



Highlights:

- 2 Success Stories
- 4 SPA Spots
- 7 Prevention
- 9 Youth Speakers Bureau
- 10 De-mystifying Kin-GAP
- 12 Employees of the Month

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Making Soup Out of Stones

Many of you know the classic Grimm Brothers tale of “Stone Soup.”

According to the story, some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers. The travelers fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire in the village square.

One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making “stone soup,” which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavor, which they are missing. The villager doesn’t mind parting with just a little bit to help them out, so it gets added to the soup.

Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which hasn’t reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more curious villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all.

What the story tells us is that we all have the makings

of a great pot of soup, but none of us have sufficient ingredients to make it alone. By working together and cooperating, we can end up better off.

It’s been two years since I was appointed director of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). I have seen a lot in that time including many examples of the “stone soup” spirit of cooperation. I’ve seen it used to better the lives of children and families.

We are still safely serving more children in their own homes and more families in their own communities. We have continued to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care, and are now at an all-time low of 17,075 as of this fall. This is the result of 17 consecutive months of a consistent downturn in the number of children in foster care. That speaks to the great social work you are doing.

DCFS survived this budget year fairly well. What could have been a disastrous situation resulted in fiscal stability for our department, no lay-offs and no hard job freezes to date. In addition, this year DCFS produced \$28.9 million funds from last year that can be reinvested in strategies and programs to help children and families. But

Continued on page 3

First Year of Title IV-E Waiver Project Results in Progress in Key Areas

This past July marked the first anniversary of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation Department five-year Title IV-E Waiver Capped Allocation Demonstration Project which is using flexible funding to concentrate on prevention of abuse and neglect, strengthening families and communities to keep children from entering foster care, and achieving faster, safe reunification for children in care.

In July, DCFS and Probation staff and community partners participated in the third DCFS-Probation Title IV-E Waiver Learning Organization Group (LOG). The theme of the LOG was “System Transformation: Keeping the Momentum Going,” recognizing that the economic

challenges that face families, community-based organizations, the State and the County, will require maximizing the resources we have through creativity, collaboration and efficiency.

In the afternoon, each Service Planning Area (SPA), with its community partners, participated in separate break-out groups where they reviewed data and identified their three top successes, three top challenges and three next steps to build on their successes and keep the momentum going.

Participants also reported back to the larger group and each SPA identified collaboration with the community as one of their top successes. The lack of or long wait for mental health treatment and aftercare services for children, adults and the undocumented were frequently mentioned as top challenges.

Continued on page 3



DCFS Success Stories

As a regular part of "DCFS News," we recognize the successes of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and its community partners. These success stories are diverse and offer an opportunity for staff and community partners to celebrate accomplishments and share the good work they are doing. To submit story ideas for this section, please e-mail Louise Grasmehr of the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at grasml@dcls.lacounty.gov.



Parents Reach Out to Parents

The Parents in Partnership (PIP) program is a collaborative effort between the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and parent partner paraprofessionals to bring about system change to facilitate safe reunification and permanency through the education, support and mentoring of birth parents.

It is anticipated that through PIP, DCFS will be able to increase the number of birth parents who will have greater success in meeting their case plan goals. Birth parent engagement work was originally introduced to DCFS through an Annie E. Casey initiative in 2005. Since then the program has grown to include parent partners in the Belvedere, Lakewood, Palmdale and Lancaster regional offices.

The parent partners are previous DCFS birth parents whose cases have been successfully closed. As a result of their journey through the child welfare and dependency court systems they possess a unique perspective and can provide guidance by sharing their experiences and lessons learned. They have received training through DCFS and the Annie E. Casey Family to Family Initiative and are skilled and knowledgeable about the child welfare and juvenile court systems.

Currently, parent partners provide orientation classes for DCFS-involved parents to educate parents on their rights, how to navigate the child welfare and juvenile court systems and how to work toward successful family maintenance or reunification with their children.

The parent partners also maintain an information line for DCFS-involved parents on orientation locations, dates and general information. They participate in focus groups, panels and discussions for agency systems improvement.

"We are committed to providing family reunification services and we know that many parents are in a crisis when a case is opened or when their children are first removed from their home," said Nina Powell-McCall, Family to Family and Family Group Decision-Making

program manager. DCFS recruits and trains parent partners, provides the infrastructure for the program and maintains the program management.

LaToyia Conway-Hampton knows first hand the struggles involved in reunification. Conway-Hampton lost custody of her seven children several years ago, but through hard work and the support of DCFS social workers, she regained custody of all of the children. Now, Conway-Hampton works for Annie E. Casey as part of the Parents in Partnership program and mentors other parents who are dealing with the same situation.

"The PIP program is doing wonderful things in the community," said Conway-Hampton. "We have a phone information line and consultations with birth parents. They also paired us up with workers to help make system improvements all across the board. It gives parents a chance to know they are not a failure."

Conway-Hampton, who travels throughout California and as far as Alaska to work with parents on improvements to the system, sees the program growing as the department and more parents see the value. "The demand for parent partners is high," she said.

PIP efforts have helped to dispel longstanding negative stereotypes of birth parents within the department as well as in local communities. Clients express high appreciation of PIP in providing increased awareness and knowledge about the DCFS child welfare system through the PIP orientations. Also, the PIP parents have reported tremendous personal satisfaction and development from their involvement with PIP.

For more information on PIP, please call Nina Powell-McCall at (213) 639-4810. Additionally, staff and parents can call the PIP information phone lines at the following offices: Belvedere (323) 725-4670; Lakewood (562) 497-3654; and Palmdale/Lancaster (661) 223-4232. 

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Continued from page 1

how we spend these savings will need to be analyzed carefully.

We need to take a good look at what we do, find out what works well and apply it to what we need to do to best serve children, youth and families. Clearly, children thrive under the guidance of strong, nurturing and permanent relationships with adults and keeping children out of the foster care system whenever possible is what is best for children and families.

Despite our optimistic financial outlook, the Chief Executive Office (CEO) has told us that it is critical all County departments tread carefully and strategically as we move forward in the development of our 2009/2010 budget.

To ensure the County continues to be financially stable, the CEO is asking each department to make projections over the next year regarding possible budget reductions that will not jeopardize the quality of County services.

This means that it will be vitally important that all County departments work closer together. By continuing to build stronger working ties with other County departments, more effective services will be provided along with a reduction in service duplication.

The sharing and leveraging of resources is necessary. For too many years DCFS, other County departments, private agencies and those responsible for providing vital services to our most vulnerable families worked independently and without the necessary collaboration or integration. This silo mentality is wasting resources and duplicating services. In these tight budget years, we can't afford to do this.

In the spirit of collaboration, DCFS is now reaching out and working with the community and other County agencies on several initiatives including providing more comprehensive mental health services and programs to help older youth. It is our hope that everyone's contribution to our "pot of soup" will result in work that enhances the lives of children and families.

Lastly, I want to stress that each and every one of you is the most important resource we have in the success of this department and the work we are doing to keep children safe and helping to build stronger families. Keep up the good work and I look forward to sharing another successful year with you in 2009. 🍷

Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW
Director

Continued from page 1

Expanding up-front assessments was almost universally noted as vital to keeping the momentum going. Also frequently mentioned were developing aftercare resources and continuing to engage, build, enhance, expand and collaborate with the community.

In the first Waiver year, DCFS implemented three priorities and made progress in key areas including:

- **Family Team Decision-Making (FTDM) Expansion** – FTDM facilitators were selected for 14 specialized positions to convene regular Permanency Planning Conferences (PPCs), modeled after Team Decision-Making meetings, for children in group homes or in foster care two years or longer with no identified permanency resource. This past spring and early summer, 222 youth in group homes had PPCs, resulting in identified plans for 61 children to safely return to parents or relatives and 59 children to move to reduced levels of care including foster family agencies and licensed or specialized foster homes.
- **Specialized Youth Permanency (YP) Units** have been established in the Pomona and Metro North regional offices to target youth most at risk of aging out of foster care without a permanent connection. Many of these youth have no or limited family connections, have run away, are heavy substance abusers or have recent psychiatric hospitalizations. YP Unit social workers have reduced caseloads and received expert case consultation and additional training on family finding and engagement strategies, reconciling loss and rebuilding relationships. In addition, all staff in these offices will receive training on achieving permanency for older youth so they are able to support and promote the YP Unit's work.
- **Upfront Assessments** - Since October 1, 2007, DCFS has contracted with Shields for Families in coordination with the DCFS Compton office to provide upfront assessments of families with high-risk Child Protection Hotline referrals when there are issues of domestic violence, substance abuse and/or mental illness. The goal is to immediately connect families to treatment and supplemental community services. Approximately 400 assessments were completed as of June 30th. The Metro North and Wateridge offices began using contracted upfront assessments in May 2008 and, in the next six months, DCFS plans to expand upfront assessments to the Emergency Response Command Post.

For more information, contact L.A. County's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project Coordinators at waiverinfo@dcfs.lacounty.gov and waiverinfo@probation.lacounty.gov. 🍷

About the Insert...

The insert in this edition of "DCFS News" features important information about the current state of DCFS and our mission and vision as we look toward future initiatives in 2009. We have a lot to be proud of. I hope you keep this insert handy, reflect with pride on the good work we've done and will continue to do, and spread this good news to your friends, neighbors, colleagues and community partners.

Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW
Director

SPA SPOTS

In every issue, "DCFS News" provides information about what's happening in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Service Planning Areas (SPAs). If you have SPA news to report, please submit your ideas to Stuart Riskin of the DCFS Public Affairs Office at riskis@def.s.lacounty.gov.

DCFS Wateridge Office Honored by AAAP

The Association of African American Professionals (AAAP), Inc., honored the DCFS Wateridge office this past summer at their annual Hat Breakfast charity event "Celebrating Our Heroes" held at the Westin LAX Hotel.

The AAAP is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to provide public education on issues affecting African-American communities, inspire youth and adults to pursue academic and professional training and assist local agencies in strengthening communities. The organization also promotes civic engagement and charitable service by inspiring professionals to get involved in their communities.

The AAAP actively links professionals, community leaders, service providers and citizens to bring about social, economic and educational change. The DCFS Wateridge office received the AAAP's "Youth Services Award" for its commitment to working to keep children safe from abuse and neglect and strengthening the African-American community and its families.

The award was the result of a winter holiday program in which AAAP provided gifts and donations to enable poor families in South Los Angeles to experience a merry Christmas.

In return, AAAP learned about Point of Engagement and observed the interaction of staff with needy families. Regional Administrator Dr. Stephen Sanders accepted the award on behalf of the Wateridge office staff and the office's community partners. 🇺🇸

Foster Youth Resource Fairs Expose Older Youth to Services and Opportunities

The DCFS Education and Mentoring Division along with the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council held a Resource Fair for foster youth this past summer at the California Endowment Center.

The event was geared specifically toward Los Angeles youth and families and introduced them to an array of services. The Resource Fair was for all foster youth up to



Youth review information and services at a Resource Fair.

age 24 who are currently under the care of DCFS or the County of Los Angeles Probation Department. It was also open to caregivers, County social and probation workers and anyone in the community who works with foster youth.

Representatives from more than 80 different types of resources were on hand to aid families with everything from education support, to vital records, to public aid. The Resource Fair included information about after school and summer programs, tutoring, mentoring, sports and arts programs, mental health services, community services agencies, early childhood education, workforce readiness, college preparation, libraries and literacy, legal assistance and physical health and well-being. The fair also included free refreshments, lunch, door prizes and giveaways.

L.A. County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich attended the event and addressed the youth. Community partners who sponsored the Resource Fair included Supervisor Antonovich, former Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, the Association of Community Human Services Agencies, Casey Family Programs, the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, the County of Los Angeles Public Library, the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Los Angeles County Probation Department and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

In addition, more than 100 participants attended DCFS Lakewood office's third annual Resource Fair on the campus of Long Beach City College. Transitional aged youth ages 16 to 25 were the focus of the event. The Lakewood office Family to Family Program collaborated on this event with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Geographic Initiative, Los Angeles County Office of Employment and the college's Youth Empowerment for Student Success program.

During the fair, the college's financial aid office conducted three financial aid seminars for students applying to college. Lunch was also provided by the organizers. Over 100 youth completed their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for which each youth must reapply yearly to receive financial aid from the State or Federal government.



ICAN honors DCFS CSA II Rose Nafariyeh.



New Personnel Officer Wanda Hazel.

Twenty-three presenters included transitional-aged youth service providers, community-based organizations and employers such as H&R Block and Home Depot. Next year's event is already in the works and has been set for Saturday, February 7, 2009, at Long Beach City College. 🍷

DCFS Staff Honored By ICAN

Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) Executive Director Deanne Tilton Durfee believes in the importance of recognizing the efforts of those who protect and defend the well-being of children. This honor represents ICAN's effort to provide well-deserved recognition for exceptional work done by staff of ICAN's three member agencies on behalf of these children. Each month, honorees receive a plaque from ICAN and a scroll from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Children's Service Administrator II Rose Nafariyeh of the DCFS Out-of-Home Care Division was recently honored by ICAN and received a scroll for more than 27 years of dedication to the under-served youth of Los Angeles County through her extraordinarily skillful resolution of some of the most complex and challenging case and placement issues of at-risk youth.

Nafariyeh's commitment and assistance extends beyond the general role of social worker. She continues to develop her expertise in the areas of placement, Regional Center access, mental health resources, and other specialized services that enable her to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable children supervised by DCFS. Her amazing achievements, enthusiasm, positive outcomes, resourcefulness, dedication, and extraordinary skill level are highly respected and commended by her peers and community partners. She is also a fine example for all concerned members of the community.

When retired Deputy Director Amaryllis Watkins nominated Nafariyeh, she wrote, "She is effective because she works so well with all levels of staff and those community partners who have a shared responsibility to ensure the well being of the children we serve. Mrs. Nafariyeh is truly the embodiment of a quiet hero."

For future nominations, employees should be someone whose work has significantly affected the lives of children or otherwise furthered the goals of ICAN. The outstanding

work of these employees should have not been publicly recognized or have received only some recognition until the time of their nomination. The honor may be for work within their job assignment or as a volunteer outside of work hours. Awards can be made for ongoing excellence and dedication or for a specific exceptional accomplishment.

For more information, please contact ICAN at (626) 455-4585. 🍷

Introducing Wanda Hazel

"I love Human Resources," said Wanda Hazel DCFS Personnel Officer III. Hazel joined DCFS Human Resources in June 2008. Hazel was an English major at Prairie View A&M in Prairie View, Texas. Following graduation, Hazel went to work for the Los Angeles Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as head of personnel and dispute resolutions where she said she was allowed to spread her wings.

During this time, Hazel started law school at West Los Angeles School of Law. She graduated and passed the bar, but her love of human resources took priority over practicing law. By this time, she was working for the L.A. County at the Department of Health Services which was followed by five years working for the Department of Human Resources. At DCFS Hazel manages payroll, workforce management (item control), the exams section and personnel processing which is handling employee's status changes.

When she is not at work, Hazel enjoys spending time with her husband and children, a girl, 5 and boy, 2. She also likes to read fiction. 🍷

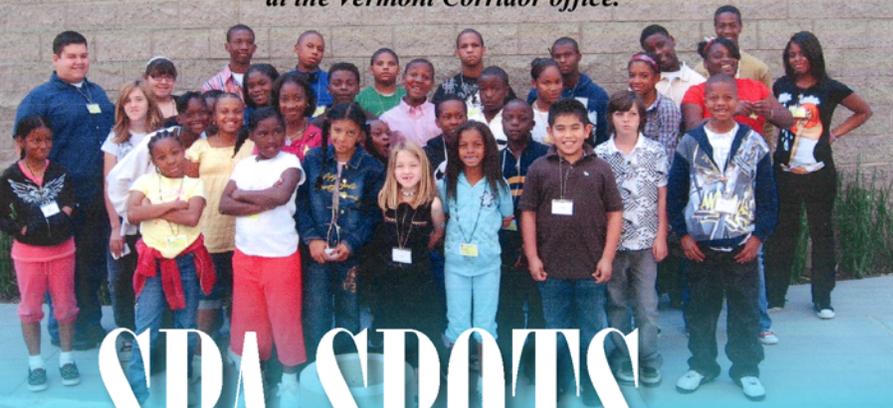
Vermont Corridor Celebrates 'Bring Your Daughter and Son to Work Day'

The DCFS Vermont Corridor office welcomed 38 youngsters ranging in age from 9 to 17 to their annual "Bring Your Daughter and Son to Work Day" this past spring.

The day started out with an introductory mixer letting the youth meet and greet one another, while enjoying a continental breakfast. After breakfast there were short

Continued on page 6

Kids participate in 'Bring Your Daughter and Son to Work Day' at the Vermont Corridor office.



SPA SPOTS

Continued from page 5 ...



Jacqueline Byers, left, of NACo, presents Elma Forrest-Stewart, right, with an award for the Adoption Promotion and Support Services program.

presentations by social workers, roll call to receive their L.A. County Youth badges and finally, an activity icebreaker to get them loosened up and ready to roll for a tour of the office.

There was hands-on experience regarding telephone etiquette, typing using the Quick Pads, photocopying and fax demonstrations. Lunch was left to the parents so they could spend quality time talking about the morning.

The children also participated in a scavenger hunt for symbols strategically placed throughout the office in various social worker cubicles. Once found, they would ask the worker prepared questions regarding their job assignment. This activity was followed by a group discussion regarding the answers they received. The activity was fun, interactive and thought provoking. It opened the door to help youth begin to think about making choices and how those choices can affect their lives, present and future, and the lives of the people around them.

To help some of the older youth transitioning from high school to college, there was a session on how to fill out a job application. Certificates of participation, presentations and a gift bag full of goodies rounded out the day. 🍷

2008 NACo Awards Presented to DCFS

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) received three National Association of Counties (NACo) awards for 2008. Department programs honored included Adoption Promotion and Support Services (APSS), Psychiatric Discharge Planning and Medical Hubs.

APSS is federally funded through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act. The specific goal of the APSS Program is to increase permanency for children in Los Angeles County. This is a new resource available to all children's social workers where the issue is permanence.

Community-based agencies with adoption expertise located in each Service Planning Area provide coordinated case management services and specified services along with providing referrals for linkage services that can include childcare, health care, mental health, physical and developmental services, Regional Center Services, educational, special education, substitute adult role model, income

support and transportation services. Case management services ensure a service plan designed to strengthen and preserve the child and/or family. The expected outcome of APSS services is a decrease in the number of children remaining in out-of-home care and an increase in the number of finalized adoptions.

In January 2006, the Interagency Hospital Discharge Planning Program was started to reduce the number of acute psychiatric hospitalizations or re-hospitalizations of children in Los Angeles County.

DCFS, Probation, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Court collaboratively developed a program to conduct discharge planning meetings for children prior to discharge from the hospital and link them to the most appropriate mental health services in the community. The purpose of this planning process is to provide continuity of care and subsequently reduce the number of children hospitalized or re-hospitalized.

Prior to discharge, the agency with primary responsibility for the youth coordinates a discharge teleconference which is moderated by DMH licensed clinicians and may also include the DCFS Children's Social Workers or Deputy Probation Officer, the child's attorney, hospital discharge personnel and if appropriate, the out-patient mental health professionals with whom the child has a current relationship.

Discharge recommendations are made with the goal of stabilizing the child. DMH clinicians follow up to ensure that the children quickly receive the best mental health services in the community. The program reduced re-hospitalizations of DCFS children by 11 percent in 2007 and has shortened the length of stay.

Under the leadership of DCFS and in partnership with the Los Angeles County Departments of Health Services and Mental Health, the Countywide Medical Hub program was developed and implemented in 2006 to create better outcomes for children by providing expert medical examinations and care. 🍷

With innovative efforts underway in each of Los Angeles County's Service Planning Areas (SPAs), the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP) has already seen ground-breaking collaborations between DCFS staff and lead community agencies.

Eleven lead agencies are working closely with DCFS, community partners, and County departments to create a strength-based prevention system that leverages resources to support families and prevent child abuse and neglect. PIDP will help support DCFS' continued development of flexible strategies, identify promising practices and determine how successful models can be sustained and replicated across the County.

Since the launch of the PIDP in the spring, community-based organizations in the eight SPAs have begun collaborating with DCFS and other County agencies to implement plans to help enhance existing community networks of support for children and families in need or at-risk and provide services, resources and support to the community in a quick, efficient way. This represents a paradigm shift for both DCFS and the community organizations, which typically work separately to serve families.

Through the PIDP, DCFS and community agencies aim to prevent child abuse and neglect by decreasing social isolation for families; increasing economic stability for families in the communities where they reside; and creating an integrated, community-based spectrum of prevention services, resources and activities to meet the needs of families.

In upcoming newsletter issues, we will highlight SPA lead agencies and their work with DCFS in Los Angeles County. Below is the first story in a series.

'Friends of the Family' Implements New Referral System under PIDP

Based in Van Nuys, Friends of the Family is among the most highly regarded family resource centers in Southern California, serving more than 5,000 families per year. Friends of the Family is the lead PIDP agency for SPA 2 and a mentor agency to Grace Resource Center in SPA 1.

Through the PIDP, Friends of the Family is working with DCFS offices in the San Fernando Valley, West San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita to implement a unique system that will streamline the referral process, cut-down on the confusing bureaucracy felt by families and find appropriate help for them quicker.

"We want to address their needs, but also help the family make the most of its strengths," said Susan Kaplan, Executive Director of Friends of the Family. "This collaboration allows us to have a deeper level of contact with DCFS social workers so that we can assist families in a real way."

Added Dawna Yokoyama, Regional Administrator of the San Fernando Valley Office: "DCFS refers appropriate cases to Friends of the Family. Upon referral from the family's social worker, Friends of the Family then assesses the family's psychological and economic needs and develops plans for counseling and other assistance." Yokoyama explained that Emergency Response social workers have received specialized

training on properly identifying, assessing and accurately screening cases for high-risk families that would significantly benefit from prevention-related measures and efforts, such as those offered by Friends of the Family.

"We strongly believe that the development and strengthening of resources and services in communities with economic challenges will create a solid foundation and robust safety net," she said. "The ideal results will be a decrease in the likelihood that children and families will re-enter the child welfare system at the previous rates."

Ultimately, the relationship between Friends of the Family and DCFS means less bureaucracy for the family, Yokoyama said. DCFS social workers work closely with Friends of the Family staff to ensure that all family members receive the necessary counseling for their social and emotional circumstances.

"Caseloads are managed for truly individualized attention, and both the staff and the family receive great satisfaction from the process," Kaplan explained.

Through the PIDP, the success of collaborations like this one will be evaluated to determine what practices can be replicated County-wide. 🍷

Celebrity Basketball Game at Pierce College Entertains Foster Youth

Last spring, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) sponsored a charity event for foster children residing in the San Fernando Valley (Service Planning Area 2). The "One Child At A Time" Celebrity Basketball Game was hosted by comedian/actor Katt Williams and organized by Jackie Solomon and Lovette Panther of DCFS and Crystal McGhee, Williams' mother.

The wonderful day was a way to give back to the community, with hundreds of foster children, community leaders and many other celebrities attending the charity event at the Pierce College gymnasium.

The celebrities were divided into two teams – the White Team and the Purple Team. Rapper Snoop Dogg led the

Purple Team with Magic Johnson as coach. Lil B. Sure led the White Team with Williams as coach. Other celebrity participants and attendees included Lil JJ of "That's So Raven," Texas Battle of "The Bold and the Beautiful," rapper Soul Ja Boy and Tequan Richmond of "Everybody Hates Chris."

Williams presented \$100 bills to foster children in the audience totaling up to \$5,000 in cash. The singing group Ment2B from Atlanta and Lil Tommy and The Krump Clowns performed the half-time show. Williams received a scroll from the L.A. County Board of Supervisors honoring him for his generosity to DCFS over the years. 🍷

CSW Trainee Learning to Use Clients’ Strengths to Find Solutions

Helping those who can’t help themselves is a creed that Children’s Social Worker (CSW) trainee Brittney Marie Holzinger lives by. The award winning former student recently graduated from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) academy and joined the line as an Emergency Response Worker in the DCFS Lakewood office.

Prior to joining DCFS, Holzinger was a social work undergraduate at Cal State University, Long Beach (CSULB). At CSULB, Holzinger was described as a “blur of activity,” so much so that she was voted the 2008 Outstanding Graduate from the College of Health and Human Services. She received her award alongside DCFS Director Patricia S. Ploehn who was awarded the 2008 Distinguished Alumna of the College of Health and Human Services last spring.

Throughout her college career, Holzinger was busy helping and organizing on and off campus. Her CSULB activities included a stint as president of the Associated Students of Social Work and she served as an advocate for the university’s social work department at its annual Lobby Day in Sacramento. Holzinger was also accepted into the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) program.

In addition to school activities, Holzinger also found time to clean local beaches and participate in the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life and tutor homeless children for School on Wheels.

When Holzinger arrived at CSULB four years ago, she did not know what she should major in. She comes from a long line of teachers – her mother teaches in a Montessori school – but teaching was not the way she wanted to help people. She thought of sociology or possibly communication disorders and then she took a course in social work. It was the hands-on aspect of the work that drew her into the profession.

The hands on part of the work was reinforced during Holzinger’s internship in the DCFS Compton office as a Volunteer Family Maintenance and Reunification intern. She is grateful that she got to actively participate in case work from inputting information in the CWS/CMS computer system to case planning and being a part of lots of Team Decision-Making groups.

Holzinger says she is very appreciative of SCSW Richard McKinley at the Compton office for his support.

“I am also really grateful for all the help my preceptors Grace Gutierrez, Elizabeth Cedeno, Vickie Garcia, Joannem Avila-Baker and Daralyn Goodman gave me. They were the ones who actually took me out

into the field and showed me the ropes,” said Holzinger.

Through her internship she learned about using a client’s strengths for a solution-focused approach to helping the family system. By seeing many different worker’s skills and styles of working, her own skill level grew. She also experienced working with clients who were not afraid of the social workers or the help DCFS had to offer them.

As part of the DCFS academy, Holzinger said she is filling in the practical gaps from her schooling as well as reviewing and reinforcing what she has already learned. Additional professional perspectives are also a big plus, she says.

During the academy, Holzinger looked forward to getting out into the field and joining the DCFS staff as a team member. Over the next few years, Holzinger wants to earn her Master’s degree in social work. At this time, she is not sure where she wants to go in the department although she is interested in adoption or medical social work. 🍷



Brittney Marie Holzinger

Youth Speakers Bureau—Another Road to Permanency

As children available for adoption get older, it is more difficult to find permanent homes for them. Different ways of presenting youth to potential adoptive families without doing them harm requires constant creativity and sensitivity.

About two years ago, after developing the first Teen Youth Conference to help empower youth to be an active participant in their own permanency outcomes, DCFS Recruitment Administrator Sari Grant wanted to create a Youth Speakers Bureau as a way to present older adoptable youth to potential families, build their self-esteem, and raise awareness of potential resource families about the need for permanent families for older youth in the foster care system.

The goal of the Youth Speakers Bureau is to have a list of youth, ages 13 and up, available to speak publicly on panels. These panels are at places such as Permanency and Safety – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP) classes or Kidsave host family trainings.

The audience is always made up of individuals who are in the process of becoming resource parents or host parents and may be interested in possibly adopting now or in the future. All new potential resource families must go through the PS-MAPP classes.

One goal of the classes is to educate applicants to better understand and experience the types of children they may be adopting. The PS-MAPP class exercises help the applicants experience what it is like for a child to go through the child welfare system and how it may affect the child and the caregiver. By introducing the youth and their unique life story into the PS-MAPP classes, another layer of sensitization is experienced by the applicants.

The youth who want to be on the Speakers Bureau go through a training process. The training helps the youth decide how much of their history they want to share and

how best to present it. They practice speaking to other youth who have been in similar situations which helps them become comfortable with public speaking.

There is also a therapeutic aspect to the training. It helps provide insight for the youth to see where they have been, where they are now, and where they want to go with their lives. As they practice speaking among their peers, the youth gain a clearer understanding of their life experience and in turn they feel more comfortable presenting their stories.

Public speaking has always been a good way to build self-esteem and it is no different with these youth. The retelling of their stories is beneficial in another way as well. The more they tell their stories and see how others react to them, the deeper their own insight becomes and the less stigmatized they may feel.

As the Youth Speakers Bureau develops, it will be a great way to raise awareness in the community for the need for permanent families for older foster youth. Many of the youth that have been trained have moved on to permanent situations or had a change of plan, so right now there are only a few youth who feel ready to participate. However, a new training session is being developed and should begin in the next couple of months.

Hopefully, audience members who see and hear these youth tell their stories will decide to reach out to them. They might also spread the word about these youth to their friends and community where someone might be interested in adopting. In the future, a Speakers Bureau Mentor program will be established to support the youth when they speak and help with transportation.

If you have a youth in need of a permanent family who you feel would be good for the Speakers Bureau, please contact Angela Karimyan at (626) 229-3808. 📞



MATCHING HEARTS

Jacob, age 11, knew loss; first losing his mother at a young age and then his maternal grandmother. He was then placed in a series of relative and foster homes. He had no family who would commit to him. Understandably, his behaviors began to worsen. As he grew older his prospects of finding a forever family grew smaller.

Although Jacob's photos had been posted on the internet for many months, no matches were made. They did not capture his sweet spirit or highlight his best features. But, through the power of a great picture, Jacob's future became bright and full of promise. His future family saw Jacob's Heart Gallery photo and stated "it was love at first sight." His photo had "reached out and touched them."

They were eager to learn more about this handsome boy with the beautiful eyes and big dimples. Great photographers believe that an exceptional photograph is a "window on the soul." For Jacob, this is clearly the truth. His future family was able to see Jacob's true potential and today they are living happily ever after. Because of a simple photo, Jacob has a loving home and a family he can call his own. That is the power of the Heart Gallery. It does make a true difference in the life of a waiting child, one heart at a time.

Los Angeles County has over 500 children in foster care waiting for permanent adoptive homes. Many of these children are older or part of a sibling group. Many have special needs related to their health or development. All of these children have in common a keen desire to belong to a "forever" family. Unless unique and exceptional efforts are made to find them adoptive homes, it is likely that these children will remain in foster care, living a life of instability and insecurity.

For more information on the Heart Gallery Los Angeles, log onto www.heartgalleryla.org. 📞

De-mystifying Kin-GAP

Over the last few years, enrollment in the Kin-GAP program has steadily increased with approximately 1,600 children exiting the foster care system in 2008 through Kin-GAP. As the department works further on reducing caseloads, Kin-GAP is being looked at closer as a way for children to safely and permanently exit the foster care system.

Although the number of children transitioning into Kin-GAP has been on the rise, this success is now being challenged by a steady increase of Kin-GAP youth being disenrolled from the program for reasons that may be associated with the filing of Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 388 petitions.

Several factors have been identified which may be contributing to an increased number of WIC 388 petition filings. These include:

- Caregivers with children receiving specialized D and F rates are requesting the reinstatement of jurisdiction to now be assessed for Regional Center and hoping to receive the dual agency rate which is higher than the Kin-GAP rate. These specialized rates are for children with severe physical and emotional conditions who need trained caregivers and intensive services to meet their daily needs.
- A number of children who are presently enrolled in Kin-GAP are, in fact, eligible to receive or are receiving dual agency services. They may also be eligible for SSI. These children should never have been entered into Kin-GAP and their petitions are filed to ensure access to services that they are eligible for and entitled to receive.
- Children whose assessments for dual agency service needs are incomplete or insufficiently documented to identify that the child is ineligible for the Kin-GAP program.
- Misinformation given to caregivers before entering Kin-GAP.
- The loss of certain funding supports for youth over the age of 16. Moving children into Kin-GAP prior to age 16 results in the loss of participation in the Transitional Housing Program and their inability to receive a Chaffee scholarship if they are planning on going on to college or vocational school. Many times caregivers are not aware of alternate educational funding sources.

A primary component to reversing these trends is a refresher training program designed to reinforce social workers' confidence, said Kinship Division Chief Michael Gray.

When regional workers have a greater understanding of the Kin-GAP program, they can educate caregivers at the beginning of the application process. The trainings were developed and are being presented by the DCFS Training



More than 57 percent of caregivers are over the age of 55 and are unfamiliar with current resources and procedures involving DCFS and the education and health-care systems.

Section. The first three regional offices to have this training are Compton, Vermont Corridor and Wateridge.

Along with the refresher training, a brochure and newsletter are being developed as an ongoing tool with the most up-to-date information about kinship services. A Kin-GAP checklist is also being created to help social workers cover all necessary information with caregivers along with having all proper documentation completed for the program. A similar checklist is in development to make sure the court can be confident in being able to terminate the case with Kin-GAP in place.

The Kinship Centers are vital to enhancing the quality of services to Kinship families. The Kinship Centers will begin integrating services from a number of community agencies to include services such as educational opportunities, DPSS Cal WORKS and legal assistance.

Additional center support will be established with financing underwritten from Senior Services. Senior caregivers will be positioned in each center to serve as receptionists and answer the warm line phones in the centers to help address the needs of other caregivers.

Enhanced connections for caregivers will also be accomplished by placing Kinship materials at Children's court to support court staff as well as caregivers. In the future, the goal is to place a worker at court to help kinship families with emergency support and to assess their immediate needs thereby averting a possible disruption.

For more information, call the Kinship Support Division at (562) 903-5122. 📞

Pomona Office Uses Innovative Ideas to Shorten Timelines to Permanency

As a result of their involvement in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC)/Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) on Kinship in 2004, the staff of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Pomona regional office learned about the BSC/PDSA methodology and embraced it. The Pomona office has successfully used BSC methods to enhance their Concurrent Planning strategy by shortening the timelines to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).

Since its initial development in 1995, the BSC has helped to streamline change in the health care field. It was developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and the Associates in Process Improvement. Casey Family Programs brought the BSC methodology to child welfare to improve outcomes in out-of-home care.

BSC is an innovative framework for making planned change that is easy to replicate and can produce immediate results at all levels of an agency. The Pomona office has used the BSC/PDSA methodology in the past and found it to be a very dynamic and flexible system change approach.

“Our experience has been that change and innovative ideas can come from the top or the bottom, and by giving staff and community partners permission to think outside of the box, the possibilities are amazing,” said DCFS Pomona Regional Administrator Maryam Fatemi.

In the Pomona office, the process looked like a well-tuned team meeting in which all participants had clear action steps to ensure that they were adequately prepared for the 366.36 Permanency court hearing.

In June 2006, when the Pomona office began the Concurrent Planning Redesign (CPR), they used the BSC methodology and developed the Termination of Parental Rights Conference (TPR) model. The purpose of the TPR Conference was to shorten timelines to permanency for children and support the department's goal of decreasing timelines to permanency.

The Dependency Investigation's (DI) unit embraced the TPR conferences and has taken the lead in implementing many of the CPR's protocols to create timely permanency for children.

The purpose of TPR conferences is to try to quickly identify barriers to reunification and provide resolutions to terminate parental rights at the first 366.26 court hearing. The case-carrying social worker and supervisor, along with the adoptions social worker and supervisor meet with the Dependency Investigator and the

Dependency Investigator supervisor to work as a team. It takes from 45 days to 12 months to TPR once the Dependency Investigation's unit receives a packet for the 366.26 judicial hearing from the case-carrying CSW.

In the first year of the Concurrent Planning Redesign implementation, the Dependency Investigation's unit held approximately 134 Termination of Parental Rights conferences; 208 children were referred to the unit and 48 children, or 23 percent, were processed for TPR.

Due to the success of the TPR Conferences, other DCFS regional offices saw the value of the process, they observed the process and replicated in their own office.

From July 2007 through June 2008, the Pomona office completed 77 finalized adoptions and 74 legal guardianships, a significant increase over the past year.

“We are excited about what the future may bring, using the BSC methodology, we will continue to explore the possibilities and with this will come innovation and improved services for our children in most need,” said Fatemi. 

Key aspects of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative of practice improvement include:

- Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles which encourage small ideas to be tested in rapid succession rather than taking too much time to figure out the entire framework before implementing the program. Less time is spent on planning and more time is spent learning from practical experience.
- Anyone can have and test ideas grounded in the framework, not just the four to six people in the core group. By having multiple people testing their own ideas, greater and more dynamic creativity occurs.
- Consensus is not needed to test ideas as in most planning processes. Simultaneous testing encourages a more rapid pace for buying into successful activities and discarding ones that hinder the process.
- Changes happen at all levels as opposed to taking the time to figure out the entire model first. Changes are created rapidly and simultaneously implemented in small increments by each level to meet their own needs. These quick changes are monitored, assessed and measured immediately, so that they are expanded quickly and failures need not be duplicated. Eventually, all the successes merge to create one harmonious working model.



DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Every month, DCFS employees are honored as part of the "DCFS All Stars" employee recognition program. All of these employees are honored for enriching the lives of the children and families and contributing to our goals of permanence, safety and reduced reliance on out-of-home care. Recipients are chosen by a rotating panel of all levels of DCFS staff and given special certificates. Photos of all recipients are also mounted on the wall outside of the Director's office at DCFS Headquarters and posted on L.A. Kids. We're always looking for "DCFS All Stars" to honor and all staff are encouraged to send in nominations using the form on the L.A. Kids website.

For more information, call Lois Shirk in the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at (213) 351-5886. To learn more about these outstanding recipients, check out L.A Kids. Congratulations to all of the honorees!

Outstanding Administrative Service Staff Award

March: Ruby Owens, CSA III, Education and Licensure
April: Guy Trimarchi, CSA III, Policy Development Section
May: Nayat Mutafyan, CSA II, Service Bureau 2 Administration
June: Jorge Garay, CSA I, Pomona office
July: Chui Hom, CSA I, Family Preservation Program Administration
August: Lena Ward, Senior Departmental Employee Representative, Performance Management
Carmen Abbot, ARA, ASFA Division

Outstanding Direct Service Staff Award

March: Ruth Herrera, CSW III, Santa Fe Springs office
April: Patrick Lew, CSW III, Adoptions, Permanency Resource Division
May: Denise Belon, CSW III, Adoptions, West LA office
June: Rosella Yousef, SCSW, Torrance office
July: Eunice Thomas, CSW III, Vermont Corridor office
August: Miriam Munte, CSW I, Compton office
September: Verlinda Ginn, Palmdale office

Outstanding Support Service Staff Award

March: Debra Rankin, ITC, Emergency Command Post
April: Emily Andrade, Human Services Aide, Pasadena office
May: Michelle Fenison, Human Services Aide, Vermont Corridor office
June: Carol Darin, Unit Clerk, West LA office
July: Ana Martin Del Campo, Human Services Aide, Belvedere office
August: Elizabeth Soto, Unit Clerk, El Monte/MacLaren office
September: John Jackson, ITC, Adoption, Torrance office

Outstanding Team Award

March: Child and Family Services Review Team
April: Sonia Lorenzi and Kathy Tsegga, CSW IIIs, Covina Medical Placement Unit
May: DCFS Walkers for March of Dimes
June: No recipient
July: No recipient
August: Lovette Panthier, SCSW, and Jackie Solomon, CSA I, San Fernando Valley office and Pasadena office
September: Court Liaison Support Staff

L.A. County Board of Supervisors

GLORIA MOLINA

Chair Pro Tem
First District

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

Third District

DON KNABE

Chair
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH

Fifth District

L.A. County Commission for Children and Families

Carol O. Biondi
Patricia Curry
Ann Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Sandra Rudnick
Stacey Savelle
Adelina Sorkin, Chair
Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton
Executive Director,
Kimberly A. Foster

L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services

425 Shatto Place
Los Angeles, CA 90020
www.lacdcfs.org

Child Protection Hotline
1-800-540-4000
Adoptions and Foster Care
Information 1-888-811-1121

Director
Patricia S. Ploehn, LCSW

DCFS News Staff

Editor
Louise Grasmehr

Writer
Stu Riskin

Editorial Assistant
Loreta Sirakian

Photography and Graphic Design
Richard Cervantes

DCFS News is published by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Office of Public Affairs. For article ideas and submissions, e-mail grasml@dcfs.lacounty.gov, or fax to (213) 738-9257. All submissions are subject to review and editing.