Family to Family Message from Carol Collins, Assistant Agency Director

By now, most of you have learned of the child welfare reform initiative Family to Family (F2F) and the tremendously positive impact it can have on the lives of the children and families we serve. The Department of Children and Family Services is committed to implementing the F2F strategies as soon as possible. It offers us our best hope of achieving better outcomes for families. It is really important that all staff in the department be able to articulate the F2F philosophies, especially as related to our department’s vision. More importantly, the changes must be reflected in our practices.

While we’ve been able to engage some stakeholders and community partners in the planning process, it is still a challenge for us to determine the best methods for engaging the consumers, our families in a participatory manner.

I speak about the urgency around our change efforts whenever I have the opportunity to do so. I also proudly tout our many accomplishments. The reality is that we are in no position to rest on our laurels and become complacent at a time when there is such a heavy focus on measuring child welfare performance and outcomes. Our achievements will pale if we can’t demonstrate the willingness and ability to make our commitment to change visible and tangible.

I would prioritize the direction that has been provided to the workgroups as follows:

- **Team Decision Making**: Implement Team Decision Making with new intake in South Hayward by September 1, 2004;
- **Recruitment, Training & Support**: Continue with efforts to improve upon our relationships with county licensed foster parents;
- **Self-Evaluation**: Focus on data integrity so that our online data accurately and completely reflects the work that’s being done and the actual outcomes for families;
- **Community Partnerships**: Develop strategies for community engagement, forming partnerships and capacity-building beginning with neighborhoods in South Hayward, East Oakland and West Oakland.

Many thanks to all the workgroup members, who continue to take the time and make an effort to meet and engage in challenging discussions. I am relying on our dedicated co-chairs to be facilitative change agents. Lori Jones, recently promoted to a Division Director position will continue with her role as the F2F Coordinator. She is to be commended for doing a great job in keeping us all on task. We are also very fortunate to have Lisa Abernathy providing much needed and appreciated coordination and support to the workgroups, Lori and myself.

What is Family to Family?

Family to Family is about keeping families together and about building bridges. Abused children need good families—to protect them today, to care for them as they become young adults. Child Welfare systems can build the bridges that will connect these children with families right for them—bridges of support, of caring, and most of all — of hope.

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There seems to be an insurrection of initiatives and programs that are focused on changing the delivery of child welfare services and improving the outcomes for children and families involved in child welfare. Family to Family – Linkages – Redesign – AB636 – EPSDT – CPYP – Forging the Links. These are the initiatives that we are working on in our department. Not surprising, each of these efforts is promoting the same goals and outcomes, but from a different focus area. Still, they are all inter-related, and as we continue to move forward, we are building a uniform planning approach as defined by our Family to Family philosophy.

In upcoming issues of our Family to Family newsletter, we will address the various change efforts our department has undertaken – defining what these efforts mean, and keeping you updated on our progress, our successes and our challenges. I will show you how these efforts are connected and how you and the work you do everyday plays a significant role in our success. I encourage each of you to get involved in our planning and implementation process. Not just by going to meetings, but by educating those you work with including peers, colleagues and community; by making suggestions for how we can continue to improve our practices; and by recommitting yourselves to improving the welfare of the children and families in Alameda County.

Finally, I am including a powerful speech excerpt that I feel focuses us on the real issues – the children and their well-being. Since my first reading of this excerpt, I ask myself these questions every day...how are the children, really? Did I do anything today that would change their experience in our system? And, what else can I do differently that will have a positive impact on their well-being? As you read it, please consider what role you play in the lives of the children and families you serve each day.

“And How Are The Children?”

Among the most accomplished and fabled tribes of Africa, no tribe was considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It is perhaps surprising then to learn the traditional greeting that passed between Masai warriors. “Kaserian Ingera,” one would always say to another. It means, “And how are the children?”

It is still the traditional greeting among Masai, acknowledging the high value that the Masai always place on their children’s well-being. Even warriors with no children of their own would always give the traditional answer, “All the children are well.” Meaning, of course, that peace and safety prevail, that the priorities of protecting the young, the powerless are in place, that Masai society has not forgotten its reason for being, its proper functions and responsibilities. “All the children are well,” means that life is good. It means that the daily struggles of existence even among a poor people, do not preclude proper caring for its young.

I wonder how it might affect our consciousness of our own children’s welfare if in our culture we took to greeting each other with this same daily question: “and how are the children?” I wonder if we heard that question and passed it along to each other a dozen times a day, if it would begin to make a difference in the reality of how children are thought of or cared for in this country.

I wonder if every adult among us, parent and non-parent alike, felt an equal weight for the daily care and protection of all the children in our town, in our state, in our country...I wonder if we could truly say without any hesitation, “the children are well, yes, all the children are well”.

What would it be like...if the President began every press conference, every public appearance, by answering the question, “And how are the children, Mr. President?” If every governor of every state had to answer the same question at every press conference: “And how are the children, Governor? Are they all well?” Wouldn’t it be interesting to hear their answers?

Excerpt from a speech by the Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O’Neill,
First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Framingham, MA
Recruitment, Training & Support (RTS) of Resource Families by Brittany Walker Pettigrew

The RTS workgroup has been involved in several efforts to help promote the Family to Family philosophy in our activities and relationship with our Resource Families (foster parents, relative caregivers, foster family agencies, and birth parents). These efforts include organizing a series of Roundtables with our foster parents to address some of their concerns and provide answers to questions they had around placement, licensing, and pay rates. Other projects include organizing meetings with foster parents in February and most recently in April. Again, these meetings were an effort to further address care providers’ concerns and to continue dialogue between Children and Family Services staff and our foster parents.

RTS, along with the CARI Program, was also involved in planning the Breaking Down Barriers Conference which featured a presentation on Family to Family with emphasis on the Team Decision Making process.

Future projects that RTS is working on include an effort to launch a campaign to reinvigorate the priority of returning phone calls to each other, our foster parents and the community. In addition to improving communication efforts, we are also looking at ways to enhance the department’s relationship with our resource families. Other efforts are underway to develop strategies around training accountability—making sure foster parents are accountable to the utilization of training and are better prepared to provide quality services to the children in their care.

The members of the RTS work group are committed to seeking effective ways of supporting our resource families and improving channels of communication. Beginning in July, the work group will meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month—we’d love to have you join us.

Community Partnerships—Making Connections by Community Partnerships Work Group

Community Partnerships is one of the 4 workgroups under Alameda County’s Children and Family Services department “Family to Family Initiative”.

Our workgroup consists of foster parents, leaders and staff from community-based organizations, the Alameda County Public Health Department and Every Child Counts.

Our group began meeting in May 2003. Over the course of two meetings we developed a mission statement—it reads: “Our mission is to provide every child in our communities with the greatest opportunity to be healthy and to develop and grow within a safe and nurturing atmosphere.”

Our vision is “Together with the community, we will build a resilient community safety net, to support children through which no child will fall. Each child is our own.”

To date, we have accomplished the following:

- Expanded our workgroup participants to include a diverse group of public and private stakeholders;
- Met regularly and consistently;
- Hosted a series of information forums and trainings in various parts of Alameda County to educate the broader community about the Family to Family Initiative;
- Developed a strategic plan for community outreach;
- Developed a work plan with a committee and subcommittee infrastructure responsible for implementation;
- Began partnering with Every Child Counts on community outreach;
- Created a brochure;
- Created a survey that was well received and elicited many responses and support of our Family to Family planning efforts.

Our future looks bright and we hope to:

- Evaluate survey responses and delegate follow-up to workgroups;
- Plan a series of focus groups to concentrate on community engagement efforts in our target areas;
- Solidify our connection with the South Hayward Neighborhood Collaborative.

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Community Partnerships (continued from page 3)

- Identify and partner with community groups, agencies and individuals who can join us in providing services and support for families;
- Identify one or more sites in the community to hold Team Decision Making meetings;
- Attend community meetings with the Assistant Agency Director, Carol Collins; and
- Develop a speaker’s bureau.

If you have ideas, thoughts, questions or want to participate in the Family to Family Community Partnerships workgroup, we’d like to hear from you. Family to Family contact information is located on page 6 of this newsletter.

Team Decision Making by Pauline Keogh

What’s going on with TDM and what’s happening in the work group?

The TDM work group has recently undergone a “split” in its structure. We now have two work groups that are referred to as the “Large” and “Small”. There continues to be two meetings per month, one of the Large and one of the Small. The Large group is focused on the regular TDM planning matters such as preparedness, training, working on timeline, etc. The Small group was set up as an offshoot of the Large group to hash out the nitty-gritty, so to speak, of the day-to-day operational details of implementation.

Right now, the Small group has crafted two drafts of Emergency Response and Dependency Investigations tasks and issues related to starting TDM’s in those programs. These drafted documents are then returned to the Large group meeting for review before being finalized and submitted to the Labor Family to Family subcommittee for review.

Other news about TDM in synopsis:

- The work group has met regularly for about a year and a TDM protocol was written in the early stages.
- Staff readiness steps are in progress with many units already having received an orientation about TDM—more are in the works. The group is also working on identifying needs in other areas of readiness and orientation and planning on approaches and methods of delivering quality orientation experiences to all who may benefit and who need to be informed.
- Job descriptions have been developed for TDM facilitators; department staff have attended training that will equip our department to train our TDM facilitators; a job description has also been developed for a clerical support person for TDM facilitation.
- A new timeline for implementing TDM’s in our department has been developed with the help of the Department Director, Carol Collins, and it is expected that TDM’s will commence at the beginning of September 2004. All the other key steps to getting this done have been written into the timeline.
- A labor-management subcommittee has been established to look at TDM implementation, several meetings have taken place and the TDM Protocol has been reviewed in full.
- The TDM work group meetings take place on the afternoons of the second Thursday of the month (Large) and the fourth Thursday (Small). People from all aspects of the department are invited to participate, as well as foster parents, community organization participant and others.
The Family to Family Self-Evaluation Workgroup has been busy behind the scenes in recent months. The workgroup launched the Data Awareness Campaign in March, 2004. The Campaign consists of short data presentations by members of the Workgroup to unit staff meetings, a kind of data roadshow. To date, ten presentations have been made to various unit staff groups and the feedback and responses have been very positive. One of the major points made in the presentation is that the focus on Child Welfare outcomes by the state and federal government is part of a new culture of accountability. In the future, county child welfare agencies will likely be funded based solely on performance on outcomes. And, in that new world, any good practice or work performed by Child Welfare Workers that is not documented (entered into CWS/CMS) will not count. “If you do it, document it,” will need to be our new motto for survival.

One of the other Workgroup activities has been distributing via e-mail a short data snippet that we call Data Bytes. Here is another example that shows how some of the practice changes already underway in the department are making positive changes in a critical Family to Family outcome indicator, the number of children entering foster care for the first time. The chart below shows that in 2002, for the first time in many years, less than 1,000 children experienced a first entry into foster care. This decline can be attributed to the effects of implementing the Structured Decision Making system, the development of the diversion program, Another Road to Safety (ARS), and the work of the Neighborhood unit in the Emergency Response program.

![Entries into Foster Care for 1999 - 2002](chart.png)
Family to Family is a child welfare reform initiative developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation that is based on the belief that community-centered responses can better protect children, support families and strengthen neighborhoods. Family to Family is a shift in philosophy: a change in our approach to child welfare practices, requiring "systematic re-thinking" that views each part of the child welfare system in relation to the entire picture.

We invite you to partner with us as we endeavor to improve outcomes for children and families. Our goals are to:

- Develop network of neighborhood based resource families;
- Ensure all children are placed with families in their own neighborhoods;
- Increase the number & quality of resource families;
- Provide timely reunification services;
- Determine resources needed to keep children safe in home;
- Create teams that work in the best interest of children;
- Become a neighborhood resource for families.

Food For Thought

"Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out."

James B. Conant
(1893-1978)

In recognition of Foster Care Month, the Department of Children and Family Services held several events to honor our foster parents. The first event was acknowledgment by the Board of Supervisors, where a proclamation was issued recognizing May as Foster Care Month. On hand to receive the proclamation were Tina Hughes, President of the Alameda County Foster Parent Association and foster parent, Mary Ann Aikens.

On May 18th the Department hosted a Foster Parent Social. This event was held to provide an opportunity for foster parents and staff (particularly placement staff) to meet and greet in a relaxing and informal setting. Foster Parents were given a tour of the Assessment Center and had an opportunity to visit the Foster Parent Office located at the Assessment Center.

Foster parents, their family and friends had a chance to celebrate their many accomplishments at the Annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner held on May 21st. Guests included Supervisor Keith Carson, County Administrator Susan Muranishi and Social Services Director, Chet Hewitt. Our Department Director, Carol Collins was also on hand to acknowledge our foster parents for their continued dedication to Alameda County’s children in care.

Way to go, foster parents!