

Daughter continues family tradition of service

By: [L Robbins](#)
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Carrie Ann Young, daughter of the [Rescue Mission](#) CEO Mary Gay Abbott-Young, gives up her well paying job to serve the people of Trenton

Before her decision to return to Trenton, Carrie Ann Young thought that she had landed her “dream” job.

That was in 2006, when the recent University of Pittsburgh graduate was working for the national polling and marketing research firm Harris Interactive. There, she compared the buying habits of television viewers with their favorite programs and the products the shows sponsored.

But as she approached her mid-20s, a larger dream was forming in the heart and mind of this young woman from a middle class neighborhood just outside of Trenton. She could not quite define it at first, but it was not long before the new dream took shape, thanks to a judge she met when serving jury duty, a book she read about one man’s recovery from drug addiction, and daily news stories she witnessed about people learning to cope after losing their jobs or homes in a downturn economy.

At age 25, Young realized that public interest law was the career path she wanted to follow. At the time, she did not know that her decision would eventually lead to her following a family tradition of altruism and service — her mother heads the Trenton Rescue Mission — and take a position at the Community Justice Center, a downtown Trenton-based nonprofit organization that provides legal services to disabled veterans and civilians. She only knew that it was time to make a change.

She left her well paying New York City job, enrolled at the Widener University

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School of Law-Delaware, and racked up \$200,000 in debt before graduating and taking her bar exams in 2013.

Young says the transition was scary but worth it. Her mother, Mary Gay Abbott-Young, totally agrees.

“Carrie made a conscious decision to change careers so she could provide a service to the community. She chose this career path,” Abbott-Young said. “Carrie understands that as a society we can do better by people in need.”

Abbott-Young is the CEO of the Rescue Mission of Trenton, a nonprofit agency serving men and women in need of shelter, food, and clothing. Clientele include people who are underemployed, unemployed or recovering from addiction.

In 2012, the mission provided shelter to more than 1,400 individuals and served more than 121,000 meals. The mission also provides addiction treatment programs, employment training and opportunities and runs a mission store.

While Abbott-Young has devoted her career life to community service, she never wanted her children to feel obligated to follow her footsteps. But Abbott-Young admitted when her daughter decided to pursue a career in public interest law, she was proud.

“We will be very successful [as parents] if we can impart a degree of social responsibility to our children,” she said.

Carrie Ann is the second of Abbott-Young’s offspring to pursue a career dedicated to helping those in need. Her son works at the mission in the addiction recovery program. Her husband, James Young, is a recently retired Amtrak announcer.

When Carrie Ann Young was 17 years old, she volunteered for the Rescue Mission for a short period of time. She worked as an assistant at the women’s shelter, helping to check women in at night. Young says that the experience of working with people in dire need helped her understand the life trials described in *Broken*, a book that influenced her decision to change careers.

The book was written by William Cope Moyers, son of television journalist Bill Moyers. The story described the son’s drug addiction and his hard road to recovery.

Today, W.C. Moyers is an advocate for community-based recovery programs and is the vice president for external affairs at the Hazelden Foundation in Minnesota. At the conclusion of *Broken*, Moyers had provided a list of things that individuals and communities can do support those seeking to overcome addiction or poverty. One suggestion was to attend law school and study the area of public interest law.

“So, that’s what I did,” Young said.

At times, she questioned her decision. She recalled weekends when she turned down social invitations because she had to study.

But she received encouragement along the way. She had developed an email friendship with W.C. Moyers that grew from a note she had sent him sharing that he was her inspiration for studying law. In one of his messages to Young,

Moyers told her that she was an inspiration to him.

“You are in the vanguard of the next generation of leaders. We need your passion, commitment, and expertise to help people who need and deserve help in overcoming addiction, mental illness, homelessness, and all the other obstacles to recovery,” she reports him saying.

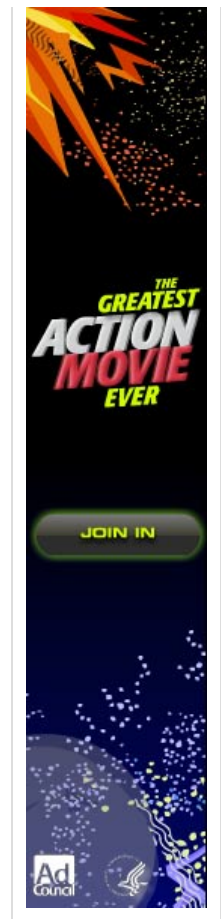
In the spring of this year, she learned about the job opening at the Community Justice Center in Trenton, interviewed in May, and was offered the job by executive director Melissa A. Gertz, the day before she graduated.

Young, who lives with her parents in South Trenton, began work in September. As a disabilities rights advocate, she is one of the first contacts with the clients and does all the research needed for the clients to receive benefits.

“My work at CJC is everything I want to do,” she said. “It’s so amazing to see people who love what they’re doing and want to help people. Melissa is amazingly smart. She gets it,” Young said.

Gertz, founder of CJC, opened its doors in 2009 with the help of a few friends and professionals, in Gertz’s words, “crazy enough to become involved.” The idea behind the center began taking shape after Gertz survived a near fatal car accident that left her with severe physical, neurological, and mental wounds.

After a few years undergoing several surgeries and therapy sessions, she had



recovered to the point that she felt it was time to begin “paying it forward.”

In an article for the American Bar Association’s Young Lawyer’s Division, “From Aspiring to Inspiring,” Gertz discussed her decision to open a center that would provide legal services specifically for veterans. She knew firsthand the complications that come from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, which are the two “signature” wounds of the current wars.

“I knew what it was like to wake up one day to an entirely different world around you and to have to adapt to a new ‘normal’,” she said.

CJC’s short and long-term efforts focus on returning veteran’s rights, public benefits, environmental justice, and civil rights. The center is comprised of five team members, three college interns, and three board members.

People such as Melissa and Carrie are examples of young people who put the needs of their clients first, and they are the ones who are the most successful in their work, says Abbott-Young says that people such as her daughter and Gertz are “examples of young people who put the needs of their clients first, and they are the most successful in their work.”

“I’m energized by people in their 20s,” she said. “Young people who work in organizations like CJC and the Rescue Mission care. They are connected to the people they serve. They are tuned into the needs of the person they are serving, not the system. They are about ‘This is what my client needs.’ Not ‘this is what I am.’ They know that work isn’t just about money.”

Collaboration with other organizations is important, says Young. “Organizations and agencies are recognizing this concept and really striving to become united.” The organizations refer clients to the groups that specialize in other needs the client might have. Recently, CJC has started collaborating with the Rescue Mission.

Abbot-Young feels that in spite of all the negativity, positive changes are being made in society and in the business world, using as an example the Mission’s recent public presentation by keynote speaker Joe Sibilias: “Corporate Social Responsibility: Making Business Sense for the Common Good.” Sibilias is founder and CEO of Meadowbrook Lane Capital, described by the Wall Street Journal as a “socially responsible investment bank” specializing in turning values into valuation.

“I think it will take a lot of hard and sometimes frustrating work while keeping an open mind but I definitely think we will get there because we are already getting there,” Young said.

Just one year ago, while Young was earning her law degree, she was receiving encouragement from W.C. Moyers. Today, she is among those eager to encourage others.

“The best advice I can offer someone is: Do not be afraid to change your mind. Just like an organization needs to evaluate how it’s doing, you need to make sure the path you are on is right for you. I decided to follow a different dream than the one I had originally dreamt. It was a scary transition but one that I don’t think I will ever regret. You are never too old to change paths. It is important for you to know the person that you are and the person that you want to be — and figure out how to make that person one and the same.”

Community Justice Center, 310 W. State St., 3rd Floor, Trenton, (609) 218-5120. On the Web: nj-communityjusticecenter.org.

Rescue Mission of Trenton, 98 Carroll Street, Trenton, NJ, (609) 695-1436, On the Web: rescuemissionoftrenton.org.

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