Parent Advocates as Leaders and Managers
Introductions

- **Brejea Colthirst** – Senior Defense Parent Advocate, EBFD
- **Arielle Reisman** – Senior Defense Social Worker, EBFD
- **Rita Rodriguez** – Supervising Attorney, EBFD
Group Agreements

- Recognize racism, power, privilege and intersectionality
- Respect each other’s time, space, opinions and boundaries
- Have courageous conversations
- Assume positive intent and acknowledge harm
My Lifesaver
My Success Story

- Introduction to the Department of Children and Family Services
- My Family
- Relationship with my Attorney
- My Supportive Family Maintenance Worker
- A New Beginning
- Rising to a Different Level
Parent Advocacy & Social Work: unique & complementary disciplines

- Case Referrals
- Building Trust and Rapport with Parents
- Collaborative Projects
How can attorneys promote leadership of parent advocates?

► Discuss race, power, and privilege
► Design programs that support parents
► Develop roles for former clients
Group Discussion
Contact Information

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- **Rita Rodriguez** – Supervising Attorney, East Bay Family Defenders, rita@familydefender.org
A key strength of interdisciplinary parent representation is pairing attorneys with parent advocates who have lived experience in the system. These interdisciplinary models are nearly always designed and managed by attorneys or social workers. How can parent advocates successfully design interdisciplinary programs and be part of a management team at a family defense organization? This resource guide will help individuals and nonprofits interested in promoting leadership development for parent advocates in their own organizations.

1. Sample Parent Advocate Job Description
2. Sample Parent Support Group Description
3. Biography: Brejea Colthirst
PARENT ADVOCATE

We seek a brave, compassionate, self-reflective Parent Advocate with relevant lived experience in the child welfare system who wishes to work within a legal defense team on behalf of parents threatened with the loss of their children to foster care.

**East Bay Family Defenders** (EBFD) will be opening our doors to clients on September 1, 2018. Our mission is to keep families together and minimize the time children spend in foster care. We seek staff to join us by mid-August to build a cutting-edge, interdisciplinary family defense practice. We will provide innovative legal defense, social work support, and peer mentorship to all parents facing child welfare intervention in Alameda County who cannot afford to hire counsel. We will advocate for systemic change in Alameda County Juvenile Court and the local child welfare system to reduce system intervention in families and promote community-based preventive resources and restorative solutions that meaningfully strengthen families.

The Alameda County Juvenile Dependency Court will appoint our Staff Attorneys to represent parents in cases filed against them by the filed by the Department of Children and Family Services. Parents in these cases face allegations of child maltreatment, ranging from neglect to abuse. Our interdisciplinary teams provide dedicated, zealous client-directed legal defense while addressing underlying issues that brought the family into the child welfare system. We promote interdisciplinary collaboration within our staff and value diverse experience that equips staff for delivering the highest quality of representation to our clients. We will partner with a robust network of community-based providers and allied advocates, drawing upon their expertise to address families’ complex needs.

**JOB DESCRIPTION**

This full-time Parent Advocate will be a founding staff member of East Bay Family Defenders, and will have great influence over the development of our growing interdisciplinary staffing. The Parent Advocate is a community professional with personal lived experience successfully navigating the child welfare system. The Parent

Advocate has the skills, knowledge, and professionalism to work within an interdisciplinary team. The Parent Advocate and Social Work staff will collaboratively advocate for parents alongside EBFD Attorneys in our client-directed model. This will entail advocating for clients in and outside of court, with the Department of Children and Family Services, and with service providers as needed. The Parent Advocate will provide guidance and advocacy to parents facing drug and alcohol addiction who, as a result, have had their children removed or are at risk of having their children removed by the Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services.

Roles and responsibilities include: participation in weekly individual and team supervision; participation in ongoing training and professional development; establishing, maintaining and documenting contact with clients; providing assistance to clients accessing needed services; attending meetings with clients; interfacing with service providers to proactively address challenges; supporting parent/child visits; conducting home visits as needed; and supporting clients at court hearings.

The Parent Advocate may also participate in systemic advocacy, outreach and community events, and engage in coalition-building efforts with community-based agencies. The Parent Advocate is expected to maintain updated case data and client contact documentation according to EBFD Program Guidelines.

QUALIFICATIONS & DESIRED EXPERIENCE

- Successfully completed Family Reunification with the Alameda County Department of Children & Family Services
- Prior dependency case that has been dismissed
- Experience with addiction and recovery
- Experience with community based social services
- Ability to engage with families from diverse communities
- Bilingual skills preferred
- Valid CA driver’s license
- Reliable transportation and proof of insurance
- Experience working with individuals from multi-ethnic communities

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS
Salary is commensurate with experience. Competitive benefits package will include health, dental and vision coverage and generous paid time off.
NO LABELS
A PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

“YOUR JOURNEY. YOUR VOICE.”

WHAT IS THIS GROUP ABOUT?

This is a support group for parents involved in the child welfare and or the criminal justice system. This group will be a safe place for you and other parents to come together to; build relationships with other parents who are also navigating the court process, get your questions answered about the child welfare system, and gain resources to support you and your family on your journey through the court system.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING?

* Meeting with other parents who are experiencing involvement with the child welfare system
* Learn about the different components of the system
* Gain resources
* Learn how to improve relationships
* Learn how to reduce stress

* Have a safe place to talk and feel supported
* Childcare provided
* Stipends Offered
* Snacks
* Certificate of completion

WHO WILL FACILITATE THIS GROUP?

Our Senior Defense Parent Advocate, who has successfully navigated the child welfare system will lead group sessions along with a team of social workers.

HOW LONG WILL MEETINGS BE? WHERE? & WHEN?

Sign up today! We meet once a week for 8 weeks. Group sessions happen in our offices (San Leandro).

START DATE: March 14, 2019
5:00-7:00pm

HAVE A QUESTION OR INTERESTED IN SIGNING UP? 📞 (510) 671-0108 (Ask for Bre)
✉️ brejea@familydefender.org
My name is Brejea Colthirst. I am the proud mother of three sons, ages 29, 26, and 10 years old. I am of Jamaican/African American descent and I currently reside in Oakland, California. I first became involved with the child welfare system as a client, in 2008. My youngest son, Love, was born on my birthday, July 17th; however, he was removed out of my care because he showed a positive toxicology screening. I chose to have him placed in foster care, instead of with my family, because I knew it would motivate me to get clean and get my child back. I can say with certainty that had my son been placed with my family, I would not be standing before you today, clean and sober. I knew I had a drug addiction problem and I had tried several times to get clean, but I was unsuccessful because I was not ready. I was trying to get clean for everyone but myself.

After participating in the child welfare system’s Team Decision-Making meeting, I was invited to go to an outpatient program. I knew from my previous experiences that I needed an inpatient program, so I entered into a one year residential treatment program called “Healthy Babies” in Oakland, California. My newborn son, Love, was eventually placed with me, within the first month there. I was a very committed parent, I worked closely with the child welfare worker throughout my involvement with the program. I was able to have my two older sons visit me and go on outings with me as well; we were a family again. That feeling was priceless - seeing the smiles on their faces at every visit and hearing them say, “I’ll see you next weekend mama,” made my heart full. I had been in the program for six months when I lost my best friend, my mother. That was a hard pill to swallow, but it also fueled me to push forward and harder. I also had to deal with my son’s foster parent, who was fighting to get custody of him. At the end of one year, I successfully completed the program and was ordered to move into, ‘Henry Robinson’s Transitional Housing,’ for six months before
returning home to my son’s father and his family. Would you believe that six months turned into two years? In those two years, I was able to parent my son and see things in him that I didn’t see in my two older sons. It was truly a blessing to have the support and I gained so many outside resources. My son’s father still could not understand why I wasn’t coming home. When my son was 1 year old, my CPS case was closed, and Love remained with me permanently. I am now 10 ½ years clean and sober, and still actively involved in recovery and I see it as a lifelong process. Today, my son, Love, is 10 years old and is in good health; he will soon graduate from KIPP Academy and enter into middle school. His relationship with his brothers is so special, they have an unbreakable bond, even through the trials and tribulations. They are not only brothers, but they are all best friends. I am now a grandmother of a 3yr old grandson Matthew, he is our world. Watching Love and his nephew interact is priceless. He is an awesome “Uncle Wove” as his nephew calls him and I’m Nana Bre’.

I was extremely grateful for the support that I received when I was in the child welfare system. I had a Family Maintenance worker who saw things in me I couldn’t see in myself. He always included my son’s father in activities because he knew we were a team. Unfortunately, I did not have a parent advocate while navigating through the system, but I was determined to make it out successfully. As a way of giving back, I volunteered with the recovery program I once resided in. I worked with the child welfare system and had the opportunity to participate in leadership development classes at our county building for three years. And I must mention my amazing attorney, now a Judge in Alameda County in Hayward, Mrs. Toni Mims. Mrs.Mims was known for always answering or returning my phone calls, meeting with me before my court dates and explaining my court reports so that
I would understand. Even though my son’s father and I had different attorneys, she would still include my son’s father on our decisions because everyone knew we were a team and they were pulling for us. Today, my son’s father is my best friend and we co-parent excellent together.

In August 2011, I was hired with A Better Way, Inc. to work with families involved in the child welfare system in Alameda County. I feel that it is very important to have procedures in place to help new parents entering the system. The class taught me about the child welfare system, how to get referred to a Parent Advocate and allowed me to get linked immediately to resources. Parents can ask Parent Advocates any questions they have about the child welfare system and are encouraged by Parent Advocates to develop positive relationships with their child welfare worker and attorneys. I was frequently called upon to participate in presentations and training to child welfare system staff, foster parents and other community partners. I have also shared my personal life experiences at numerous conferences and workshops. I spent 8 years as a Parent Advocate for A Better Way, Inc., and I have participated in numerous multidisciplinary committees, including working with Casey Family Programs Birth Parent Advisory Council and the Birth Parent National Network. I love the work I do, and I am thrilled to be leading the development of the Parent Advocate component of East Bay Family Defenders Interdisciplinary family defense model, alongside my awesome colleagues, who are social workers and attorneys, respectively. Who would of thought this would be my life?

Thank You.