January was National Mentoring Month! DCFS has begun a new collaboration with Be A Mentor Inc., a Fremont community-based nonprofit.

Be a Mentor Inc. collaborates with local governments, social service agencies and the private sector to design, implement and manage sustainable mentoring programs and is proud to announce the launch of two new programs to match caring adults with youth throughout Alameda County. DCFS is co-sponsoring the foster youth mentoring programs with a special focus on transition age foster youth and foster youth with an incarcerated parent. However, all foster youth can be referred to Be a Mentor to be matched with a trained mentor.

The program is already working to support Nekisha Gallon’s natural leadership abilities. Nekisha, age 17, was matched with a mentor through Be a Mentor Inc. She attends the Leadership Preparatory Program at Castlemont High School and also participates in the Alameda County Mentoring Program Oversight and Steering Committee.

Her experiences have been painful and disturbing, yet despite many challenges, Nekisha is a proud, strong young woman. All along, she has had family support that means the world to her. She says she knows that without them, there would no

Nekisha Gallon, 4.0 GPA student, softball player, and oldest of 5 kids.

Nekisha’s mentor, UC Berkeley student Amber Rae Edlin, has helped her in many different ways. She learned to explore appropriate subjects, college, and to complete the required paper-work for application to college. Nekisha is glad that she was able to have a mentor in a difficult stage of her life and she enjoys the way her mentor is supporting her dreams.

Nekisha believes that youth, especially teenagers, need to be connected with a mentoring program. It helps them to have guidance other than family and friends. Nekisha added, “My mentor, as a positive role model, is a key to my transition into adulthood.” She believes that one day she can become a lawyer, social worker or whatever she wants to be.

Be a Mentor needs volunteers from the community who are especially interested in mentoring foster youth.

It’s easy to refer a foster youth to the program. Contact the Child Welfare Worker assigned to the youth. CWW’s can refer youth by calling 510-795-6488 or go online to answer a few questions at www.beamentor.org/foster/ssa.asp.
Carol’s Column

Dear Colleagues, Resource Families, and Community Partners:

In July 2007, DCFS and the Probation Department became one of two California counties (Los Angeles being the other) to participate in the Title IV-E Waiver. The aim of our participation is to have flexibility for a series of proactive reinvestment strategies to better direct resources to prevention, early intervention, and long-term family-based support strategies that serve youth, parents, and caregivers with local support in agencies that are already serving their community.

With July 2008 coming soon, our Department is approaching the end of our first year participating in the Title IVE Waiver. DCFS is deeply engaged in the first year activities of the Waiver and already planning upcoming activities for the second year. Our programs and activities are aimed at prevention, intervention, and support for current and former foster youth and families.

There is more information on our participation in the Waiver in this edition of the newsletter. I also encourage you to remain updated by attending staff meetings, provider meetings, and other community forums in which we will continue to discuss the anticipated outcomes, achieved outcomes, and strategies to meet those outcomes.

Carol Collins
Assistant Agency Director

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.

-Maya Angelou

IVE Waiver Promotes Prevention Intervention & Support

The following strategies and collaborative efforts are aimed at preventing entry to foster care, providing timely and adequate intervention for youth who must enter foster care, and supporting youth and families before, during, and after a foster care episode. These strategies represent our first year’s plan for the Title IVE Waiver.

Prevention:
- Expand Another Road to Safety
- Create Voluntary Diversion Program to divert families from formal court dependency
- Engage in family-finding efforts when youth are referred to DCFS

Intervention:
- Continue with Group Home Family Preservation and Dumisha Jamaa efforts, which are focused on increasing permanence for older youth and reducing the number of youth placed in group homes
- Implement “One Child, One Placement” philosophy
- Enhance county-licensed foster home recruitment
- Ensure youth are placed in group homes only when necessary
- Expand use of Structured Decision Making tools to ensure that decision making is as consistent as possible
- Expand Family Reunification Team Decision Making meetings to continue engagement of parents in the decision making process
- Implement CHAT meetings between foster and birth parents to enhance the support for reunification

Support:
- Expand Foster Care Eligibility to make ET’s available early in reunification process to ensure that families have the financial and medical resources to assist with successful reunification
- Create system to link families to community based services post-reunification to help sustain permanent placements with parents, adoptive parents or guardians.
- Implement Permanency Team Decision Making meetings to achieve more effective concurrent planning
- Enhance safety net for transition-age youth
- Implement emancipation conferences
- Increase outreach to eligible youth not currently engaged in ILSP services

DCFS Press Editorial Board

Connie Linas
Andrea Crutchfield
Fredi Juni

Pauline Keogh
Cerise Grice
Rebecca Legaspi

Please provide comments and feedback regarding DCFS Press to Connie Linas at linasc@acgov.org
Having Faith in Foster Care

Alameda County’s Faith Initiative provides faith and community leaders with a vehicle by which they can make a difference in the life of a foster child or youth. Pathways to Home is dedicated to finding loving homes and families for Alameda County children and youth. Two of our new resource families are profiled here. For information about becoming a foster parent contact Lori Carr Johnson at the recruitment hotline 510.259.3575.

Pastor Carl Hetler and his wife Heather are parents of two biological children, ages 4 and 6, and an African American six month old foster baby. Pastor Carl’s decision to provide foster care in Alameda County was “a mission of God’s love”. A native of Berkeley, CA, Carl Hetler worked as an adoptions social worker for two years in Indiana before returning to the Bay Area to become the Pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of Oakland.

The Hetlers became licensed foster parents in May, 2006 and have received special training to care for newborns and children with special needs through the county’s Community Action to Reach out to Infants (CARI) Program.

Carl and Heather, who are caucasian, are fully engaged in the process of cross-cultural fostering and have sought education, support and encouragement from the county’s Faith Initiative. The Hetlers also have neighbors, co-workers, and community members who have helped by providing clothes, suggestions for hair care products, as well as emotional support. Most recently, other church members have expressed interest in becoming foster parents, and the Faith Advisory Council will be holding a presentation at his church.

Mr. Charles Booth, a single African American ordained minister, always wanted children. One day, he saw a television advertisement that asked adults to consider becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent. It was then that Mr. Booth decided to adopt a child. He met some people at his church who were Alameda County foster parents and encouraged him to complete his Resource Parent training in 2006.

Mr. Booth received his foster care license in December, 2006, and although he did not meet his son until the summer of 2007, they have been inseparable ever since. Mr. Booth is now counting the days until he is able to adopt his 7-year-old son. He describes the experience as one of both complete joy and some challenge. Joy because his son is a wonderful boy and active in his church, but frustrating because the process to adoption has been very time consuming.

He also emphasized that as a new foster parent it is important to have good communication with your Child Welfare Worker. He said asking lots of questions is key to having a good understanding of the path to adoption. So as Mr. Booth looks to the future with his son, he reflects on the blessings bestowed on him and thanks God everyday for them.
**Birth Parents and Foster Parents have a CHAT**

Parent Engagement activities have been going strong since 2005. The birth parents who participate on the Parent Leadership Team plan and work on projects that will provide better services for Alameda County families, including Parent Advocate matching and Parent Orientation sessions. Currently, 22% of all birth parents with youth entering foster care are participating in Parent Orientation and we hope to increase that number to 50%.

In February of 2008, another program was developed to support foster parents and birth parents. CHAT, which stands for Communicating History And Transitions, is an introductory meeting between a foster parent and birth parent to exchange information about the youth.

The information that is shared is focused on the youth; however the foster parents have an opportunity to talk about their home and parenting style while the birth parent discusses the child’s likes and dislikes and other habits.

The 30 to 45 minute meeting helps the foster parent better understand the child’s needs and can ease the transition from home to foster care. The meeting helps the birth parent feel more secure in knowing who is taking care of their child.

A BIG THANKS to our Parent Advocates: Thomas, Lisa, Diane, Dorothy, Gladys, and Monique!

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**Resource Parent Recruiter**

Lori CarrJohnson began her work as a resource family recruiter for DCFS in April 2007. She works closely with the Faith Advisory Council focusing primarily on recruitment of families in East and West Oakland and South Hayward.

Her work as a recruiter to find new foster and adoptive families involves responding to the recruitment hotline (510) 259.3575 and email inquiries on the recruitment web site at www.pathwaytohome.org.

Lori spends a lot of time in the communities and also co-facilitates the resource and adoptive parent orientation meetings. These are held on the first Thursday at 6:30PM in Oakland at 401 Broadway and on the third Thursday at 6:30PM in Hayward at Glad Tidings Church.

Lori also supports families and individuals through the four week PRIDE training. She is an enthusiastic and optimistic recruiter displaying faith and pride in the community we serve.

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**The Bay Area Heart Gallery**

*Connecting Hearts...Building Families*

**Please Visit Our**

**Traveling Photography Exhibit**

*Finding permanent homes and lifelong connections for youth in foster care*

**April 2008 Alameda County**

County Administration Building  
1st Floor Lobby  
1221 Oak Street, Oakland

AND

Eden Area Multi-Service Center  
1st Floor Lobby  
24100 Amador Way, Hayward  
Monday - Friday  8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

www.bayareaheartgallery.com
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Questioning Youth

The Model Standards Project (MSP) Workgroup has been leading the Department’s work on implementing best practice guidelines for work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in foster care.

This workgroup developed the Department’s new LGBTQ Policy, given below, which is in keeping with AB 458, The Foster Care Nondiscrimination Act, and the Alameda County Equal Treatment and Respect policy.

DCFS LGBTQ Policy

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth, or those perceived to be LGBTQ, are entitled to the same care, support, and protections that are provided to all children and youth served by the Department of Children and Family Services. This policy is in keeping with the Department of Children and Family Services’ commitment to the safety, permanence, and well being of the children and youth we serve. DCFS is committed to treating all children and youth with respect, valuing and affirming differences, and preventing harassment or discrimination of any kind.

Sexual orientation and gender identity must be affirmed, respected, and considered in all decisions regarding placement, care, manner of treatment and benefits received. Safety concerns must be considered when evaluating the placement needs of LGBTQ children and youth. LGBTQ children and youth are entitled to support for their positive expression and development of their identities, in the same manner as their peers. Anti-LGBTQ violence, the use of slurs, jokes, name-calling or other forms of real or perceived verbal, nonverbal, or emotional harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited.

Employees, resource families, care providers, and community members who provide services to children and youth will be treated with respect. Differences will be affirmed and harassment prevented and addressed. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identification will not be tolerated.

SSI and Transition Age Youth

SSI is a federal benefit that provides a monthly income to individuals with severe physical or mental disabilities and entitles them to additional supportive services such as subsidized housing, vocational training and expanded access to health services.

New legislation in California, AB 1331, is designed to ensure that foster youth with serious mental or physical 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.

This legislation requires all child welfare agencies to ensure every youth who is 16.5-17.5 years of age be screened for SSI eligibility and to submit an application for youth who may be eligible.

AB 1331 is important to transition age youth because many former foster youth are without a place to live, less than 3% go to college and 51% are unemployed. There are an estimated 15% of foster youth with a serious physical or mental disability. These young people exit foster care with the same challenges as all youth in foster care and must also contend with the challenges of managing a mental or physical disability.

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 child or 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, Management Analyst at 510-780-8947 or linasc@acgov.org.

For more information about AB 1331, contact Amy Lemley at the John Burton Foundation at (415) 693-1322 or Angie Schwartz at The Public Interest Law Project at (510) 891-9794 x 125.
A few words from our retiring senior managers...

Donna DeAngelis
“What matters is the lives we touch! I am honored to have worked with a dedicated and committed staff that is more than ready to meet the challenges of the Millennium.”

Rita Hayes
“Be good to others and take care of yourself. Enjoy life and celebrate accomplishments as much and as often as you can. Be a life-learner and continue to give to others.”

Erika Shore
“In a very special way, this job is a gift, a real opportunity to touch the lives of many, many children and families. It’s important to recognize the profound impact you can have in this work. And it is equally important to take care of yourself while you do it. I feel genuinely honored to have been able to spend a part of my professional life in this noble endeavor called child welfare.”

Varghese Vengapally
“Be receptive to change and learn to negotiate change well. Your talents will be rewarded in the effort you put forth and the enrichment you provided others.”

Mary Volz
“Work smart with play in your heart!”