

## **Community Youth Program Director's Report, Lisa Freeman**

2019 marked my first six months on the job as your Community Youth Program Director! I officially started my job on June 1st and immediately began building relationships in the St. John's community and getting our program requests through the appropriate parish channels. I spent most of the summer months developing the program alongside the parish, including submitting both a budget and a program proposal to the Vestry, and space use proposal to the Architecture and Space Use Committee. I spent significant time having one-on-one meetings with people in the community connected to youth work and participating in local community organizing efforts on issues such as mental health and youth violence that impact the lives of the youth in our area. This led to a busy whirlwind of a summer, as I was adapting to both a new job, a new community, and wanting to do all that I could to learn about Aptos and see how our program was going to fit a need in our community.

In the fall, I began my work at Aptos Junior High School and received a warm, enthusiastic welcome by teachers, students, and support staff there. It was essential to me as a leader of this program to know what it was like to walk the halls at Aptos Junior High, spend time in classrooms, and hear stories from both teachers and students of the challenges they face. I wanted to build the type of collaborative school partnership for a youth program to thrive and make our program support the school as well. This is often the slow work of organizing. Still, I know successful grassroots programs like ours are built on relationships and partnerships and that these early school interactions are crucial for the success of our program. I had the opportunity to work closely with both the Pride Club and the Leadership class at AJHS and enjoyed working closely with Aptos Community Youth Committee member and AJHS teacher Karen Elerick. I also continued to meet monthly with the three high school students who served on our committee as we continued to dream about the program and problem-solve together.

My first six months of the job have also kept me busy with administrative items necessary to get our program off the ground, including program policy development, collaborating with the finance committee to get financial policies in place for our program, creating legal forms for parent registration and adult volunteers, and taking on new job responsibilities as a result. The diocese proved to be an excellent resource for me in this process along with parish attorneys and Mother Tracy. Protecting and keeping our youth safe is of high importance to me, and I knew our program needed these necessary items completed before starting our program.

By November, it was time for us to start thinking about launching our program with a party before the end of the year. I began organizing a group of youth in Karen Elerick's leadership class and high school students from Aptos High School who were passionate about both the program and the party. The youth chose the theme of "Cozy Winterland," given the time of year the party was happening. We officially launched the Aptos Community Youth Program on December 13th with a party on the St. John's campus where 80 youth enjoyed a fire pit, painting a 10-foot #BETHECHANGE art mural, sipping hot chocolate, eating delicious tacos, making paper cranes led by an artist from the Santa Cruz Arts Council, dancing, taking polaroid photos, and enjoying the newly furnished youth center at St. John's that the high school committee members designed back in September. It was a wonderful evening and helped generate significant support and excitement around the program.

Overall, 2019 was a year where I saw an inclusive and vibrant spirit show up in the many places developing this program has taken me. Whether it was in a school classroom, on our parish

campus, or in meeting with leaders out in the community talking about the issues that impact my youth, all of this has led to a wonderful start of our program.

Most importantly, I see the youth involved in this program becoming the compassionate, justice-minded, and courageous leaders our community and world needs, and I can't wait for what is in store for next year.

Respectfully submitted,

*Lisa Freeman*