

## **Witnessing Event at Watson House: A Half-Way Home for “Delinquent” Youth**

I wanted to tell you about a mini witnessing event I did at Watson House. Remember I mentioned how when a kid graduates, the ceremony is insufficient? Ali, a 20-year old who has been there way too long just because the system has failed him, finally got permission to leave on Tuesday. I wrote a formal witness message and asked if it was okay if I delivered it in front of the staff and residents. I talked about Ali's achievements there - enduring, speaking truth to power, honoring himself and us with his leadership skills, using his words in poetry and rap to express what was in his heart, taking risks to look within himself for the source of his problems and in doing so, experiencing the strength and hope that comes from the knowledge that the solution lies there as well. Then I presented him with three gifts: a small candle, symbolizing light that cannot be diminished in the sharing; a necklace with the word Inspire on a chain, for how much he's inspired me and others with his stories; and a wooden bead from Africa to honor his roots and as a reminder that he comes from something and that he is not alone. I passed the bead around, asking the kids and staff to hold the bead while saying a word or phrase about Ali to "go into" the bead, so that he can take the power of their words with him. They were totally silent and attentive to the whole thing, and loved the bead passing. They said things like "Power", "endurance", "freedom", "courage". Afterward several kids asked if they would all be having the ceremony when they left. One resident said he had an idea of what he wanted his gifts to be. At the very end I read the mittra: May you be safe from harm, May you be peaceful and happy, May you be healthy and strong; May you be free from suffering. I gave him the whole "speech" - ceremony and witnessing - on a piece of heavy, ceremonial type paper in a folder. I had a feeling it was a great success for him and the witnesses. Now I have to come up with two more tomorrow!!

Glenda Alderman