

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA

Children's VOICE

July/August 2008

Teens Taking Charge

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Steven S. Boehm	Director of Publications
Emily Shenk	Editor-in-Chief
Jennifer Michael	Contributing Editor
Meghan Williams	Contributing Editor
Marlene Saulsbury	Art Director
Karen Dunn	Advertising, 703/412-2416

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Child Welfare League of America

2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 250 • Arlington VA 22202
703/412-2400, Fax 703/412-2401
E-mail voice@cwla.org • www.cwla.org

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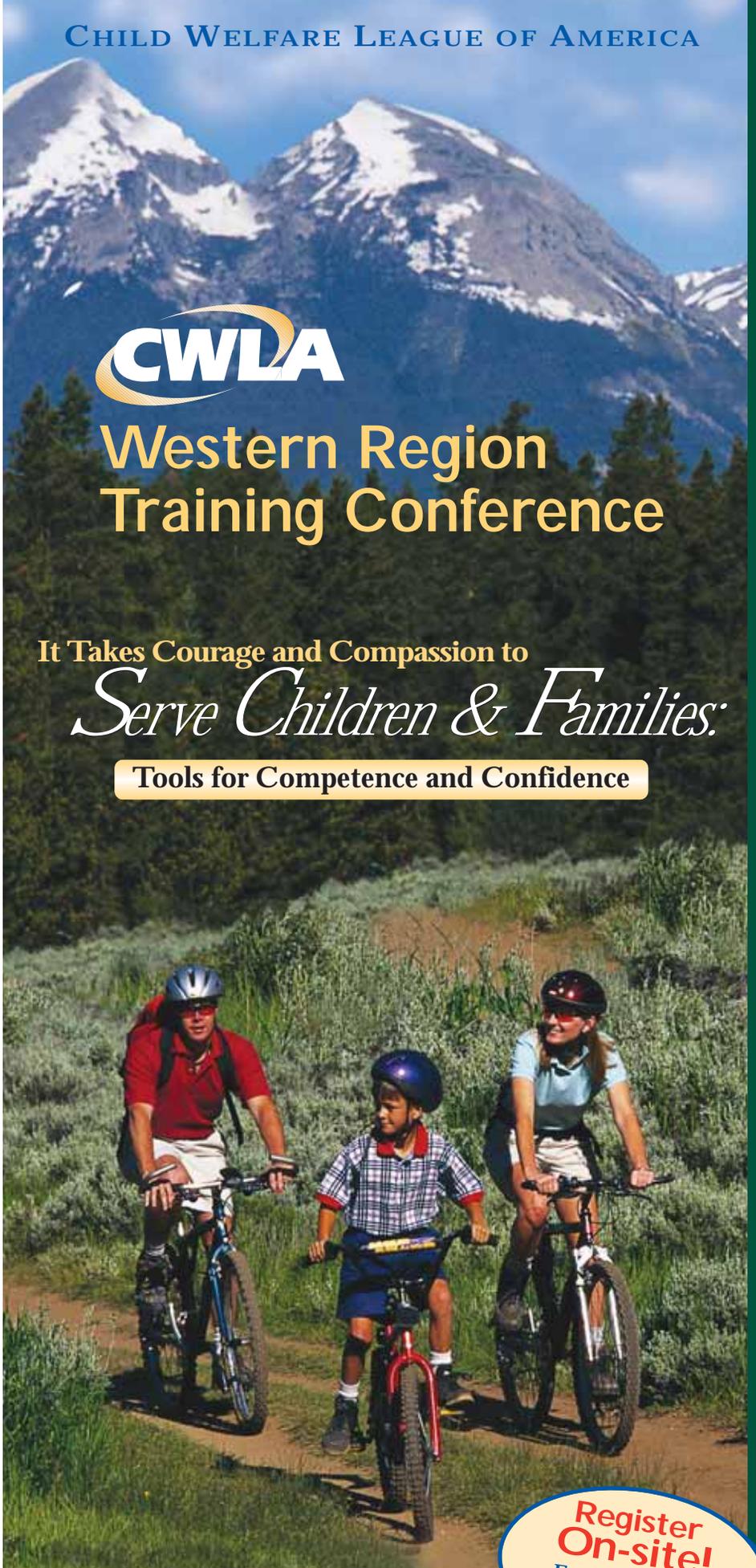


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LeadershipLens

Christine James-Brown



Although there is often one overall theme for each issue of the *Voice*, the underlying themes in this—and frankly, almost every—issue are responsibility, accountability, and complexity. These are topics that all of us in the child welfare field deal with on a regular basis. They are the underlying themes of the FLDS situation in Texas this spring and of almost every high profile child welfare case, but they are also the issues that every caseworker and child welfare agency deals with on a smaller scale every day. The issues are very apparent when more than 400 children are removed from their homes at one time, but not as apparent (though just as important) when more than 40 children are removed each day in the state of Texas.

So these themes of responsibility, accountability, and complexity are something we must grapple with as we read each issue of the *Voice*. More importantly, they are issues that must be understood every day as we work to secure safety, well-being, and permanence for all children in this rapidly changing world. Just looking at the articles in this issue prompts questions about who is ultimately responsible for our children. Should youth have to advocate for themselves to find

adoptive homes (as in “Teens Taking Charge”)? Should parents or the child welfare system be held responsible for making sure that children aren’t overweight (see “Childhood Obesity: Is it Abuse”)?

It often seems, especially in the middle of high-profile cases, that the child welfare system—or even the individual caseworker—is viewed as responsible for maneuvering through very complex situations to find the appropriate balance between child safety, well-being, and permanency. Ultimately, we share responsibility for making sure that every child in this nation is happy, healthy, and able to reach his or her potential. This “we” includes parents, families, communities, the child welfare system as a whole, and individual child welfare professionals. Each of us is accountable for our specific role. Shared responsibility without clear accountability, however, is not enough; no one person can achieve our desired objectives without the support of others.

As families and society become increasingly complex, it will be even

more important to have clear accountability. Our member agencies, parents and families, communities, and youth each have their own set of interdependent accountabilities. Going into the next several years, CWLA will be accountable for raising the level of awareness in the United States about the needs of vulnerable children and youth, supporting the development of policies that provide adequate resources for children and families and make child welfare a desired profession,

“Ultimately, we share responsibility for making sure that every child in this nation is happy, healthy, and able to reach his or her potential.”

giving workers the ability to do their jobs effectively, and facilitating the sharing and adoption of practices that achieve better outcomes for children, youth, and families. I hope you’ll join me in continuing to do your part—at work and in your community—to reach these goals together. ■

Christine James-Brown

Combining Art and Mentoring for Pre-Teen Girls

The pop song was right—girls just want to have fun. But in Alexandria, Virginia, that's not the whole story. The dozen fifth-grade girls who participated in this year's Space of Her Own (SOHO) program want a particular type of fun: Thursday night art class, working with their mentors, and making decorations for their new rooms.

SOHO is an art-based mentoring program run by Alexandria's Court Services Unit and The Art League, a local nonprofit visual arts organization. The SOHO girls partner with a female mentor for a year; art classes begin in the fall and continue through late spring, when the mentors remodel each girl's room with the decorations they've made in class. There's a reception

to start a program for girls," Odell says. "Their issues tend to be truancy and runaway behavior, so getting them to show up for the program was a challenge."

"We knew that mentoring is a best practice, so we just started brainstorming with friends," she adds. With research that suggests mentoring needs to last at least a year to build the kind of relationship that will make a big difference in a child's life, Odell needed a program with a hook that wouldn't let go. Inspired by the popular television show *Trading Spaces*, Odell thought the promise of a room renovation might interest the girls enough to keep them coming back week after week. Casual conversations at a party gave Odell the chance to test her hypothesis: She shared

her idea with several people and got a wave of positive feedback. "By the end of the night there was a circle of women around me saying 'I want to volunteer.' ... I didn't realize it would also be a great way to lure the adults," Odell says.

But interest the adults did. In addition to her regular job, Lesley Harris is a part-time artist. She volunteered as a mentor for the 2006–2007 SOHO group and has been doing double duty in the current session, serving as both a mentor and one of the art instructors.

Throughout their classes, the girls and mentors decorated storage crates, picture frames, wall hangings, lamps, and chairs. They also learned painting and photography skills. Most of the things they create end up in the

girls' rooms, which often also get a fresh coat of paint and new furniture. The remodeling comes from little things that are easily transferable if the family moves. "We know that it may not be a permanent place, so we try to make it stuff they could keep and take with them," Harris says.

"Last year I had a nice feeling when I was done," she says. "I didn't know that you could do so much with so little. I felt like it didn't just have an effect on Ki'Nesha and her room, but



SOHO's sixth year: the girls and mentors for the 2007 program, as well as some of their art instructors, gather with program cofounders Alice Merrill and Linda Odell (standing on the steps behind the group.)

in early summer to share the results with the group, but each pair completes community service projects throughout the summer before the girls graduate from the program.

Linda Odell is the Director of Alternative Programs for Alexandria's Court Services Unit and cofounded the program six years ago with Alice Merrill, Director of Development at The Art League. Odell and her coworkers were trying to create a preventative program for at-risk girls. "We knew we needed

maybe the whole family.” Though she is mentoring Nyree this year, Harris is still in touch with Ki’Nesha and her family. That’s what Odell likes to hear. “We find about half the relationships work longer than a year,” she says.

Odell has learned a little more each year of SOHO, tweaking aspects of the program for better results. When SOHO started, the girls invited to participate were already involved in the Alexandria court system and middle school-aged. “I sort of learned the hard way that once the girls are already in trouble it’s very hard to get them involved with the mentors,” Odell says. The girls she invites now are still considered at-risk; they have problems at school or a court-involved family member. But they’re younger—this year’s SOHO class was all fifth-graders. “We think we finally found the right age group,” Odell said.

This was the first year all the girls who started coming to SOHO classes continued through the end. Three girls even had perfect attendance and were given digital cameras, as Odell had promised them at the beginning of the year. The Art League added another surprise: iPod Shuffles for those three, and new sketchbooks for all the girls to keep them working on art. They



Tonya's room after the project.

received the gifts at a reception with their families and alumnae of the program. Each girl had brought in several of her completed projects to show off. Having a major event near the end of each year’s program, Odell says, not only brings a sense of accomplishment to the participants, but also serves as a springboard for the next session, helping to recruit mentors.

There is currently a waiting list for interested mentors, but Odell is always trying to add more names. Those who cannot mentor but would

like to support the program are encouraged to donate. SOHO currently receives funding from the Alexandria Youth Fund and the Otto Whaley Family Foundation, as well as area businesses, organizations, and individuals. “It’s a pretty big undertaking,” Odell admits, but she’d like to see similar programs in other areas. “I’d love to help guide them.”

After SOHO was featured last year in Vanessa A. Camilleri’s book *Healing the Inner City Child: Creative Arts Therapies with At-Risk Youth*, Odell got calls from people who wanted to know more—from as close as Richmond, Virginia, which is starting its own version of the program, and as far as Australia. Odell advises checking some of the ideas on the National Mentoring Partnership website, www.mentoring.org, and visiting SOHO to see the program in action. ■

On the Web

- For an overview of SOHO, including video presentations of the before-and-after room renovations, visit www.alexandriava.gov/soho.
- Linda Odell also coordinates a program for boys, iM2 — iMovie Mentors. In its second season, sixth grade boys and men who have volunteered to be their mentors work together to make a short movie using Apple digital technology. The movies debut at a film festival at a local theater. Visit www.alexandriava.gov/iM2.
- To learn more about either program, contact Linda Odell at linda.odell@alexandriava.gov, and for additional ideas on mentoring projects, visit the National Mentoring Partnership at www.mentoring.org.

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Children's Issues in the News

MARYLAND



Gov. Martin O'Malley

Governor Martin O'Malley has announced his intentions to launch a high-tech monitoring system for juvenile offenders that will track the exact movements of 200 of Baltimore's most troubled youth, according to the *Baltimore Sun*.

"For the last several years in big cities throughout our country, there has been a battle raging

where drug dealers have been trying to steal the lives of our children from us," the *Sun* quoted O'Malley during a news conference last winter. "We are trying to rescue Maryland's children from the clutches of drug dealers, drug violence, and drug death that has gripped too many of our children for too long."

O'Malley plans to designate \$1 million in funding for the program, which is anticipated to begin operating in July under a newly created unit in the juvenile services department focused on an offender's whereabouts. The offenders being tracked will primarily be 13- to 17-year-olds who are on probation or enrolled in aftercare services or the Operation Safe Kids program, according to the *Sun*.

The monitoring devices will be based on Global Positioning System technology. The system will feed real-time information on when offenders are not in school or when juveniles enter high crime areas that are restricted under probation agreements, the *Sun* reports.

State and city officials said the program is intended to keep juvenile offenders away from the city's drug culture and protect the general public. "I strongly believe in my gut and in my soul that we are on the verge, as never seen here in the state of Maryland and the city of Baltimore, to really reduce violent crime," the *Sun* quoted Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon.

NEW JERSEY

New Jersey met and exceeded its goal for the number of adoptions of foster children in 2007. More than 1,500

children in foster care were adopted in the state last year, topping the previous state record, set in 2004, by 122, according to the *Star-Ledger*.

"Kids need and deserve families, and this reminds us that anything is possible if we are passionate, focused, and committed to finding each child their forever family," the *Star-Ledger* quoted Kevin Ryan, New Jersey's Children and Families Commissioner.

After Governor Jon Corzine appointed Ryan in January 2006, he set about recreating the state's specialized adoption teams that were dismantled during the early stages of child welfare reform. The move was part of the original blueprint for court-ordered reform—the state is agreeing to allow a federal judge to monitor its child welfare system until at least 2012. The teams also helped lower the number of cases per social worker, the *Star-Ledger* reports.

Over two years, the state also reduced the number of children waiting to be adopted, from 2,260 in January 2006, to 1,295 in January 2008, according to the *Star-Ledger*. Overall, New Jersey's Division of Youth and

The Star-Ledger

2007, including about 10,000 children removed from their homes and placed in foster homes, shelters, group homes, and residential centers.

Mary Coogan, Assistant Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey, also acknowledged the role played by court-appointed special advocates who advise the judges and the law guardians who represent the children in foster care. "It's all coming together, and it's a wonderful thing."

"This effort shows that when the state forms the needed partnerships and devotes sustained attention to solving a problem in the child protection system, real success can be achieved," child advocate E. Susan Hodgson told the *Star-Ledger*. "This is a lesson we should apply to all aspects of child welfare reform, with the goal of ensuring the safety and permanency of all New Jersey children."

NEW JERSEY *news continued*

The Association for Children of New Jersey has issued an annual scorecard for children and youth in Newark since 1993, and last year's card, *Newark Kids Count 2007*, found some encouraging signs. More young adults are enrolling in college, infant mortality fell 40% from 2000 to 2004, and the number of children arrested dropped 27% since 2002, according to the *New York Times*.



The report also found that juveniles in Newark are no more likely to be arrested for violent crime than youth in surrounding wealthy suburbs or in the rest of the state as a whole. "This data shows we're on the right track," the *Times* quoted Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director of the Association for Children of New Jersey.

Young people in Newark are not without continued challenges, however, as the association noted during a press conference. The number of youth apprehended on drug charges jumped 66% in 2006, and the number found with weapons did not drop. Officials said gang activity continues to be a problem, with 3,600 suspected gang members identified by the Newark Police Department, most of them under 25.

Newark Kids Count 2007 also notes that Newark's child population has dropped 8% in recent years and that police have stopped arresting young people for fights that do not involve weapons so as to shield the youth from the negative effects of the criminal justice system, according to the *Times*.

NORTH CAROLINA

Ninety hospitals statewide in North Carolina will be providing videos, booklets, and other information to parents and babysitters as part of a new \$7 million shaken baby prevention project. The state adopted the education program to reduce the number of deaths and traumatic injuries that can occur when caregivers become frustrated, the *Fayetteville Observer* reports.

Health care providers plan to educate parents about how to respond when infants are crying and to raise awareness of the effects of shaking an infant, which can lead to brain trauma, long-term health problems including mental retardation or blindness, and death. Desmond Runyan, a University of North Carolina medical school professor, told the *Fayetteville Observer* that about 40 children under age 2 are admitted to a hospital intensive care unit each year due to being shaken, and about 10 of these children die.

OREGON



Gov. Ted Kulongoski

A federal review has found Oregon's child welfare program failing in 11 of 14 areas crucial to the safety and well-being of children in foster care, *The Oregonian* reported earlier this year.

Among the report's findings were that Oregon is short on foster homes, reports of abuse are not quickly investigated, children are not receiving necessary mental health care, and caseworkers are not checking in with children as often as they should. About 12,000 children are in state custody at any one time in Oregon.

A prior federal review in 2001 found the state's child welfare system failed to meet standards in eight key areas. The standards in the latest review were more rigorous, according to *The Oregonian*, and the results are particularly troubling to Governor Ted Kulongoski, who was himself raised in an orphanage.

"I identify a lot with these kids," Kulongoski told *The Oregonian*. "I've been in a number of situations where I've lived with other people when I was younger ... These kids, through no fault of their own, they're a lot of times mistreated, whether it's physical abuse, mental abuse, or it's just neglect. And they're just kids."

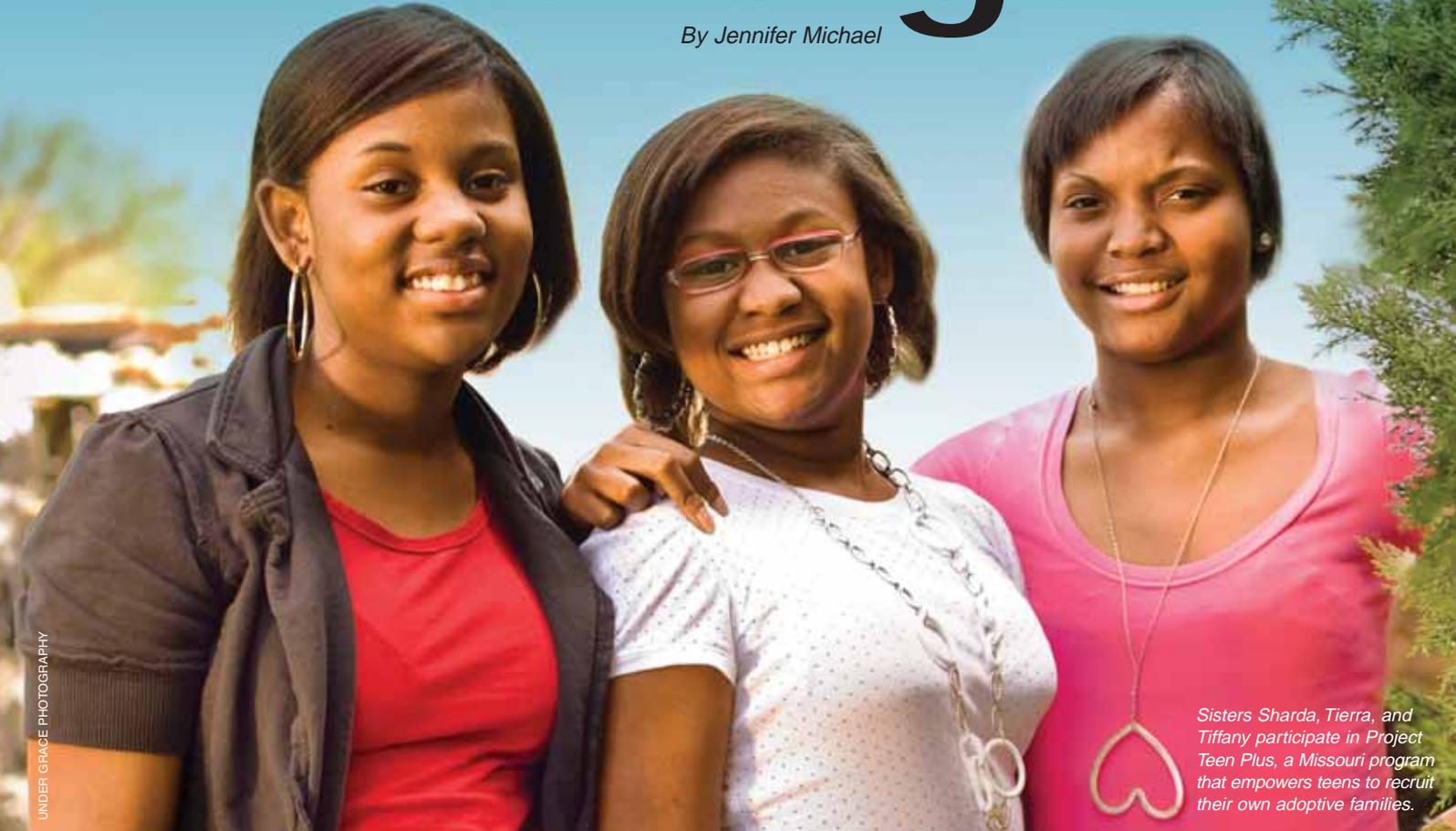
While in Oregon last September, federal reviewers looked through 65 case files and noted 11 of the 65 cases showed no caseworker visits to a child over an extended time period—in some cases several months had gone by. The team was also told during interviews with child advocates, lawyers, judges, foster parents, and others during their visit to the state that little support is given to foster parents and children, according to *The Oregonian*.

Oregon was scheduled to submit their improvement plan to the Administration for Children and Families this past April. "We want to be in a place that's much better, and we're aware of a number of issues raised in this report," Bruce Goldberg, Director of the state's Department of Human Services, told *The Oregonian*, adding that the state has endured a recession since the 2001 review and cuts have been made to drug treatment programs, health care, and other services.

The 2007 Oregon Legislature approved money to hire an additional 100 caseworkers and approved \$10 million for alcohol and drug treatment for parents. ■

Teens Taking Charge

By Jennifer Michael



UNDER GRACE PHOTOGRAPHY

Sisters Sharda, Tierra, and Tiffany participate in Project Teen Plus, a Missouri program that empowers teens to recruit their own adoptive families.

Programs encourage youth in foster care to drive their plans to find adoptive families

At age 11, Roger* realized he wanted to be adopted. It was 2002 and the state of Minnesota had stripped his parents of their rights to raise him after years of abuse and neglect. Roger wound up in a foster home and then lived with his aunt and uncle for a time, but the arrangement didn't work out.

He went on to live in a shelter, then another foster home, then a group home. At 15, he still hadn't found a permanent home but he hadn't given up hope either, even with the odds against him. In Minnesota, teens ages 13 to 17 represent 22% of children waiting for a home, but represent only about 7% of adoptions.

Eventually, the Homecoming Project was Roger's answer to permanency. The demonstration project, funded by a federal Adoption Opportunities and Activities Grant, is working to increase adoptions of teens in Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Human Services is contracting with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network to coordinate the program.

The Homecoming Project is one of a growing number of foster care campaigns focusing on boosting adoption numbers by encouraging foster youth to take charge of their destinies. By participating, the youth are encouraged to gain as much public exposure as they can to increase their chances of adoption, whether that means being profiled on the nightly news or on roadside billboards or websites. With the help of their caseworkers, the teens leave no stone unturned in reviewing their current and past adult connections to develop a prospective pool of people who might be willing to adopt them.

Teens participating in the Homecoming Project create brochures about themselves, eat meals with prospective

adoptive families in their homes, and speak publicly before the state legislature and at adoption events and trainings. “The Homecoming Project is really about engaging the youth themselves in the process of thinking about the future and how adoption and having a family fits in with what they want to do,” says Chuck Johnson, Assistant Commissioner of Children and Family Services.

Without the Homecoming Project, says Roger, who is now 18, “I don’t know where I’d be. I wouldn’t have a family.” From the beginning, his caseworker Jen Braun worked with him one-on-one to explore the adoption option and strategies for marketing himself to prospective families. The *Star Tribune* newspaper took notice and ran a story about him and the Homecoming Project in January 2006. A photo with the story showed Roger and other youth in his group home alone on Christmas Eve with little to do other than lounge on couches next to a Christmas tree and watch movies.

After the story ran, more than 70 calls came in from families interested in adopting Roger, a response he calls “mind-boggling.” Roger chose one of the families and lived with them for two months, but ultimately decided they weren’t the right fit for him. Ironically, Braun and her partner ended up adopting Roger. “It just seemed like since Jen and I got along great together, why say no,” Roger says.

Braun says if she had been asked four years ago when she started working with foster youth if she would one day adopt, she would have laughed. But with Roger it seemed the natural thing to do. “It’s amazing how working with this population really opens your eyes,” says Braun, who stepped down as Roger’s caseworker after she decided to adopt him. “These are really incredible kids.”

The upside of Roger’s public exposure, Braun notes, is that many of the families who called to inquire about him after reading the *Star Tribune* story eventually went through the home study process and adopted other youth who were looking for homes.

“Empowering the Child”

In Missouri, a program similar to the Homecoming Project is also empowering teens in foster care to actively recruit for adoptive families. The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition of Greater St. Louis created Project Teen Plus in 2002 after receiving a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. In metro St. Louis, nearly 400 preteens and teenagers are waiting to be adopted.

Programs like Project Teen Plus are important because too many older kids in foster care get overlooked, or it is

assumed that once they hit age 14, adoption is no longer an option and they need to start preparing for living on their own once they hit age 18, explains Sheila Suderwalla, Director of Project Teen Plus. “I think it’s just an unfortunate reality of our foster care system nationally,” she says. “Every year, more and more kids are aging out of the foster care system to no one, and then their chances for success in life are just greatly diminished. They are not leaving the system supported or prepared for adulthood.”

Project Teen Plus, on the other hand, works on “empowering the child every step of the way to write [his or her] adoption profile, to meet families, to have a say in adoption, period,” Suderwalla says. The program uses a three-tiered recruitment model: general recruitment through the mass media by profiling waiting youth on television and in newspapers; targeted recruitment by featuring waiting youth in publications aimed at licensed foster/adoptive families; and youth-specific recruitment, which involves recruiting families from the youth’s church, neighborhood, or elsewhere within their community network.

Similar to the Homecoming Project, caseworkers for Project Teen Plus review the case files of the youth participants going back to the first day they entered foster care to fully understand their history and their needs to determine the most appropriate adoptive resource. They work individually with each youth, conducting a strengths-based interview and a genogram and ecomap. Monthly Project Teen Plus recruitment team meetings are held with the youth’s team members and usually the youth himself to make recommendations and develop an action plan for securing a permanency goal of adoption. The teens also take part in support groups with their peers where they can openly share their feelings about and experiences with the adoption process.

Results & Lessons

The Homecoming Project is now in its final year of federal funding but officials hope to continue the program. As of late last year, 17 Homecoming Project youth had been legally adopted since 2004, 11 were in preadoptive

**Roger’s full name is withheld to protect his privacy.*

The Prospective Parent Pool

According to a recent poll commissioned by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 3 in 10 Americans have considered or are currently considering adoption, and 71% of that group considers foster care adoption above other forms of adoption, including private infant adoption and international adoption. These results translate into 48 million Americans who have considered or are currently considering adoption from foster care.



Roger, now 18, was adopted through the Homecoming Project.

Illinois Foster Kids Speak Out: “Don’t Write Me Off”

How does the public view foster care? When a group of private child welfare agencies in Illinois posed this question to focus groups, the answer was disheartening, but not surprising—people were concerned about the negative news surrounding foster care. In a nutshell, they feared the system.

The agencies—65 in all under the direction of Voices for Illinois Children and with the support of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services—decided to tackle the stigma directly. In April 2006, they launched a statewide, multi-year marketing campaign aimed at encouraging Illinois residents to support youth in foster care and foster care agencies.

During its first year, the Foster Kids Are Our Kids campaign involved foster children telling the public directly through television ads and posters, “Don’t write me off.” WGN-TV in Chicago ran \$800,000 worth of free air space featuring commercials in which foster youth say, “Just because I’m a foster kid, doesn’t mean I’m a lost cause. I have the potential for greatness ... I wish

you could see me for who I am. Don’t be afraid of me, and don’t feel bad for me. Just care what happens to us.”

In 2007, the campaign focused on the theme, “Making foster care better,” and expanded advertising to bus and subway stations, highway billboards, and college campuses. In television commercials, average citizens point out that growing up in foster care is tough but that you don’t have to be a foster parent to help. They say they mentor foster children, volunteer at agencies, donate money, and take the kids next door to ball games.

A website (www.fosterkidsareourkids.org) and toll-free number (1-888-4RKIDS2) direct visitors and callers to local foster care agencies prepared to help people get involved in different ways. During the first year the website received more than 56,000 hits, and 621 inquiries were made to the toll-free number, 255 of them from out-of-state callers. Ninety-five percent of the calls were inquiries about becoming foster parents.

Federal grants are funding the Foster Kids Are Our Kids campaign

through 2008, but Jerry Stermer, President of Voices for Illinois Children, hopes more resources can be found to continue the campaign for another 5 to 10 years. “This is probably one of the most amazing efforts that I’ve seen in child welfare in the 35 years I’ve had some association with it,” he says.

A statewide phone survey conducted in early 2007 as part of the campaign to evaluate public opinion about foster care found that among those familiar with the issue of foster care, 43% said things had gotten better and 15% said things had gotten worse. Ten percent clearly described the campaign’s public service announcements. Of those who had seen the PSAs, 62% were more likely to strongly agree that “Foster kids are our kids” than those not exposed (51%).

Stermer says he would like to share the campaign’s creative work with other state coalitions that have secured major media partners and have the capacity to link citizens with agencies that can guide them within their communities. Contact Stermer at jstermer@voices4kids.org.

placements, and eight had established permanent relationships with an adult who had committed to supporting them.

While grant funding from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption covered only the first two years of Project Teen Plus, other private funding has since been secured to keep the program going. As of late 2007, 22 participants in the program had been matched with adoptive families.

The teens have taught staff a great deal over the first five years of Project Teen Plus, Suderwalla says. The road to adoption,

for example, can be frightening for some youth, so staff walk the youth through each step of the adoption process. If a youth says “no” to adoption, that doesn’t necessarily mean no. Some youth may simply not want to change their last name, or they fear being abused by an adoptive family, or they don’t want to be disappointed if a family isn’t found for them. The staff make sure to address their concerns and misperceptions.

Project Teen Plus staff have also learned that being part of a family does not always come naturally to children who have grown up in foster care. Project Teen Plus teens expressed the need for more exposure and practice with family activities



Teens involved in the Homecoming Project take an active role in advocating for their own adoptions, including assisting with marketing tools like Jordin’s, above.



Jessica, age 15, is part of Project Teen Plus.

such as eating dinner as a family. In response, Project Teen Plus developed a monthly teen support group called “Sunday Dinners” for youth to meet at the home of a licensed foster parent where they help prepare, cook, and clean up after a meal.

Finally Belonging

In April 2007, Roger reached the pinnacle of his participation in the Homecoming Project—his adoption was finalized. Follow-up stories ran in the local media, including a story by Minnesota Public Radio, and Braun wrote an essay published by American RadioWorks about her experience adopting Roger.

“Roger is something else,” Braun wrote. “You’d have to meet him. He wakes up every day full of the conviction that life is a solid, fine thing. If you look up ‘carpe diem’ in the dictionary, I’m certain his picture is there.”

This past spring, Roger graduated from high school. While many youth his age are eager to break free from mom and dad, Roger isn’t in any rush to leave his newfound home. He plans to commute to a local community college and study nursing.

When asked what he most values about his new family, he says, “A sense of belonging ... and just like all the love that is there.” ■

Jennifer Michael is the former Editor-in-Chief of Children’s Voice.

Project Teen Plus Strategies for Building Youth Empowerment

- Inform youth of each program aspect and ask what they think might specifically work best for them. Be flexible in program activities and be willing to alter activities to best meet the needs of the teen.
- Complete a strengths-based interview with the youth.
- Complete an ecomap and a genogram with the youth.
- Ask the youth about their feelings regarding different adoption recruitment activities (i.e. television, newspaper).
- Include the youth in creating their adoption profile. Have professional pictures taken of the youth and have the youth pick which picture they would like used for adoption recruitment.
- Allow youth to pick topics, location, and activities of teen support groups.
- Be honest with the youth throughout the adoption process.
- Allow youth to read a potential family’s information. Allow them to submit questions to the family.
- Allow youth to choose their forever family.

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Serving Youth Through Systems Integration

By Sorrel Concodora

John Tuell (right), Director of CWLA's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative, reviews material during a symposium held in June.

This past January, 14-year-old David Bennett* was resented to six more months of treatment at a juvenile detention center for the death of his 11-year-old cousin. David lived in a rural community with his two older sisters and mother, who would often accommodate other family members for extended periods of time. In the summer of 2004, David and his sisters were removed from the home and placed in foster care. David was 11 years old. The reunification of the family took less than one week; however, during the next year and a half David and his sisters would find themselves in and out of foster care several more times.

The severity of problems surrounding David and his family pinnacled in December 2005 when their home caught fire. Most were able to escape physically unharmed, with the exception of Serena, David's 11-year-old cousin, who died in the fire. Within two weeks David and his sisters were back in foster care. The following week David was arrested for setting the fire that burned down his home and took his cousin's life.

David, who was 12 years old at the time, was adjudicated delinquent and placed in an adult jail. Several months later he

**David and Serena's names have been changed to protect their identities.*

was moved to a secure juvenile detention treatment center with specialized programs that address emotional behavioral issues that lead to delinquent behavior. David, now 15, is being transferred to a less restrictive residential facility. His sisters, for reasons not having to do with the fire, are in foster care and have two hours of visitation with their mother every month.

Opening Communication

While David's case is very extreme, it exemplifies what so many practitioners see on a regular basis: dually involved youth, or youth who have been served by both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. An increasing amount of research is now available to support the undeniable relationship between child maltreatment and delinquency. The child welfare and juvenile justice systems often serve the same children, respond to similar issues, and ultimately desire the same positive outcomes for the youth and communities they serve. Yet, traditionally and typically, they work in exclusion of one another.

Across the country, communities are starting to recognize the link between these two systems and are taking extraordinary steps to bring agencies together to best serve dually involved youth. Such collaborations have been able to eliminate the

duplication of assessments and services, provide seamless processes easily navigable by families, reduce the time youth spend in detention, strengthen families and stabilize home environments, reduce recidivism, and improve the overall outcomes for dually involved youth. To reach these goals, communities are developing interagency strategies that pool resources, increase information sharing, formalize interagency case coordination, and establish cross-systems training of staff.

The Child Welfare League of America established the Juvenile Justice Division in 2000 through the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which also led to the development of CWLA's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative. This initiative uses a careful, methodologically designed action strategy to assist jurisdictions wishing to improve outcomes for their youth and communities. In the last eight years, states and communities encouraged by the leadership, dedication, and successful outcomes demonstrated in the many jurisdictions that have undertaken this initiative have moved forward with similar objectives. The Juvenile Justice Division strives to provide CWLA members (and other public and private youth-serving agencies and organizations) with useful tools, resources, and publications to help further their worthy goals.

Successful Collaborations in the United States Virgin Islands

In June 2006, CWLA provided a keynote address at the U.S. Virgin Islands Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Symposium that initiated dialogue encouraging the collaboration of various agencies to better serve their children and youth. Within a few months, Kimberly Causey Gomez, Assistant Commissioner for the Department of Human Services (DHS) in the U.S. Virgin Islands, facilitated a meeting hosted by the Chief Family Court Judge that inevitably led to the formation of the St. Croix Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative. Since March 2007, this broad group of public and private agencies and organizations, in collaboration with CWLA, has been making remarkable strides for the dependent children and youthful offenders they serve.

Once the various agencies and organizations collaborated together, they conducted a legal and policy analysis to achieve a better understanding of how local and federal statutes are able to support their systems integration initiative. During this process the committee learned there was more flexibility with information sharing and confidentiality policies than they had originally known or practiced. This new knowledge opened many doors for new multidisciplinary teams to review dual jurisdiction cases.

By sharing information and working together, the youth-serving professionals involved conducted a very thorough data

profile of the young clients they commonly serve. Through this data analysis, the stakeholders involved learned that over one-third of the youth being served by the U.S. Virgin Islands DHS had at some point entered the juvenile justice system. Of those dually involved youth, more than 50% had a history of maltreatment. The committee also found that within the dual jurisdiction population, approximately 50% had mental health deficiencies and 90% had educational deficiencies.

Having a better understanding of their young clients allows the committee to address the important legal issues relevant to dually involved youth. Currently, the legal and policy analysis committee is researching local and federal statutes that will encourage parents to be more involved with their children. According to Causey Gomez, this also includes discussing ways to create consequences for parents who either abuse or neglect their children or contribute to the delinquency of a minor involved in the system.

Overcoming Barriers

Many communities are accustomed to believing that the laws and policies within their jurisdictions are more restrictive than beneficial, discouraging systems integration efforts. "Sometimes people are reluctant to undertake the systems integration work because they worry that they do not have enough support in their community or the resources to carry out the work," says Janet Wiig, Director of the Juvenile Justice Division at CWLA. Wiig, who is currently consulting on systems integration initiatives in Arizona and Washington state, knows that a legal and policy analysis can serve as a useful tool to reveal ways to allow



Janet Wiig (left), Director of CWLA's Juvenile Justice Division, is currently working on systems integration initiatives in Washington State, Arizona, and Louisiana.

for information sharing, pool resources, and create multi-agency collaborations for new programs and protocols. This analysis can also offer new interpretations to already known provisions and bring awareness regarding barriers that may be overcome.

John George, Senior Consultant for CWLA, believes that "by separating myth from fact" a legal and policy analysis can

also reveal and break down challenging barriers. John A. Tuell, Director of CWLA's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative, agrees. "The barriers may be real or perceived—but in many instances the effort produces policies that artfully explain the prohibitions and proper protections provided by state and federal statutes and regulations," says Tuell. "The process permits an understanding of those restrictive policies that have traditionally been enforced without support from statutory language."

Forming a Committee

A positive relationship between collaborating agencies begins with carefully organized committees. "To get the ball rolling, [communities] need to have a small number of key players from the various agencies who see the problems that need to be addressed and agree to sit down and begin identifying the desired improved outcomes for youth," says Wiig. Ideally, this committee includes an array of youth-serving professionals who have experience in the respective local law and procedures and are able to commit time, energy, resources, and credibility to the overall goals of the initiative. Committee members vouch credibility to other collaborating organizations and their own frontline staff (who will most likely be taking on work created by the committee) and they legitimize the work to the community.

Initial committee meetings give each member an opportunity to share materials and identify the legal and policy issues relevant to the initiative. With these initial conversations it is essential to have the assistance of a facilitator. Tuell, who is currently facilitating meetings in Illinois, Washington, New Hampshire, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, has guided committees through the process of cataloging relevant statutes and policies. At times, he has had to play the role of a "neutral convener" to resolve contentions that have come up in analyses, especially in the beginning. "It is important to remember that the goal is to produce agreement—or consensus—that satisfies the interests of the participants and their jurisdiction," says Tuell. "The solutions need to be organic and applicable in their world of practice."

"There is usually some intensive work involved in this kind of analysis, and each partner organization has its own considerations and limitations, including the amount of staff time that can be devoted," says George. Because of this, whether it is a local person or an outside consultant, having somebody serve as a project coordinator can greatly benefit the entire initiative.

"The project coordinator is key," says Causey Gomez. The Virgin Islands Systems Integration Initiative hired a project coordinator who was able to "assist in all of the subcommittees in coordinating the meetings, notify members of meetings, send e-mail correspondence for follow-up, and compile work completed in the subcommittees."

Through these initial meetings the committee determines which laws and policies are most relevant to their desired goals. Together, the committee researches how the local, state, and federal laws affect the community's child-serving entities. "[This ensures the committee has an] understanding of the rules set out by these laws, as well as the underlying purposes and goals of pertinent legislative and administrative man-

dates," says Jessica Heldman, legal consultant for CWLA and author of *A Guide to Legal and Policy Analysis for Systems Integration*.

Research and Analysis

Through surveys or interviews, committee members conduct qualitative research by sharing their experience with how the current legal and policy framework shapes the system. "The benefit of conducting qualitative research with practitioners and case managers is that it contributes to a practical understanding of current interpretation and implementation of law and policy," says Tuell. Through this process the committee may find that relevant laws are explained or interpreted differently. Successful committees also extend the qualitative research beyond its members and include the points of view from stakeholders at all levels.

With this information compiled and organized, the committee conducts a more in-depth analysis and then reports positive findings that encourage collaborations among youth-serving agencies to the systems integration taskforce. These findings include "areas in which agencies and entities are

Who Should Be On the Committee?

- Legal counsel associated with the participating organizations and agencies
- Attorneys working for legal organizations in your community that are directly involved with juveniles in both the dependency and delinquency arenas, including:
 - Public defenders or other attorneys charged with representing juveniles in delinquency or dependency matters
 - Attorneys representing local child welfare agencies and employees
 - Prosecutors who charge juveniles in delinquency matters
- Those from within each agency who develop policy; this may be legal counsel or others within an administration
- Other professionals involved in law and policy regarding child welfare or juvenile justice in your community, including:
 - Public officials, including judges
 - Child advocates within the legal community
 - Academic professionals such as law professors
 - Non-legal professionals, such as administrators and line-level staff

Heldman, J. K. (2006). *A guide to legal and policy analysis for systems integration*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

already working together productively, areas in which efforts are underway to develop coordinated strategies, and areas in which the legal and policy framework supports the goals of the overall initiative,” says Heldman. Likewise, the committee addresses the barriers that discourage coordinated efforts among agencies.

Looking Forward

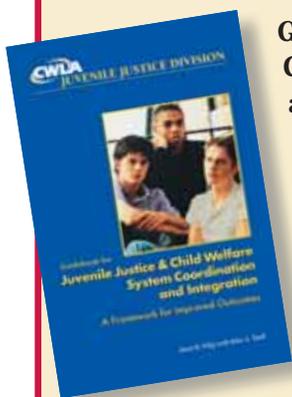
People who choose to serve youth have a special drive and determination, but often face barriers that hinder them from providing positive outcomes. The systems integration initiatives, however, have been successful in achieving many positive outcomes for youth and the systems that serve them. “Those who choose to take on the task of legal and policy analysis have the opportunity to create new possibilities for interagency understanding and collaboration,” says Heldman. Every community has unique features, but through legal and policy analysis, collaborating agencies have the framework to develop an action strategy to achieve systems integration goals. Together, agencies develop infrastructure, agreements, resources, and new policies and procedures and promote statutory change. While successful solutions and agreements in one community may not have the same application in another, as more jurisdictions take

on this work, core strategies are being developed to craft interagency solutions to address particular jurisdictions’ information sharing, funding, service, or resource issues.

Foster parents, social workers, teachers, probation officers, mental health care providers, and other mentors often meet children who are like David—children raised in environments that have not supported a happy, healthy, and thriving childhood. Instead, these children face the increased likelihood of neglect, abuse, maltreatment, and a trajectory toward delinquency. As a result, these children may encounter many people devoted to helping them, but who perceive their collaborative action to be limited by statutory and/or policy prohibitions. While it may be easy to become frustrated or discouraged, CWLA and the Juvenile Justice Division hope that you will be inspired by the communities currently working together to achieve common goals. There is realistic and positive hope for children like David, and for the people who are determined to help to help them. ■

Sorrel Concodora is Program Coordinator of CWLA’s Juvenile Justice Division. To learn more about Systems Integration and how it can positively affect your community, contact her at 703/412-2410 or sconcodora@cwla.org.

Recommended Reading



Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: Framework for Improved Outcomes

by Janet K. Wiig, with John A. Tuell, 2004; revised, 2008

This guidebook helps state and local jurisdictions achieve greater system coordination and integration. It is built from years of CWLA collaborations, co-sponsorship of state

and local symposia, technical assistance, consultation experiences, examination and use of the most credible research, and program and practice evidence.

Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative: A Promising Progress Report

by John A. Tuell, 2008

The framework detailed in this bulletin outlines the components of a strategic planning process and study and analysis methodology that examines the dependency and delinquency population. The bulletin highlights key research, federal legislation, and state and local jurisdictional reform, efforts that have resulted in more coordinated, integrated child welfare and juvenile justice system practices and reforms.

Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions

by Janet K. Wiig and C. A. Widom, with John A. Tuell, 2003

This monograph describes the best research on the connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. Also included is a description of a wide array of promising responses for improving outcomes for dual jurisdiction youth. It will assist agency leaders, policymakers, administrators, judges, attorneys, and practitioners in the field of juvenile justice and child welfare to develop practical program, practice, and system responses to this important issue.

A Guide to Legal and Policy Analysis for Systems Integration

by Jessica Heldman, 2005

This publication details the process of examination of the legal, policy, and procedural mandates unique to each agency/organization in order to make recommendations for changes that will contribute to improved coordination of initial decision making, case management, and service delivery. It is developed through experience gained from efforts in numerous jurisdictions that have worked to improve cross-system practices and policies.

These free publications are available online at www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/jjpubs.htm.

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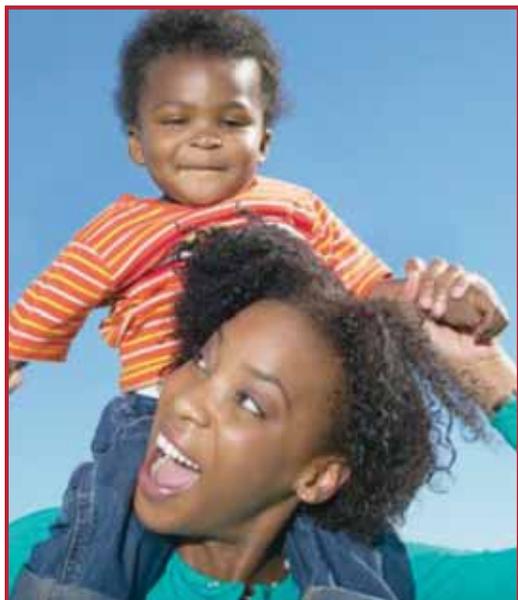
Sheldon H. Horowitz

Enhanced Communication Is a Key to Success

No one would argue that communication between parents and educators is a bad thing. When families and schools share their expectations, their values about learning and behavior, and their views on roles and responsibilities, students learn more and both parents and school personnel feel supported and appreciated. The positive feelings and mutual trust that result are ingredients to success for students, especially those who struggle with learning.

Open avenues for communication, however, are not always easy to establish. Parents, for any number of reasons, are often unfamiliar with the intricacies of the school day, homework routines, assessment activities, and procedures for grading and evaluating student progress. Teachers are often unaware of a child's particular family circumstances that directly impact learning,

such as his care providers or language or cultural considerations. Sharing this information paves the way for more in-depth and targeted discussions about students with learning disabilities and the services and supports they need to succeed in school.



What Kind of Communicator Are You?

A colleague once shared his perception that there are four kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, those who don't know that anything is happening, and those who try to keep anything from happening. He went on to explain that one of the most difficult challenges organizations face (including schools) is figuring out how to create opportunities for frequent, honest, and productive communication, considering the people involved can usually be described by their level of engagement:

- **The engaged:** These folks actively seek to share information and receive feedback; they feel a profound connection to their cause and are open to discussion, problem solving, and innovation.
- **The non-engaged:** These individuals are essentially going through the motions, putting time and energy into their work but not with the passion that earns them respect and gets results.
- **The actively disengaged:** These people are often unhappy and dissatisfied with having to work cooperatively with others; they may or may not intend to undermine the efforts of others, but their lack of interest and engagement creates bad feelings and makes it very difficult for others to get things done.

Think about the lines of communication you have established for yourself regarding your child's education, and reflect upon the types of interactions that you have (with children, classroom teachers, and at conferences and IEP meetings, for example). Are you *engaged* when it comes to the child's academic studies, but *disengaged* regarding social and behavioral issues? Do you perceive that some of a child's teachers or care providers are more engaged than others, and might this be having an impact on his or her confidence level or willingness to seek help? Given all the different people and personalities that comprise your support network, wouldn't it be great to have some way of organizing your thinking and planning? Read on.

NCLD's Great Expectations Worksheet

The National Center for Learning Disabilities has created a simple, easy-to-use worksheet that facilitates communication and clarifies people's opinions during discussions or meetings. While designed primarily for parents, anyone can use it, including educators, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, or school administrators. To be most effective, each person should fill it in completely *from his or her perspective*. And be sure to include the children themselves in this discovery process.

Other resources to use to learn how to effectively communicate include:

- **IDEA Parent Guide**

(<http://www.nclld.org/content/view/900/456084/>).

Learn about your expanded parent rights and opportunities under the most recent special education law.

- **IDEA 2004 Close Up: The Individualized Education Program**

(<http://www.nclld.org/content/view/642/456084/>).

The 2004 update of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act made several significant changes to the Individualized Education Program, both in terms of who should participate and what should be included in this important process.

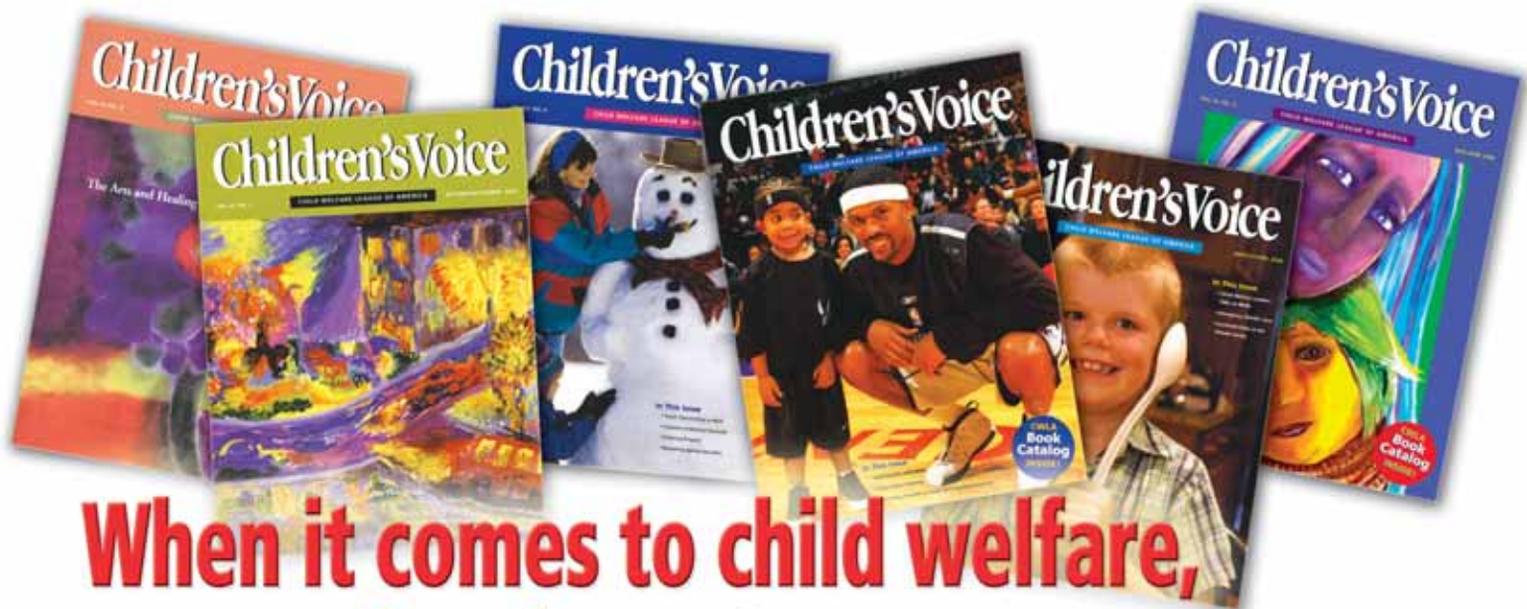
- **Five Essential Skills for Becoming Your Child's Advocate** (<http://www.nclld.org/content/view/1153/456188/>). Learning the essential skills to become your child's advocate and ensure your child receives an appropriate education does not require lots of money or even years of schooling. All it requires is learning five basic skills and consistently implementing them within the school community. ■

Sheldon Horowitz EdD is Director of Professional Services at the National Center for Learning Disabilities (www.LD.org), New York, New York. NCLD provides essential information to parents, professionals, and individuals with LD; promotes research and programs to foster effective learning; and advocates for policies that protect and strengthen education rights and opportunities. This article was adapted from a Research Roundup column in LD News, September 2007, available online at www.nclld.org/content/view/1285/480. Visit www.LD.org for more information about LD and resources for families, educators, and more. For permission to reproduce this article, or to contact Dr. Horowitz, e-mail help@nclld.org. © 2004, 2005, 2007 National Center for Learning Disabilities. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Great Expectations Worksheet

Instructions: This worksheet is intended to facilitate communication and clarify the opinions of each person who will participate in a discussion or meeting. Each person should fill in **ALL** of the boxes *from their perspective*. For example; a parent would insert information about what they perceive to be the needs, expectations, fears, etc. of each other person listed. **BE HONEST** and try to be as specific as possible. Having examples and a rationale to support your answers can also be very helpful.

Completed by: (circle one) →	STUDENT	PARENT	TEACHER	ADMINISTRATOR	SUPPORT	OTHER
NEEDS						
EXPECTATIONS						
FEARS						
ROLES						
SKILLS & RESOURCES						
OUTCOMES						



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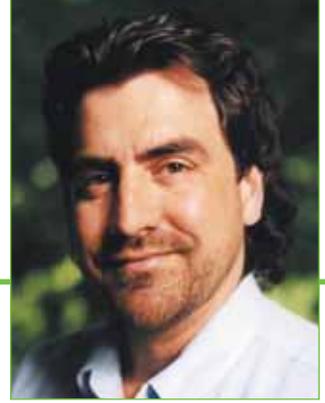
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DownToEarthDad

Patrick Mitchell



Leveraging Dad Wishes to Reel in Dad Fishes

I routinely interview dads connected to child- and family-serving programs—mostly fathers of preschool children—and they routinely tell me their child is bound for college one day to earn a bachelor's degree and then immediately pursue an advanced degree or land a meaningful, high-paying job. These things are to happen, the dads explain, immediately following four successful years of high school.

I have come to believe that such fatherly proclamations, born of pride and hope, are in part a reaction to memories these dads have of mistakes they feel they made when they were younger. Most dads tell me fatherhood changed them—pretty much completely—from the person they used to be. The dads tell me they want something better for their kids: namely, academic success.

Like me, the dads I interview think their children are incredibly bright learning machines, capable of soaking up vast amounts of knowledge—the alphabet, numbers, shapes, music, and rhythm—and possess fantastic problem-solving skills and vivid imaginations. The dads' collective reasoning seems to be, *"My child is bright, as evidenced by all the things she knows, and all the learning she appears capable of; therefore, she's going to succeed in the school years, graduate with honors from high school, then go off to college and have a successful experience there, and then pursue life with vigor (and high income) and be a successful person in the world."*

Greg Panther, father of 4-year-old Shoshini, would concur. Shoshini attends Cherokee Tribal Child Care Services Head Start and Early Head Start in Cherokee, North Carolina. She's definitely college material, says her dad, as is her brother, 7-year-old Corbin.

"I think it's important that Corbin and Shoshini finish school and then do well enough in school in order to go off to college. You stand a better chance of getting a good paying job if you have a college degree," Panther says. "There are days when I wish I had gone to college. I think life would have been a little easier had I done so. I firmly believe that the more my kids know, the better they'll be equipped to compete against other people in society going for the same job as them."

Mr. Panther's children have a lot going for them. For starters, they have an involved dad in their lives, meaning, right off the bat, they're less likely to experience the negative outcomes associated with father absence, such as growing up poor, breaking the law, abusing drugs and alcohol, doing poorly in school, becoming a teen parent, dropping out of school, or committing suicide. Rather, Panther's kids have a statistically better chance of doing relatively well in many ways, including academically, just the way their dad would wish.

Programs Can Leverage "Dad Dreams"

Progressive child- and family-serving programs may find success in motivating dads to get involved when they leverage fathers' pre-existing enthusiasm for getting their child to college. They can do this by hosting events

that teach practical steps dads can take to meet their goals. I do this in my Father Involvement and Literacy Enhancement trainings and in Family Storytelling Night™ events. The idea is to emphasize that children's potential for academic success begins long before school age.

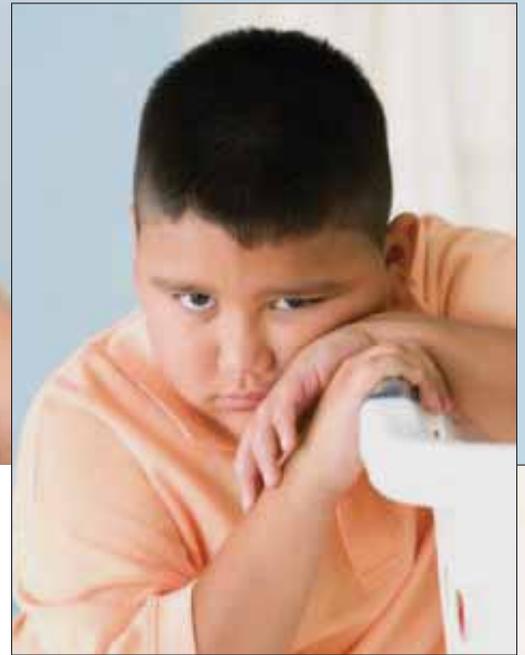
According to Early Literacy Researcher Elizabeth Sulzby, children need 1,000 hours of early literacy enhancement *prior to kindergarten* to be good readers in school—things like lap reading, singing, dancing, rhyming, and storytelling. Early childhood educators are aware of a correlation between how well a child tackles literacy in kindergarten and that child's 10th grade reading ability. How well a child reads in the 10th grade can determine how well a student does academically overall.

Dads can help whittle away those 1,000 hours. Programs giving dads tools to promote literacy are also empowering fathers to take tangible steps toward reaching their goal of seeing their child succeed academically and go off to college. ■

A regular contributor to *Children's Voice*, Patrick Mitchell publishes a monthly newsletter, *The Down to Earth Dad*, and facilitates the *National Dads Matter!™ Project* for child- and family-serving organizations. He provides keynote addresses and trainings, and conducts *Family Storytelling Night™* events for programs and schools. To reserve Patrick Mitchell for speaking engagements, or to implement the *National Dads Matter!™ Project* for your families and community partners, call him toll-free at 877/282-DADS, or e-mail him at patrick@downtoearthdad.org. Website: www.DownToEarthDad.org.

Childhood Obesity: Is it Abuse?

By Abigail Darwin



With childhood obesity increasing across the nation at dramatic rates, courts and child welfare systems in many states are facing novel issues. One of these issues is whether children whose weight poses serious dangers to life or health are properly considered neglected when their parents disobey medical orders to put them on diets. A second issue is what the state should do in these cases. That is, is it proper to remove these children and place them in foster care; or should states take other, less drastic steps to help children attain a normal, healthy weight, making removal unnecessary and allowing these families to remain intact?

Few state courts have experience dealing with this issue, although in recent years more cases have begun to emerge and it is likely only a matter of time before other states will face the issue. The state courts that have heard cases involving children whose obesity threatened life or health, and whose parents were unable or unwilling to follow medical orders to reduce their children's weight, have considered this a form of medical neglect. They have ordered myriad forms of state intervention in an attempt to help these children and their families, using judicial discretion to make their decisions.

These courts have been willing to expand their state's statutory definition of medical neglect to encompass morbid obesity. But no state has a statute on the books specifically

addressing how and under what circumstances a dangerously obese child may be considered "neglected" or "medically neglected." Additionally, no state has statutory language addressing what forms of state intervention are proper in cases dealing with child victims of obesity-related medical neglect.

Who Is Accountable?

In the United States, the number of overweight and obese adults and children has increased steadily over the last three to four decades. Today, according to researchers, almost 66% of adults and 14% to 19% of children and adolescents are considered overweight; approximately 33% of adults and 11% of children are obese.

The ramifications of obesity are arguably more severe for children than for adults. Indeed, obesity deprives youngsters



of many of the social and physical activities that comprise a meaningful childhood. Also, obese children must often endure excessive teasing, social stigmatization, and discrimination by their peers and teachers. Indeed, obesity, with all its attendant social and physical maladies, tends to be a life-long affliction if it is not curbed early in a child's life.

Children, especially very young children, often have little or no control over what they eat and how much they exercise. Parents dictate this, serving as strong role models who shape their children's eating and exercise habits early in life. Even in cases of older children and adolescents who have more control over their food intake and exercise, severe obesity is largely traceable to their parents.

Some critics may question whether it is fair to hold parents responsible for their children's obesity in all cases. After all, many external influences can determine a child's weight. In other words, what a child weighs is not solely determined by what he or she is fed at home. This is especially true as a child gets older and is capable of making more independent choices. Indeed, schools are at least partly to blame, considering that most children consume anywhere from a third to more than half their total daily calories at school.

On the other hand, the few courts that have heard cases involving children with severe obesity that threatened life or health whose parents disobeyed medical orders to reduce their children's



weight have processed these cases as neglect cases. These courts did not examine factors that were external to the family setting that could have contributed to the child's extreme obesity; thus, by omitting consideration of extra-familial factors, state courts have arguably concluded that in cases involving alleged obesity-related medical neglect, even if the child's poor eating and exercise habits are to blame for her condition, it is her parents who are legally responsible.

Other critics assert that it is unfair to punish parents for their children's morbid obesity because of the large role genetics play in determining weight. Research shows that genetic factors do make some people more susceptible to gaining weight and keeping it on. Further, some genetic disorders, such as Turner Syndrome and Prader-Willi Syndrome, prevent a child from ever feeling full after eating. Children with these syndromes are almost always severely obese as a consequence.

Some medical disorders that are not genetic, such as hypothyroidism and central nervous disorders, can cause obesity. But while it is almost impossible for parents to control the weight of children with certain genetic and medical disorders, these abnormalities are rare. For the vast majority of children, proper diet and exercise can usually temper genetics and help them maintain a healthy weight.

The United States Supreme Court has consistently recognized that parents have a fundamental Constitutional right to direct the upbringing of their children free from government interference. They are viewed as being the people most likely to act in their child's best interests. But there are limits to parental autonomy. The Supreme Court has also found that the state has a compelling interest in the health, safety, and welfare of children within its borders.

What constitutes abuse or neglect, however, is often a matter of debate. Federal legislation passed in the mid-1990s presented a baseline definition of child abuse and neglect. This legislation was known as the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1996 (CAPTA). Although each state defines child abuse and neglect in a manner that is consistent with CAPTA, because these statutes tend to be written in broad language, courts must often interpret the statutory language to determine whether specific parental acts or failures to act violate the state child abuse and neglect statutes.

Recent Court Cases

In recent years, as a result of the obesity epidemic that has swept the nation, several state courts have had to grapple with deciding cases of first impression. Specifically, state courts in California, Indiana, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas have had to determine whether morbidly obese children whose parents are unable or unwilling to control their children's weight against medical orders are properly considered abused or neglected.

The California case, decided in 1998, involved a 13-year-old girl named Christina Ann Corrigan* who weighed more than 680 pounds; the Indiana case, decided in the late 1990s, involved a 4-year-old boy named Cory Andis who weighed 111 pounds; the New Mexico case, decided in 2000, involved a 3-year-old girl named Anamarie Martinez-Regino who weighed 131 pounds; the New York case, decided in 2007, involved a young adolescent girl named Brittany who weighed 261 pounds; the Pennsylvania case, decided in 2002, involved a 16-year-old boy named D.K. who was just over five feet tall but weighed in excess of 451 pounds; and the Texas case, decided in 2002, involved a 4-year-old boy named G.C. who weighed more than 136 pounds. All these courts, except the California court, adjudicated the children to be neglected

* Though Children's Voice doesn't typically publish the real names of children, in these instances, their names have already been used in the media.

and reached this conclusion by expanding their states' statutory definition of medical neglect to encompass morbid obesity. In the California case, the child died before the case was heard. The court did, however, ultimately charge her mother with misdemeanor child abuse through inaction.

A second issue that state courts have struggled with in cases involving dangerously obese children is determining the proper mode of state intervention to help these children and their families prior to and after adjudication. The New York court ordered nutritional counseling and cooking classes for the obese child and her mother and also required the parents to purchase a gymnasium membership for their morbidly obese daughter and take her there two or three times per week; several state courts ordered that state-commissioned homemakers be sent into the households to model appropriate cooking and feeding techniques; and the Pennsylvania court ordered the child be taught how to exercise. In each of these cases, except the California case, the child was removed from the home at least temporarily and placed in foster care.

In the Texas case, parental rights were terminated, and in the California and Indiana cases, criminal charges were filed against the parents. It should be noted, however, that in the California case, the charges were ultimately reduced, and in neither the California nor the Indiana case were the parents sentenced to prison. In the California case, the mother was originally charged with felony child abuse and endangerment, but she was eventually convicted only of misdemeanor child abuse through inaction. In the Indiana case, Cory Andis' parents plead guilty to criminal child neglect. The court ordered Cory's mother to serve one-and-a-half years probation and perform 100 hours of community service for endangering Cory's health. Cory's father was placed on probation for three years.

Steps to Help Families



Courts should look at whether the state has provided the family with intensive, family-oriented services including: family counseling, education regarding proper nutrition and exercise, income supports, menu planning, a visiting nurse, and a visiting homemaker. These components are necessary to form the basis of a comprehensive "reasonable efforts"

protocol to help families with morbidly obese children overcome all the challenges associated with helping their children lose weight.

Family Counseling

The family counseling component ensures all family members are mentally healthy. Severe obesity can often be the result of mental illness or family dysfunction. A family counselor can treat minor mental health problems, especially those that can be solved by talk therapy, such as situational depression.

For more serious mental illnesses, such as chronic depression, the counselor can refer the parent or child to a higher certified mental health professional. Family counseling can also help a family develop and maintain strong bonds and enhance trust so that members are well equipped to provide one another with the emotional support they will need to get through the difficult ordeal of helping a morbidly obese child lose weight.

Health Education

The education component provides parents and children with information about proper nutrition and exercise. Many parents of severely obese children do not act intentionally to inflict harm on their children. Rather, they are often unaware of the composition or importance of a proper diet and exercise.

In the Indiana case involving 4-year-old, 111-pound Cory Andis, for example, his parents told child welfare officials and nutritionists the reason they did not provide their child with a proper diet was because "they did not understand the suggested diets [which] were too hard to follow." In addition, when Cory had to later be hospitalized for conditions related to his severe obesity, his parents were seen giving him a fast food meal. And in the New Mexico case involving 3-year-old, 131-pound Anamarie Martinez-Regino, "[h]er parents blamed the weight gain on 'uneven sidewalks,' which prevented Anamarie from exercising at home," according to an article published by Deena Patel in the *Family Court Review*.

Further evidence that parents of morbidly obese children are often not malicious but rather just unaware of the importance and composition of a healthy diet and exercise is the fact that these parents are often severely obese themselves. In the New York case of *In re Brittany T.*, for example, Brittany's mother weighed more than 430 pounds. In the Pennsylvania case, *In re D.K.*, the court noted that D.K.'s mother weighed about 600 pounds.

Research also shows that 80% of children are obese when at least one parent is obese, while only 10% of children are obese when neither parent is obese. Thus, obesity of parents and children is intricately connected. While the connection may in part be genetic, proper nutrition and exercise can usually mitigate the effects of genes responsible for weight.



Secondly, a visiting nurse can help ensure the family maintains dietary compliance. The visiting nurse can also provide treatment for any minor health ailments afflicting the child as a consequence of the child's severe obesity. Finally, a visiting homemaker benefits the family by modeling healthy cooking and feeding techniques for parents. She could teach the parents alternatives to cooking with products that are high in fat, for example, such as cooking with margarine instead of lard or butter. She can also help parents and children discern more appropriate portion sizes at mealtimes.

Preparing for the Future

Since obesity among children and adults has been increasing at an alarming rate in the United States, it is certain that more courts will soon have to decide whether children with levels of obesity that threaten life or health and whose parents are unable or unwilling to follow medical orders to help them lose weight may properly be adjudicated to be neglected. Beyond that, more courts will also have to determine what the proper forms of state intervention are for helping these children and their families. In addition, they will have to determine under what circumstances removal of dangerously obese children from their homes is warranted. ■

Abigail Darwin is a former CWLA Government Affairs Intern and a recent graduate of the University of Iowa College of Law. This article is adapted from a paper she wrote entitled "How the Iowa Child Welfare System Should Handle Cases of Obesity-Related Medical Neglect in Children," in which she proposes specific amendments to the Iowa legal code that would address the issue of child victims of obesity-related medical neglect. She welcomes any questions or comments and can be reached via Children's Voice at voice@cwla.org.

And when parents are aware of the importance of a proper diet and exercise, they are more likely to be able to help their children engage in a healthy lifestyle. As Cory Andis' parents' legal counsel argued while their criminal neglect case was pending, educating the family—especially the parents—is key to helping morbidly obese children attain and maintain a healthy weight.

Income Supports

The income support component would be highly beneficial for impoverished families. Studies show that poor people tend to have higher rates of obesity than wealthier people. Indeed, many of the state court cases dealing with obesity-related medical neglect have involved impoverished families. As one scholar astutely noted, "[h]ealthy foods cost more than fast food, and if a parent has to choose between feeding his or her child fast food or nothing at all, fast food will prevail." Thus, income supports to impoverished families will often be necessary to help parents of morbidly obese children purchase healthy food for their children.

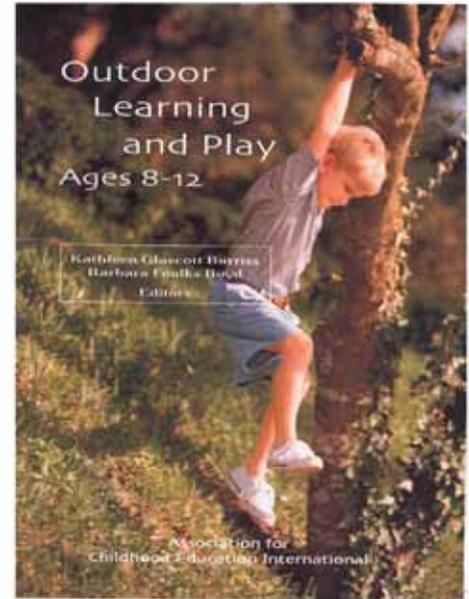
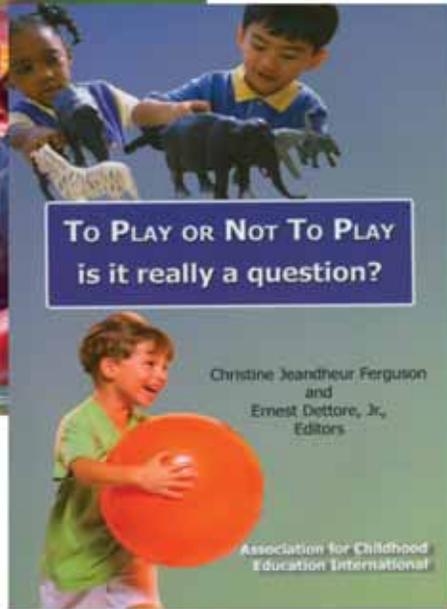
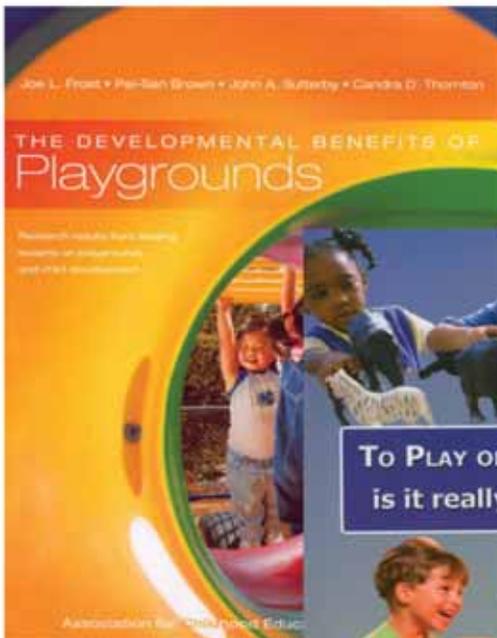
Menu Planning, a Visiting Nurse, and a Visiting Homemaker

The remaining three components also are beneficial to creation of a comprehensive "reasonable efforts" protocol. First, the menu planning component benefits families with morbidly obese children by helping parents prepare more nutritious meals that have the appropriate caloric content for their child. For best results, a treating physician, dietician, or other medical professional should plan the children's menus.

Tell Us What You Think

Should childhood obesity be considered a form of parental neglect? We'd like to hear your thoughts on or your experiences in handling this issue and share them with other readers in a future issue of *Children's Voice*. E-mail voice@cwla.org.

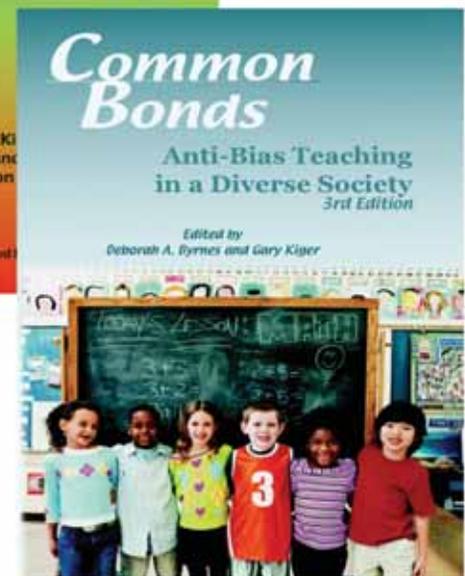
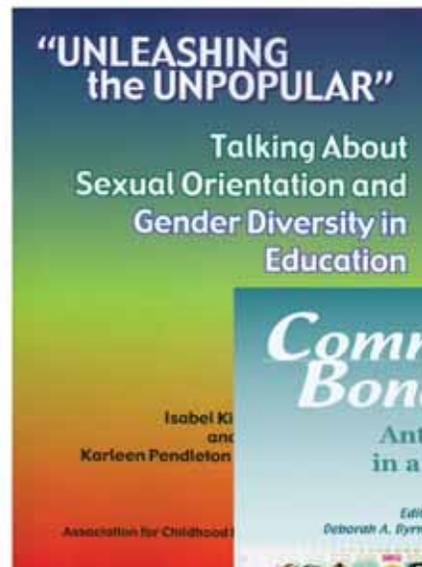




“Play needs to be cherished and encouraged, for in their free play children reveal their future minds.”
 ~ Friedrich Froebel (1887)

“Anti-bias educators play a crucial role in the formation of nonprejudicial attitudes and in supporting respectful behaviors among school children.” J. Barta and C. Mount Pleasant-Jetté, 2005.

—*Common Bonds: Anti-Bias Teaching in a Diverse Society, 3rd Edition*



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While our victories have been many, Congress faces many tough choices in terms of priorities over the next several weeks.

Make sure Congress picks children to be the national priority!

The advancements are each a true tribute of your advocacy.

We encourage you to continue to work with us in the remaining months of this year to make the remaining agenda items a reality!

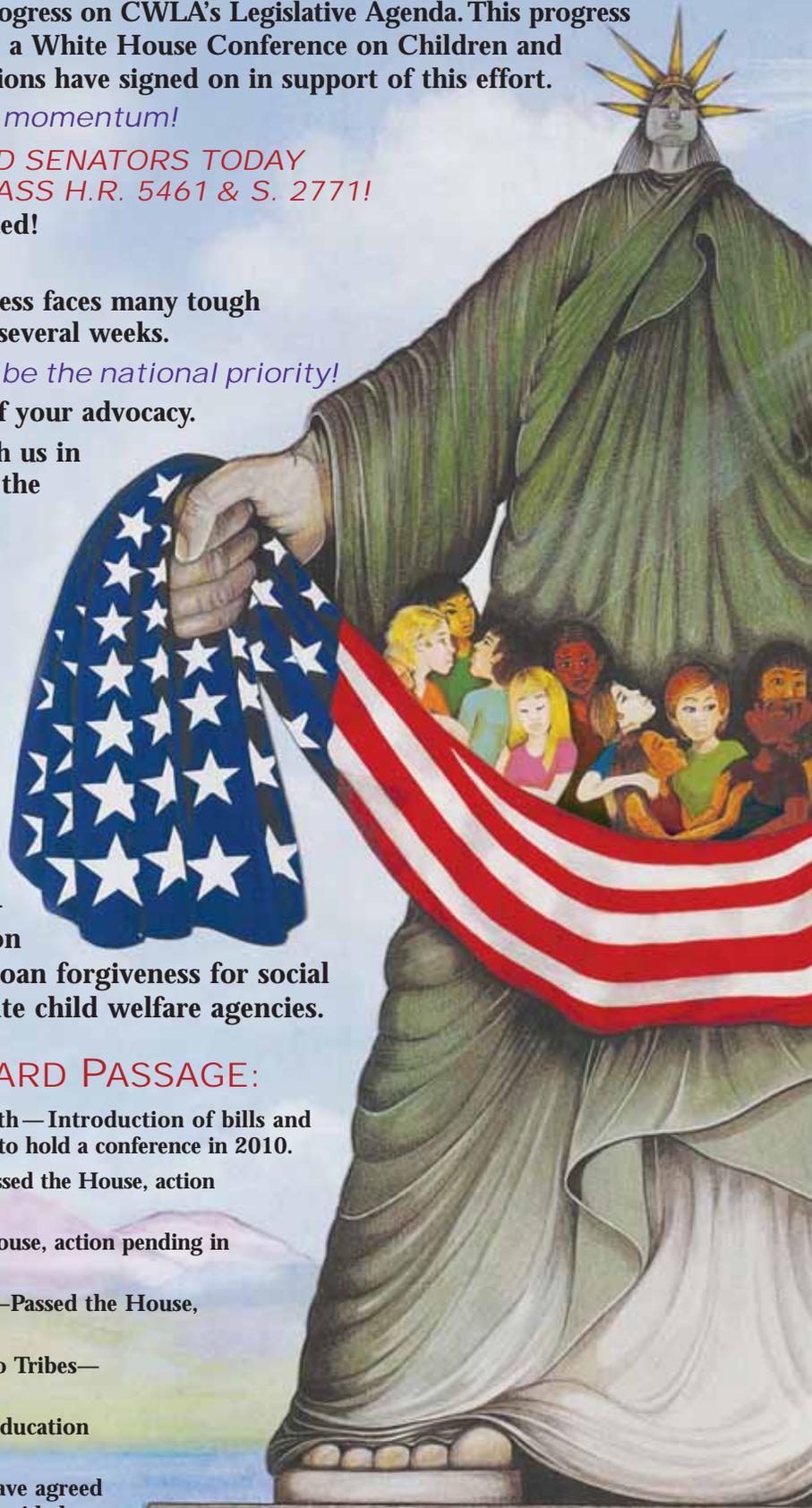
ENACTED:

- ✓ **Preserve Medicaid TCM and Rehab Services— Coverage remains in place as per the supplemental appropriations bill signed into law.**
- ✓ **Reject Cuts to Social Services Block Grant— Included in Budget Resolution.**
- ✓ **Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers— The Higher Education Reauthorization includes a new program to allow for loan forgiveness for social workers who work for public or private child welfare agencies.**

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARD PASSAGE:

- ★ **White House Conference on Children and Youth— Introduction of bills and growing co-sponsorship in the House and Senate to hold a conference in 2010.**
- ★ **Access to Training Funds for Private Agencies— Passed the House, action pending in the Senate.**
- ★ **Title IV-E Funds for Kinship Care— Passed the House, action pending in the Senate.**
- ★ **Extend Federal Foster Care Funding to Age 21— Passed the House, action pending in the Senate.**
- ★ **Extend Access to Federal Child Welfare Funds to Tribes— Passed the House, action pending in the Senate.**
- ★ **Home Visiting Legislation— Passed the House Education & Labor Committee.**
- ★ **Mental Health Parity— The House and Senate have agreed on final bill. Covering cost of legislation being decided.**
- ★ **Reauthorize the Adoption Incentive Program— Passed the House, action pending in the Senate.**

We THANK YOU for Your Continued HELP and SUPPORT!



A Little Effort Goes A

Strategies for Preventing Staff Turnover

By Kathryn Brohl



Nationwide, child welfare organizations struggle with retaining good staff. Managers know that staff turnover is costly. High turnover can delay permanency outcomes, create low morale, and result in higher caseloads. According to one Florida organization, the cost to hire a new case manager is nearly \$13,000.

Ultimately, children and families suffer when they are assigned multiple case managers and when decisions about their future are forestalled due to worker turnover. In addition, administrators and supervisors bemoan the fact that, many times, just when a new worker is trained and beginning to deliver quality services, they leave.

Worker turnover can be attributed to different things that may include a change in agency mission or management, or lack of appropriate supervision. One agency, Children's Home Society of Florida (CHS), was challenged to address its worker turnover issue when it received statewide child protection service contracts as a result of Florida's three-year transition to privatization/community-based care in 2000.

As a result of these new contracts, CHS hired former state child protection professionals, but shifting from government to private employment eliminated overtime compensation for these professionals. Consequently, CHS divisions that had service contracts with community-based care organizations were challenged to address low morale in these newly hired workers.

One CHS division in Central Florida, after receiving a contract to provide child protection services in 2003, sought to address the morale problem by implementing innovative strategies to "embrace and inspire staff." They knew that when staff stayed on the job longer, client outcomes improved.

"We didn't want children and families to go through the trauma of establishing a relationship with a new worker every time a staff member left," said Andry Sweet, CHS Central Florida Division's Executive Director. "We knew a stable workforce was the key to providing the best service to our clients."

Long Way

How It Began

In 2004, the CHS Central Florida Division began addressing the morale problem by surveying staff. Some of the survey comments were distressing. One employee remarked, "People feel like upper management does not care about them. People feel that CHS has been disloyal to their staff with the community-based care contractor." In addition, only 42% of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the survey statement, "Overall, I am satisfied with my job."

While somewhat painful, these remarks and others helped set goals for implementing initiatives to retain and engage staff. Management began by setting the following goals:

- Create opportunities for staff to communicate directly with management.
- Conduct team-building activities to build trust among staff.
- Inform staff of changes on the horizon.
- Consistently reward and recognize staff in various ways.

Next, an employee task force was formed. Employee task force members were identified as "goodwill ambassadors" and chosen because of their longevity with the organization or commitment to

engaging coworkers and making positive connections within the division.

The group consists of one representative and "back up" representative from each department. All comments shared with members remain confidential to avoid any perceived retribution. According to Jo Howard, a long-time CHS volunteer coordinator and one of the founding task force members, "The task force was designed to address concerns generated from the survey in order to improve communication, team-building, and provide a safe, anonymous venue in which to raise concerns."

Sweet reports that, initially, employees were tentative about participating because they were unsure if senior management would follow through on the recommendations.

"At first, people were hesitant and brought forth very simple requests such as 'The water cooler has been broken

for a month and no one's fixed it.' This was great because we were able to take care of easy fixes and staff witnessed immediate follow through," she said. "After that, suggestions really started to pour in. Not all suggestions could be implemented. However, it opened the dialogue between staff and management about the challenges of managing a nonprofit budget."

The Results

As senior management consistently responded to staff need, staff participation grew. As a result of the implementations generated from the task force, staff turnover improved to 37% over Florida's average of 45%, and division employees were staying on the job longer—length of stay on the job increased from 2.7 years in 2004, to 3.7 years in 2007. In the process:

- cases were closed more quickly;
- more clients were reunified and/or adopted, and;
- the number of caseloads dropped.

Eileen Ford, another CHS employee and administrative secretary, sees a difference since the task force was formed. "Through the task force members, our voices have been heard. We usually get some type of satisfaction. CHS has taken the initiative to listen to its employees."

How Did They Do It?

Following are suggested strategies and activities that CHS found influenced staff retention:

Motivational Messaging

Motivational messaging creates unity, improves communication between management and staff, motivates the workforce, allows staff to see the more human side of managers, and supports a positive work experience.

In the CHS Central Florida Division, Sweet writes a weekly "state of the union" staff memorandum providing division updates, motivational information, and acknowledgments. In addition, every quarter she meets with staff in-person to exchange information and address staff concerns and questions.

Management and supervisors are encouraged to recognize and congratulate staff through face-to-face or group contact, e-mail, cards, or personal calls. The division newsletter also recognizes staff efforts. Supervisors are given a recognition kit filled with pens, candy, note cards, and other items to pass on to staff to congratulate and recognize their efforts. In addition, management and other staff learned to share motivational stories with staff one-on-one or in groups.

Creating an Employee Task Force

Begin by surveying staff and creating initial goals and objectives from the survey feedback. Then identify a team leader from management and ask each department/site location to select a task

force member with enthusiasm, leadership and listening skills, and the ability to rally support and build a team.

The team leader personally contacts task force members and gains a commitment (through a commitment form) from them that they will meet with the task force on a monthly basis for at least one year, solicit input from their departments/sites, and maintain confidentiality.

Before monthly task force meetings, members meet with their departments and/or send e-mails asking for input, gather ideas from their local/site suggestion boxes, and prepare a report to take to the meeting. The task force meeting agenda includes updates, concerns and suggestions, activity planning, newsletter discussion, and suggestions about communications from management to staff. Task force members, with the help of co-workers, also are responsible for planning and implementing activities in their location.

Quarterly Employee Retreats

Retreats create teambuilding and networking opportunities, reenergize staff, and build a positive working environment. A retreat can be as cheap and simple as a potluck luncheon, or a half- or full-day retreat with training at a local venue. If cost is involved, first secure a budget from a management team leader.



Staff from the Children's Home Society of Florida gather during their 2007 Winter Retreat.

Ask each task force member to select a representative to become a “retreat-planner” who will solicit ideas from staff, recruit helpers from their work-site, and stay within budget. (If your organization has many sites in different locations,

it is recommended that you do quarterly retreats in those locations or at least nearby to have optimal attendance, but try to do at least one retreat per year for all staff.) Onsite retreats generally take four weeks to plan. Offsite retreats may include parks, bowling alleys, restaurants or museums, and require about eight planning weeks.

An emcee is identified to direct retreat activities that can include any of the following:

- *Ice-breakers*
- *Team spirit days*—Make the theme a tailgate party and invite staff to wear their favorite team jersey to a barbecue. Enlist someone to download college fight songs, the NFL theme song, and other sports-themed music.
- *Diversity day delights*—Create a two-hour potluck luncheon where everyone brings a dish from their native culture and then shares a family or cultural tradition.

- *Trivia contests and puzzles*—Instructions are available online for creating personalized puzzles and trivia questions—these can be most effective when specific to your organization.
- *Deal or no deal*—Choose three contestants who take turns selecting 10 cards held by 10 staff members, ranging from \$0 to \$10. Every third pick the banker (a retreat-planner) calls the emcee on a cell phone and offers the contestant money in lieu of continuing. The contestant is asked, “Deal or no deal?” and the contestant with her or his selected “lifeline” partner considers whether or not to accept the deal. (Before the event, ask staff to create support signs for each contestant.)
- *Jeopardy*—Allocate about 30 minutes for the activity and give three contestants a cowbell, kazoo, and a pair of cymbals. Identify three categories, and assign each topic under each category, with dollar amounts. Contestants sound their instruments first before attempting to answer a question. The winner receives a group prize awarded to their department or site/location.
- *Talent contests*—Recruit people to give five-minute performances. Select three impartial judges who will score the acts. Gift cards or homemade awards can be presented to winners. Be sure to take pictures for staff to post and enjoy later.

Mother's Day Brunch

A Mother's Day brunch was created to acknowledge working mothers within the organization. The brunch demonstrates appreciation for the challenges working mothers face every day. Coordinated by managers or supervisors, invitations are sent three weeks in advance. The organization may prepare or purchase food and incorporate fun activities, such as a raffle and parting gifts, into the celebration.

Welcome Wagon

The Central Florida Division Welcome Wagon's function illustrates that new staff members are important because it shares relevant information, provides important networking tips, and contributes to teambuilding with the organization.

Identify one Welcome Wagon designee per location (and a back-up) who is responsible for welcoming new employees. The designee or an administrative assistant prepares welcome bags each month based on the anticipated number of new hires. Keep the bags at a secure and central location. Welcome bags include the organization newsletter, desk items such as pencils, pens and note cards, and a key lanyard. Also included are snacks, phone lists, and menus from local restaurants.

The designee welcomes the new staff member on their first day by placing a welcome sign on her desk, presenting a welcome bag, and introducing her to co-workers. They also share contact names and phone numbers, answer immediate questions, and follow-up at least twice over the next month to see how the new staff member is doing.

Leadership Book Club

All staff are invited to meet for breakfast each month to discuss various assigned leadership books and explore leadership theories and how they might be applied on the job. The book club gives staff the opportunity to study and apply leadership theory in a collaborative learning environment, and informally mentors them while attracting some who do not generally participate in traditional leadership venues.

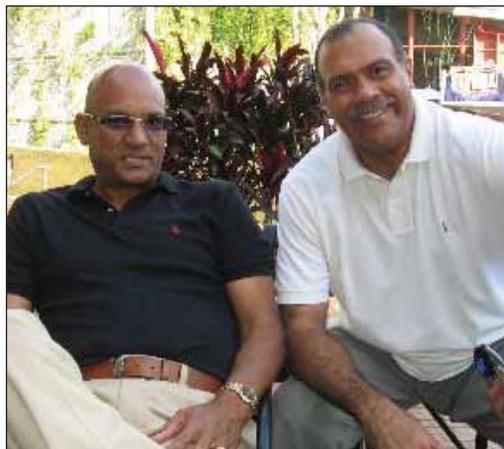
Suggestion Boxes

Suggestion boxes are as effective as the responses by management to the suggestions. When suggestions are implemented, staff observe follow through. Designate someone at each office to oversee the suggestion box. Locked suggestion boxes can be obtained from most office supply stores with pre-printed suggestion cards. Place the boxes in a conspicuous area and create a schedule to prompt employees to make suggestions, schedule pick-ups, deliver to management, and follow-up with staff on suggestion ideas. A follow-up e-message is sent to staff to let them know which suggestions will be implemented.

Drop in the Bucket

The Drop in the Bucket program is based on the book by Tom Rath and Donald Clifton, *How Full Is Your Bucket?* This is an on-the-spot recognition program in which an employee recognizes another employee by completing a “drop” form that

identifies an action worthy of recognition. A copy of the form is placed in the receiving employee’s box and another copy is placed in a bucket located in a centralized place in each work location. At the end of each month, a designee pulls one “drop” out and the recognized employee participates in lunch with his immediate supervisor or another member of the management staff. All “drops” are listed and acknowledged throughout the work location via e-mail.



The Children's Home Society's Winter Retreat was held at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida.

Making A Difference

While addressing staff need and taking action doesn’t necessarily raise salaries or prevent layoffs, it does go a long way toward teambuilding and communicating complex challenges facing managers and staff within an organization.

Good morale is an essential piece of preventing staff turnover and creating supportive working networks. Investing back into employees has been a priority at the CHS Central Florida Division and has successfully retained staff.

John Marcelle, another Central Division administrative secretary, says, “This is a team building effort. Our concerns don’t fall on deaf ears. We understand that some issues can’t be resolved immediately, but employees feel they can say what their issue is without feeling exposed.”

Kathryn Brohl MA LMFT is Director with the Children's Home Society of Florida, Center for Applied Innovation. She is the author of The New Miracle Workers: Overcoming Contemporary Challenges in Child Welfare Work, and Working with Traumatized Children: A Handbook for Healing, both available from CWLA Press.

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Advocacy Day Sparks Results

Many cosponsors were added to the House bill for a White House Conference on Children and Youth (H.R. 5461) after receiving visits from CWLA member agencies and State Leaders during Advocacy Day at CWLA's national conference. Cosponsors that signed on with-in days of visits from member agencies include:

- Rep. Diana DeGette (CO-1) – 2/26/2008
- Rep. Phil Hare (IL-17) – 2/26/2008
- Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX-18) – 2/26/2008
- Rep. James P. McGovern (MA-3) – 2/26/2008
- Rep. Jeff Miller (FL-1) – 2/27/2008
- Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro (CT-3) – 3/4/2008
- Rep. Jose E. Serrano (NY-16) – 3/4/2008
- Rep. Howard L. Berman (CA-28) – 3/5/2008
- Sen. Richard G. Lugar (IN) – 4/2/2008



CWLA members take a break at Advocacy Day last February.



Hillary Clinton



Barack Obama

Several more legislators signed on to the House and Senate bills in the months following, including Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Visiting your member of Congress can really make a difference. Keep making phone calls and keep scheduling visits with Congress in Washington and at home!

Check to see if your members of Congress have cosponsored H.R. 5461/ S. 2771! Visit www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouseconfcosponsors.htm.

Speaking Out

“Today, by cosponsoring this crucial legislation, presidential candidates Clinton and Obama sent a very strong message that we truly need to make children a national priority.”

— CWLA President and CEO Christine James-Brown in a statement in April, shortly after Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama signed on as cosponsors of the bill calling for a White House Conference on Children and Youth in 2010. Advocacy efforts have taken place with Senator John McCain as well, and CWLA is hopeful he will sign on soon. ■

Jack Lightfoot, CWLA New Hampshire State Leader, and Michael Ostrowski, President and CEO of Child and Family Services in New Hampshire, congregate with others in front of the U.S. Capitol building after visiting their members of Congress during Advocacy Day 2008.



PHOTOS BY MARLENE SALLISBURY



NEWS FROM THE HILL

A White House Conference on Children & Youth Has Liftoff

Specifically because of CWLA's efforts and leadership, legislation to reinstate a White House Conference on Children and Youth was introduced earlier this year and is off to a strong start. Both the House and the Senate bills have strong bipartisan support that we must continue to build upon in order to pass the legislation.

A White House Conference on Children and Youth would re-establish this conference that took place every ten years from 1909 to 1970. This one would take place in 2010. This conference would function like past children's conferences and aging conferences: funding would be provided to establish a series of events and small conferences through the 50 states. This would take place in the year before the national conference. Delegates would be sent to the White House event representing all states including the tribes, territories, and Washington, DC. Authorizing legislation would outline the focus and goals of the conference and it would be specific to child welfare, including the range of issues from prevention and intervention to permanency, including reunification, kinship care, and adoption. Indirectly this is a conference

that will affect all communities and touch on such issues as access to health care, mental health and substance abuse services, housing, and support services such as child care.

What's Next

Legislation would require this White House Conference to be held sometime in 2010, allowing for a two-year process for state and local gatherings and input. It also offers an opportunity for communities, states, and cities to come together in a dialogue about how to make real change in the lives of vulnerable children and families. Think of meetings across the country to deal with each community's unique challenges. In addition, setting this conference for 2010 allows a new president, who will not start his term until January 2009, the time to focus on this as a priority.

What You Can Do to Promote a White House Conference

First and foremost, you can contact your Senators and Representatives in Congress and urge them to support the legislation. Call 202/224-3121 to connect to Congress.

Get Cosponsors!

Call your member of Congress today and ask them to cosponsor this monumental legislation! For a list of current cosponsors, visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:HR05461:@@P>.

Contact the Committee!

The House Education and Labor committee has been assigned this important legislation. If your member of Congress is on this committee, contact them right away and tell them to support a long-overdue White House Conference on Children and Youth! To see a list of committee members, visit <http://edworkforce.house.gov/about/members.shtml>.

Sign-on in Support!

You will receive regular updates as the campaign progresses, alerts to upcoming key developments, and most importantly you will be part of a movement to make children a national priority! Visit <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouse/conf10.htm> to join in the campaign! ■

On the Line with

CWLA
AN INTERNET TALK RADIO
Program

www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio

CWLA Radio: Speaking for America's Children

In February, CWLA launched a thought-provoking, interactive radio program focusing on subjects, stories, and strategies of special interest to child welfare policymakers, providers, and practitioners. Solely devoted to the welfare of America's vulnerable children, the show features a forum where the voices of child welfare experts, CWLA's member agencies, and political figures working on behalf of children can be heard. Programs are broadcast live every Wednesday from 2:00-2:30 p.m. EST at www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio. You can also listen to previous broadcasts at any time. Shows that aired recently include "Policy Actions on Health Care Coverage for Foster Children," "Family Matters: Kinship Caregivers Around The Country Convene At The Capitol," "Call to Action Alert: CAPTA's Coming Up For Reauthorization," "Child Welfare Workers: Overworked and Underpaid," and "Labor Pains: Strengthening The Child Welfare Workforce." ■

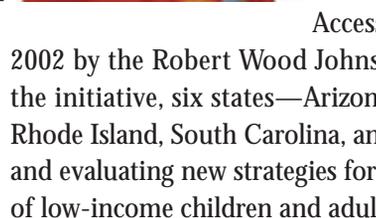
EndNotes

Dental health care for low-income children, or the lack thereof, has been a hot topic in the news headlines lately, last year in particular. In early 2007, the nation focused on a 12-year-old boy in Maryland who died after his untreated tooth infection spread to his brain. Then *ABC News* reported on a national dental chain serving large numbers of children on Medicaid that provided inappropriate and unnecessary care. And the *New York Times* ran a story on dental problems in Kentucky and how half the state's children have untreated cavities.

As a result, George Washington University's Rapid Public Health Policy Response Project decided to tackle the issue and in January 2008 came out with a report, *Pediatric Dentistry: How Can Dental Care for Low-Income Children Be Improved?* The document presents data and other background information on the issue with the goal of educating the public, policymakers, health care providers, and others to promote informed decision making.

In addition to the background information, the report provides a brief overview of state-level activities across the nation to increase access to pediatric dental care. In Michigan, for example, a single commercial vendor is administering a Medicaid fee-for-service children's dental program; Alabama is administering its own fee-for-service program that included targeted dental case management; and in Vermont, private dental services operate with public subsidies. The report also highlights the State Action for Oral Health Access initiative, launched in 2002 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Under the initiative, six states—Arizona, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Vermont—are testing and evaluating new strategies for meeting the dental needs of low-income children and adults. ■

PHOTO BY MARLENE SAULSBURY



Following The Election

Common Sense Media has come up with a few ideas on getting kids interested in the electoral process as the presidential campaign heats up.

Scholastic.com is a good spot for elementary children to read about the presidential election. Kids can click on a star on a U.S. map to read dispatches from kid reporters.

Factcheck.org is a good site where kids over age 12 can get the information presented by the candidates in their speeches. Hosted by the Annenberg Foundation, the nonpartisan site monitors the TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases of all the major candidates.

MTV's **RockTheVote.com** is a nonpartisan site that works to mobilize young voters. ■



Did You Know?

While the economic costs associated with child abuse and neglect were \$103.8 billion in 2007, only 10% of federal funds dedicated for child welfare (approximately \$741.9 million) can be used to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. ■

Source: *Total Estimated Cost of Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States*, by Prevent Child Abuse America, and *Time for Reform: Investing in Prevention, Keeping Children Safe At Home*, by Kids Are Waiting, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts.





Research Report

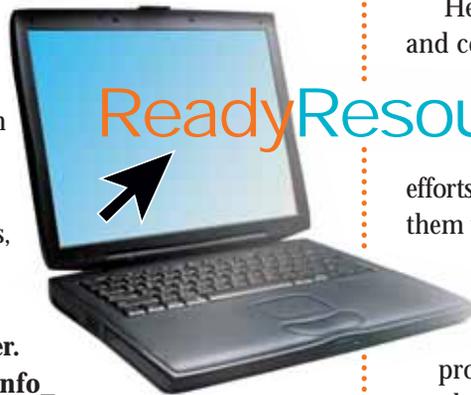
Child Maltreatment 2006: This report, released by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, compiles 2006 data on child abuse and neglect from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).

According to the report, an estimated 3.6 million children who were alleged victims of child maltreatment were accepted by state and local Child Protective Services agencies in 2006. Of these children, an estimated 905,000 were substantiated as victims of child maltreatment, a rate of about 12 per 1,000 children in the United States and Puerto Rico.

The report also provides statistics on preventive services and postinvestigation services to families. In 2006, an estimated 3.8 children received preventive services, such as respite care and parenting education, and 59% of child maltreatment victims and 30% of nonvictims received postinvestigation services. Download the report at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm06/cm06.pdf.

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) Report #14: This report on national statistics on adoption and foster care for fiscal year 2006 shows several changes from 2005. Positive trends include the number of children in foster care dropping from 513,000 to 510,000, as well as a drop in children entering foster care, which went from 311,000 in 2005 to 303,000 in 2006. The report also states that the number of children waiting to be adopted increased from 114,000 in 2005 to 129,000 on the same day in 2006. The number of children adopted with public agency involvement stayed the same, at 51,000. Read the full report on the Children's Bureau website at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm#afcars. ■

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning has put together a webpage with various resources involving health and child welfare. The page includes links about the health and mental health of children and adolescents, including guides, managed care resources, curriculum, teleconferences, and presentations. For more information, visit www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/child-and-adolescent-health-care.html.



instructions on how to administer the survey and other related resources.

Helping America's Youth, which aims to raise awareness and connections with mentors for at-risk boys, created a Community Guide to Helping America's Youth to encourage communities to further youth-serving efforts. The website details how to form partnerships and make them work, assess a community and connect its resources, and search for youth-serving programs. When searching for programs, users employ a Program Tool to search for programs based on risk factors, protective factors, and keywords to find strategies that can be used in their communities. Data about youth and information on federal youth initiatives are also available at <http://guide.helpingamericayouth.gov/default.htm>. ■

The NRCFCPPP's website has resources for health, and Helping America's Youth aims to help at-risk boys by involving communities.



The NRCFCPPP's website has resources for health, and Helping America's Youth aims to help at-risk boys by involving communities.



OneOnOne

Questions and Answers with CWLA Staff

John Tuell, Director

Child Welfare-Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative

Since 2003, CWLA has participated in the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice Initiative. Tell us about this work.

The Models for Change initiative makes grants to national organizations, such as CWLA, that together constitute a national resource bank that those working on juvenile justice system reform at the state and local levels can draw upon. CWLA has primarily focused on two major areas: the connections between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency, and the integration and coordination of programs and services across the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. But more than that, CWLA has developed a technical assistance framework that is used in state and local jurisdictions within Models for Change and in other jurisdictions across the country to improve system coordination of multiple youth-serving agencies and organizations, including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, education, and health.

As examples, CWLA has helped a state-level working group in Pennsylvania

address improvements in mental health care for juvenile justice involved youth; in Illinois we have assisted Peoria and DuPage counties mobilize a consortium of personnel with the authority to direct activities that support improved policies and procedures for addressing delinquent youth with dependency histories; in Louisiana we have helped Jefferson and Rapides parishes form state mandated children and youth planning boards that must, by law, develop strategic plans for addressing juvenile

delinquency and implementation of evidenced-based intervention approaches; and in Washington State we have helped King, Clark, and Pierce counties use the technical assistance framework to improve outcomes for dual jurisdiction youth and families through a study and analysis of key issues, such as data collection and information management.

CWLA has been privileged to use the Models for Change framework through contractual agreements in Los Angeles County, and with Arizona, Colorado, South Dakota, and the U.S. Virgin Islands territory in St. Croix, to develop policies, protocols, and statutory reform designed to improve outcomes for dependent and delinquent youth through improved multi-system coordination.

How will we continue to contribute to the Models for Change initiative?

In addition to continuing the focus of work indicated above, the MacArthur Foundation has recently funded CWLA, in partnership with the Juvenile Law

Center, to create a portfolio of products that may be used by the Models for Change sites in designing initiatives and resolving

issues regarding information sharing, confidentiality, and self-incrimination. We will train other state and local organizations participating in the Models for Change initiative on using the portfolio of products to assist the Models for Change sites.

Why is CWLA's work with the Models for Change initiative important?

CWLA's core mission is grounded in improving the lives of children, youth, and families. Research and evidence from

demonstration projects increasingly supports our intuitive expertise that to achieve improved outcomes for our most disadvantaged children and families, we must partner across multiple youth-serving disciplines. In isolation, we will likely fail our mission. In thoughtful and prudent collaboration, we can interrupt trajectories toward failure and contribute to positive outcomes.

The MacArthur Foundation's generosity has permitted CWLA to be an active leader and partner in this positive reform, including legislative and statutory reforms, and providing consultation and technical assistance with members and other important partners in the field to develop new protocols and practices. All of these activities are consistent with the support CWLA has historically provided to members and the field.

What resources has CWLA developed in this area?

The following publications are available at www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice:

- *Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems Integration Initiative: A Promising Progress Report.*
- *The Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: Framework for Improved Outcomes.*
- *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions.*
- *A Guide to Legal and Policy Analysis for Systems Integration.*

CWLA has also established a small cadre of expert senior consultants. Chief among them are Juvenile Justice Director Janet Wiig and Senior Consultant John George, who provide quality technical assistance and training to member organizations and other agencies in the youth-serving field. ■

"To achieve improved outcomes for our most disadvantaged children and families, we must partner across multiple youth-serving disciplines."



Children Today...

America's Future!

February 23–25
Washington, DC

During the next year, our nation will elect a new President, and CWLA will continue to lead the call for a White House Conference on Children and Youth in 2010. Our national conference, *Children Today... America's Future!* will set the stage for the important work to be done in 2009 to make the well-being of our children a top priority.

If there is one conference you attend in 2009, *Children Today... America's Future!* should be it!

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