

Lifting All Boats in Our Field

By Thomas Showalter

Standing before long boats built of bamboo and coffee filters by young people, I felt viscerally the artistry that went into this project – and the human potential we leave on the table as a country when we don't find ways to support all young people on their journey to self-sufficiency.

The pictures in this issue of *YouthNotes* come from the California Family Life Center. The boats are filled with letters by young people to their past selves, powerful warnings about the challenges they will face, better paths that could have been taken, and what future lies in store for them.

Mary Jo Ramirez, the director of CFLC; Michele Worth, CFLC's resident art teacher; and others at CFLC were among the many NYEC members I had the privilege of meeting during a trip to California earlier this month.

Another highlight of the trip for me was the chance to sit with over 20 youth advocates from city agencies, nonprofits large and small, and at least one social enterprise. The gathering was organized by longtime NYEC members Glenn Eagleson, Kevin Hickey, and Larry Robbin; Glenn and Kevin were in attendance, and gave powerful testimonies about what NYEC has meant to them over the years. I previewed some of the work that I hope NYEC will be undertaking this year, but most enjoyable for me was the vigorous conversation that erupted about WIOA implementation in California – with a strong subtext of, What could those DC types have been thinking when they wrote this?

It's my hope that, through the Forum, our publications, and the Peer Learning Networks, NYEC can give all of you an inside view into how high-performing programs do what they do, and can be a place where your biggest questions can be addressed.

While NYEC members are working at the forefront of our field, I also visited WIBs and organizations that are still struggling with what it means to support and empower young people with multiple barriers to employment.

For example, on my trip through California I had a WIB staffer explain in detail how he selectively enrolls easier-to-serve jobseekers. I met senior one-stop staff who had never heard of WIOA. And I heard numerous stories about the challenges and consequences of implementing California's new statewide case-management and reporting system, CalJOBS: a dearth of training, too much (or too little) information in the system, and organizations that are clinging to old systems and re-inputting data into CalJOBS.

NYEC, and NYEC members, are ideally positioned to support these organizations as they educate staff, make tough transitions, and implement best practices. **You're the best ambassadors that NYEC has.** In YouthNotes I've linked to NYEC's one-pager, which contains information on joining, as well as other recent resources that demonstrate the value of membership. Please share these with colleagues who may be interested in NYEC or may benefit from joining our community.

As always, if you have any questions, or just want to talk, feel free to reach out to me at Thomas.showalter@nyec.org.