

CONGRATULATIONS

DCFS ALL STARS

DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNERS

July 2009

Outstanding Team Staff Award

ASFA Division

County-Wide

The ASFA Division ensures that all relative and non-related extended family member caregiver homes meet the same standards as those of State licensed foster family homes and meet the Federal regulations as established in the Adoptions Safe Family Act and the State Assembly Bill 1695.

The Division conducts initial and annual assessments on all relative and non-related extended family member homes to ensure that they meet the:

- Physical safety standards
- Mandated criminal and child abuse clearance requirements
- Caregiver qualifications and have been provided
- A comprehensive orientation and training
- And information regarding the children's personal rights.

During the past year and a half, the ASFA Division has processed a historic backlog of uncompleted and/or overdue assessments and is currently maintaining a workload of assessments within 30 days from receipt of the initial assessment request. Additionally, all annual assessments have been completed on time in 99.87% of assessments.

The Division's progress has resulted in a net savings of \$9,600,000 per year (based on an average net monthly savings of \$800,000) to the Department and the County. The ASFA Division drastically reduced the number of placed children whose care was funded by all county funds (GRI) because of the lack of timely and/or approved ASFA home assessments, providing families with a sense of security and permanency.

These successes could not have been achieved without the exceptional team effort of all Division staff from Division Chief down through the ranks of ARAs, SCSWs, CSWs, Unit Clerks, ITCs Live Scan Technicians, Secretaries and other

support positions. Without the ongoing efforts, team spirit and dedication of all staff, the exceptional results could not have been achieved.

The ASFA Division reduced the average time frame for completing an Initial ASFA Assessment from an average of 53.4 days in the beginning of 2007 to 24 days by the end of 2008. The average time from receipt of the request to the actual home inspection frame in the beginning of 2007 was 16.5 days. By the end of 2008, this time frame was reduced to an average of 7 days.

When the Adoptions Safe Family Act was implemented in California under AB 1695, the State delegated responsibility the responsibility for relative/non-relative extended family member home approvals to the child welfare agencies in each county. Most counties in California relegated this duty to their foster family home licensing units. Based on the ongoing CSW caseload and due to the high number of children placed in relative/non-relative extended family member homes, DCFS delegated the process to the ASFA Division.

During 2008 the number of children placed in relative/non-relative extended family member homes varied between 8,388 and 9,887 children. The ASFA Division completed a total of 14,745 assessments (7,979 initial assessments and 6,766 annual assessments) for these children.

If a relative caregiver's home is not approved within the mandated timeframe, Federal funding is not available and the caregiver must seek a lower reimbursement through CalWorks as a non-needy caregiver. If the caregiver is a non-related extended family member, they are not eligible for CalWorks, and funding is paid from all County Funds (GRI) for which there is no State or Federal matching funds.

The ASFA Division's efforts shorten the timeframe to permanency for children in out-of-home care by placing them with kin rather than with non-relative foster parents whenever possible and reducing the likelihood of recidivism by assessing the relative's home to ensure that the home meets the regulatory safety standards.

It is the sole responsibility of the ASFA Division to determine if a home can or cannot be ultimately approved. When necessary, the ASFA Division develops Corrective Action Plans, Documented Alternative Plans and purchases goods, to allow the child to safely remain in the home.

The ASFA Division also conducts the live scan fingerprinting operation for all adult members of the caregiver's household and any adult with significant contact with the child. The ASFA Division is also responsible for granting or denying waivers for criminal history of caregivers and other adults.

The ASFA Division has historically been hampered by lack of technological advances in processing and tracking the numerous initial home assessments. There was no consolidated means to track the Initial Assessments because a majority of the assessments were prior to placement, or where placements were never made. The Initial Assessment Units each independently tracked the intake, process and completion of Initial Assessments with separate Access Databases on a shared remote hard drive. In 2008, the Kinship Assessment Tracking System (KATS) was launched which combines the tracking of both Initial and Annual Assessments. KATS utilizes information downloaded from CWS/CMS into COGNOS as well as manually submitted assessment requests for prospective and new caregivers. The utilization of COGNOS and KATS has enhanced the Division's ability to accurately track upcoming, pending and completed assessments.

For the ASFA Division's many accomplishments in ensuring child safety, processing old assessments and completing new ones in a timely manner thus providing a net savings of \$9,600,000 for the Department, the ASFA Division is presented with the July 2009 DERA for Outstanding Team.

Outstanding Support Service Staff Award

Mary Burnell, HSA

Palmdale Office

Mary Burrell's strong work ethic, compassion and commitment to her job and co-workers is greatly appreciated by the Dependency Investigators Unit at the Palmdale Office.

Recently a group of siblings were detained, including a 12-year old disabled child that still wore diapers. Finding an appropriate placement for this child proved difficult while she stayed in the Palmdale office for most of the day. Seeing that it was necessary, Mary bathed this youth and changed her diaper. Frequently, Mary provides that extra degree of care for our youth; bathing them, combing their hair, and dressing them in clean clothes.

Mary proved invaluable in caring for a psychotic client that needed to be transported to Antelope Valley Hospital immediately following a MAT assessment. After driving this mother to the hospital, Mary remained with her until she was admitted and in her room. Mary remained with the frightened mother long after working hours until she was comfortable.

Mary ensures delivery of court reports from Palmdale to Monterey Park (68 miles one way) leaving at 5:30 am and returning to the office to help out with

monitoring visits and transporting youth. She loves her job, is dedicated to serving our clients and does so with an ever-present smile. Her most difficult task comes on her duty days when she is unable to interact with clients or help out in an emergency.

Mary's working area is a source of wonder as it is organized to accommodate any possible item a child might desire: toys, story books, videos, crayons, pencils and scissors-you name it, Mary's got it! In addition to monitoring visits between parents and children, she provides the parents with these items to help the bonding process. She teaches the parents how to interact with the youth using these resources to make their visits more meaningful.

A wall with cards and photos of the many children she has worked with attests to the gratitude felt by the parents she has assisted in reunifying with their children. Their desire to remain in touch is mutual.

Mary makes everyone's job easier. More importantly, the same smile she always has on her face is left with all staff and clients who come in contact with her. We are proud to honor Mary Burnell as the July 2009 DERA winner for Outstanding Support Service Staff.

Outstanding Direct Service Staff Award

Brenda Batarse. CSW II

Chatsworth Office, Adoptions

Brenda Batarse exemplifies the social worker who goes out of her way for the children on her caseload. She initially started as an Adoption CSW and is currently assigned to the Older Youth Adoption Project. This program provides Family Finding and Engagement services (to assist children in making a lifelong, significant connection), Adoption Recruitment services, and all secondary adoption related services. Many children argue that they don't want to be adopted, don't want to be moved from their foster or group homes, and have given very little thought to their future and the meaning of having a family they can depend on. They have a lot of misconceptions about permanency and adoption. Brenda has worked diligently to break through these barriers. One youth, age 17, was doing very well in high school and college bound, but had not thought about the need for a family connection. With her 18th birthday approaching, Brenda had to "think outside the box" to quickly find a family for this child. Brenda searched for and located a family in Carmel who were looking to adopt an older child, who they could support in obtaining a college education and beyond. It was a perfect match. Brenda arranged for transportation, flew the child to Carmel, and spent a weekend with them so they could begin to know each other. The weekend was a huge success and a life-long connection was born. Since then, this child has flown to Carmel many times and has the support of a life-long connection when she attends UC Riverside this fall.

Brenda has also worked closely with another young lady who is just turning 15. Brenda has spent many weekends taking her to various adoption events in the hope of matching her with a family. Although the child was matched twice with an adoptive family, in both cases the child had changed her mind. Brenda has also attempted to connect this child with extended family members who have repeatedly changed their minds about being part of this child's life. This child has said that the one thing she wanted was a Quinceanera. In collaboration with Child S.H.A.R.E., a program that works with faith communities to find and support foster and adoptive homes for foster children in Southern California, Brenda organized this coming of age party for this young lady who otherwise would not have had a celebration. Brenda spent many hours on almost every detail of the event, assisted by many community volunteers, none of whom even know this child. This child will have a memorable day, all because of the efforts of Ms Batarse.

Brenda has also developed a support group for youth who were hesitant to be adopted. Brenda facilitated the meetings, often picking up the girls for the meetings if their foster parents weren't able to transport them. The group met at the office for 6 sessions, after regular business hours. The group sought to dispel the many misconceptions the children have regarding adoption and permanency. Brenda developed a test to identify the girls' misconceptions about adoption and employed various teaching methodologies, along with therapeutic art projects to engage the girls in conversation about permanency and adoption. Brenda then administered a post-test which reflected that the girls learned a significant amount during these sessions and viewed adoption in a more positive light.

Brenda brings resourcefulness and dedication to this job, working many extra hours to ensure that her youth receive the extra attention necessary to find a family or life-long connection. For this invaluable service, it is with great pleasure that we honor Brenda Batarse as the July 2009 DERA winner for Outstanding Direct Service Staff.

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

NOMINATE Someone NOW!

(Insert link to nomination form)