

CONGRATULATIONS

DCFS ALL STARS

DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNERS

August 2009

Outstanding Support Staff

Adela Morris, Adoptions Assistant

Metro North Office

For the last two years, Adela Morris, an Adoptions Assistant in the Metro North Office, has made a significant contribution to the success of the Older Youth Adoption Project (OYAP). OYAP is a grant funded project that ensures the successful adoption of older foster youth ages 9 and older.

When this project first started, the authorized data base had not yet been installed. Adela took the initiative to develop and implement a basic collection tool which the State accepted pending proper installation of the official collection tool. Thanks to Adela, OYAP was able to capture most of the data requirements during its initial operations.

Adela would confirm the accuracy of OYAP data prior to input by checking frequently with various staff. Input was received for over 250 children on a monthly basis; a task that proved tedious, detailed and difficult. To accommodate system changes requiring additional information, Adela would search for required data in the narrative portions of the tracking forms. The success of this program was due in large part to Adela's tenacity and focused thoroughness in obtaining and properly recording OYAP data.

There's a common phrase learned by DCFS managers that "data is our friend" reflecting the importance of data in defining vision, goals and viable outcomes. Adela appreciates the meaning and seriousness of accurate data collection. Her data collection efforts for OYAP will conceivably help establish future adoption projects. Congratulations to Adela Morris, the August 2009 DERA winner for Outstanding Support Service Staff.

Outstanding Administrative Service Staff or Manager

Tim Varvais, ARA

South County

Tim Varvais is the ARA over the Emergency Response Section in the South County Office. In July 2009, Tim graciously agreed to assist new Torrance RA Tedgi Dessalegn by helping cover her ER operations in the Torrance Office. Torrance had been without an ER ARA for over a year. Prior attempts by South County to assist the Torrance ER Section had been met with resistance from staff. Tim agreed to spend every Tuesday and Thursday, each week, at the Torrance Office. Despite initial resistance from staff, Tim maintained an extremely positive “can do” attitude. He persevered and was able to identify and implement many system and process changes which dramatically improved the efficiency and productivity of the section. Tim provided clear and concise direction and training to staff while maintaining a calm and constructive approach. Tim’s changes resulted in benefits for all to see. Tim’s willingness to help and be available quickly endeared him to staff.

Tim’s time in Torrance came at perhaps the most difficult time for ER ARAs in the Department’s history. He was responsible for the review of all unfounded referrals for two of the largest DCFS offices. In fact, Tim was responsible for reviewing close to 20% for all of the unfounded referrals in the Department, during the months of July and August. During these two months, Tim worked countless hours in the evenings, weekends, on his RDO and early mornings just to keep from getting behind in either office. Tim was able to complete the reviews in a timely manner saving staff from having to go out on additional visits and identifying pertinent issues for follow up. Tim’s selfless and tireless efforts in both the South County and Torrance offices ensured the efficient facilitation of ER operations in both offices. Despite all the changes with the unfounded referral review process and the pressure felt by staff due to negative media coverage, the Torrance Office actually decreased their ERs under 30 by over a hundred referrals during the time Tim covered the office! Additionally, Torrance’s detention rates in July and August were cut by more than half over the prior six months. As reported by staff, this is largely due to staff feeling empowered to work with families and community service providers to keep children safe in their homes rather than detain at the slightest provocation. By proactively working with families, morale in the section has dramatically increased. In fact, many ER staff have reported feeling like they are now doing actual social work for the first time in their careers.

Tim’s example of helping peers in need, maintaining a positive attitude in the midst of the most trying circumstances and putting the needs of children and families before his own, has been inspirational and motivating to staff in both offices. Large number of staff have banded together to help and support one another in ways they have not done so before. This has contributed to improved morale and a culture of collaboration within each office and between the

Torrance and South County offices. Tim has forever endeared himself to the ER staff of Torrance many of which begged Tim to stay on a permanent basis. He has set himself apart as a manager who is truly willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that the needs of children, families and staff are being met. Tim's selflessness and willingness to be a true partner should be an example and inspiration to us all. For these reasons we are proud to honor Tim Varvais as the August 2009 DERA Outstanding Administrative Manager

Outstanding Directive Service Staff

Lisa Arnold, SCSW

South County

As reported by her unit, SCSW Lisa Arnold, while sensitive to the needs of children and families, makes sound decisions based on her thorough knowledge of Department policies and procedures.

Ms. Arnold makes it her business to familiarize herself with all families under her unit's supervision so she can discuss them in detail with her unit. Her open door policy and enthusiastic nature encourages her workers to discuss difficult case problems and brainstorm solutions.

Ms. Arnold is culturally sensitive and pays attention to details especially when detaining and placing children. She consults with foster families to make sure that they are aware of children's specific needs as they relate to food, skin, hair care and other hygienic issues.

Ms. Arnold teaches her unit to work with their clients, not for their clients. If the client is showing initiative and making progress towards having their children returned, her workers will support that parent. It is imperative that clients truly learn new skills in parenting and domestic violence classes and not just "go through the motions" to minimize chances of recurring abusive behavior. Parents are encouraged to actively participate in classes; identify contributing issues and be able to discuss what they have learned and how they will be able to incorporate these new skills in the future. Supervisor and CSW make it clear to clients before they commence classes that they will be held accountable for the information learned in class. These expectations placed on clients have yielded successful results with clients completing their requirements in a timely manner.

Ms. Arnold is involved in many of the activities of the Lakewood office. She can be counted on to celebrate her unit members' birthday parties, plan holiday events and acknowledge any important event in the lives of her co-workers. Recently she organized Saturday morning runs for office participation in a 5K run. Her unit, office and clients are all appreciative of the many skills and

positive attitude she brings to the job. Congratulations to Lisa Arnold, the August 2009 DERA winner for Outstanding Direct Service Staff.

**An Outstanding Colleague
Of Yours Could Be the Next Winner.**

NOMINATE Someone NOW!