

Public Oversight Hearing on Improving School Attendance: Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and the Implementation of Reform Initiatives

ATTACHMENT 1

Show Up, Stand Out Parent Testimonial Stories

Marquia Bailey

For Marquia Bailey and her three kids, life hasn't always been easy. Without a steady job, moving from place to place and being a single mom, getting the kids to school on time every day was a real challenge. Being late was common but she never thought it was serious or affecting their education, until she was invited to join a breakfast club at her children's school by Diane Hall, a caseworker with Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative, at Ketcham Elementary.

About a year ago, Diane was passing out flyers to parents about the breakfast club she was starting at the school as part of the Show Up, Stand Out program. Ms. Hall invited her and Marquia decided to join. In time, the club -- and Ms. Hall -- have become a critical support system for this struggling single mother.

The breakfast club taught Marquia that she was not alone, that there were other parents who were going through similar challenges. They talk about parenting and also planning for the future, including college for their kids. Marquia learned that when her kids were late to school, they missed out on important learning opportunities and it was imperative for them to be on time.

Since then, the bond between Marquia and Ms. Hall has grown, because as this mother states, "there is a relationship of trust and understanding. Whether it is getting help with SmartTrip cards for transportation, uniforms for the children or book bags and school supplies, I know Ms. Hall is there for me and my children. All I need to do is ask."

Now that Marquia is part of this community of parents at school, things have changed for her children as well. They like to see their mom at school interacting with other parents and teachers. They leave the house early in the morning so they can take at least three buses to get to school on time. This is the new norm for them now that their mom knows how important it is for them now, and for their future.

This simple morning gathering changed Marquia's whole outlook, and brought her into a community of parents who support each other. She said the support and resources available through SUSO brought her back on track.

Melinda Harris-Bryant

Melinda has known her share of loss. From the loss of her father, her home to fire, to the most difficult of losses – a child. Keeping track of her children's attendance at school was not high up on the list of priorities. There were days when she didn't know where to turn for help. That changed when she received a phone call from Catholic Charities and the Show Up, Stand Out program, because her children had been reported truant.

It has been three years now that Melinda has been working with Johnetta Mosley, her SUSO case manager from Catholic Charities, and it has made a difference for the whole family. With help from Ms. Mosley, she says she is now able to ensure that her children received a good education.

Ms. Mosley helped this mother get mental health counseling, helped with the logistics and costs of getting her children to school on time, and found temporary housing for the family through Catholic Charities. She also helped with getting clean uniforms for school. This connection to much needed services was a turning point in getting Melinda on the right track.

Shortly after she started getting help from Mosley, she wanted to get her daughter an IEP at school. Mosley facilitated the meetings and was able to assist in getting this education program for Melinda's daughter, making sure that the child's needs were met.

With strength and faith, Melinda works with Mosely every day to help her overcome the personal challenges that affect her children. She is now strong, healthy and stable, and can in turn provide her children with what they need to get to school and thrive. She just recently completed her own college degree, and Mosley was there for her at graduation.

Latonya

My name is Latonya. I have four children – a 21-year old son and three daughters aged 18, 7 and 2. Last year was a very hard year for my family. I was out of work, and we were homeless. Not knowing where you're going to be staying each night makes everything more difficult. Constantly on the move, staying with friends and family, moving all the time with my little girls – we lost a lot of things. Every house had different rules. Things were terrible. Getting Destiny, my first grader, to school every day just was not always possible. The worst part was the feeling that I couldn't provide. I didn't really know what the next step was. We were living in this limbo – just trying to get by and survive day to day. This went on for a full year.

One day I got connected to a program through the school, called *Show Up, Stand Out*, because they noticed how many days Destiny had missed from class. I was skeptical at first, but then I met Ms. Bullock, the *Show Up, Stand Out* family worker from Collaborative Solutions for Communities, and she was someone who understood me. She sat down with me at the school and explained that she wasn't Child Protective Services, she was my new advocate. I told her everything – about our family being homeless, about needing to get a steady job and needing a way to feel steady again. Ms. Bullock visited me at home, and we began to meet and talk regularly on the phone – sometimes twice or three times a week.

My daughter is extremely bright. Even though she'd been missing lots of class, her grades were very high, and after seeing that and talking to me, Ms. Bullock was determined to fight for us. She explained to the principals about our situation and helped me get the opportunity to turn things around on my own.

She helped me come up with a plan to get a stable place to live – which is where I am now, living with my uncle and paying rent; and she helped me put my work history together in a resume that helped me get my new job.

Destiny doesn't have a problem with attendance this year, and she's doing really well in school. I would definitely tell other parents to go to *Show Up, Stand Out* and learn more about it. The people there – like Ms. Bullock – are just good people, and the support they offer really works. I feel very thankful to have Ms. Bullock as my advocate and my friend.

Esperanza *names changed

Esperanza Martinez* is a single mom with two children, Diego*, a 5th grader and Isabella* a 1st grader. Their lives were in transition and the children were not attending school regularly. A SUSO team member met with the family two times a month at their home to teach both the mother and children skill sets to improve their lives and help the children to get to school daily.

Their struggles included:

- Undocumented Hispanic Family
- Homeless
- Job for less than 40 hours a week and 1 hour commute
- Domestic violence resulting in a dissolved relationship with the father
- Power struggle with Diego to get to school, said he hates school
- Paying rent
- Mother and father keeping children out of school to spend time with them.

Diego's school set up a meeting with a SUSO community based organization called Georgia Avenue Family Support Collaborative to meet with Esperanza to learn how they could help with her struggles.

How SUSO provided help:

- Matched with a support worker who was a woman
- Help to prioritize education for the children
- Figured out expectations for both children
- Assigned a student mentor to Diego for a positive male role model
- Esperanza joined a parent group to be surrounded by a support system
- Found another family to share a home with to help with rent
- Embraced natural strengths to find a job for Esperanza
- Got medical attention for Isabella and set up getting her glasses

Results and closure:

- Diego started going to school, was matched with the soccer coach as a mentor and he joined the soccer team and got great grades.
- Isabella's medical issues are under control.
- Esperanza was left with a solid "family unit" to live with, a job closer to home, the skills to network and a support system.