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Rising to New Heights

JANNYDA SRE FIRST participated in the Boys and Girls Club of Pomona Valley the summer before her freshman year of high school and has been intimately involved ever since. She attributes the life affirming lessons and incalculable benefits of the organization to her bright future ahead as she proudly soldiers through her freshman year at UCLA.

The Boys and Girls Club is her home and everyone at the club is her family. She reflects, “They have supported me and pushed me to achieve greatness. I have learned many crucial life skills and gained numerous experiences that are definitely life changing.”

Life for Jannyda before the club was not so bright and sunny. She grew up in the projects in a small apartment with her mother and two brothers. Life was difficult enough being the youngest and the only girl. “I never knew my father,” she recalls. “But I always wanted to.”

As for the necessities, her mother did the best she could with what they had—she acknowledges that mom provided the basics, “a roof over my head, clothes on my back, and food in my stomach.”

“But the one thing that she did not provide was affection,” Jannyda continued. “She always held back her feelings from me. I never knew why, and until this day, I’m still not quite sure.”

Jannyda’s isolation was not limited to affection, for the entirety of her childhood, she was kept locked in the small apartment with her brothers anytime they weren’t attending school.



They were essentially shutoff from the outside world. Into her early high school years she wasn’t afforded any extra-curricular activities, a social life or any friends whatsoever.

“It was like living in a cage,” she remembers with great sadness. “I was never given the opportunity to hang

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out with friends after school or even have sleepovers. We did not have cable television. We did not have internet. We did not have freedom. My mother restricted everything.”

Their living space was sparse and cramped, she remembers with sorrow, “It literally felt like I was living inside a cage.”

Compounding her living situation, when she was at school, she was

embarrassed by life she had no control over. “We were not like other families. My mother was incapable of work, so we lived off of government assistance my entire life. We had social security (SSI), medical, food stamps, and Section 8 housing,” she explained.

She was mortified to have to wear ratty hand-me-down clothing most of the time. And the worst part was they were from her brothers.

Most years it was difficult for her mother to pay all of the essential bills. Jannyda carried such shame as a child, “People would mock me, taunt me, and just destroy my self-esteem.”

It wasn’t until she found the Boys and Girls Club that her life began to finally change for the better. “It was the

About the VCLF of the SFVBA

The Valley Community Legal Foundation is the charitable arm of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association. The Foundation’s mission is to support the legal needs of the youth, victims of domestic violence, and veterans of the San Fernando Valley. The Foundation also provides educational grants to qualified students pursuing legal careers. The Foundation relies on donations to fund its work. To donate to the VCLF or to learn more, visit www.thevclf.org and help us make a difference in our community.

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club that changed it all and showed me that I should use the things I dislike about my lifestyle as motivation to aim for an even better lifestyle in my future and the future of my own family.”

In 2014, she was nominated to be the Boys and Girls Club of Pomona Valley’s 2014-2015 Youth of the Year. Some of her peers told her that she should not be the Boys and Girls Club’s representative because of her underprivileged and uncouth upbringing. Others picked on her “bad habits” and claimed that she did not fit the role of “Youth of the Year.”

Jannyda’s Teen Director, Lance Holliday, who nominated her, always believed in her. He encouraged her to continue to thrive and prove to everyone who doubted her that she could rise to the honor. Jannyda remembered, “He taught me how to be humble but to not let them silence me. He showed me that my story can make a big impact and let my voice move the people. I was the club’s Youth of the Year for two years and I hold that title proudly because I’ve worked for it. I worked to change myself as a whole. I wanted to be better. I wanted to have a better attitude, a better view, and simply be a better person. I didn’t want to let the negativity going on at home to affect me anymore.”

The Boys and Girls Club taught her so many things about life and how to overcome her own personal struggles. They also taught her how to be a better person through community service. “I didn’t want any of the other people around me to suffer anymore. I wanted everyone—children, teens, and even adults—to understand that there is always a helping hand. You may not find it at home, you may not find it at school, you may not even find it within the circle of your friends, but you will definitely find it at the club. At the club, each and every one of us is special in our own way and we have different potentials.

“The club showed me that I had the potential to make an impact among our youth and myself. I have to admit, sometimes I did not want to be the bigger person or hold my tongue when people say hurtful things to me and constantly bring me down. And I know a lot of people can relate. But Victor Caceres, the Executive Director at my club, told me that, ‘Sometimes we simply have to brush it off because the most successful people fight the toughest battles. Not all battles were won, but that did not stop them.’ ”


“The club, the members, and the community,” Jannyda said, “are my motivation.”

VCLF AT WORK

Jannyda is just one of more than 3,000 local kids helped by Boys and Girls Clubs, funded in part by Valley attorneys through their support of the VCLF. Every year the VCLF supports the Boys and Girls Club with financial contributions, from which real and positive results come, like the success of Jannyda Sre.

“The Boys and Girls Club is a great example of an organization the VCLF proudly supports,” says VCLF President Laurence Kaldor. “They are providing great and necessary services to our community, and we are proud to fund their efforts.”

It’s estimated that helping someone like Jannyda costs about \$590 per year. That’s right, just \$590, to help a child, impacted by life’s challenges, a casualty of the impoverished sectors of our society, yet turning out to be a shining star.

“There are a lot of Jannydas out there in the San Fernando Valley,” says Kaldor. “We’d like to help as many as possible. We love getting large corporate donations, but here’s a very concrete way an individual, an attorney, a judge, or a businessperson can make a real difference. For a donation of \$590, we can help another Jannyda right now.” 

DEFAMATION

The Play Comes to the San Fernando Valley

By Anngel Benoun, VCLF Board Member

THE VALLEY COMMUNITY LEGAL Foundation of the San Fernando Valley Bar Association and PESA's Teen Court Project for Justice is proud to bring the play Defamation to the San Fernando Valley on Monday, February 13, 2017. The performance will be attended by the Law Magnets of Reseda High School and James Monroe High School and high schools participating in PESA's programs, including John Burroughs, Grant, Van Nuys, Taft, Canoga Park, Northridge Academy, and San Fernando High.


Nationally acclaimed, Defamation is a riveting, brilliant and shifting jigsaw puzzle of a courtroom drama that explores the highly charged issues of race, religion, gender, class and the law with a twist...the student audience is the jury and through post-show discussions and deliberations, gives them a unique opportunity to engage in civil discourse about the pressing issues of the day. Written by playwright Todd Logan, Defamation opened in November 2010 and has played to countless students audiences throughout the United States.

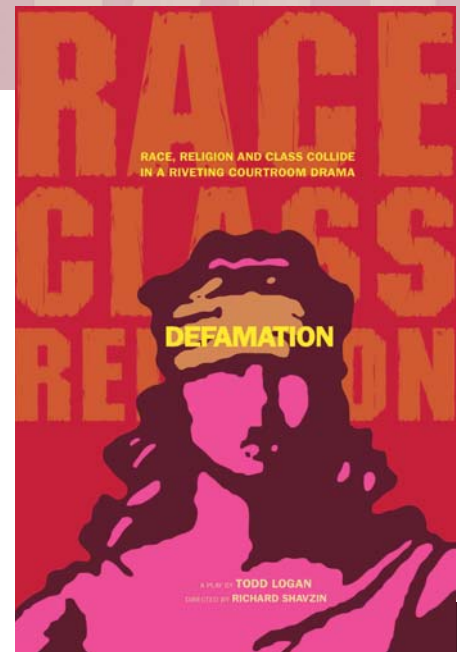
SFVBA President Kira Masteller has long had a passion for fostering diversity within the Association and the community and the first Bar committee she served on was the Diversity Committee (now called the Inclusion & Diversity Committee). She said a mission of "the bar association, the judiciary, the school district and the community at large is to see diversity on the Bench, legal careers and in law enforcement, and when I read about the play and the interactive participation with a judge and the cast, I knew this would be a fantastic opportunity to allow students to actively participate in the learning and the teaching of acceptance of differences."

VCLF President Laurence Kaldor adds, "This is exactly the type of live interactive educational experience our young legal aspirants need in order to awaken and expound the creative aspects of their legal instruction. Performances such as these bring to life the colorful world of the legal practice while highlighting its complexity and importance within our societal evolution, especially with regard to how our legal system relates to our civil liberties. It is our sincerest privilege to continue to avail our Valley youth to opportunities such as this."

"Los Angeles is a melting pot of all peoples and yet somehow in this greatly diverse San Fernando Valley, we have pockets of intolerance and bias that we need to evolve out of," Masteller states, adding "I, along with the Bar Association and VCLF, are part of the necessary change in our community to be inclusive and to celebrate the diverse population that we are."

How can SFVBA members help? Members may sponsor student admission to the event to be held at St. Bernadine's Church in Woodland Hills. Sponsorship of a student is as little as \$15 for one student and only \$10 per student if sponsoring 10 or more students. For more information on sponsorships, contact Anngel Benoun at anngel4re@earthlink.net or wait for email blast coming to your inbox soon.

Kira's message to the membership is simple, "How can we miss the opportunity to bring the learning gift of Defamation to our children so they may become leaders in diversity, setting an example for their families, peers, city, state and country? We can't and that opportunity is here because of our volunteers and members and our courage to dream big!" 



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with Participation from
PESA Teen Court
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*Sponsor a student
for as little as \$15 to
attend Defamation on
February 13, 2017.*

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

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