



TENNESSEE JUSTICE CENTER

Advocates for Families in Need

301 Charlotte Avenue, Nashville, TN 37201

Phone: (615)255-0331 Fax: (615)255-0354

e-mail: gbonnyman@tnjustice.org website: www.tnjustice.org

November 2010

Dear Friend of the Tennessee Justice Center:

In a time of anger and division, TJC works to build community. In a time of personal crisis for many Tennesseans, TJC works to improve lives. Thanks to your generosity and to the response of the extraordinary Tennesseans we serve, these efforts are richly rewarded.

Never more so than the other day, when Marvin Berry called to say, "This is the happiest day of my life!" We have worked with Marvin for over a decade, and his file is flagged to keep "Always Open." That's because the challenges in Marvin's life are unrelenting. The victim of a shooting accident when a small child, he is paralyzed from the neck down. Now in his 30's, Marvin is one of the most courageous, inspiring people I know. He and his doctors have fought protracted battles with TennCare HMOs to get the care he needs. Denials of care have brought him to the brink of death several times, requiring extended hospital stays to treat pneumonia and bedsores. Worse, this outgoing, talented young man has endured years of isolation and forced inactivity that would embitter most of us and make us give up on life.

Marvin doesn't do bitterness, though, and there's no quit in him. He was calling with two pieces of good news. The bed sore that had brought him low for nearly three years had finally healed. Better still, he had just learned that he had earned a favorable law school admission test score and was scheduled for an admissions interview that he hoped would clear the way to attending law school. He called us even before he phoned his mother, because he said he would not have made it that far without TJC's help.

Five years ago, we asked Marvin to speak at TJC's Tenth Anniversary reception. It was the first public speaking he had ever done and he was terrified. We believed in Marvin far more than he believed in himself. His compelling performance gave him new confidence and confirmed his resolve to become a lawyer. Five years and many struggles would ensue to bring his dream within reach. During the prolonged isolation, confined to his apartment by the bed sore and battling despair, he confided that he would look at a photograph of himself as TJC's spokesman to remind himself that he would prevail. And prevail he will – his tenacity and compassion will make him a fine lawyer who will give much to his clients and his community.

Marvin is one of the hundreds of Tennesseans of all ages that TJC serves each year. We carefully track expenditures on each case. Here's a sampling of how TJC used your gifts:

- \$50 restored TennCare for toddlers Addleigh and Kennedi of Kingston Springs, correcting a state error that had disrupted the twins' treatment for seizure disorders.
- \$200 won 13-year old Trevor of Greeneville the home nursing that enables him to live with his family instead of in an institution.
- \$325 obtained a wheelchair for 3 year old Terrell of Memphis, removing roadblocks that had stymied his doctors and family for 7 months.

- \$400 won Darius of Chattanooga life-saving brain surgery that had been cancelled at the last minute when his insurance was wrongfully terminated.

Our individual clients enable us to help many thousands of others, too. Marvin, for example, testified in a class action that laid the foundation for Tennessee's new program of home and community-based services, known as CHOICES, that offers thousands of seniors and Tennesseans with disabilities alternatives to institutionalization in nursing homes.

In the past year, guided by the experiences of our individual clients, TJC won other systemic gains that benefited hard-pressed families throughout Tennessee:

- Correcting a state policy that wrongly denied TennCare coverage to many people receiving Social Security disability insurance.
- Identifying a widespread failure to provide appropriate mental health follow-up for children in foster care.
- In the wake of the May floods, persuading state and federal officials to extend disaster food stamps to more than 1,000 families in 46 counties.
- Preventing the withdrawal of in-home services for people contending with severe mental and physical disabilities.
- Through behind-the-scenes technical assistance, quietly helping garner essential federal funding for public hospitals in Memphis and Nashville.
- Focusing national attention on Tennessee as the only state to close enrollment in its health insurance program for children, and thereby prompting state officials to reopen CoverKids.

The challenges and opportunities that lie ahead are daunting. A billion dollar state budget shortfall threatens Tennessee's already frayed social safety net. Implementation of health reform presents complex technical challenges. TJC's experience with TennCare and expertise in the arcane details of federal health care financing equip this small organization to play an oversized role. TJC staff members already serve on several national and state technical advisory committees, enabling us to benefit many people in and beyond Tennessee.

In all of our efforts, extraordinary clients like Marvin Berry keep TJC grounded. They inspire us to keep working to build a community that is more inclusive, more loving, more just. And they teach us *so much* about persistence.

So do you. The generous support of so many compassionate donors has sustained TJC for fifteen years, enabling us to operate without the constraints, or security, of government funding. TJC has labeled Marvin's file and the files of many other extraordinary Tennesseans as "Always Open," in the confidence that our wonderful community of support will enable TJC to be there for them when they need us.

Thank you again for enabling TJC to work for the ideals we all hold dear. Please continue to be an indispensable partner in our work for justice.

Sincerely yours,

Gordon Bonnyman
Executive Director