Mutual of America Community Partnership Award:
Honoring Successful Cross Agency Collaboration

by Barbara Loza-Muriera

On April 24, 2014, the Mutual of America Foundation Award luncheon was held at the Oakland Marriott, honoring CALICO’s facilitation of multi-disciplinary cross-agency teamwork in response to child abuse allegations. The 2013 Community Partnership Award recognizes “outstanding nonprofit organizations in the United States that have shown exemplary leadership by facilitating partnerships with public, private or social sector leaders who are working together as equal partners...to build a cohesive community that serves as a model for collaborating with others for the greater good.”

In attendance for the celebration were CALICO partners Alameda County District Attorney’s Office, Alameda County Sheriff’s Department, 18 local police departments, Alameda County Social Services Agency, Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services, Alameda County Counsel, Alameda County Probation Department and Oakland Children’s Hospital, Highland Hospitals, and City of Oakland Mayor Jean Quan.

During the event, Certificates of Appreciation were given to all leadership present. Among the certificate recipients were Assistant Agency Director Michelle Love, Assistant County Counsel Victoria Wu, District Attorney Nancy O’Malley and Alameda County Sheriff Greg Ahern. In addition, five individuals received a commemorative medallion for their exemplary teamwork on a specific child abuse case: Jocelyn Jackson, Child Welfare Worker, Emergency Response Unit; Dan Baer, Alameda County Sheriff’s Department; Eddie Viera-Ducey, Mutual of America representatives, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan and CALICO Executive Director Victoria Gwiasda.

Mutual of America representatives, Oakland Mayor Jean Quan and CALICO Executive Director Victoria Gwiasda.

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Greetings Colleagues, staff and community partners!

Fall has arrived—and with it a new issue of the DCFS Press! Our team of staff and guest writers has provided a series of articles capturing the many events of the past six months, as well information that we hope you find both interesting and useful. For my part, I am hoping that by the time you read this edition, we would have been granted an extension of the Title IV-Waiver Demonstration and we will be continuing to enhance and further develop the important work begun 7 years ago. In this new phase of the Waiver, the department will be looking to refine and improve implementation of core strategies and collective practices. I cannot stress enough the importance of our many partnerships and collaborations in this endeavor—as the work before us has increasingly become interdependent across sectors. It must also be said that the very heartbeat of the Waiver lies in staff (all of you!) and the hard work that has made this effort a success in Alameda County. Moving forward, this continues to hold true, as the entire department will be challenged to improve and grow practice to meet the evolving needs of children and families. It will also require that we redouble our efforts to support each other—as divisions, units and colleagues—through the process.

As autumn’s annual touchstones present themselves—the start of a new school year, the turning back of clocks, the parade of holidays lining up on the horizon (Halloween already?), the more pronounced morning chill that motivates one to grab a scarf before heading out the door—perhaps you’ve noticed, as I have, that these yearly seasonal rituals seem so very familiar and yet somehow new each time. Similarly, much of our work often seems very familiar and routine, and yet each day often presents new aspects in the form of circumstances we did not expect, interactions we have not encountered, information that was not previously known to us. These moments are reminders that we are always in the position to learn something new about the children, families and communities we serve, as well as ourselves. With that thought, I challenge myself—and everyone—to end each day with this simple question: what did I learn today? The answer may surprise and inspire you!

Warmest wishes to one and all in advance of the holiday season ahead,

Michelle

Michelle Love, Assistant Agency Director
In April, youth from Project WHAT! were here talking to (and training) CFS staff. They were sharing their life experiences and the day-to-day challenges of being the child of an incarcerated parent. They represent Project WHAT!, a program of Community Works located in Berkeley, which is a youth-led initiative that seeks to raise awareness about the profound impact that parental incarceration has on youth and to improve services to children of incarcerated parents. WHAT! stands for We’re Here And Talking and refers to the youth who make up the Project WHAT! team, as well as the millions of other children in the nation that have a parent who is incarcerated.

The emotional, social and educational impact of parental incarceration on children is perhaps immeasurable, and one that is commonly overlooked, yet millions of children in our country are impacted by this experience. They are children who have experienced the trauma of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, neglect, the arrest of a parent and they are disproportionately poor children of color. Project WHAT! employs, as training facilitators, youth who are 14-18 years old and have had at least one parent incarcerated. Project WHAT! youth gain skills in writing, public speaking, facilitation and other valuable experience. Each youth facilitator intertwines their unique, personal experience into the trainings. Since Project WHAT! began in 2006, the team has presented to nearly 6,500 people through more than 120 trainings and presentations throughout the nation. In the first year of the program, the youth researched, created, and piloted a training curriculum for teachers and social workers. The trainings provide participants with tools to more effectively serve children who have or have had a parent incarcerated. The Project WHAT! team has presented to public officials, agency leadership, probation officers, attorneys, doctors, foster parents, CASA volunteers, incarcerated parents, and other youth, including the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families Children’s Summit; Casey Family Programs Annual “It’s My Life” Conferences; Oakland Children’s Hospital (during grand rounds); Teachers 4 Social Justice Annual Conferences; and Alameda County First 5. The team has provided valuable insight and the social context of their experiences as they connect with the community, youth and professionals along the way.

In addition to their outreach through various presentations, the Project WHAT! team developed the Resource Guide for Teens with a Parent in Prison or Jail. The 80-page guide answers common questions that children have when a parent is incarcerated, and it has an entire section that explains complex jail and prison visiting procedures in plain language. It also includes compelling stories written by youth. Youth can get a free copy of the guide mailed to them by requesting it from Project WHAT! at cw.project.what@gmail.com. The guide is a great resource that Child Welfare Workers can use to support youth who have an incarcerated parent. Child Welfare Workers (CWWs) can download a copy of the guide directly from the Project WHAT! site at http://communityworkswest.org/images/stories/projectwhat2008.pdf

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In September 2013, Alameda County Social Services Agency’s Department of Children and Family Services was awarded a federal planning grant. Dubbed the Youth Transitions Partnership (YTP), the goal of the YTP planning collaborative is to identify the most effective, evidence-based service array to support foster youth identified as being at high risk of homelessness. Focusing on current and former foster youth ages 14-21, the planning process includes a variety of stakeholders from public and private sectors, and includes a leadership team, as well as several specialized workgroups focused on four critical outcome areas: Stable Housing, Permanent Connections, Education and Employment, and Social/Emotional Well-Being.

The two year project includes several opportunities for community partners and young people to contribute to the YTP planning process. In that spirit, the YTP Leadership Team and DCFS hosted a series of large, dynamic stakeholder gatherings called “charrettes” to inform the work. A charrette is an intensive, structured planning activity that includes “fishbowl” style conversations with experts having focused dialogue on key issue areas, followed by ample opportunity for audience members to share feedback and recommendations. The unique charrette format was employed to jumpstart collaboration among diverse stakeholders to solve community problems related to homelessness within a very short period of time.

Held during the week of June 23rd at Preservation Park in Oakland, and facilitated by Consultants from Corporation for Supportive House (CSH), six charities were held where held with expert panelists participating in thoughtful—and often lively—dialogue covering the topics of:

- Education and Employment
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- Permanent Connections
- Stable Housing
- Creating a Seamless Transition to Adulthood
- Coordinated Assessment

150 people were in attendance over the course of 2 ½ days, generating some 100+ recommendations—each of which will be discussed and prioritized by the YTP workgroup and leadership teams.

“It’s been a wonderful experience—not to mention a luxury—to have this time to reach out and bring so many people together to share their ideas. There’s a wealth of collective knowledge out there…” says Connie Linas, DCFS Supervising Program Specialist and YTP Coordinator, “and we want to harness that energy—and put it to work to prevent youth homelessness.”

For more information about YTP please contact Connie Linas at linasc@acgov.org.
DCFS Recognized for Continuing Leadership Serving LGBT Youth and Families

by Fredi Juni

All Children – All Families (AC-AF) is a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, a national civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The AC-AF project provides a framework for public and private child welfare serving agencies across the country to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for all children and youth by improving their practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children, youth and families.

Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services has been participating in this project since 2007. Participating agencies work to meet ten key Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency — from client non-discrimination policies and inclusive agency paperwork, to staff training and creating an LGBT-inclusive agency environment. Once these benchmarks are met, the agency is designated a “Leader in Supporting and Serving LGBT Youth and Families” and awarded the All Children — All Families Seal of Recognition. This seal can be used to enhance an agency’s outreach and recruitment within the LGBT community. DCFS earned the AC-AF seal of recognition in 2011.

In late 2013, the All Children — All Families project expanded and revised its’ Benchmarks for leadership recognition. In June 2014, we earned the 2014 All Children-All Families “Seal of Recognition” for our continuing leadership in serving LGBT youth and families. Alameda County is one of only two public child welfare agencies in California that has earned this recognition, and one of only three public child welfare agencies nationwide to hold this honor.

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Our Youth are “Making Proud Choices”

by Cerise Grice

This fall, the Making Proud Choices (MPC) training for youth 14-18 years old will be adding 15 new Facilitators to the program. Staff from youth serving organizations and Alameda County Departments will be participating in a 3-day curriculum training to learn the details of the curriculum and will begin offering MPC to youth in out of home care (both child welfare and probation) throughout the County. The Independent Living Skills Program has hosted MPC for two years now and continues to be our chief supporter along with MISSSEY, Youth Radio, Casey Family Programs and Alameda County’s Camp Sweeney. MPC is also welcoming a new partner, Youth Uprising, and hopes to expand to other youth serving organizations as well. To date, over 100 youth have participated in MPC and many have received a $50 Visa gift card for completing the full training. Most classes are held from 4:00-6:00pm for 5 days. Youth who complete the full training will receive a MPC completion certificate and a $50 Visa gift card.

If you know of youth that are interested in participating in MPC please refer them to Cerise Grice at cgrice@acgov.org and 510-780-8939 for upcoming classes.
It is not an uncommon narrative; in 2003 the police arrived at a home with no heat or hot water. The two boys (aged 6 and 7) had no food and could not recall the last time they had eaten. The parents struggled with substance abuse and were unable to meet their sons’ needs. This resulted in the police taking the children into protective custody. The parents were not able to achieve sobriety and had their family reunification services (case management services targeted to eliminate the conditions leading to the children being placed in foster care) terminated after 6-months. A maternal aunt made herself available to become the boys’ legal guardian. She fulfilled this role for the next 10 years until circumstances required her to turn the youngest brother back over to the care of Alameda County Social Services (the agency responsible for administering foster care services).

In the intervening period the father had maintained contact with his sons. While the older son had turned 18 and wanted to be on his own, the younger son needed his father as much as ever. A Family Preservation referral was made in order to assess the potential for reunification and, if possible, support it. As it happened, the father had gotten sober a few years before and was self-employed as a gardener. He also stated he wanted “to do right” by his sons and make up for his prior behavior. The family was referred for and engaged in family therapy. As their relationship strengthened, the father used his section 8 voucher to move into a 2-bedroom home and the two reunified.

Currently, when not lifting weights with his father, the son plays rugby and is engaged in ILSP services. The father and son recently attended a Transitional Living Conference together and have their sights set on a bright future. Family Preservation receives referrals from Family Maintenance (FM), Family Reunification (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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Introducing CFS’s FY 14-15 Substance Abuse Testing and Outpatient Treatment Providers

Terra Firma Diversion & Education Services
Serving Southern & Eastern Alameda County

Options Recovery Services
Serving Northern Alameda County

Alameda Health System — Highland Hospital Substance Abuse Program
Serving Oakland and Central Alameda County

Congratulations Contractors!

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Please contact Beth McAllister if you have any questions.
elizabeth.mcallister@acgov.org or 780-8692 (58692)
Special Care Rates: A Great Way to Support the Placement of a Foster Youth
by Budd Seeley

Special care rates provide a supplemental payment to a foster youth’s caregiver to support their efforts in meeting the youth’s health and/or behavioral needs. To be included in the special care rate, the youth’s needs must require more supervision and assistance by the caregiver than what is covered by the basic foster care rate. Special care rates support placements of children and youth with special needs in the least restrictive, most family-like setting.

DCFS staff can learn more about special care rates on OPG. Caregivers interested in having a foster child in their care assessed for a special care rate should speak with the assigned Child Welfare Worker. Caregivers can also find more information about Alameda’s special care rate program on the CDSS website - http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG1649.htm

Who is eligible for a special care rate in Alameda County?
Licensed foster parents, relatives, and non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) as long as the child is receiving AFDC-FC funds. A special care rate may carry over to KinGAP, a non-related and non-dependent legal guardianship, AAP, and Extended Foster Care (EFC).

Note: For foster care and guardianships, eligibility depends on the youth’s county of residence. Not all counties provide special care rates or have the same eligibility criteria for their special care rate program. Please ensure you have the special care rate application paperwork from the youth’s county of residence to determine an accurate rate and eligibility.

What kinds of behavioral or health needs can be included in the special care rate?
Additional supervision and support provided by the caregiver to a child for behavioral and health needs that include, but are not limited to:
- Monitoring an ongoing medical condition and responding to the child’s medical needs
- Providing a level of structure/supervision that is higher than what is expected for the child’s chronological age
- Participating in therapy and working closely with a therapist to support the child’s emotional and behavioral well-being

CFS’s FY 14-15 Treatment Providers (continued)

Specific Enhancements to the New Contracts
- A standardized assessment will be completed for all CFS clients to determine level of testing and treatment.
- Contractor develops a Client Recovery Plan based on client assessment and input from CWW.
- A Certified Drug & Alcohol Counselor will be available upon request by staff to assess clients in the field—facilitating a client’s access to treatment, participate in TDMs, and to provide ongoing staff training.

Contracted Services Provided
- Intake & Assessment
- Supervised Random Drug Testing
- Group Counseling
- Certified Drug & Alcohol Counselor Consultation
Solid as Rock with gold and purple accents and centerpieces completed the theme on Friday, May 9, 2014 as we honored 137 dedicated foster parents and relative caregivers at our Annual Resource Parent Appreciation Dinner. This year’s celebration was held at the Hilton Pleasanton at The Club of Pleasanton, California.

The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was The Voice of the San Francisco Giants and Morning Show Host for 98.1 KISS FM, Renel Brooks-Moon. Many of our foster parents were awarded for their years of service for the caring and support of our foster children in Alameda County. Among honorees in attendance were four foster families who received awards in recognition of 5-25 years of service. Service awards were also presented to 27 of our committed Relative Caregivers at this year’s ceremony for partnering with the Department of Children and Family Services to assure that children and youth in their families stay connected to their roots. Adding to the celebration was licensed foster parent and singer, Takis Paras, who wooed the audience with his own rendition of “All of Me”.

The evening was highlighted by the dynamic Keynote Speaker, President and CEO of Youth Uprising, Olis Simmons, who emphasized the importance of how solid and supportive foster

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parents make all of the difference in the development of foster youth and their chances of doing well in the future. The program also included the presentation of a formal proclamation by Alameda County Supervisor Nate Miley to Gwen McWilliams, President of the Alameda County Foster Parent Association (AC FPA), proclaiming May as “Foster Care Month” in Alameda County. Also of special note was a great rendition of the song “Happy”, performed by the musicians, “Just 2”—and that had some, including our very own Assistant Agency Director, Michelle Love, dancing and singing along.

Many donated gifts and volunteered their time to make this annual event a success. There were 23 business donations and 39 gift baskets with various themes from the Children and Family Services Department staff. Karen Castro, Licensing Supervisor and one of the event planners expressed her gratitude. “We are so grateful! The gift baskets are so creative and beautiful. They did an awesome job! Some staff also donated gift cards.” Each year the licensed Resource Parents and Relative Caregivers look forward to the unique gift baskets, raffles and gift cards. Some of these donated gifts also included tickets to Gilroy Gardens and the Oakland Zoo. A raffle for a trip to Disneyland for four was sponsored by the Alameda County Foster Parent Association and was a successful fundraiser.

Alameda County Social Services Agency Director, Lori Cox, attended the dinner and shared the following about this year’s festivities. “It was an awesome event—one that year after year leaves me feeling inspired and hopeful. We have a great group of foster parents and staff that never fail to amaze me with their dedication to this work.”

The staff received great feedback from the Resource Parents for this year’s event. One particular quote says it all. “What a wonderful celebration! Thank you so much for this evening. I loved it all. Great speakers, welcoming staff, musicians and the great food and raffle. More of the same next year would be great.”

Special thanks to everyone that supported our Licensing Unit in putting together this year’s Resource Parent Appreciation Dinner, as there was plenty of help from sections throughout the department—and SSA. Please consider joining the planning efforts for next year when, for one night, it’s all about our caregivers. See you there next year.
Mutual of America Community Partnership Award (continued)

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Alameda County District Attorney’s Office; Vickie Hart, Alameda County District Attorney’s Office, Victim Witness Assistance Division; Rachel Gilgoff, M.D., Center for Child Protection, UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital Oakland.

“By working together, we can minimize the impact of the traumatic event on the child and the family as a whole,” said Michelle Love, Assistant Agency Director, DCFS. Jocelyn Jackson, Emergency Response Unit Child Welfare Worker, echoed this sentiment when describing her experience working on a child abuse allegation case with CALICO staff and the collaborative team members. “It went so smoothly, from the first call, to the investigation to the arrest of the perpetrator... it happened in a matter of hours. All the investigative pieces were in place, so the family didn’t have to keep having to go to appointments or have all these intrusions into their life...it lessened the stress of the trauma for everyone.” When asked about her personal experience of the collaboration, as a social worker, Jocelyn reflected for a moment. “Doing it this way—we truly are a team, with everyone’s focus on the safety of the child,” she answered. “For me, it’s very fulfilling—very rewarding.”

To view more pictures or see videos of the event go to: https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.629205143833169.1073741842.119666941453661&type=3

To view video clips of the event go to: https://www.youtube.com/user/CALICOCENTER

Jocelyn Jackson, CWW, Emergency Response Unit, DCFS

Alameda County District Attorney and her team; Chief Paul Rolleri, City of Alameda Police Department.

Alameda County Assistant County Counsel Victoria Wu

Mutual of America Representative & Alameda County SSA Assistant Agency Director Michelle Love.