

From: Michael Howe <mhowe@stanford.edu>
To: cphewitt@sierrahealth.org
Sent: Wednesday, April 13, 2011 8:20 AM
Subject: Sacramento Steps Forward

Dear Chet,

It has been too long since we last spoke. I hope you, Laura and the boys are doing well. Our Granddaughter just gave birth to our first Great Grandson, Michael Aaron Parziale.

Having worked with you to make Safe Passages one of the more successful public/non-profit joint powers authority that continues to coordinate youth development activities in Oakland, we both know the challenges communities face in applying that model. Selection of such an effort's leader is probably the most immediate and important tasks the collaborative will face.

To that end I am writing in support of Robert Tobin's candidacy for the Executive Director position at Sacramento Steps Forward. I believe he has the background, experience, determination and passion needed to implement the homeless intervention strategy outlined by the JPA.

As you may recall, I founded the University of San Francisco's Research Institute in the late 1960's where Tobin quickly became a project leader. The work that Robert undertook under my guidance was based upon the work I did while I was one of the founding board members of San Francisco's Central City Hospitality House located in the Tenderloin District. After graduation Robert became the CEO of Hospitality House where he successfully grew and developed their programs for over a decade – being the most successful, innovative and longest serving executive director in its history.

In both these capacities along with the others I have observed during our long acquaintance, Tobin has shown unswerving dedication to those people who are at greatest risk and have the most problems – welfare recipients, people with physical disabilities, drug addicts, disenfranchised youth and, the most confounding of all these – those who are homeless. He has consistently taken a “community development” rather than “social service” approach whereby people are helped to identify their needs and then supported in meeting those needs without losing their dignity. In all this, Tobin has shown a combination of commitment, perseverance and creativity that is increasingly rare at a time when it is needed most.

I suspect you found as I did when I visited the Cottage Housing Project a number of years ago different and innovative solutions to the problem of homelessness being practiced at Cottages. All agencies strive for meaningful engagement with their program's consumers, but few actually achieve it and fewer still among those that work with populations who are the most difficult to reach and serve. It was immediately obvious to me when I met Gary, the homeless parolee leading my tour of the facility, that he was not only fully engaged in improving himself as well as the program and community of which he was a part. I could see by observing his demeanor and relationships with his peers that he was an active participant rather than passive recipient at Cottages. Candidly, this was an unprecedented experience for me after the decades of site visits around the country.

It is easier to talk about creating a national model than to do it, and I was not surprised to find Cottage Housing had done the latter. In a field where there is often more motion than movement, Robert Tobin generated during his tenure the leadership, entrepreneurship, passion, media interest, political and financial support needed to do the hardest of things: create change. You would do well to engage his talents to lead your program.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely, Mike

Michael Howe
Chair, National Task Force on Community Leadership
John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities
Stanford University
505 Lasuen Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-3083

Phone (415-488-4611)

FAX (415-488-9524)

mhowe@stanford.edu