

TELLING IT AT TEE TIME

charity golf outing benefits youth outreach program

On July 21st **Telling It** was the beneficiary of the 2015 Howard S. Holmes II Charity Golf Invitational. Holmes, a philanthropist in his mid-twenties, is the son of Howdy & Carole Holmes of the Chelsea Milling Company, home of "JIFFY" mixes. Our Presenting Sponsors were Victory Automotive Group and the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office, Jerry L. Clayton, Sheriff. The weather was perfect and the course was in pristine condition for this sold out event. For the vast majority of the golfers, this was their introduction to **Telling It**.

Washtenaw Co. Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton provided a sobering overview of the challenges faced by the youth in our communities, highlighting the reasons he believes in and supports **Telling It**. State Representative David E. Rutledge (D-Superior Township) also in attendance, shared his plans for a new collaborative initiative in response to the recent gang-related murders involving young people in Ypsilanti. Representative Rutledge expressed that he was impressed by **Telling It's** impact and its innovative approach to supporting children and teens.

...we are not giving a voice to the voiceless but rather understanding that each youngster has an existing voice and is an expert of their own experience. Our job is to support their exploration of how best to be heard.

The following is an excerpt from the speech delivered by Deb Gordon-Gurfinkel, Telling It Founder and Director:

Telling It (TI) has come a long way since 2002 when the seeds of the idea for the program were first germinating. Since that time we have served more than 700 youth ages six to 18 years old through long-term partnerships with organizations such as SOS Community Services, Avalon Housing, the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office and Parkridge Community Center.

This coming fall, following a successful pilot of **TI** at Ypsilanti Community Middle School, we will be running **TI** in collaboration with Ypsilanti Community Schools. Additionally, this fall new groups are being added at all of our current partnership sites in order to serve more of their children and youth.

Telling It has evolved to meet the needs of the youth we serve by forming familial-like groups of no more than twelve participants. By keeping the groups small we can establish



safety and a level of mutual trust between the youth, the site leader, the social worker and the support team in order for us to meet individual needs. In collaboration with the youth and over the weekly sessions, we invite young people to share and speak candidly, with no censorship on subject matter or language excepting Hate Language, which we explore in a separate unit.

What **TI** does is to provide platforms of expression so that young people can discover where they best express themselves, be that photography, dance, spoken word poetry, visual arts and so on. One of the foundational tenets of **TI** is that we are not giving a voice to the voiceless but rather understanding that each youngster has an existing voice and is an expert of their own experience. Our job is to support their exploration of how best to be heard. As part of that exploration, new ideas and skills are introduced that may alter a young person's worldview and even the choices they make.

In closing, I'd like to share the last lines of a poem written by Jamel, a **TI** participant who was heavily gang-involved.

"Why should I serve or follow these men who create nothing but problems and hate to the point that it spirals out of control?"

**Yesterday you were my friend, homie, dawg.
Today you are my enemy because they say so.**

Yeah right!

**I will choose my friends, my future, my destiny.
Yes I would die for my family, girlfriend and friends.
I'm not dying for your special color, hand sign, symbol or street corner.**

So instead of gang life, I choose LIFE" ■