

SOAR *for Youth*

Support, Opportunities, and Rapport

December 5, 2017

Dear Friends,

Nine years ago, after more than a decade of managing small and large information technology (IT) departments, including those in Fortune 500 companies, education and government institutions, I decided to embark on a new career. With the help of my former colleagues at the University of California, Berkeley SOAR for Youth was established in February 2009 to provide the intense training and motivation that enables teen aged foster youth to finish high school, attend college, and succeed in life with a purpose. We want the young people to receive the high quality support, opportunities and rapport that they need to become independent and productive members of our society.

Why would a person who enjoyed a fulfilling management career in IT move to work in foster youth services with no pay and many challenges? The inspiration came when a manager in my department told me how he and his siblings were abused after their parents died and his aunt, their foster parent, took them in. His story opened my eyes and my soul to the needs of these children.

SOAR is carrying out its mission exceedingly well. 96% of SOAR youths have graduated from high school (compared to a 50% national average for foster youth), and 93% of these graduates have gone to college (compared to a national average of 10%). Our summer program graduates have returned to serve as Junior Counselors, Counselors, and to lead youth workshops. At SOAR events our young people open up. They build lasting friendships. They grow academically. They walk away wanting to recommend our program to other foster youth. With a large pool of committed volunteers and no paid employees (including myself), and by leveraging community resources to the maximum, more than 90 cents of every general expenditure dollar that SOAR has spent directly benefited our young participants.

Our program is grounded in the active engagement of many volunteers, including professionals and student mentors. From donors to university sponsors to local vendors and the many individuals who donate their time and expertise, we believe that our caring presence and respectful yet firm guidance show our participants that their commitment and efforts will result in success. These young people have experienced many disappointments in their lives; only by demonstrating the collective action of a broad community of supporters and leaders can we gain their trust and begin to foster true change for their futures.

This is the best “paying” job I have had. I invite you to partner with SOAR for Youth. The gifts we receive are investments that will bring great returns in many ways, not the least of which is hope for a bright future for these kids. Please consider volunteering (http://www.soarfor youth.org/involved_volunteer.php) or making a tax-deductible contribution (http://www.soarfor youth.org/involved_donate.php) to SOAR today.

Thank you for your consideration in giving foster youth a chance to SOAR.

Sincerely,

Diana Brown
President