On May 17, 2013 the Department of Children and Family Services hosted an evening of recognition, encouragement, dinner, dancing and goodies at the Hilton in Pleasanton for over 200 Alameda County licensed foster parents and relatives. The affirmation for this year’s dinner was, “To see things in the seed, that is genius.” Our keynote speaker, John Keane with Alameda County Probation Department, shared his story of being a former foster youth and challenged our caregivers to see the children and youth they are caring for as full of potential, just like a single seed that is planted and needs water and nurturance to grow into a thriving, healthy tree. His message was well received and encouraged our caregivers to keep fighting the good fight!

Department management also thanked staff for their donation of time, energy, gift cards and gift baskets to the Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner! Caregivers were very excited to receive gift baskets with items that they can use to pamper themselves and/or plan an evening or day out on the town, as well as the lovely orchid centerpieces on each table. Many caregivers expressed a heartfelt thanks to the range of department staff that donated baskets, gift cards, entertainment tickets and food items.

We encourage staff to stay mindful of appreciating and acknowledging our caregivers for the tireless work they put forth to care for our children and youth day in and day out. Return their calls timely. Anticipate their needs. Make time to discuss their concerns. Advise the court of their good work in court reports. Ask for their feedback on a regular basis. Remembering the smallest need goes a long way with our caregivers and can make the difference in a placement that is at risk for disruption. Our caregivers deserve this type of support, and it’s in our best interest to treat them as the partner they are in this very important work.

Each year it is the primary task of our Licensing Unit to coordinate the dinner with assistance from our recruiter and placement staff. The team welcomes staff volunteers and hopes that many staff will join in the planning for next year’s celebration.
JOIN THE DCFS PRESS EDITORIAL BOARD

The DCFS Editorial Board wishes to extend a warm welcome to staff interested in writing for the DCFS PRESS. We enjoy fresh ideas and energy and invite you to contact any member of the Editorial Board to learn how you can get involved!

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DCFS Press Editorial Board

Budd Seeley
Beth McAllister
Kaitlin Bruner
Marcy Takeuchi

Connie Linas
Barbara Loza-Muriera
Cerise Grice
Renee Cage

Please provide comments and feedback regarding DCFS Press to Connie Linas at linasc@acgov.org

Youth in Out of Home Care Are Making Proud Choices

by Cerise Grice

DCFS launched a new effort in the fall of 2012 to provide youth in out of home care (ages 14-19 years old) a comprehensive training called Making Proud Choices (MPC) MPC is designed to give information about preventing unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases to youth and caregivers. The MPC training is a part of a national initiative with five participating states including (Alameda County-DCFS/California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Rhode Island and North Carolina) participating.

Alameda County began the first series of MPC trainings this past spring with youth participating in the department’s Independent Living Skills Program, Youth Radio and MISSSEY. More trainings were offered in the summer and plans are underway to offer trainings in the fall at a host of venues including the Juvenile Justice Center.

Current evaluation feedback from over 40 youth participants in MPC indicates that MPC is a great program and that the youth participants enjoyed learning and interacting in a small group of 8-10 teens. They also liked that the information is shared in a variety of ways: video, small group exercises, games, role-plays and there was room for them to ask questions and practice talking about abstinence and condom use. The MPC Co-Facilitators mentioned these things as well and added that many participants intended to share this information with their friends, caregivers, family members and trusted adults.

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.

Message from the Director

The DCFS Press is back! After a year long hiatus, we heard from you that you enjoy reading about the articles that connect all in our work for the department. As always, there are many good things happening in the department right now. We have over three hundred youth that have opted to remain in foster care as a Non Minor Dependent. That is due in no small part to the support and assistance they receive from each of you! We have an incredible opportunity to better prepare them for adult hood with three more years of service. Looking for ideas or updates regarding AB 12? Be sure to check out Faith’s Tips and Tidbits.

After several years, we are in the process of hiring again! The department will be bringing on twenty six additional Child Welfare Worker II’s this fall. Their training will be held at OMO, so if you see them please welcome them. We are also looking to increase the number of clerical staff in the department.

As the summer comes to a close, I hope everyone is looking forward to autumn and the anticipation that comes with the change of season. I encourage everyone to take a moment to celebrate the good moments—big and small—and share that “bounty” with colleagues, friends and most importantly, the children and families we serve.

Michelle Love
Assistant Agency Director
Having an eye for detail, a strong work ethic, a personal commitment to excellence and a sense of humor (often seeing the ironies in life), Sharon Hansen-Kildegaard is truly an asset to the Department of Children and Family Services’ Adoptions Program. Sharon is the quintessential teacher and a lifelong learner. Before arriving at the Department, Sharon was educated and professionally trained as an elementary school teacher and taught special needs adults one-on-one independent living skills as well as for 17 years in a San Leandro day program. Sharon loved this work, mentoring students and over the years had thrived in these very rewarding, yet often challenging environments. However, towards the end of 2007, in the beginning of the global financial crisis, Sharon found herself looking for work—and this highly qualified educator had a difficult time finding employment in her discipline. Funding and positions had dried up and she realized she needed to create a “new wheel.” In the interim, she found part-time work at UC Berkeley and in the Oakland Unified School District.

After a few frustrating years of job searching, Sharon applied with Alameda County and was hired by the Department of Children and Family Services in January 2010. Sharon promoted to a Clerk II position in the Adoptions Program, six months later, in June 2010—a job she looks forward to everyday, in a position that supports the Department and families, which she says she is very thankful to have! Sharon’s (and her colleague’s) work is so important; however, somewhat understated—without the direct client contact or visibility inherent in other positions within the Department. As a Clerk II in the Adoptions Program, Sharon processes countless requests for adoption case files, performs quality assurance activities regarding the integrity of the information contained in the file, she works closely with Child Welfare Workers and maintains an adoption file tracking log to ensure case files are always readily available.

Sharon’s Supervisor, Evelyn Montgomery, told me that when she thinks about Sharon, she smiles. Sharon’s intelligence, competence and her positive can-do attitude are evident in all that she does and her ongoing contributions to the Adoptions Program are numerous. Sharon is described as dependable and flexible; a very conscientious employee, who is independent, yet works well in a team environment. Sharon has a rich life outside of work, eclectic interests and enjoys collecting antique toys, writing children’s stories (and will work to publish them when time permits) and she would love to pursue “open mic comedy” someday. Although Sharon is not working in her first love, teaching, she has now brought that same dedication and passion to children, youth and families, in an alternate venue, through the Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services.

### Alameda County’s Peer Review

by Budd Seeley

The Alameda County departments of Children and Family Services and Probation jointly conducted their Peer Review process during the week of July 29, 2013. The Peer Review is one component of the 5-year California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) cycle, which all counties must complete. Alameda County’s Peer Review was conducted in partnership with the California Department of Social Services, the Bay Area Academy, and Shared Vision Consultants.

For each Peer Review, a county must identify a focus area, using one of the mandated outcome areas under the C-CFSR. Alameda’s Peer Review focus area for both departments was Family Reunification.

Peers from several other counties interviewed Alameda staff about family reunification cases in order to identify common themes, as well as patterns of agency strengths and challenges. Information resulting from these interviews will be compiled into our County Self Assessment, and used to revise our System Improvement Plan for the benefit of the children and families we serve. More information about the results will follow in a later edition of the DCFS Press.
DCFS Celebrates Our Caregivers (continued)
DCFS Celebrates Our Caregivers (continued)
Opening its doors 11 years ago, in August of 2002, the Alameda County Assessment Center provides stabilization services for youth removed from their home for the first time and for youth experiencing placement disruptions. Designed to be a warm, engaging, child friendly environment, the AC is staffed by Child Support staff, public health nurse, mental health clinicians and LGBTQ and CSEC youth advocates working as a team to address the immediate, short term needs of children, adolescents, teens and non-minor dependents. “Central to the AC’s operations is the ongoing communication between the Placement and the Assessment Center staff… making it as seamless as possible,” says Kair Gebauer, Director of the STAT Program. STAT, a program of West Coast Children Clinic, and the primary provider of on-site services at the AC, working with DCFS Placement CWWs to assist children with their transition forward. CWW Supervisor Horace Williams heartily agrees, “We all work together for the benefit of the kids…it’s all about the kids here.”

The Assessment Center will be hosting an Anniversary Celebration on September 6th, from 2-5 pm. For more information regarding the event please contact Barbara.loza@acgov.org.

SSI Eligibility

SSI is a federal benefit that provides a monthly income to individuals with severe disabilities and entitles them to additional supportive services such as subsidized housing, vocational training and expanded access to health services. Legislation in California, AB 1331, is designed to ensure that foster youth with serious disabilities who are potentially eligible for federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits have applications submitted on their behalf well in advance of their exit from foster care.

With AB12, SSI is especially important for Non Minor Dependents (NMDs) who remain in care after their 18th birthday. For disabled Transition Age Youth and NMDs, SSI benefits are an essential part of being able to successfully transition to self-sufficient adulthood.

Caregivers and community based organizations that serve foster youth can help expedite the process of applying for SSI benefits by contacting your youth’s Child Welfare Worker with detailed information about behaviors or developments related to a youth’s physical or mental disability.

Also, be sure to submit to the Child Welfare Worker all documentation of medical and mental health services, including psychiatric evaluations, quarterly reports from providers, medical records, and other materials submitted by licensed professionals.

Find out more about the Department’s efforts to have all youth, regardless of age, screened for SSI eligibility by contacting Connie Linas at linasc@acgov.org.

Bay Area Collaborative of American Indian Resources (BACAIR) Trainings

September 19, 2013
Eden - CA Poppy
1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

September 24, 2013
Hegenberger - Grizzly Peak
9:00 PM - 12:00 PM

CWW & Parent Advocate staff welcome!
The Future Looks Bright...ILSP Graduation 2013
by Marcy Takeuchi

June is the time of year every young person looks forward to. It is the end of school and the beginning of summer. June is Graduation season! It is a chance to don a cap and gown, listen to inspirational speeches, and walk across the stage to receive your diploma. Thoughts of college, employment, technical school or just “whew I finally did it” fill the thoughts and minds of young people across the country. For our youth and Non Minor Dependents (NMD’s) it is also a time to remember the past and how they overcame challenges to get to that point.

On June 7, 2013 Alameda County Independent Living Skills Program celebrated and honored 81 youth who successfully completed their senior year of Life Skills classes. This year’s event was held at the Oakland Airport Hilton and was filled with graduates, friends, family and supporters. Scholarships were awarded, speeches were made and every youth was given a gift card and duffel bag filled with household goodies to begin their journey towards independence. The graduation opened with a welcome by Assistant Agency Director, Michelle Love. This special event ended with an inspirational speech by Division Director Faith Battles. ILSP Coordinator, Kenneth D. Shaw and Head Trainer, Robert Jamerson were there to keep the event running smoothly and support the youth, as they have done for so many years.

With the passage of AB12, completing high school is no longer a double edged sword. Graduation no longer automatically equates to dismissal of dependency. No longer will foster youth have to worry about where they are going to live or how they going to support themselves. Thanks to AB12 they have the safety net of extended foster care until the age of 21. Now they can just celebrate their achievements and look toward a future that is filled with hopes and dreams.

To the Class of 2013...achieve your goals, inspire others, and follow your dreams. Congratulations!

― Dr. Seuss

Camp
by Renee Cage

“And will you succeed?
Yes indeed, yes indeed!
Ninety-eight and three-quarters percent Guaranteed!”

― Dr. Seuss

When school is out for summer...The fun times begin! Summer break is often a source of fond memories from our childhood. However many of the children we serve do not have the opportunity to participate in fun summertime activities for various reasons. For many years Children and Family Services has worked collaboratively with programs such as Camp Mendocino and Cal Camp in providing free camp sessions to our youth. Each year up to 70 children in out-of-home care attend these camps. Some campers that have attended several years are offered the opportunity to become a Camp Counselor. We would like all of our children to be able to attend camp every year, however the spaces are limited. If you would like to sponsor a child or donate to the fund, you can do so through the Shirley Eastman Fund. Child Welfare Supervisor Meredith Samp is the Agency’s contact. She can be reached at 510-268-2238.
On April 25, 2013 the Department held its own Take Our Children to Work Day events, encouraging employees to bring their children to work. This was a part of the national Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work program, which occurs each year on the fourth Thursday in April. The national theme for this year was “Work In Progress.”

DCFS put on activities at its 401 Broadway, Oakland and 24100 Amador St, Hayward locations, so that staff could participate within, or close to, their everyday worksite. Children of employees from other county agencies at those locations were also able to participate.

Altogether 110 children attended the events. Their day included time learning about what their parents and other staff do for the Social Services Agency, receiving a presentation about saving and finances (and great prizes) from 1st United Services Credit Union, meeting our Sheriffs, getting their own I.D. badges, participating in career related activities and games, and much more. We look forward to another great event next year.

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The 2013 National Theme

**Work In Progress**

Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work® 2013