancy, drug and alcohol use or other acute behavior challenges, and most of them have not been taught the skill of self-advocacy, so it is woven into all YouThrive workshops (resumed in-person July 7!). Follow-up topics such as attitude, accountability, and responsibility help reinforce that skill.

"A lot of our youth are so afraid of rejection that it prevents them from speaking up," says YouThrive Program Supervisor Vernon Pope-Banks. "They'll say they don't care about a poor grade such as a D or an F, but the truth is, they are afraid of being told 'No' because that's all they have ever been told," he explains. One YouThrive youth recently talked to his teacher about an F, reached an agreement, and raised his grade. "He said it was scary, but next time, it will be a little bit less scary because the skill of self-advocacy is like a muscle," says Pope-Banks. "It gets stronger the more you use it."

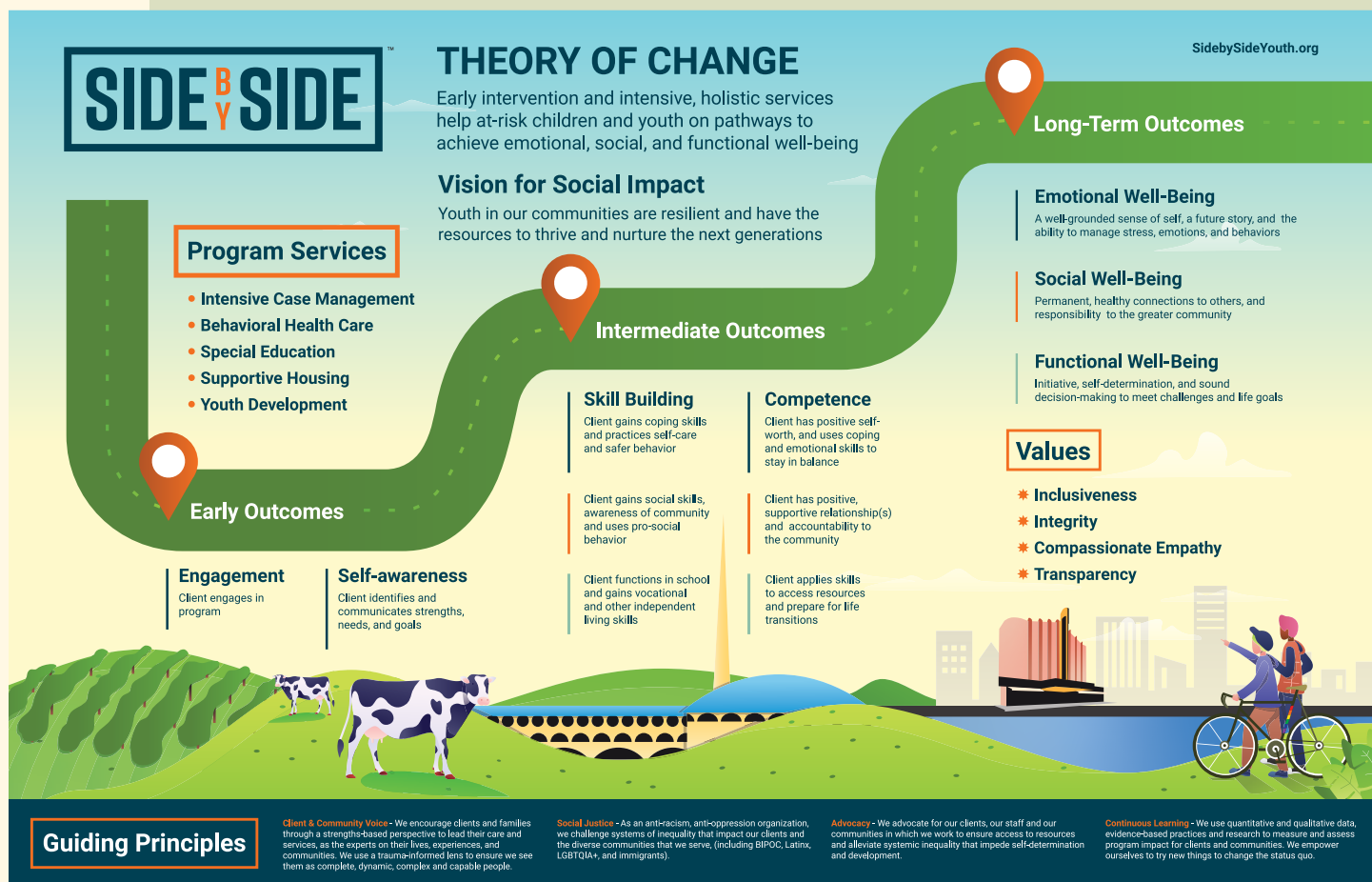
Some youth learn how to self-advocate through necessity. "Queer and trans youth self-advocate constantly," says Diego Basdeo Fitzgerald, LGBTQIA+ Services Program Manager. Basdeo Fitzgerald explains that they use this skill in everyday life when they do anything that's gender segregating, such as using the bathroom, or when they correct pronouns. "Becoming educated about your rights is empowering, and precedes the ability to self-advocate," says Basdeo Fitzgerald. **Our Space's** recent youth-driven "Know Your Rights" project explored LGBTQIA+ civil rights and the history behind those rights. "But the main goal of these workshops was to teach youth how to research and distill information, then how to use their voice."

Our Space's virtual drop-in groups during the pandemic have provided queer and trans youth with an awareness about what they are entitled to and the gap that often exists between them and those things. They discuss how to communicate in order to get their needs met. Transformative Justice Circles allow queer and trans youth the opportunity to work out conflicts in real time. "It can be intense," says Basdeo Fitzgerald, "but they learn to resolve something that at first felt impossible. And if they are feeling scared or angry, they learn how to speak from a more balanced place. That's a valuable communication skill."

When a young person is diagnosed with mental health challenges, they often feel stigma regarding their diagnosis and are embarrassed to advocate for themselves. **TAY Space** Program Director Laura Taylor says that trauma, neglect, substance use, homelessness, and immigration status create increased challenges for many. One client, raised in a family of violence, trauma, and neglect, felt invisible. TAY Space staff worked with her to slowly build her belief that she deserved to have her needs met and her voice heard. "Taking baby steps, she grew," says Taylor. From staff accompanying her on the bus to build her self-confidence, to role modeling how to set healthy boundaries with her family, she began to trust her own thoughts and feelings, and she found her voice. Today, she has completed her Associate of Arts (AA) degree and is working full-time in a bank.

Youth of all ages with mental health challenges develop the ability to self-advocate thanks to Side by Side's **Community Counseling** program. Larry Woodland, Side by Side's Chief Program Officer

Below: Side by Side's Theory of Change holds that early intervention and intensive holistic services help at-risk children and youth achieve emotional, social, and functional well-being. To view a larger version of this graphic and better understand the path that we walk with our youth and the outcomes that we support them in reaching, please visit SidebySideYouth.org/theoryofchange



described a two-step approach. First, therapists model advocating behavior for clients. "I am often on calls with teachers, county workers, principals, or medical providers on behalf of my clients," says Woodland. "When clients see their therapists interacting with other people on their behalf, they learn about self-advocacy." The second step is to teach young clients how to have those conversations on their own. Role playing, planning out what the youth will say, and addressing the fear and anxiety that often arise are all tools that help youth find the courage to use their own voice.

"To me, self advocacy means expressing my needs and enforcing my boundaries to get to mutual understanding and solving of problems."

— Kevin, TAY Space client

At **Irene M. Hunt School**, where a special education plan is combined with therapeutic supports to fit the specific needs of students with behavioral challenges, self-advocating is woven into almost every aspect of the curriculum. A proprietary behavior improvement "Step System" provides specific, attainable goals for each student to work on. As students move up Steps, they gain privileges, but in order to move up, they must explain why they feel they should graduate to the next Step. "Having students participate in their progression through the Steps develops both self-awareness and self-advocacy," says Hunt's Assistant Director of Behavior Kevin Abaya.

"We teach students how to self-advocate as we go," says Abaya. Hunt School Director Jolene Yee adds, "When a new student is feeling frustrated, we advocate for him and provide him with the tools we think might help. Next, we begin to invite him to notice his needs by asking, 'Do you need a fidget tool? Do you need to go on a walk? Do you need to take space?' The next level will be 'I see you're upset, what do you need right now?' And finally, he will learn to recognize and ask for what he needs all on his own. When our students transition back to traditional schools, it's so vital that they bring with them the skill of self-advocacy, so they can continue to get what they need in order to thrive."

That's a sentiment we can get behind across all of our programs at Side by Side.



CLIENT PROFILE

Quinlyn is an Irene M. Hunt 8th grade student, who loves to write. Her education, tailored to her specific needs, provides a therapeutic environment where she's learned valuable tools to maintain focus, regulate behavior, develop resilience, and enjoy healthy, trusting relationships.

SBS: Saying how you feel and asking for what you need can be hard at any age. What have you learned about that while you've been at Hunt?

Quinlyn: I've learned how to stand up for myself when I feel picked on or how to express myself to a teacher when I need to take some space because of how I am feeling. I like to support my friends, so I try to keep in mind how it will affect my environment if I don't express how I am feeling. I want to set a good example for younger peers as well, especially when we are around the younger classrooms.

SBS: How have the Hunt School staff helped you advocate for yourself?

Quinlyn: Ms. Chloe was always willing to check in with me, even at times when I might not have wanted to, she still wanted to be sure everything was okay. Mr. Kevin, Mr. Yee, Mr. Ken – they were all very supportive of me expressing what I felt and needed. And my therapist, Bryanne, helped me find the tools so I could progress.

SBS: If you had to pick one thing about Hunt that you love the most, what would it be?

Quinlyn: My favorite thing about Hunt would have to be my friends. While so many of my friends have come and gone, there are still so many that I love to hang out with. My best friend in the whole world is super awesome and I definitely never could be so positive without her.

SBS: What are you looking forward to in terms of the next school year?

Quinlyn: I am looking forward to working more closely with staff. Before COVID, I was peer tutoring in the younger classrooms. I like to go to the K-3rd Grade classrooms to help out. Those are the classrooms I was in when I first came to Hunt, so it feels good to return. I know what it is like for these students. I'm excited to be going into high school at Hunt during the 2022 school year as well.

CLINICIAN'S CORNER

Over the course of the last 18 months there has been unprecedented suffering, pain, and overall uncertainty everywhere. People in our communities are suffering with declines in their mental health. Sometimes, that has hit even closer to home when a loved one is in crisis. Statistics show that 1 in 5 people struggle with mental health issues. We want to help, but how?

It can be challenging and overwhelming to support someone who is struggling with mental health issues. The symptoms may be hard to discern as changes in functioning related to mental health can be subtle in some cases and cumulative in others. The stigma and shame that comes from having a family member who is in need of help is a real barrier for some as we might feel that others will see us as the cause of the problem. Even with those challenges, having the support of a trusted family member or friend will make a real difference in the lives of those you care about.

Here are a few things you can do to support someone who is dealing with mental health issues:

- 1. DO YOUR HOMEWORK:** If you think something might be wrong, find out information about symptoms, treatment, and what to expect in terms of recovery and prognosis. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org) is a great resource.
- 2. SHOW UP:** Don't disappear when things get tough. That should be a given in any situation, but particularly important when someone is in crisis. If your loved one is willing, go with them to a therapy or doctor's appointment.
- 3. ASK QUESTIONS:** Often, when people are struggling, they can feel isolated and alienated. If someone they know and trust asks questions and shows an interest, it may provide the relief they need. Ask what you can do to be supportive or helpful, don't just assume.
- 4. DON'T TRY TO FIX IT:** There is a time for advice—and that comes when someone asks for it. If they haven't asked, lean towards support. Ask what they need and what you can do.

Mental health issues can be stressful, overwhelming, and scary. If someone says "I don't want to do this," then you're probably going to make it more difficult for yourself (and for them) by demanding it. Follow the lead of the person in need of help. It will go a long way.



DONOR PROFILE: DEANNA BROCK

Deanna Brock came to our agency four years ago when her son became a student at our Irene M. Hunt School. Since then, she's joined the board, co-chaired the Reach for the Stars Gala, and become chair of Side by Side's Development & Communications Committee. She is a passionate supporter of the agency and the work we do in the community.

SBS: Tell me about your initial impressions of Side by Side and how your understanding of our agency deepened over time?

DB: I must admit, my initial impression was based on my lack of knowledge about what the agency does and the clients it serves. I mistakenly thought those buildings behind the Red Hill Shopping Center were still a residential facility for troubled boys. I was so wrong! When the Irene M. Hunt School was suggested to us for our son and I learned it was on the Sunny Hills campus, I realized that facility wasn't what I thought it was.

SBS: How did you evolve from being a parent to being a donor, and then a board member?

DB: Because of my lack of understanding of the agency, I was nervous to have my son placed there. I was worried that the school would be too regimented and not a good fit for him. Again, I was wrong. The consistency and predictability of the Hunt School gave my son less to be anxious about. And because he felt that psychological safety, he was able to be a better student and classmate. I wanted to give back to the school/agency that was providing my son with so much and making a positive impact on our lives. The more I learned about Side by Side, the more I wanted to be involved in its future success.

SBS: You've been a co-chair of our *Reach for the Stars* Gala for the past 3 years. What would you tell folks about why they should join us at our events?

DB: Besides the fact that it's always a fantastic event for a great cause?! It's such a treat to be at the Dolans, such a beautiful venue. I went to the gala even before I was on the SBS board and it was so fun and so heart-warming to hear the success stories of its past clients. And who doesn't love a great party?!

SBS: What about the Hunt School stands out for you? What makes that program so successful and impactful?

DB: Hands down, the staff make the Hunt School the success that it is. The Hunt staff are so dedicated and so in tune with each student's

needs – it really is amazing. Ben recently graduated from Hunt and to see all the staff and students rally around my son and congratulate him on his accomplishments was inspiring.

SBS: Besides the Hunt School, what aspect of the work that Side by Side does do you find the most meaningful?

DB: What I love the most about the work that Side by Side does is that our clients are treated with respect and dignity...we want them to feel and believe that they matter. My hope is that through our services and providing our youth a safe and caring place to go, that they gain the skills and confidence to show the world who they are and what they are capable of. We help them see that "Impossible" really can be "I'm possible."

SBS: What do you see as the larger picture of Side by Side's work?

DB: I've seen firsthand the impact the Hunt School has and have heard what our programs do for other youth. It is amazing work that makes a difference in these kids' lives. And that difference has a ripple effect...when our clients are leading meaningful lives, their family, friends, and community benefit.

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