A Definition of FOSTER
Foster, fostered, fostering, fosters
1. To bring up; nurture
2. To promote the growth and development of; cultivate
3. To cherish

May is National Foster Care Month across the country. This Blue Ribbon Campaign is intended to celebrate foster families and call attention to the need for more caring adults to play a meaningful role in the lives of America’s foster children.

On any given day over a half million American children are living away from their families in foster care. In Alameda County over 2000 children are in out-of-home care. African American children are significantly over-represented in Alameda County’s child welfare system. Many older youth are living in residential care without parental nurturance or guidance, not because they need this specialized care, but because there are not enough families willing to care for them. In the spirit of service and as a response to the crisis in child welfare we are calling for the support of our community.

We’ve all heard it before: “Recruitment is everybody’s business,” but just what does that mean?

To our current resource parents it means you are the single most influential voice for new caretakers. Resource parents who share their stories and experiences are an inspiration to other families who think about foster care and adoption. By sharing the incredible rewards that come with caring for children, helping families reunify or providing permanence for children, you can encourage other families to also get involved and become resource parents.

To our community partners it means you can provide services and information to our resource parents so that they can continue to provide optimal care to children. It also means that you can partner with DCFS by sharing the message that we need more resource parents or by hosting a recruitment event at your agency, church or workplace.

To staff it means always treating resource parents like gold! Remember that a resource parent who is well informed about the needs of children and youth in their care, who receives prompt responses and who feel respected and valued directly impacts stability for children. As a way to recognize the incredible service of our resource parents we have featured articles in this newsletter on just a few of our special resource parent partners. The remarkable stories of these resource parents reflect the same tireless, unconditional commitment of all our resource parents.

If you or someone you know is interested in fostering or adoption please join us at an Orientation to begin the process of becoming a county licensed resource parent. Orientations are held every 1st Thursday of each month at 401 Broadway, Oakland and every 3rd Thursday of each month at 26879 Tyrrell Avenue, Hayward from 6:30 PM to 9:00 PM. For more information about how to become a resource parent call (510) 259-3575.

(continued on page 5)
Dear Colleagues, Resource Families, and Community Partners:

Happy Foster Care Month!

May is National Foster Care Month during which we honor and appreciate our resource families, including foster parents, relatives and other caregivers. We also use foster care month to remind us of our call to action on behalf of foster youth and families across the nation. I hope you all join us at our annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner on May 15th.

Please consider the many ways you can get involved and impact the lives of a foster youth. You can become a resource parent. Call our recruitment hotline at (510) 259-3575 or refer to the article in this edition of the DCFS Press for information on where to attend an orientation session. You can also become a mentor for foster youth. Go to www.beamentor.org/foster or call (510) 795-6488 ext 6174 for information on becoming a mentor specifically for foster youth. Another opportunity to improve outcomes for foster youth is to contribute to the Shirley Eastman Fund, which provides funds to send youth to summer camp and purchases holiday gifts for foster youth. Find out more about making a tax deductible donation to the Shirley Eastman Fund at (510) 259-3575.

There are multiple ways you can partner with DCFS to get involved in the lives of youth and families in Alameda County. This month, and all year long, I encourage everyone in the community to open your heart and build a connection with a foster youth in our community.

Please enjoy this issue of DCFS Press, which highlights our resource families and provides information on some exciting new opportunities we have in store to further support our resource families, staff, and community partners in this work. For example, read about our plan to provide child care to our county licensed foster parents caring for children ages 0-6 and to create a family friendly visitation center where parents can visit their children in a central location!

I am so grateful to our resource families, staff, and everyone who contributes to our vision that as many youth as possible return to their birth families or are placed with relatives and that all youth will be permanently connected to caring, committed adults.

Carol Collins, Assistant Agency Director

We all need to feel as though we belong...

We all need somebody to hear us when we say, ‘I’m out here by myself. I’m scared. What am I going to do?’

— Regina Louise, Author of the memoir Somebody’s Someone

From the Desk of Ombudsperson

The Foster Care Ombudsperson, Sherri Brooks, provides services in resolving complaints related to the Department of Children and Family Services. Anyone may call for assistance: parents, foster youth, relatives, foster parents, teachers, therapists, social workers or other concerned individuals.

The Ombudsperson is there to listen and will provide information, answer questions, and refer callers to the appropriate staff members or resources. The Ombudsperson conducts independent reviews of complaints regarding Agency practice and policies, as necessary.

The office of the Ombudsperson does not have the authority to overturn court decisions or make recommendations to the court.

Call the Foster Care Ombudsperson at (510) 268-2365.

Win a Starbucks Gift Card from our Assistant Agency Director

Improving Practice with Tools

For this quarter’s trivia quiz, name three reports that are found in Safe Measures.

Did you know that using Safe Measures is a great way to find out how well we are meeting the needs of children and families? In Safe Measures, information on Safety and Permanence outcomes as well as Structured Decision Making compliance is readily available.

All entries will be entered into a random drawing. Submit your answer by email to Budd Seeley, seeleb@acgov.org, by June 15, 2009. Three winners will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card. Winners will be notified by email and announced to all in the next DCFS Newsletter. Good luck!

DCFS Press Editorial Board

Connie Linas
Cerise Grice
Rebecca Legaspi
Budd Seeley
Fredi Juni
Beth McAllister
Marilyn Todd
Sherri Brooks

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

Carol’s Column

We all need to feel as though we belong...

We all need somebody to hear us when we say, ‘I’m out here by myself. I’m scared. What am I going to do?’

— Regina Louise, Author of the memoir Somebody’s Someone
Our Department is actively involved in the development of a new state of the art Emancipation Village—a comprehensive range of co-located housing and services, including the Alameda County Independent Living Skills Academy, for current and former foster youth and young adults to support their transitions to independence and successful adulthood.

When foster youth emancipate from the Alameda County foster care system, typically at age 18, county-funded services are discontinued. While most other youth receive significant support during the critical transition to adulthood, emancipating foster youth often find themselves without family resources, adequate adult guidance, income, healthcare or housing. Many youth who age out of foster care are more vulnerable to homelessness, low educational achievement, underemployment and poverty. The proposed Emancipation Village will be designed to assist young people to counter these disturbing outcomes.

The goal of Emancipation Village is to dramatically improve the lives of young people exiting foster care by providing them with a positive environment in which they can gain skills they will need to meet the challenges of living on their own. The vision is to create a campus that integrates transitional housing, education and employment training with connections to a caring and stimulating adult and peer community.

The proposed location for Emancipation Village, including housing, the Independent Living Skills Academy and twenty-four hour staffing is on Fred Finch Youth Center’s campus located centrally in Oakland.

For more information about the Emancipation Village please contact Vince Reyes at vreyes@acgov.org.

Title IVE Waiver Year 2 Strategies and Proposals

Alameda County is one of two California counties (the other is Los Angeles) that are participating in the Title IV-E Waiver. The IVE Waiver allows us to serve more families, more effectively by:

- Providing a tool for accelerating current child welfare system reform efforts in the county.
- Capturing the Federal/State money that would otherwise be lost to the system due to declining caseloads.
- Reinvesting our savings to improve services for:
  - Families at risk of entering the child welfare system;
  - Children, youth and families in foster care working towards permanence;
  - Youth emancipating from the child welfare system.

DCFS is very excited to announce the success of the first year of the waiver, which generated enough savings to invest in at least six efforts to improve outcomes for youth and families. We hope that the success of these programs will improve the outcomes for our families and become a statewide and national model.

Highlighted below are six of our Year 2 strategies:

1. **Providing Child Care** for county licensed foster families with children ages 0-6 to enhance recruitment for foster homes in an effort to provide the least restrictive care possible for young children and support our foster families.
2. **Increasing Parent Advocates** add 7 more parent advocates to work with birth parents entering the child welfare system.
3. **Hiring Additional Child Welfare Workers** to increase the ability to provide comprehensive services to families by reducing caseload.
4. **Expanding County Counsel** to increase court related support and training for staff.
5. **Establishing a Visitation Center** to support reunification by creating a family friendly center for structured and supervised visits. The goal is to increase the frequency of visitation and provide a strengths-based supportive visitation opportunity, which will hopefully increase successful reunification and re-entry will decrease.
6. **Implementing Family Finding & Engagement** as soon as children enter foster care. By initiating family finding & family engagement work when a child enters the child welfare system we will increase the likelihood that children are placed with relatives. In situations where the child cannot be reunified, identified family members will be considered as a permanent option for the child.
Few things in our lives can provide as much meaning as being a resource parent. No other job allows you to parent kids who often have no one else. Nothing else gives the opportunity to help a family by keeping their child safe until the parents get things together. Often, the community doesn’t give enough appreciation to resource parents for their valiant efforts, and it may seem to some that the challenges outweigh the benefits. But actually, for those that know, resource parenting is worth it all, because of its foundation on beautiful relationships of reciprocity between kids and resource parents. Relationships where kids and parents help each other, when resource parents challenge themselves to meet the needs of the child, and the wondrous nature of children—their resilience and ability to overcome all obstacles—provides more than enough reason to carry on with the efforts that resource parents make every day.

DCFS is grateful to have many outstanding resource parents. Three of our very special resource parents are featured in this article. Resource parents Gloria Riley, Gwen McWilliams, and Nicole Doyle perceive the many challenges and rewards they experience as resource parents as learning experiences that have helped them become who they are today.

Gloria Riley has been a resource parent for 18 years, has had approximately 40 children in foster care in her home at different times, and she is the Legal Guardian to two teenagers who first came to her home as foster youth. Mrs. Riley is proud of her teenagers’ accomplishments and recognizes how their strength and resilience has helped them survive their experiences, be on target to graduate high school, all the while being good kids who are into the usual teenage stuff.

Darius, age 17, and Queenstone, age 16, both came to her home as young children. Along the way, her kids have had their own difficulties at times. One of her sons required intensive treatment, and she sought the help he needed and did not give up on him during challenging times. Her unwavering commitment to her child demonstrates the beauty that is her outlook on resource parenting, which is also part of the advice she gives to other resource parents: “Try not to take the kid’s behavior personally, get support, [and] don’t try to do it alone”. Much of Gloria’s own strength and resiliency comes from her faith in God and prayer, and she realizes that there is nothing wrong—it is a strength, actually—to seek help from others in order to be the best resource parent possible.

Children should be, whenever possible, with their parents and families. Mrs. Riley has strived to work hard with parents in order to help them during the reunification process. She remembers a child whose father was working hard towards reunification but was struggling to make a connection with the Child Welfare Worker, and Gloria helped the process. The child eventually reunited with the father, and the father occasionally contacts Gloria to this day. Such successes happen largely because of Mrs. Riley’s outlook on resource parenting. To her, it means resource parents are involved “in the child’s life by caring about them, staying connected with each other, connecting with resources to get support, and receiving training”.

Gloria Riley first became interested in becoming a foster parent after learning of the lack of African American foster families. She was concerned and motivated by this to become involved in order to help kids in need. Nowadays, in addition to parenting, she is a PRIDE trainer, speaks at Resource Parent Orientations, and works at the community organization Family Paths as a Community Advocate. She often counsels foster parents about being a foster parent, what they should expect from the system, and on the need for permanency for children.

Nicole Doyle and her husband, Kevin, knew a few years ago that they were interested in becoming foster parents and possibly adoptive parents. Nicole remembers the PRIDE training as a great experience. After they were certified, the first call from DCFS was for Joey. Nicole recalls that placement did not occur at that time, because the county had decided not to move Joey. However, she remembers believing that wasn’t the end of her family’s involvement with Joey, and after a few weeks went by the county called again. After the Team Decision Making meeting and pre-placement visits, Joey moved in. The adoption was later finalized, and she and her husband continue to work “really, really hard every day about being the best parents” they can to him.

Kevin, Nicole, and Joey Doyle

Mrs. Doyle remembers relying on expert advice and support from Gwen McWilliams, Joey’s former resource parent, after Joey came to live in their home. She, too, recognizes how all resource parents cannot do it without support. The Doyle’s are
WHO SERVE

a team, and they strive to work together to resolve problems and continually “pause, shift, and regroup” to adjust to Joey’s ever changing needs as he grows, and Nicole recognizes that outside support—be it other resource parents or community organizations—is essential to ensuring that resource parents are able to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.

Mrs. Doyle recommends that resource parents be patient (“because things don’t go as planned”), and she believes that communication with other resource parents and the Child Welfare Worker is invaluable. Nicole believes that resource parents should not “stay quiet about things”, because if you “talk about it, you will find a path”. She perceives the system to be dynamic, and solutions for what kids need can be found if parents are willing to open up and talk about their problems with others.

Gwen McWilliams became a foster parent about 18 years ago, and along with her husband Robin, they have fostered 57 children, adopted two with plans for a third adopted child, and have three biological children. Mrs. McWilliams is a wealth of knowledge on what it takes to be a great resource parent and how to help kids who come from troubled experiences. Not only is she a full-time mom, but she also works as a Family Advocate with Lincoln Child Center and as a support resource for caregivers through a program called Project Permanence, which seeks to provide services to keep children in permanent homes rather than institutional care. In addition, she is the CARI president, a PRIDE trainer, Vice President of the Foster Parent Association, and also sits on an advisory board for Children’s Hospital and Research Center Oakland.

Through it all Gwen and her husband, a “dad of all dads” who encourages his kids to pursue education, realize what resource parents need to do in order to be in the position to care for kids the best they can. She emphasizes that everyone should be open with each other and upfront about the challenges associated with resource parenting. “If you are going to go into this work, be open to the challenges. Be forthright, [and] make sure that you go into it for all the right reasons.” To Gwen, this means “being non-judgmental” and realizing that a resource parent’s role is to “strengthen other families, and to support their needs”, “to help parents to get their children back”, or to help kids get into permanent homes if reunification is not possible. Being adopted herself as a child, she knows first hand what it means for children to benefit from a loving adoptive parent. She had a wonderful relationship with her adoptive mother, who passed away six years ago.

Gwen has been so profoundly affected by her kids that she “can’t imagine her life without them”. She speaks with pride about her son Demetrius, who took the initiative to enroll himself in a mentoring program that provides groceries to needy families.

Mrs. Riley, Mr. and Mrs. Doyle, and Mr. and Mrs. McWilliams may seem to stand out from others. But they also are—just like many other resource parents—people who know what it takes to raise healthy kids. They realize the importance of receiving training and for getting the support they and the youth need. They also all cherish the gift each youth has brought to their lives. “The kids have been so much joy, because they have helped me be a better person”, says Mrs. Riley. And Mrs. Doyle describes their three year old, Joey, as “the best part of everyday for us”. But of course, when your child says “daddy” for the first time on Father’s Day, as Joey did to his dad Kevin, it is hard to resist the charm.

Gwen, Jocelynn, Robin, and Demetrius McWilliams

National Foster Care Month

(continued from front page)

All families are welcome to attend an Orientation to learn more about foster care and adoption. Our children and youth need loving, stable families who can support and care for them on a temporary basis or become permanent families for them when reunification is not possible. Resource families can be single or in couples, young or old, heterosexual or gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Please consider that now is the time to take the first step — to learn more — to get involved — and to possibly change a life forever, including your own!

Please join us for a Celebration of Foster Care Month at Frank Ogawa Plaza on May 1st, at Oakland City Hall at noon. And attend and contribute to our Annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner. This annual event will take place on Friday, May 15th, 2009. Please contact Katherine Richard for more information at rich6k@acgov.org.
It is a complex subject that has troubled child welfare administrators, researchers and workers for the last 30 years: racial disproportionality in the Child Welfare System. Throughout the child welfare continuum, African American children are represented in numbers that far exceed their proportion of the population. Rates of substantiated maltreatment, entry into care, and length of stay are all higher for African American youth than other racial groups.

In Alameda County, African American children are 13% of the child population but make up 40% of referrals, 43% of substantiated referrals, 44% of first entries to care and 64% of children in care.

The crisis of racial disproportionality is not exclusive to the child welfare system. Institutional bias and differential access to services for African American youth, is present in many other public systems including law enforcement, health care and education. In 2005, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services & Programs and the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare decided to formally address the complex issues of disproportionality in the child welfare system by sponsoring a national two-year collaborative on Reducing Disproportionality and Disparate Outcomes for Children and Families of color in the Child Welfare System.

In late 2008, the DCFS Community Services Program Manager, Gumaro Garay, was asked to lead the California Disproportionality Project for Alameda County—one of 12 participating California Counties. The overarching goal of the Project is to create a child welfare system that is free of structural racism and that supports and benefits all children, families and communities.

In January 2009, the Alameda County Project Core Team Meeting was formed with representation from all levels of DCFS staff and various community partners including foster youth and birth parents. The Project Core Team will test new ideas in small pilot projects so that issues will be examined, evaluated and addressed. The team created a Team name and Team motto: Team RAISE (Racial Awareness in Social Services Everyday) and the Team’s motto: “Challenging Awareness and Responsibility for Equity in Public Child Welfare.”

Initial and ongoing work in this project will include:

- **Workgroup meetings** providing an opportunity for collaborative learning
- **Awareness building** exploring underlying contributing factors, including implicit and institutional bias;
- **On-going technical assistance** for each team provided by experts in the field that will be focused on moving the work of each team forward
- **Collection and review of data**, so all participants will know the extent of the issue in their communities and be able to track improvements;
- **Facilitation of open communication** so that courageous conversations can occur within the teams, with others in the county, across the state, and ultimately across the country;
- **Active and ongoing community engagement** in recognition of the fact that it will take the wider community to brainstorm ideas and implement solutions;
- **Training and engagement of staff** in order to educate staff on how their decisions and day-to-day practices impact disproportionality (and how to change practices);
- **Active family and youth engagement**, in both identifying challenges in the system and being part of the solutions;

The California Disproportionality Project is a work in progress. The Project Core Team is enthusiastically working together to form a shared value for what success will look like in Alameda County. This shared value will be created through conversations with families, youth, community, partners, and Agency staff. Ultimately, the shared value statement, together with strategies developed to address the results of ongoing data analysis and a facilitated self-assessment process will form the basis of the Alameda County work plan that will serve as the foundation for the Project Core Team’s ongoing work.

**Team Name**: RAISE (Racial Awareness in Social Services Everyday)

**Motto**: “Challenging Awareness and Responsibility for Equity in Public Child Welfare.”
We’re very fortunate in Alameda County to have several academic services and programs available for foster youth that will assist in helping youth reach their full potential.

Alameda County Office of Education, Foster Youth Services is one such service offered. They provide Educational Mentors to foster youth to help facilitate student school enrollment and academic activities that will result in better educational outcomes for foster youth. The Educational Mentors also provide the following assistance:

- Communicate school information and collaborate with child welfare workers and foster care providers.
- Function as an advocate for special education students.
- Work with individual students to meet their educational needs and goals.
- Assist in making sure IEP is current.
- Secure tutorial and other academic support services for foster youth.
- Facilitate student enrollment and encourage regular school attendance.

All foster youth are eligible for this service, however, foster youth with learning disabilities will be given priority, and/or those foster youth with multiple school challenges.

The program has the following service goals: school placement stability, completed Student Study Team (SST) and/or updated IEP, improved grades, passing California High School Exit Exam (if applicable), and building helpful relationships with a caring adult.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Tarango, Program Manager, Foster Youth Services 6925 Chabot Road Oakland, CA 94618 (510) 601-9813, lizt@acoe.org

The Inside/Outside Advocate Program is another program in Alameda County that has partnered with Be A Mentor to increase the number of Oakland Unified School District students receiving mentors from the community that can support their academic and personal goals. This program has expanded to include both middle and high school students. Mentors have been trained to work specifically with foster youth. For more information about this program contact Risha Riley at 510-879-8114 and Risha.Riley@ousd.k12.ca.us.
Spread the word about the FREE SUMMER LUNCH for Kids and Teens

The Summer Food Service Program in Alameda County will serve free lunch to children and youth 18 years and younger starting June 27th, 2009.

For a meal site near you, call:
Alameda County Community Food Bank
1-800-870-3663

Oakland Residents may also contact:
Oaklanders’ Assistance Center
Tel. 510-444 C-I-T-Y (2489),
www.oaklandhumanservices.org/contact/locations/summerfood

To become a Summer Lunch Program site, community organizations may contact:
City of Oakland, Department of Human Services
Tel.: 510.238-3121 or 510.615-5576.

SWIMMING LESSONS and AQUATIC PROGRAMS for a VERY LOW FEE

Swimming lessons and Aquatic programs in the East Bay Regional District Facilities for a very low fee.

East Bay Regional Parks District
1-888-327-2757 or 1-888-EBPARKS
Hearing impaired TDD: 510.633-0460
http://www.ebparks,org/activities

The East Bay Regional Parks offer swimming lessons and aquatic activities to children and adults this summer. Financial assistance on swimming and aquatic lessons is available to qualified registrants.

Alameda County Attn: L001
Social Services Agency
Department of Children and Family Services
P.O. Box 917
Oakland, CA 94607