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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Concurrent Planning is Key to Improving Timelines to Permanency

As we move forward on achieving better outcomes for children and families, we cannot discount the importance of Concurrent Planning, a vital case management tool.

The goal of Concurrent Planning is to work toward family reunification, while at the same time developing an alternative permanent placement plan, preferably with extended family. The alternate plan will often include adoption as a major alternative to family reunification. Concurrent Planning is intended to reduce the total period of time a child remains in foster care before being permanently placed with a family.

The strategy of Concurrent Planning is consistent with our Department goal of reducing timelines to permanency. To improve Concurrent Planning, we will need to make structural changes that allow us to provide services simultaneously rather than sequentially. For example, in most offices, the Emergency Response worker conducts an investigation, and then transfers the case to the Family Maintenance/Family Reunification (FM/FR) worker who provides ongoing services.

The FM/FR worker is singularly responsible for all case activities. In addition to case management work, the FM/FR worker carries out all functions related to Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) filing, referrals to contracted providers, etc. Finally, in situations where a TPR occurs, an Adoption worker then becomes responsible for all case activities. In the past, this process has delayed permanency.

The Department has made some changes to address this delay. Specifically, Point of Engagement at the Wateridge and Compton offices, along with the Torrance Adoption Model, are ways we have streamlined the permanency plan process. The key is servicing families as early as possible through teaming social workers who have different responsibilities. Support staff will also be brought into this team to allow social workers to focus on working directly with families on permanency plans.

Currently we are working to make Team Decision-Making changes to better support Concurrent Planning and to address the TPR process. We will continue to work with Locals 550 and 660 and the Staff Advisory Forum on these changes.

It is critical that children brought into our care achieve stability and permanency as quickly as possible. Improvement in the consistent use of Concurrent Planning will improve timelines to permanency and is a key strategy for creating more stability for children. ■

David Sanders, Ph.D.
Director

Compton Office Opens in South Los Angeles New Facility Houses Innovative 'Compton Project'

In the first six weeks of operation, staff at the Compton office began to notice dramatic results in the way they were serving children and families in the South Los Angeles area. More families were working through their problems, taking advantage of services provided and keeping their children safely in the home. In that six-week period, staff investigated 500 referrals, yet only two children had to be removed from their homes and placed in foster care. Impressive outcomes for a project that had begun as a vision just a year earlier.

The vision for the Compton Project began with discussions between community stakeholders and the Department on the best ways to develop an innovative, community-based office that would provide increased services to children and families and keep children out of foster care. What emerged in June encompasses these goals.

"We aren't the 'Department of Placement.' We aren't the 'Department of Separation,'" said DCFS Director Dr. David Sanders at the community grand opening of the Compton office in July. "Our job isn't to be distant from the community, but to be part of it. That's what we're about. Our job is to serve children and families."

Dr. Sanders also praised DCFS staff for the year of hard work developing the Compton Project and building community partnerships. "Staff has developed the relationships to move this project forward. This staff is an incredible group," he said.

Although the South Los Angeles area is home to about a quarter of the children served by the Department, the Compton office is the first office based in that community to provide a comprehensive group of services to 10,000 foster youth. It is planned to be used as a model in service delivery for the Department's other offices and throughout the nation.

Along with DCFS, staff from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) are housed in the Compton office and are a vital part of the Compton Project. DCFS and DMH work hand-in-hand to efficiently provide the comprehensive health, mental health and community services needed by clients. Compton Project staff are also working closely with the provider community, schools, churches, law enforcement and hospitals to work on placement avoidance and placement prevention.

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Compton Office Entrance



As a regular part of "DCFS News," we will recognize the successes of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and its community partners. These success stories will be 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 Stuart Riskin of the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at riskis@dcfs.co.la.ca.us.



Lonnie Woods

Caregiver Praises Clerk for Being Efficient, Caring

Lonnie Woods, an Intermediate Supervising Typist Clerk in the Central Clerical Foster Care Approval and Payments section of Revenue Enhancement has a big job to do. Not only does he supervise 24 clerks in four units, Woods oversees the Foster Care and Adoptions Assistance Hotline support staff who handle payment issues, medical card issuance, rate changes, request for adoptions assistance and

related budgetary issues in support of Children's related budgetary issues in support of Children's Social Workers.

To succeed at his job, Woods says you have to have good communication skills, motivation, patience and professionalism while being friendly at all times. If you can explain to a caregiver the situation and its limitations, says Woods, they may not like what they hear, but they will accept it. The bottom line is to "try to smooth out the rough edges" and to remedy the situation as soon as possible. "Always ask questions and always call back."

Recently, DCFS Director Dr. David Sanders received a letter from a relative caregiver who described her interaction with Woods: "Mr. Woods is one of the most efficient, caring, and professional managers I have dealt with in the Department. As a grandparent, it is most comforting to know that you are relating to a person, whose utmost concern is how to facilitate the process and be supportive during a time of crisis. Mr. Woods personifies that individual."

Woods, who describes himself as a County "lifer" employed for 36 years, has seen many changes since starting his career just two days after graduation from Thomas Jefferson High School. Through the years, Woods has kept active in union activities. Currently, he is a Union Shop Steward, a member of the Labor-Management Committee, and a part of the Department's clerical redeployment workgroup. Most of Woods' career has been involved in customer relations. When asked what has sustained him through all these years, Woods noted, "I'm a people person." ■



Shirley McHenry

ITC Supervisor is 'Backbone' of Covina Annex

Intermediate Typist Clerk Supervisor Shirley McHenry retired from the Department in 1989 because of her husband's health. But she wasn't gone for long. McHenry was asked to return in 1990 and 14 years later at age 69 she is still working and has no plans for retirement. "I love working with these wonderful employees," she says. "I have to keep busy. I wouldn't know what to do with myself."

Busy is an understatement. McHenry is a dynamo, thinking creatively and always going above and beyond what is expected. Three days a week, she supervises clerical staff, orders cell phones, sets up CPR training for staff, supervises summer interns, organizes fundraising sales for decorating the building and even finds time to play Mrs. Santa Claus for the children in the Medically Fragile Unit at Christmas. Recently, McHenry used money she raised to buy a new conference table for the Asian Pacific Unit.

Staff feelings for McHenry run very deep and their statements speak volumes. Regional Administrator Amaryllis Watkins describes McHenry as "the backbone" of the Covina Annex. "She is efficient, has the most positive attitude at all times and has made our office look and feel child-centered by the decorations she generously contributes. This is a welcoming environment not only for the children and families we serve, but also a boost to the staff."

When she's not busy making the Covina Annex a more inviting place, McHenry has a very full family life, which includes 18 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. You can also find her at the mini-stockcar races in Victorville where she cheers on her son, son-in-law and grandson who are all racecar drivers.

"What we hear said most often about Shirley," said Watkins, "is that people want to be just like her when they grow up." A true testament to this valuable DCFS employee. ■

'Wednesday's Child' Celebrates 10-Year Partnership with DCFS

Every week on the Fox 11 10 o'clock News, children looking for loving families to call their own are profiled on a news segment called "Wednesday's Child." In October, Fox 11 celebrates 10 years of successfully finding homes for hundreds of Los Angeles County children waiting for adoption through "Wednesday's Child" (formerly called "Sunday's Child") sponsored by the Freddie Mac Foundation.

In the past four years since the program became "Wednesday's Child," 51 children featured on the program have been adopted, 36 are waiting for a court date to finalize their adoptions and 90 children have prospective adoptive families identified. "Wednesday's Child," a partnership between DCFS, Fox 11 and the Freddie Mac Foundation, boasts a 70 percent success rate

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Fox 11 News Anchor Christine Devine (right) and one of the families she's helped through "Wednesday's Child".

Compton Office

Continued from Page 1

"We aren't the 'Department of Placement.' We aren't the 'Department of Separation.' Our job isn't to be distant from the community, but to be part of it. That's what we're about."

-- Dr. David Sanders, DCFS Director

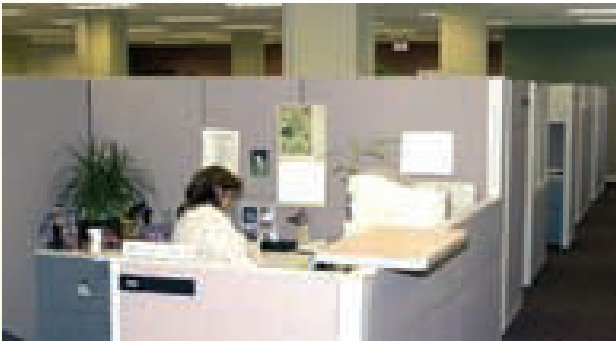
Making sure that families get appropriate services to reduce the reoccurrence of abuse and address the issue of permanency for children are the main goals of the Compton Project.

Most of the families served by the office need help dealing with the day-to-day stresses of life, as well as with more serious issues such as unemployment and substance abuse, explained DCFS Regional Administrator Eric Marts, who spear-headed the Compton Project and now heads the office. The best way to do that, noted Marts, is by building strong community partnerships with providers who are already in the community.

"Not only do we need to be in the community - we need to be a part of the community," said Marts.

DCFS staff at the Compton Office are excited about the future and look forward to working with the South Los Angeles community to improve services to children and families helping them avoid the foster care, as well as improve the outcomes for thousands of children in foster care.

The Compton office is located at 921 East Compton Boulevard. For more information about the Compton Project, call Eric Marts, at (310) 668-6605. ■



Compton Office Interior

Success Stories

Continued from Page 2

with many harder-to-place older youth and sibling sets finding new homes.

Fox 11 reporter and anchor Christine Devine produces "Wednesday's Child." Devine, with the help of Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services staff member William Wong, has been an integral part of creating positive outcomes for children. For more information on "Wednesday's Child," please call William Wong at (626) 229-3783. ■

New Emancipation Division Chief Seeks to Build Partnerships



Rhelda Shabazz

Rhelda Shabazz, the new Emancipation Services Division Chief for the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), plans to use her extensive experience in child welfare and background in communications to ensure that the Emancipation Services program fits into the DCFS goal of permanency for youth. Shabazz was appointed in August with input from the Emancipation Partnership, which includes repre-

sentatives from the Chief Administrative Office, Probation and numerous other stakeholders.

Shabazz plans to work to strengthen partnerships with stakeholders, especially the Emancipation Partnership. Shabazz said she aims to find a balance between the Partnership's goals and the goals of the Department. "The goal will be to reach a full understanding between the two that will be in the best interests of the emancipating youth," explained Shabazz. "I am really excited about the position."

Shabazz comes to her new assignment with a strong background in child welfare services and a wealth of experience in developing and working with community partnerships.

Shabazz has worked for DCFS for 20 years. She started her career as a Children's Social Worker (CSW). She worked for four years as a court officer and five years as a line Supervising CSW in the Metro North Office. Shabazz was also an Assistant Regional Administrator in the Wateridge and Torrance offices.

For the last four years, Shabazz played a leadership role in the Community Based Support Division within Services Bureau 2. For three of those years, she was an Interim Division Chief and helped to oversee the Family Support Program, a federal program open to all families, and the Family Preservation Program that contracts with 38 network agencies to provide support services to DCFS families to help keep families together. In addition, she provided oversight for the Department's Child Care Program, Victims of Crime Program, and 1733/2994 federally funded programs.

Shabazz received a bachelor's degree in Communications from UC Santa Barbara and a master's degree in Counseling/Psychology from Loyola Marymount University. ■



Work Begins to Recruit Resource Families

"DCFS News" recently sat down with Nina Powell-McCall, Program Manager for Foster and Adoption Recruitment, to discuss the concept of the "resource family."

"DCFS NEWS"

How is a resource family different from a traditional foster or adoptive family?

NPM

The resource family is committed to working with the birth parents to strengthen reunification. Resource families are committed to the permanency of children and therefore are willing to adopt that child as a permanency solution if reunification is not possible.

"DCFS NEWS"

How does this concept fit into the idea of concurrent planning?

NPM

The resource family facilitates concurrent planning. Because the desired end result is sometimes reunification, that's a hard concept to handle and can be very emotionally hard on the resource family. But we have many giving and selfless resource families who are willing to work on a permanency plan for a child's future, even it does not include them as parents.

"DCFS NEWS"

What does a resource family look like and who are you looking for?

NPM

We are looking for people who are flexible, adaptable and willing to commit. We are actively recruiting families for medically fragile children, teens and sibling groups. We are also looking for Spanish-speaking families, Asian-language families and families that meet the cultural needs of the children we serve.

"DCFS NEWS"

How are we recruiting resource families?

NPM

We have established partnerships with various agencies, such as Rancho Los Amigos which deals with medically fragile children, and we are looking at more outreach within the faith-based community. Currently, we are seeing more streamlined recruitment efforts because of the merger of the foster and adoptive recruitment sections. We have also begun the Consolidated Home Study Project so that all families, foster and adoptive, will be assessed at the same level, which meets the State's standards for adoptions.

"DCFS NEWS"

How can social workers help?

NPM

Social workers can help resource families by being supportive of them. They can also help them deal with their feelings and relationships with the birth parents. Social workers can also call the Foster and Adoption Recruitment section with ideas for outreach to the communities in which they work. In addition, they can refer children on their caseload who are in long-term foster care for an adoption assessment. Permanency Liaison workers in the regional offices can help with that. ■

Department's Self Improvement Plan Goes to State

As part of AB 636, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has completed its Self-Assessment and System Improvement Plan (SIP) which is now on its way to the California State Department of Social Services.

The Self-Assessment is conducted every three years and provides a snapshot of how the Department is currently doing. The SIP is a yearly report that includes a plan for how the Department will improve its child welfare performance and guides implementation and monitoring of those improvements.

The road to developing the Self-Assessment and SIP was paved with months of self-analysis, improvement recommendations, meetings with stakeholders and Peer Quality Case Reviews used to gather qualitative data that was included in the Self-Assessment, the blueprint for the SIP.

Six Peer Quality Case Reviews of 12 cases each were completed from March through August in order to examine issues such as: What are the barriers to social workers?, How involved are the families in case planning?, and How effective are the services and programs we provide to families?

Six DCFS Service Planning Areas (SPAs) participated in the Peer Quality Case Reviews. A team comprised of eight DCFS staff from the SPA being reviewed and other staff from a visiting SPA participated in the review process.

The information taken from the reviews are outlined as strengths and weaknesses in the Self-Assessment. This information was used as a basis for the SIP.

A copy of the Department's Self Assessment and Self Improvement Plan are posted on the L.A. Kids web site. ■

Self Assessments

Areas of Strength

- Decline in number of first entries into foster care
- Decline in rate of children in foster care
- Lower rate of recurrence of abuse or neglect when children are not removed from the home
- Major decline in foster care re-entry rate
- Low rate of multiple foster care placements
- Least restrictive placement setting

Areas Needing Improvement

- Recurrence of maltreatment
- Rate of child Abuse or neglect in foster care
- Length of time to exit foster care to reunification
- Length of time to exit foster care to adoption
- Management Information Systems
- Services array
- Social worker workload

Robert Haley

Supervising Children's Social Worker
Lakewood Office

Member of the Peer Quality Case Review Team

"I was most interested in the experience of the CSW providing services to the cases. I tended to focus on the impact that servicing cases has on the worker as an individual. I was impressed at the level of commitment demonstrated by each of the workers that I interviewed ... Overall, I'd say the experience was a good one."

Rose Powder

Children's Social Worker III
Lakewood Office

Member of the Peer Quality Case Review Team

"I enjoyed my experience on the team, and especially working with staff from different levels. It helped to know that sometimes social workers and management do have common goals, and that management supports us in attempting to reach them. Together we were an extremely creative force, and were able to meet the goals of the project."

ON THE LINE

Luck Has Nothing to Do With It Worker Builds Relationships to Finalize High Number of Adoptions

To hear Adoption Children's Social Worker (CSW) Nicole Engel tell it, her outstanding track record of finalizing a high number of adoptions is based on luck. But those who work with Engel know better - luck has nothing to do with it. Engel's steadfast dedication to providing permanent homes for children is what drives her to succeed. Nicole Engel

"Committed," "an advocate" and "willing to work with others" are all terms co-workers use to describe Engel. But Engel remains humble and instead, heaps praise on others. "I get by because my co-workers are all here," she said. "There are a lot of great workers out there." Despite her humility, the proof of Engel's success is in the numbers. Last year, she placed more than 20 children in adoptive homes, well above the average of one a month.

Engel has worked in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Lakewood Adoptions Office since beginning her career with DCFS six years ago. She decided to become a social worker after college during an internship where she worked with inner city seventh graders in Washington, D.C.

When she started as an Adoption worker, Engel describes the experience as "death by fire." At the time, she was carrying a caseload of about 100. Things have settled down and now her caseload is at about 55.

"She has developed and matured into an excellent team player, a dedicated and very sensitive social worker," said Supervising Children's Social Worker Jose Lujan, who has supervised Engel since 1999. "The quality of her overall case management skills as an advocate for children and as a clinician is excellent and consistently demonstrated in her casework."

"I am always impressed with how positive Nicole is, even when facing very challenging case circumstances. She has a great deal of stamina and a 'can do' attitude."

-- Adoptions ARA Joe Prusak

Recently, Engel became part of the expanded Torrance Adoption Model. The Torrance Adoption Model uses a team approach to promote early and on-going case planning coordination between the child protection and adoption social workers assigned to a child's case to achieve the goal of timely adoptions. Engel has been highly effective in developing constructive, collaborative relationships with regional colleagues through implementation of the Torrance Adoption Model in the Lakewood office.

"I am always impressed with how positive Nicole is, even when facing very challenging case circumstances. She has a great deal of stamina and a 'can do' attitude. She is determined to achieve the best permanency outcome for each child. She clearly believes in a team approach and in working collaboratively. This is the basis of the 'Torrance Model' and it's a natural fit with Nicole's style," explained Adoptions Assistant Regional Administrator Joe Prusak.

Co-workers also view Engel positively. Unit member Kateri Carriere said, "Nicole is one of our favorite people. She offers her help readily and is always available to give advice. She is so generous with her time and knowledge. In the six years I have worked with her she has made my job so much easier and so much more fun. She is so well respected and so well liked around here!"

Engel is happy meeting challenges head-on such as setting up an adoption for older, higher-needs youth or putting a sibling set back together in an adoptive home. "Putting together an unattached family with a child is exciting and feels good," she said. ■



'Tour de Lakewood/Torrance' Pedals for Clean Air

Early this year, Lakewood-Torrance Office Clerical Administrator Carrol Harris, decided to pedal for clean air after receiving a flier from the Los Angeles County Department of Transportation regarding Clean Air Month. She organized a group of 10 staff members for the effort, however, by May 20, 2004, "Our proud group of 10 ended up being a faithful four," she said.

The group didn't get a lot of practice in before the ride. Still, the four friends gathered that early morning in Paramount and pedaled the 5.6 miles to the Lakewood office, but only one way. "Believe me, it wasn't as easy as it sounds. Still, they had a wonderful time as they ached along the miles of terrain!", said Harris. The group says that they learned a lot being together, being supportive and encouraging each other. They are already planning next year's ride and are actively recruiting many co-workers to join them in pedaling for clean air. To sign up, please call Harris at (562) 497-3314. ■

Mommy, Daddy, What Do You Do All Day at Work?

County employees were encouraged to take their children, between the ages of nine and 16, to work on April 20, 2004, as part of "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" sponsored by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. It was a chance for employees' children to see where their parents worked and what they did for a living. At DCFS headquarters, children could be seen filing and stocking shelves and helping to prepare certificates of acknowledgement for their participation on this special day.

The goal for next year's event is for stronger attendance throughout the entire Department. For information on the national "Take our Daughters and Sons To Work Day", you may wish to check their web site at www.daughtersandsonstowork.org. ■

Transitional Housing Youth Mix and Mingle

The Second Annual Transitional Housing Youth Retreat and Recognition event was a success hosting 170 youth at Ladera Park on June 19, 2004. The event, which was funded by United Friends of the Children (UFC), provided a fun-filled day for the youth and provided a chance for youth to mingle, interact, share information and network with their peers. The goal was to nurture a sense of community and help youth develop support systems. The retreat also recognized those youth completing the program.

"Tommy the Clown" was the day's entertainment highlight. He not only entertained, but provided a positive message to youth regarding the attainment of an education, working toward goals and taking advantage of opportunities that the Transitional Housing Program has to offer. In a humorous yet serious moment, he shared a few personal points about challenges in his life. His mantra, "Not to give in nor to give up!" resonated with the group. In high-stepping style, he engaged the youth with the latest hip-hop tunes to callisthenic dance routines, and comedic magic tricks.

Additional fun included sack races, various field and board games, arts and crafts, and a hula-hoop contest. Gifts included T-shirts and a \$50 Office Depot gift cards. All youth received a ticket for the door prize drawings, which included Disneyland, Magic Mountain, and Universal Studio passes. ■

Third Annual Kinship Conference

The DCFS Kinship Care Division hosted about 300 caregivers at their third annual Kinship Conference, "Keeping Permanent Family Connections" on June 2, 2004 at the Radisson Hotel in Culver City. Dr. America Bracho, a nationally recognized leader on health issues in the Latino community was the keynote speaker. Her dynamic, plainspoken message addressed the issue of empowerment and the need for caregivers to overcome fears in order to succeed. This will help them to be open to utilizing new ideas and better strategies in raising the children in their care, said Bracho.

The well-attended conference provided caregivers with an enjoyable opportunity to meet and talk with others who are experiencing the same rewards and challenges as caregivers. Resources specific to their needs were available at the event. The conference also provided the opportunity to raise awareness of the special issues faced by kinship caregivers such as raising grandchildren on fixed incomes and how family dynamics change when relatives become foster parents. So that all caregiver needs were met, two workshops were presented specifically in Spanish.

Kinship Care Services staff was commended for their excellence in producing such a valuable and well planned training event for kin caregivers and other committed stakeholders. Caregivers' response to the event was overwhelmingly positive. They felt that the choice of workshop topics was very well thought out and that the keynote speaker was excellent. ■

In every issue, "DCFS News" will provide 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 riskin@dcfs.co.la.ca.us

DCFS Raises \$3,000 During Walk-a-Thon

On Saturday, April 24, 2004 the March of Dimes highlighted its 2004 fundraising campaign "Strike Out Prematurely" with an annual Walk-a-Thon. DCFS Director David Sanders, one of the campaign's chairpersons, led the Department in the 5-mile walk at Griffith Park along with Team DCFS.

This year's top DCFS fundraiser was Mary Jane Abyss of the North Hollywood office, who raised over \$650. Abyss has been raising money for the March of Dimes since 1984. "It's a good cause and after all, we work with children. It's also the one time a year that I get to catch up with my friends at the DPSS," she said. Mary Jane usually can be found walking with her niece or other family members.

Beverly Yates, who was this year's DCFS team captain assisted by Susan Jakubowski of Team DCFS, spearheaded the Department's March of Dimes fundraising activities. To date, about \$3,000 has been raised by DCFS from the walk and other fundraising items. The DCFS Executive Team posted a \$1,300 matching challenge to the rest of the Department.

Each bureau selected a team leader who was in charge of selling items such as Krispy Kreme doughnuts and Beanie Babies to raise additional funds. Team Captains also set up activities such as bake sales. To get involved in next year's Walk-a-Thon, contact Beverly Yates at (213) 351-5772. ■

Caregivers Turn Out in Droves for Third Annual Angel Heart Awards

More than 1,000 foster and relative caregivers gathered to be honored at the Third Annual Angel Heart Caregiver luncheon on May 26, 2004 at the Pacific Palms Resort in City of Industry.

Recipients in six categories received special recognition at the event. They included:

- Outstanding Licensed Foster Parent Irma Daniels
- Relative Caregiver Rexford Crawford
- Adoptive Parent Marlene Gumbs
- Specialized Caregiver Jerome Ming-Lee
- Outstanding Legal Guardian Hattie Mae Smith
- Outstanding Foster Family Agency Caregivers Diane and Andrew Barda.

Nominees were submitted by CSWs to the DCFS Foster Care Home Support Services Section. The nominating criteria were based on the Five Outcome Measures for Foster Children set down in the DCFS Strategic Plan of 2000 as well as Dr. Sanders' additional three goals.

Daytime television actress Victoria Rowell and Chief of Staff for Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke John Hill gave rousing speeches. Both speakers had been foster children and had deep, heart-felt thanks to their foster parents. They believed that a good part of their personal success came from the outstanding jobs their caregivers had done for them. Other speakers included DCFS Medical Director/Interim Chief Deputy Director Dr. Charles Sophy and Masters of Ceremony Eric "Rico" Reed. ■

Youth Voices Heard

Director's Youth Council Brings Together Foster Youth to Discuss Issues



DCFS Dr. David Sanders meets with members of the Director's Youth Council.

Current and former foster youth now have a way to voice their concerns and ideas directly to the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Under the Director's Youth Council, a new group made up of 20 former and current foster youth, youth are participating in the decision-making process regarding issues

that directly affect their quality-of-life. The group began meeting with DCFS Director Dr. Sanders in July.

"As we move toward our goal of positive outcomes for the youth that we serve it is important that we include the voice of that youth in the decision-making process," said Dr. Sanders. "The youth that we serve are assets to our community and we should encourage them to participate in making meaningful decisions on issues that affect them. Instead of making decisions for youth we need to begin to make decisions with our youth."

The Director's Youth Council meets every six weeks to discuss the issues that are most important to them. The youth have already begun working on issues related to family reunification, specifically, their view of the best practices in promoting safe, timely, and successful family reunifications. They have also begun to survey youth in group homes through a formal Group Home Evaluation. The survey, drafted with the input of the youth, allows participants to share

their placement experience in an effort to enhance the quality of care provided by group homes.

Berisha Black, a former foster youth and the DCFS Emancipation Ombudsman, is responsible for coordinating the Director's Youth Council. Black feels very strongly about the positive impact that the Director's Youth Council can have on the Department policies.

"These meetings give foster youth an opportunity to raise their concerns to the Director," she said. "It is a way for them to advocate for changes in the Department and gives voice to emancipated foster youth to share their ideas for change. It also gives youth an opportunity to give back and help the youth coming behind them. My hope is for the Department to really value the input of the youth and incorporate their voice in shaping the goals of the Department."

For more information on the Director's Youth Council, please call Berisha Black, DCFS Emancipation Ombudsman, at (626) 229-3829. ■



Director's Employees of the Month

As part of the new "DCFS All Stars" employee recognition program, one Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services employee in three different categories will be honored every month by the Director 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.

We're still looking for "DCFS All Stars" to honor in the months ahead and you are encouraged to send in nominations using forms on the L.A. Kids web site. For more information on the "DCFS All Stars" employee recognition program, please call Lois Shirk in the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at (213) 351-5886. To learn more about these outstanding recipients, check out the Director's Page on L.A. Kids. Congratulations to all of the honorees!

Outstanding Administrative Service Staff Award

July: Paul Gaeta,
Assistant Regional Administrator,
Antelope Valley West Office
August: No nominees submitted.
September: Aris Banico,
Children's Services Administrator I,
Specialized Programs

Outstanding Direct Service Staff Award

July: Walter Huitema,
Children's Social Worker III,
Out-of-Home Care Programs
August: Steven Newman,
Children's Social Worker III,
North Hollywood Adoptions Unit
September: Natalie Oster,
Children's Social Worker III,
Antelope Valley East Office

Outstanding Support Service Staff Award

July: Jack Limon,
Eligibility Supervisor,
Wateridge Office
August: Leticia Castro,
Adoptions Assistant,
Belvedere Office
September: Linda Clark,
Intermediate Supervising Typist Clerk,
Century Office

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY
Saturday, November 20, 2004
8:30 a.m.

Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court,
Monterey Park
Information: 310-972-3120
Courts around the country along with
Edelman Children's Court will open their
doors to finalize hundreds of adoptions and
celebrate the adoptive families.

**SUPERVISOR MICHAEL D.
ANTONOVICH'S
'MAGIC MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY FESTIVAL'**
Saturday, December 4, 2004
10 a.m.

Magic Mountain, Valencia
Information: (626) 938-1763
A day of fun beginning with gifts and lunch
for 500 foster youth, ages 7 to 18 who live
in the Covina, North Hollywood, Santa
Clarita, Lancaster, and Pasadena areas.

**SUPERVISOR YVONNE B. BURKE'S
'MAGIC MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY FESTIVAL'**
Sunday, December 5, 2004
10 a.m.

Magic Mountain, Valencia
Information: (626) 938-1763
A day of fun for 400 foster youth, ages 7 to
18 who live in the Supervisor's district. Bus
transportation will be provided at regional
offices.



L.A. County Board of Supervisors

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Adoptions and Foster

Care Information
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DCFS News is published by the Los
Angeles County Department of
Children and Family Services, Office
of Public Affairs.

For article ideas and submissions,
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All submissions are subject to review
and editing.