



## Executive Director's Message

*Chris Burns*  
*Executive Director*

This past year marked several milestones for Boys Republic. We completed the process of being nationally re-accredited and obtaining the permanent licenses for all of the residential programs being re-certified as Short-term Residential Treatment Centers under California's Continuum of Care Reform. A great focus in the State's re-design and many other professional settings is the incorporation of trauma-informed principles. The phrase "trauma-informed" has become both a buzz phrase and a trigger of sorts revealing much about the worldview and psychology of those charged with working in such frameworks.

If you remember the viral internet sensation of "the dress" back in 2015 which initially began with the mother of a bride in Scotland taking a photo of a dress she planned to wear to the wedding and sending it to her daughter. The disagreement they had about the color of the dress was shared on the internet and the world responded likewise with absolute affirmations that the dress was either blue and black, or white and gold. While the phenomenon ultimately revealed differences in human color perception, the form of the disagreement revealed how difficult it can be sometimes for people to step back and appreciate the perception of another when their own initial perception is different. This has often been the case in circles discussing what it means to be

delivering trauma-informed care or to be a trauma-informed organization.

The reactions range as wide as those the world had to "the dress" and with similar polarization. For a program like Boys Republic that has prided itself on principles of accountability and personal responsibility, occasional descriptions of trauma-informed care sounded like a removal of those principles and an excusal of problem behavior based on the often-tragic backgrounds of the youth in our care. A more holistic understanding of the term affords staff the perspective of fully integrating

the impacts of historical trauma into the understanding of the youth in our care and the team's overall approach to their treatment. A comprehensive approach to trauma-informed care incorporates the principles of personal responsibility so that the youth in our care leave the program owning their need to utilize recently developed skills in managing the challenges that life will continue to bring so they can effectively reintegrate into schools and job settings that will not necessarily care about the impact of their past.

I shared a parable about a butterfly at our Annual Awards Ceremony that speaks to this dilemma. In it, a man sees a butterfly cocoon and notices a small hole appear. He watches for hours as the butterfly tries to force its body through the little hole and



*THE GROUP IS THE GUIDE: Monrovia Day Treatment Program students discuss behavioral issues in daily group. Trauma-informed care supports disadvantaged teens so they can actively participate in the group process that fosters personal responsibility and consideration of others.*

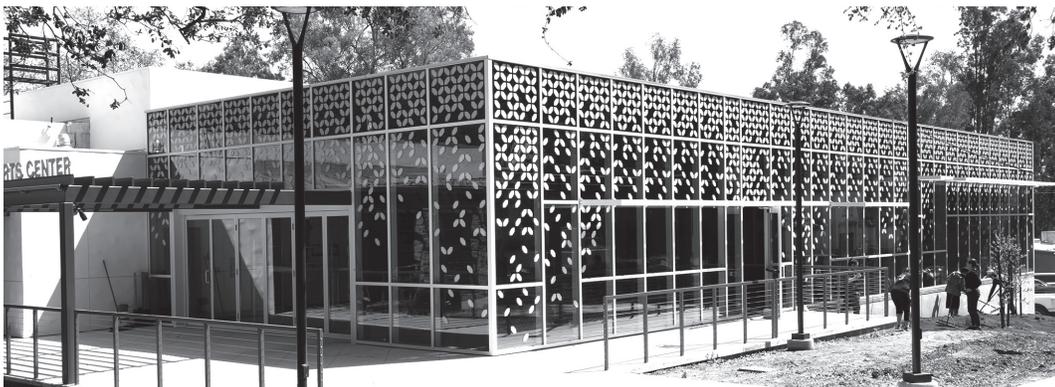


sees that it has stopped making progress and appears to have gotten as far as it could. Wanting to help, he uses scissors to open a larger hole in the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily with its body swollen and with small shriveled wings. He waited for the moment it would take flight, but it never happened. As it turns out, the struggle to break through the cocoon is the natural and necessary process that forces the fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it can be ready for flight once it frees itself from the cocoon.

The sad reality is that in an effort to help, the man actually removed the obstacle necessary for the butterfly to be able to take flight. This is a wonderful metaphor for the challenge for Boys Republic staff providing trauma-informed care for our youth within the State's new paradigm, for both our staff to struggle through understanding what trauma-informed care means for us within our group model and for them to understand what that looks like with students. For some, it can be difficult

to allow the struggle to unfold, but if we remove all challenges of working through a difficult process, youth (people) do not develop in a manner most conducive to their future success. Much of the challenging behavior our youth present has antecedent events that contribute to the development of this behavior. Understanding those events is critical toward providing treatment in a manner that youth can receive. However, that care cannot remove the responsibility for choices or eliminate the stress associated with productive change without ultimately harming student development in the same manner as the butterfly. Persevering through struggle and the development of new skills, creates growth and expands the types of strengths and skills our students' need to become successful in their home communities.

Boys Republic continues to grow in our implementation of the best ways to work with youth where we are incorporating new understanding of adolescent development while maintaining proven historical values aligned with "nothing without labor." An extension of this growth is the construction of our new Culinary Center. This is just the latest example of our organization's historical commitment to vocational training as a primary vehicle to challenge our students, develop skills and expand their potential for success. It is a landmark in the middle of the campus that trumpets Boys Republic's commitment to excellence in the comprehensive care of our students.



**KITCHEN REPLACEMENT PROJECT UPDATE:** *Fiscal 2019 marked the final construction and remodeling phase of the Max Scott Center for the Culinary Arts. The modern vocational training center will be dedicated on October 2, 2019.*