



# JPA

Juvenile Protective Association



**February 2018**

Dear Friends

Last month JPA looked at how mentors impact the lives of young teens on their way to high school. The transition from middle to high school would not be familiar to many of us today. The stakes are much higher: The 8th graders we work with face a series of potential risks — homelessness, gangs, violence, risky behaviors — that could derail not only their education but their lives. Few of us have had to face so many high stakes situations at such a young age.

Last week, I attended an information session on the “Interrupters” a program offered by Cure Violence. I thought a lot about how important it is to be a helpful, neutral ally. The men and women members of the Interrupters program are on call 24/7 to help de-escalate retaliatory violence. Since the beginning of this year, they have responded to over 1,500 calls. One of the presenters said that most of the young men he supports don’t want to retaliate when a friend or loved one is injured, but they think it’s expected of them by their peers. The “Interrupters” step into the middle of some of the tensest and potentially most violent situations imaginable. Some of them work with families or groups for up to two years. They don’t call themselves mentors but what they are doing is guiding, caring about and supporting young people in crisis. That sounds like mentoring to me.

The connection between our work and theirs is this: We both model the kind of behaviors that can soothe uncertainty, fear, loss and even anger by dispelling the notion that peers can dictate our behaviors and set expectations for us. The best mentors don’t steer their mentees, they guide them by providing the support, time, and space to reflect on what really matters when we are faced with potentially challenging or violent choices.

They help us reflect on our feelings and actions by honoring our best instincts about ourselves and about others. Mentors give us the freedom to make better decisions. That’s good for all of us.

*Karen*