Fatherhood 101: Spotlight on Fathers
by Barbara Loza-Muriera

On February 6, 2014, the Alameda County Fathers Corps / First Five, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency Department of Public Health and Alameda County Social Services Agency co-hosted a screening of Fatherhood 101, a film that in director Marquette Williams words, is about “the essence of a father’s love captured from the hearts of men from all walks of life.”

Fatherhood 101 explores the meaning of fatherhood through the thoughts and words of men from a broad range of backgrounds, ethnicities and personal philosophies, all attempting to answer the film’s central question “What’s your definition of a successful father?” The film is peppered by fatherhood research highlighting the impact of fatherhood involvement in the lives of children. “The research shows that when a father is involved in a child’s life, they are less likely to live in poverty, less likely to do poorly in school, less likely to use drugs…” says Aldonis Grimes, Director of the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative, one of many individuals interviewed in the film. “It’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever done,” says noted Hollywood director Lee Daniels and film participant, “putting someone before yourself—unconditionally.” Fatherhood 101’s passionate call for a fatherhood renaissance in America is timely, as is evidenced by the Obama Administration’s, President’s Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative, and the US Department of Human Services National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, both efforts launched two years ago to provide information and inspired guidance for fathers, advocates, service providers and citizens seeking to support men in fulfilling the Presidents Fatherhood Pledge, “an effort to encourage individuals, especially fathers, to be involved in the lives of their children, and

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Improvement Planning in Alameda County

by Budd Seeley

As reported in the last DCFS Press, the Alameda County departments of Children and Family Services and Probation conducted their Peer Review process and County Self Assessment in 2013. Both were components of the mandated California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) cycle, and are to be followed by the development of a System Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is the operational agreement between the state of California Department of Social Services (CDSS), DCFS, and Probation and provides an outline for how the county will improve its system of care for children and families.

For Alameda County, DCFS will include strategies in the SIP that are also planned for the renewed Title IV-E Waiver. The SIP strategies are intended to support DCFS in its ongoing attempts to better service children and their families, and these efforts are informed by the results of the Peer Review and CSA—including information gathered from internal staff and community partners. Once finalized, Alameda County’s SIP will be available on the CDSS website at http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG1356.htm.
A New Relative Caregiver Curriculum Coming Soon
by Cerise Grice

Several dedicated Relative Caregivers, Kinship Service Providers and Department Staff have contributed to the development of a new curriculum for relative caregivers that speaks to their unique strengths and challenges, the supports needed to succeed, what to expect from the department and the resources available. This curriculum is designed to address things like: home approval requirements, information and clarity around funding, guidance on who to call and what to do when things arise, such as; the composition of a caregiver’s home changes or a caregiver decides to take a trip. It includes explanations about Cal Works, what the child/youth needs and the necessary support systems needed for the ongoing care of a child/youth. “The curriculum also engages caregivers in conversation about permanency and their commitment beyond being a place where the child/youth can live for a period of time, but a place where the child/youth can grow up,” says Program Manager Jon Pettigrew. Additionally, there is candid discussion about the difference between being a relative and being a relative caregiver (The Parent) and providing home and school expectations, discipline and boundaries.

There is great excitement in the air as the final edits are placed on the curriculum and plans are underway to share it in the coming months. Written surveys will also be gathered to capture feedback and make adjustments in the future. Many of the relative caregivers who collaborated on the curriculum have commented that they truly value this kind of information and they are so glad that others will have it now.

Youth in Out of Home Care Are Making Proud Choices in 2014
by Cerise Grice

After one full year of implementation, DCFS’ Making Proud Choices (MPC) has trained over 100 youth (ages 14-19 years old) in out of home care and their caregivers about preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. We are proud of our collaborative partners at MISSSEY, Girls Inc., ILSP, Youth Radio and The Juvenile Justice Center for providing staff to be trained and a venue to host the trainings. In 2014, the program hopes to offer more trainings and is making presentations within DCFS and in the community to organizations that serve youth (ages 14-19 years old) in out of home care. Program letters and brochures have been mailed to all Alameda County caregivers and Casey Family Programs has offered to host the program this year. Participating youth that complete the entire training will receive a completion certificate and a $50 gift card.

The MPC training is a part of a national initiative with five states including (Alameda County-DCFS/California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Rhode Island and North Carolina) participating. Alameda County began the first series of MPC trainings in the spring of 2013 and evaluation feedback from the youth participants in MPC consistently indicates that MPC is a great program and that the youth participants enjoyed learning and interacting in a small group of 8-10 teens.

The information is shared in a variety of ways: video, small group exercises, games, role-plays and allowing youth to ask questions and practice talking about abstinence and condom use. The MPC Co-Facilitators mentioned that many participants intended to share this information with their friends, caregivers, family members and trusted adults.

MPC will be hosting a summer series at ILSP and Casey Family Programs for all youth (14-19 years olds) in out of home care. Child Welfare Workers, caregivers, parents and youth serving organizations are strongly encouraged to refer eligible youth to future MPC trainings. For more information about “Making Proud Choices” and trainings contact Cerise Grice at cgrice@acgov.org.

For information contact Cerise Grice at cgrice@acgov.org.
The OreMi Mentoring Program is looking for foster youth who are interested in having a mentor!

We have mentors who ready and waiting to work one-on-one with a young person.

Eligible youth are:
- ages 6-18 (or older if AB12 eligible)
- under court supervision currently (and expected to be for the next 6 months or more)
- live in Alameda County or one of the adjacent bay area counties
- willing to meet with a mentor at least 4 hours/month for one year

Youth are connecting with adult mentors, and finding it to be a mutually rewarding experience. For example, Michaela (age 12) lived in a foster home with one of her sister’s and two other girls. She enjoyed dance, singing, and fashion. Her elderly foster mother hoped that a mentor would be able to bridge the generation gap between Michaela and herself, and thought that a young, hip African American female mentor would be someone Michaela could identify with.

Michaela was matched with Tania, but things quickly went south in Michaela’s placement. She was placed with her father, whom she had never lived with, then with her mother, who was still working on fulfilling a case plan to reunify with her daughters.

Throughout these changes, Tania maintained contact with Michaela and spent time with her whenever their schedules allowed. Tania provided a stress-free outlet for Michaela to have fun and take her mind off of the multiple changes at home.

Michaela’s placement with her mother has stabilized, and Tania has built a relationship with Michaela’s mother. Tania recently started tutoring Michaela once per week, in addition to their fun outings a few times per month. While things started out to be somewhat challenging, it’s wonderful to see the comfortable and trusting relationship that Tania and Michaela have built.

For more information about our mentors, or how to make a referral, contact OreMi staff at www.oremi.info, oremi@fssba-oak.org, or 510-834-2443, ext. 3033.

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First Jobs Make Lasting Impressions!
Social Services Agency’s Summer and After School Youth Employment Program
by Barbara Loza-Muriera

Do you remember your first job? For most of us, getting our first “real” job and receiving our very first paycheck were important benchmarks on the path towards adulthood. Working for part of the week also filled idle summer and afterschool hours with a structured activity that served to build skills, confidence and—with the income earned—gave us a small flicker of independence. As with any teenager, foster and probation involved youth can benefit greatly from early employment experiences.

With that in mind, the Summer and After School Youth Employment Program (SASYEP) was developed to provide employment readiness and on-the-job experiences for foster and probation involved youth ages 14 -19. In operation since 2011, the year-around SASYEP has served over 1000 young people during the FY13-14 program year. Employment assignments have included working within city and county departments, restaurants, automotive shops, glass repair, clothing stores, urban farming, medical offices, libraries, animal shelters, and a wide variety of local businesses and non-profit community organizations.

Youth who have participated in the program have reported, “My assignments developed my skills” “I’m a hands on learner in a hands on environment. I have learned a lot” “They taught me things I didn’t know”. Many youth also described positive relationships with job-site supervisors and staff. “She was very nice and could be a role model. She explained clearly and made sure I wasn’t confused...” “A lot of staff were very helpful and explained a lot of things that helped me later on.” “They helped us understand how to do the job right.” One youth summed it up this way: “It’s a great feeling working!”

With Summer 2014 just around the corner, CW staff can help prepare youth by urging them to apply for work permits early, to have a current California I.D. or Student I.D., and a copy of their transcripts ready for SASYEP enrollment. Also, be reminded to update youth contact information in CMS/CWS—as lists of eligible youth will be made available to SASYEP contracted providers for outreach and enrollment purposes. More information—and youth friendly fliers—to come via e-mail. In the meantime, what was your first job? If you’d like to share, send us an e-mail and let us know a little bit about your first job—and we’ll incorporate it into a future article! Send “my first job” to: Barbara Loza-Muriera barbara.loza@acgov.org

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On December 6, 2012 a Family Reunification (FR) worker referred a mother, father, and their four children aged 7, 4, 2, and 1 to the Family Preservation (FP) program. The parents had struggled for years to keep their family together with mixed success. There were 8 referrals dating back to the spring of 2008 prior to the referral resulting in the children becoming dependents. In December 2012, all four children were removed as a result of the parents’ use of methamphetamine, active domestic violence, and the mother’s incarceration. The family’s support system rallied and two of the children were able to be placed in two different relative homes in Sacramento.

The case remained in Dependency Investigations (DI) for 6 months as further allegations of child maltreatment arose, and the father was incarcerated. Once released from jail, the parents moved in with the paternal grandmother, and the mother delivered her 5th child. By this time, both parents completed parenting courses, the mother was participating in the MOMS program (Maximizing Opportunities for Mothers to Succeed—a case management/parenting program that supports mothers during and after incarceration), and the father completed an inpatient substance abuse recovery program. When the case was assigned to FR, the parents engaged in counseling services while trying to locate a safe home for their family and traveling two hours each way to visit their children. The FR Child Welfare Worker (CWW) identified the effort the couple was making along with their commitment to each other and their children, and believed that with additional support they might be able to successfully reunify. However, she was concerned about the time remaining; the 6-month and 12-month hearings were back-to-back in January and February 2013; and if the children were not returned by the 12-month hearing, the court may determine that reunification was no longer the plan for the family.

Within four weeks of the referral to Family Preservation, the case was assigned and the FP CWW engaged with the parents. Together the FP CWW and parents developed a concrete plan for reunification. The plan included assisting the parents to secure safe housing, helping the parents develop strategies to successfully manage five children under the age of 8, and assisting with the transition home. The FP CWW met weekly with the parents, connected them with housing supports, helped the father engage in mental health treatment for his recently identified bi-polar disorder, helped the parents connect with supports for their sobriety, observed visitation in Sacramento, and assessed their ability to care for each and all of the children.

In July 2013, the parents moved with their infant child to a home in Alameda County that also offered on-going case management support. In conjunction with the FR CWW, the FP CWW developed a staggered plan for reunification. Over a 3 month period, all four children were successfully returned to the care of their parents. While the parents understandably struggled with the care of five children, four of whom were under 5-years, the FP CWW was able to support the family for two additional months and stabilize their situation. The family continues to care for all of their children with extended support and services in the Family Maintenance (FM) program.

Family Preservation receives referrals from FM, FR, Permanent Youth Connections (PYC), and the Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP). Please take a moment to consider if any of your families could benefit from the intensive services that Family Preservation can provide. Any referrals or questions regarding the Family Preservation program may be directed to Michael Little at 268-2818.

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A Celebration is in Order!!

Please join the Department of Children and Family Services’ Transitions Services Section as we offer congratulations to our Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) for providing over 25 years of excellent service to our transitional-age youth, non-minor dependents and former foster youth. ILSP has served over 10,000 young people by offering living skills classes, scholarships and other supportive services. A Save the Date announcement will be forthcoming for a well-deserved celebration. We will take this wonderful opportunity to honor the ILSP staff for 25 years of dedicated services.
to be positive role models and mentors for the children in their lives and communities.”

Alameda County joined the ranks of the father movement several years ago with Public Health’s initiation of Boot Camp for New Dads and the Urban Male Health Initiative, shedding light on the specific needs of men. In 2013, the Alameda County Fathers Corps (ACFC) was established in collaboration between First 5 Alameda County and Alameda County Public Health Department with the goal of increasing “.. involvement of fathers in their children’s lives by focusing on factors specific to the needs of men and the challenges they face in fulfilling their role as father.” Jeff Gillenkirck, Communications Specialist for Fathers Corps had come across the trailer of Fatherhood 101 and shared it with ACFC members during a meeting. He witnessed firsthand how deeply moving the material was for the men in the room. From that point forward, Jeff worked with Public Health, Social Services, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and other partners to bring the film to Alameda County. “The screening of Fatherhood 101 is an important way to reach out to the broader community of fathers and families in Alameda County…to get beyond statistics and stereotypes. It’s a very emotional film, as well as one that provides some solutions about how to help men be better fathers.” Jeff noted that over 600 people were there for the screening. “This is first time so many multigenerational families—from a diversity of backgrounds—gathered together around the topic of fatherhood. It was wonderful.” Tim Roberts, Program Financial Specialist, SSA and active Fathers Corps member attended the screening and was also happy to see the theater filled. “It was a success! It tells you that there’s a lot of interest about the subject. I think the film will help build momentum for the fatherhood movement—and I say this because you may not know it, but it really is a movement—and we need to raise awareness for those folks who perhaps were not aware of the importance of fathers and working to engage them.” SSA Assistant Agency Director Michelle Love couldn’t agree more. “We absolutely must continue reaching out to our fathers. One of the Departments stated goals is increased fatherhood engagement. We are actively examining our practices as they pertain to supporting fathers and seeking out ways to consistently bring fathers—and paternal relatives—into the picture for the benefit of the child and of the family as a whole.”

The fatherhood message is clear: To reach the goal of strengthening families we need to strengthen fathers.

For more information visit:
- Fatherhood 101
  www.fatherhood101.us
- Alameda County Fathers Corps
  http://www.first5alameda.org/alameda-county-fathers-corps
- Presidents Fatherhood and Mentorship Initiative
  www.fatherhood.gov
- National Responsible Fatherhood Movement
  www.fatherhood.gov

The Youth Advocate Program Expands!
by Loveta Head

Alameda County, Department of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with Westcoast Children’s Clinic, continue to provide the opportunity for the department staff and our partners to have access to the advocacy, support and input from young people currently or formerly in the foster care system in Team Decision-Making Meetings, Transitional Living Conferences and committee meetings such as the Disproportionality, AB 12 Stakeholders and Independent Living Skills Provider’s Meetings. This is an exciting time for the Youth Advocate Program as their managers prepare to hire five additional youth advocates in March of 2014, the majority of which will be Alameda County Non-Minor Dependents. Please continue to request youth advocates for TDMs and TLCs through the scheduling process. The YAP Management Team welcomes your feedback and appreciates your support.