

CONGRATULATIONS

DCFS ALL STARS

DIRECTOR'S EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD WINNERS

November 2011

Outstanding Administrative Manager

Tonya Octave, CSA I

Compton

Ms. Tonya Octave has been selected for the Director's Employee Recognition Award for her outstanding work as the Service Linkage Specialist (SLS) for the SPA 6 Compton office. Tonya provides consultation to CSWs at a moment's notice and feedback to both the region and Bureau of the Medical Director's Managers for some of the Compton office's high needs children, ensuring that their mental health and service needs are met. Additionally, she should be acknowledged for her collaborative work with CSWs and the Department of Mental Health's (DMH) Specialized Foster Care (SFC) co-located staff to ensure that Compton's children are timely screened, assessed and linked to mental health services through the Coordinated Services Action Team (CSAT) process. Under her leadership, the Compton office was the first CSAT Team to coordinate monthly CSAT meetings with all CSAT members (Regional Administrator, Assistant Regional Administrators, Department of Mental Health's (DMH) Specialized Foster Care (SFC) staff, Educational Liaisons, Resource Utilization Management (RUM), Permanency Planning Partners (P3), Wraparound, D-rate and Linkages staff – the largest group of CSAT member attendees in any of the current nineteen CSAT implemented offices. Other CSAT Implemented offices are coordinating their office's CSAT Meetings to resemble Compton's CSAT monthly meetings. Tonya was also assigned as a "lead" to coordinate Compton's CSAT case review, a process that ran seamlessly based on her great organizational skills.

In September 2011, Tonya was recognized by the Compton office for her outstanding collaborative work with CSWs, DMH SFC, RUM, Educational Liaison, community leaders, a placement provider and other CSAT team members to stabilize a troubled street-savvy youth with no family supports and poor school attendance. The end result succeeded in placement by having his mental health and educational needs met, as well as having a healthy "sense of belonging" to a community group of foster care peers to replace his previous gang associates on the streets. Tonya frequently extends herself on other occasions to accompany CSWs in the field to interview children to determine their underlying needs and to follow-up with the CSAT Team to develop a plan to address these needs. On one occasion, she provided weekly write-ups (over a six-month period) to the Board of Supervisors for case management support to a family with multiple service needs.

Tonya was also selected to serve as an Emergency Response Supervising Children's Social Worker for six months, supervising a team of Children Services Administrators assigned as ER CSWs from the Bureau of the Medical Director's Child Welfare Mental Health Services Division for the ER Over 60 Days Project. During this assignment, she continued in her role as SLS for the Compton office assisting the office in maintaining numbers in the high 90th to 100 percentile for the number of children screened by CSWs (exceeding the monthly MAPP goal) and referred to DMH for mental health services each month through CSAT. Since all of the ER CSWs under Ms. Octave's supervision had the dual role of ER CSW and CSAT lead/manager in their day-to-day duties, she provided great "hands-on" support which included accompanying some of CSWs on their initial home visits to teach them the fundamentals of conducting ER investigations, and/or offering telephone consultations, referring a family for Alternative Response or Family Preservation Services and/or attending Team Decision Making (TDM) Meetings for some ER referrals, as needed. Her vast knowledge of DCFS policy made many of her ER supervisees feel secure in her judgment during all referral/case consultations and has contributed to Tonya's being selected as a "Coach" for the Compton office's "Coaching and Mentoring" program for SCSWs and CSWs. In this capacity, she will work with a team of SCSW "coaches" to provide consultation on many high-needs cases for many SCSWs and CSWs teams to ensure that each child's mental health and other service needs are met. She continues to coordinate and/or provide in-service trainings to CSWs at the Compton office to educate them about better understanding the mental health needs of children and the CSAT process.

Lastly, Tonya has been instrumental in developing on-going referral consultation sessions with DMH and our ER section CSWs and SCSWs to ensure that the team approach to assessment and services is supported.

The acknowledgement of Tonya Octave's leadership, great work with children and collaborative team spirit in working with all CSAT members is long overdue – she is a manager definitely deserving of the DERA Award!

Outstanding Team Staff

Runaway Out Reach Unit

Eric Ball, SCSW, Adriana Ledezma, Jorge Ceron, Valerie Cacatian, Julie Hildreth, William Hailey, Misti Ward, Marie Lopez

Metroplex/West L.A.

The DCFS Runaway Outreach Unit is a group of extremely dedicated social workers who go above and beyond their normal everyday duties to locate, place, stabilize, mentor and save the lives of the high-risk, pre-delinquent adolescent runaway youths. These highly skilled social workers are a proven group who are often confronted by the harsh realities of the street life, illicit drugs, gangs and domestic trafficking. Their covert, bold, outside-the-box, and often cutting edge social welfare tactics and practices often go unnoticed as they regularly return the most hard-to-manage, hard-to-place, and high risk youths back to the care of DCFS.

With child safety being of paramount concern, the ROU team of children's social workers is on the front line, assuring that youths who have decided to live their lives apart from the rules and regulations of the department are re-integrated through a process of rapport-building and shared responsibility in their case planning process. The workers are seasoned at developing mentoring relationships that garner trust and comfort as they transition these hard-to-place youths back into care. These exceptionally trained CSWs often risk their lives and safety by knocking on doors in neighborhoods that even the most seasoned law enforcement officers refuse to approach. Their supervisor often calls them detectives without badges or guns, and they are very successful at what they do.

The ROU CSWs have successfully returned over 1,300 youth to the care of DCFS and they have continually reduced the department's runaway recidivism rate year by year. The ROU CSWs are currently working on the development of a Youth Symposium scheduled to be held in the summer of 2012, called "Each One Teach One" that will bring together current and former foster youths ages 11-24 for a day of life changing advocacy and empowerment building. The youths will receive information and training regarding healthy relationships, healthy eating, physical health, mental health, sexual health and substance abuse from experts, service providers and successful "alumni" of the foster care system.

The ROU CSWs are dedicated to the department's overall mission of reducing the time that youths spend in out-of-home care and have made a positive and direct impact in this regard. They are regularly searching for lasting relationships that can not only provide immediate care for these disenfranchised youths but also provide long term permanence as well.

The ROU CSWs are continually evolving to meet the needs of the youths they serve as well as to the needs of the department and community by always utilizing a strength-based, client-focused approach when dealing with the youths and their families in the program. The ROU CSWs are recognized department wide as the experts and "go to staff" in dealing with the pre-delinquent, hard-to-place high-risk population and their efforts are closely monitored and admired by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Outstanding Direct Service Staff

Evelyn Aguirre, CSW III & Rebeca Quintanar, CSWIII
Palmdale

CSWs Evelyn Herrera-Aguirre and Rebeca Quintanar demonstrated extremely effective team work and partnering on behalf of a young man, Abraham S. They ensured his successful transition from high school to college, and provided him with a permanent family very late into his teen years. Abraham S. had been in many placements, often leaving because of taunting and bullying as he was openly gay. Resilient and blessed with two of the finest DCFS CSWs, Abraham found a welcoming home comprised of two professional men wanting to provide

a sense of family to children who would not otherwise have one. These two CSWs, foster parents, and a young man set out on a journey that at times seemed impossible. Were it not for the collaboration this positive outcome would never have happened. Dr. Raymond “Chip” West III, Ph. D., one of Abraham S.'s two newly-found fathers, describes this wonderful seven- month journey below.

"I am excited to write this letter in support of Evelyn Herrera-Aguirre and Rebeca Quintanar, two social workers that I have had the pleasure of working with and getting to know personally over the past six months. These remarkable women are outstanding child advocates and truly have gone above and beyond their roles as 'social workers' to mentor, challenge and nurture the development of their respective assigned cases. Personally, I have watched both of them through their interactions with an 18-year foster-son, who my partner of 15 years and I brought to our home in February 2011. Our role was to help him complete his final months of high school, be his family, and assist him in his transition to college and adult life. Without both Evelyn and Rebeca, we would not have been successful.

Evelyn, who was initially assigned to us, we realized early on was a great communicator. Her outstanding communication skills benefited not only our foster son, but also to us as his parents. She offered our son support, helped provide him with necessary services to meet his immediate needs, and truly spent time with him getting to know him personally so that she could better assist him on his journey. She listened to him. She understood where he was coming from. She was there for him, when needed (often late at night or on weekends), providing him guidance. She challenged him as well, providing him brainstorm options for responding to the challenges he faced and helped mentor him as he made decisions about his future. She nurtured his adult development and fostered the development of positive decision-making skills which has enabled him to successfully adjust to adult life.

Most importantly, Evelyn understood his unique needs and his individual experience that brought him to our home. She treated him as a person, held him accountable for his actions, yet provided him care, comfort and concern. She also took the time to check in with us weekly to make sure that he was doing well in school and at home. As parents, we saw her as a “partner” with us – helping us and guiding us too along his journey. She was often a sounding board for us when we struggled and a counselor for us when we needed support – she enabled us to provide unconditional love to this young adult and help him continue on his journey.

After a few months, we found out that Evelyn would be leaving us, going out on leave to have a baby of her own. We were worried. We had had such a wonderful experience with her and knew that she had a positive relationship with our youth, so we were understandably concerned about her transition 'out' of our lives. Over the coming weeks we got to know his newly assigned social worker, Rebeca Quintanar and our doubts and concerns quickly subsided. Rebeca was everything that Evelyn was and more. She, in a very short time, forged a truly

meaningful and positive relationship not only with our foster son, but also with us as his parents.

Rebeca stepped in and continued guiding our son through a challenging transitional period in his life. The road was not easy and at one point, our youth decided to leave our home and go into a group facility. Rebeca made sure that he was taken care of during that period, provided him with solid-consistent support and challenged him in his decision-making, reasoning and choices. She too listened to him, but provided him with a calm and rational side to his emotional turmoil which assisted him in successfully transitioning back to our home. She treated him as a person and strongly advocated for his needs.

As he graduated she made sure he had all of the resources and support that DCFS could provide. She brainstormed with me options for him to gain additional services and even successfully advocated for him to receive a lap-top computer for college. She helped us navigate the complex transition into college life and at the same time, made sure that he was well cared for and supported. On multiple occasions, I would call her with challenges or issues that had come to my attention – yet ever calm and collected, Rebeca would provide me with wonderful advice, support and appreciation for the work I was doing to help our son succeed. I was surprised to learn that our child wasn't her only case, in that she has always been there, always answered the phone and always treated him as he was the only case she had.

Both of these women are outstanding examples of who you would want a social worker to be. They are not overtly flashy or always clamoring for the attention or the spotlight, but in quiet, powerful and meaningful ways working tirelessly to support the development of the children and young adults who they oversee. They work behind the scenes, both independently and collaboratively with us as parents ensuring that all needs are met, all services are provided with a care and concern, which I believe comes directly from their hearts.

These women know how to work extremely well with all kinds of people, knowing both how to be empathetic and understanding while at the same time setting appropriate limits. I have been amazed in my short time working with them how much leadership ability, maturity, confidence and balance they have and how that shines through in their day-to-day responsibilities. Both of these intelligent women have an innate drive to challenge and seek out the best in others, as well as a passion for giving back to these youth.

In conclusion, I hope that this letter fully conveys the deep appreciation I have for these outstanding women. They are the very example of the best-of-the-best in your Department."

Outstanding Support Service Staff

Jamie Yu, ITC

Telstar/El Monte

Ms. Yu is assigned to the Appeals and State Hearing Section in the Out-of-Home Care Management Division as an Intermediate Typist Clerk. The Appeals Section requires extensive computer knowledge and organizational skills. As an ITC for the Appeals and State Hearing Section, Ms. Yu equitably assigns newly appealed cases to the six Appeals Hearing Specialists weekly. The position also requires Ms. Yu to research information on the CWS/CMS, JADE, APPS, MEDS, and the State Hearing website. Ms. Yu assists in maintaining court calendars and ensures that accurate information reflecting filing dates, case/claimants' names, claimants' address and contact numbers are correctly inputted onto the Department of Social Services hearing website. Additionally, Ms. Yu accurately maintains the Appeals Section assignment logs and statistical reports to ensure accurate numbers are preserved for precise transfer to the Monthly Management Report.

Ms. Yu is always willing to help out her section and anyone within the Out-of-Home Care Division as a whole. She plays a vital part in working on the Hotline referrals submitted to the Out-of-Home Care section—a task which includes printing information, verifying it with Command Post, and distributing it to the corresponding person assigned. Ms. Yu also voluntarily assists the Emergency Shelter Care unit with the Group Home vacancies log by calling group homes and compiling a list of vacancies for our Command Post office to use when emergencies arise and children need to be placed after hours.

In addition with the above, Ms. Yu was asked by management to assist with completing the monthly ERCP Over-Stay Report and was subsequently asked to train a new Out-of-Home Care intern on how to complete the report. Although training is not within her job specification, Ms. Yu graciously accepted and completed the task requested of her.

Ms. Yu also voluntarily took on the extra task of assisting the FFA/GH Performance Monitoring Section by filling in on some of the duties of the Staff Assistant I position which had recently become vacant. Ms. Yu worked extraordinarily well with all CSA level staff in modifying the instruments used to conduct performance/compliance reviews. She has also been extremely helpful in modifying the Needs and Service Plan (NSP) template. She has done these modifications with minimal supervision and occasionally had valuable input into the format of these modifications. As other clerical support staff has transferred to other departments, Ms. Yu has been helpful to the Performance Monitoring Section by making copies, faxing and mailing documents as well as retrieving information from CWS/CMS as requested to ensure the safety of the children we serve.

Ms. Yu graciously performed her assigned duties and all additional duties without hesitation or complaint. Her willingness to help and team spirit is very much

admired and appreciated within the Out-of-Home Section as a whole. Ms. Yu is the model of efficiency and exactly what a support service staff member should be. She is a definite asset to the Department and the children we serve.

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

NOMINATE Someone NOW!