The Family Reunification, Parent Engagement and Family Preservation Programs sponsored the third Family Reunification Celebration on June 18th at the Buttercup Restaurant in Oakland. FR Celebrations were established to recognize the accomplishments and success of families who have reunified after a foster care episode and the staff who supported the families in their reunification.

Ten families attended the June 18th event, including one family consisting of a mother and her 5 children who had just reunified the same day. A member of each family stood and spoke of their experience in the system. They all recognized the help and support they received. DCFS staff attended, as well as the Agency Director, Yolanda Baldovinos, Assistant Agency Director, Carol Collins and Parent Advocates. They spoke about the accomplishments of the parents they had worked with and encouraged them to consider joining the Parent Leadership Team.

Thanks to all the staff, especially Vanessa Anderson, Child Welfare Supervisor, who took the lead on making this event a success.

Moira Family
Dear Colleagues, Resource Families, and Community Partners:

This August, we were fortunate enough to welcome 16 new Child Welfare Workers. I am so pleased that we are in a position to hire new staff who will help ensure we meet all our mandates and keep improving outcomes for our community.

Thanks to the Faith Advisory Council and the DCFS senior management team, on July 22nd our staff enjoyed Ice Cream Social events in our staff buildings to celebrate the IV-E Waiver’s “first birthday”. We celebrated the past year of innovation and initiative that was made possible as a direct result of flexible funding and forward-thinking.

Thanks to the managers for serving the ice cream and coordinating the event, and a special thanks to the Faith Advisory Council for donating the ice cream. I also want to extend a very big thank you to the staff who have been working hard all year to help achieve the improved outcomes for youth and families, which is our ultimate goal in the IV-E Waiver participation.

It was a pleasure for me and Yolanda Baldovinos, our Interim Agency Director, to attend each of the ice cream social events and thank our staff in person.

"Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident, it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better".
-King Whitney Jr.

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

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**Parent Advocate Recruitment**

Do you have a parent you’ve worked with recently or in the past that has done well and shows leadership potential? We are especially in need of fathers and Spanish-speaking parents. If so, please help us in recruiting them for the Parent Leadership Team that typically meets one afternoon/early evening a month. All of our Parent Advocates have been chosen from this group after participating consistently for a period of time. Parent Leadership Team meetings include a mix of training opportunities and developing and implementing ideas and projects to help support families coming into the child welfare system. Please contact Vanessa Anderson at 510-268-2364 for more information or brochures.

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**Welcome New Parent Advocates!**

The Parent Engagement Unit is excited to introduce three new Parent Advocates who began training in early July 2008. Lavonne Chaney, Dyneze Cross, and Diane McNair have participated in the Parent Leadership group over the past year, have shadowed our seasoned Parent Advocates, and are currently attending many of the Child Welfare Worker induction trainings. Unlike previous Parent Advocates, Lavonne and Dyneze have experience in the foster care system as foster children rather than as parents going through the reunification system. Both of them are confident they can use their experiences to help the parents they work with by ensuring they have access to supportive services to assist them in the reunification process. Diane is a parent who successfully reunified with two of her children, went through the Family Maintenance program and had her case dismissed in August of 2007. Special thanks to Dorothy Lewis for taking a leadership role in providing the Parent Advocate Orientation to the new Parent advocates. Diane and Dyneze presented at the recent Foster Parent Association Annual Conference in Monterey. They each spoke in front of a large group of people about their varied experiences and were very well received. Please join us in welcoming them to their new positions!
Another Road to Safety and Kinship Support Partners Selected

DCFS is pleased to announce that three Alameda County Community Based Agencies, Family Support Services of the Bay Area (FSSBA), La Familia Counseling Services and Prescott-Joseph Center for Community Enhancement have been selected to partner with DCFS in the delivery of three family support services programs: Another Road to Safety (ARS), Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) and the Another Road to Safety - Family Maintenance Pilot Project (ARSFM).

These programs are designed to prevent initial entry and re-entry into the foster care system and to provide support to relative caregivers. The agencies selected are key family service providers in the neighborhoods with concentrated referrals and removals. FSSBA will serve families in four East Oakland zip codes, Prescott-Joseph will serve families in one (and parts of a second) West Oakland zip code and La Familia Counseling Services will serve families in three Hayward zip codes.

The ARS program provides up to nine months of intensive in home support to eligible families, including assessments for postpartum depression, child development and family care plans. The KSSP provides support to relative caregivers including, family advocacy, case management, support groups, legal services, youth activities and homework clubs. The ARSFM Pilot Project will provide 3-6 months of intensive home support to eligible families following initial court dependency, including assessments for postpartum depression and child development. Families enrolled in ARSFM will be visited, on a weekly basis by a Family Advocate to address and mitigate crisis. The Family Advocate will work in collaboration with the DCFS Child Welfare Worker and other key service providers in the development of a family care plan that reflects family input, strengths, risk factors and desired outcomes. Success will be measured by reducing the rate of children re-entering Foster Care through improved family functioning.

Count Something, Write Something...

Atul Gawande is a surgeon, writer, and a MacArthur Fellow. His recent book, Better: A Surgeon’s Notes on Performance, is especially relevant to our work in social services. Gawande wrote “in this work [of human services], one begins to wonder: How do I really matter? I have five suggestions for how one might make a worthy difference…Ask the unscripted question, Don't complain, Count something, Write something, Change the way you do something.”

Gawande sums up the primary goal of the Data Integrity Self Evaluation (DISE) Family to Family workgroup, which is to link changes in agency policies and practices to the outcomes for children and families. Essentially, our workgroup’s goal is ask questions, count things, and share what we find. As Gawande writes, “if you count something you find interesting, you will learn something interesting...Write about it. Ask people what they think.”

With those goals in mind, DCFS continues to count and report on a variety of outcomes, especially those related to the IVE Waiver goals and objectives. And, in the spirit of sharing some data from the wealth of information we have available to us, here are two charts comparing the race/ethnicity of the general child population in Alameda County to the race/ethnicity of the foster care population. The over-representation of African American youth and under-representation of other racial/ethnic groups is evidence of continued disproportionality in foster care, which DCFS is consistently attempting to mitigate and address.

**Child Population in 2007 (n=363,374)**

- Hispanic: 3%
- Other: 1%
- Black: 13%
- Asian: 27%
- White: 27%
- Nat Amer: 1%

**Foster Youth in Care on July 1, 2007 (n=2,358)**

- Hispanic: 16%
- White: 11%
- Asian: 3%
- Black: 64%
- Nat Amer: 1%
Victoria is a charismatic and caring young woman. She has persevered through numerous setbacks and disappointments over her 10 years in foster care. When she heard about the Dumisha Jamaa Project, which works to find permanence for older foster youth, Victoria asked to participate and her Child Welfare Worker made a referral. Victoria has been a strong advocate for herself, finding more than 6 families on her own from her past and present to be considered as possible adoptive parents or legal guardians. She courageously agreed to participate in different matching activities and public recruiting efforts, such as the The Bay Area Heart Gallery (BAHG), and California Kids Connection (CKC), the online, searchable database listing children in California who are available for adoption.

After several months of pursuing various permanency alternatives Victoria began talking about the possibility of moving back with her biological mother, even though there had only been sporadic phone contact.

Victoria has been working with the Dumisha Jamaa Project for a little over a year now. Victoria’s Child Welfare Worker is working with her mother, who has turned her life around and is very focused on completing the necessary steps to reunify with Victoria. She is now maintaining contact with her, advocating for her needs, and researching services and resources to help successfully transition Victoria back home.

Throughout the process, Victoria has never given up as she weathered the ups and downs that have paved the way in her search for permanence.

There was standing room only at Crosstown Café on July 17, 2008 when the youth performers of The Youth Adult Partnership (YAP) took the stage for its first Fundraiser. The theme of the evening was “Hear Our Voice” and those in attendance witnessed captivating singers, hip-hop performances, comedic routines as well as thought provoking spoken word. It was evident by the rousing applause after each performance that the crowd was pleased. Moreover, many were moved to make a donation to YAP. YAP is an advisory board made up of emancipated youth and adult stakeholders who work together in reforming the foster and after care system in Alameda County. Its mission is to provide a youth voice in evaluating and changing programs and policies to better serve foster/emancipated youth in Alameda County.

By all accounts, the evening was a success and YAP met its rather modest fundraising goal of $500-$1000. They raised $800 and are still accepting donations. YAP has plans to provide youth stipends for advocacy training courses and supplies for youth led advocacy events.

“We are committed to telling our stories and raising awareness about the challenges young people face in foster care, and the need for caring adults to guide them during their journey from childhood and adolescence to adulthood”, says YAP Coordinator, Georgette Todd. After receiving two college degrees and a masters degree, Georgette says she simply had to do this work versus take a well paid private industry job, because of her own experience in foster care and her profound sense of advocacy and compelling need to help reform the system. YAP member Denise, a former foster youth, feels the same. She said: “I was attracted to the organization because of the potential YAP has to impact the current youth in care and empower those who have emancipated to help others.”

In the next few months, YAP will be participating in a Planning Retreat and will set some priorities for their future activities and events. Stay tuned, as we fully expect to hear more from this outstanding group!
DCFS and Probation Managers Meet with Community Partners at First Annual Waiver Forum

On July 15th DCFS held a community forum to update our public and private partners on our Waiver progress. There were approximately 75 participants including representation from the California Department of Social Services, Community Based Organizations, and funding organizations. Below please find some of the questions and answers raised at the forum:

Q & A from the Alameda County IVE Waiver Forum

Q: How has the first year of The Waiver affected the number of youth who age out of the system? How is this projected over the life of the waiver?

A: We hope the number of youth who emancipate (age out) will continue to decrease over time. There is a constellation of services that may be responsible for this decrease and it’s hard to link it to the Waiver or any given program. Initiatives that have likely impacted transition age youth aging out are Dumisha Jumaa, Group Home Family Preservation, increased mental health services, and other permanence efforts.

Q: The Waiver creates a strong financial organizational incentive to not open cases. What organizational safeguards have been put into place to ensure that children who need foster care are not inappropriately diverted?

A: Structured Decision Making tools are a safeguard to ensure that youth who have imminent safety concerns are not inappropriately diverted. Also, SDM gives a good picture of risk factors, and when a Child Welfare Worker does something that’s not indicated by the SDM tool, it requires a Supervisor and a Program Manager to review the decision.

Q: How will the Waiver be adapted if there is new legislation, such as expansion of foster care to age 21? Will the Waiver be re-negotiated?

A: The IVE Waiver is mostly a federal program, and the State and County can always discuss new mandates and changes with the federal government. Additionally, the counties are doing very well at tracking data and making fiscal projections so that we can all move quickly with updated information if there is new legislation.

Q: Under what financial and programmatic circumstances would Alameda County elect to opt out of the Waiver?

A: We would consider opting out if any of our outcomes turn a different way, such as a dramatic increase in our caseloads or if placement costs significantly increase.

Q: What are you doing to streamline the funding application process for relative caregivers? Right now it’s very burdensome and slow, particularly for working but poor caregivers.

A: We recognize the procedures have been onerous and complicated. We support caregivers in getting proper documentation. Our Department is also committed to providing orientation sessions and training sessions for relative/NREFM caregivers. We also want to ensure that all caregivers are linked to Kinship Centers for support.

Q: Since there is such an incentive to control costs, how are you monitoring/ensuring that youth who need intensive treatment, ancillary services are still getting them?

A: Youth haven’t and won’t be denied intensive treatment that’s available to them in order to save costs. There has always been a necessity to control costs. However, there is a wide-range of services and intensive treatment that is available in Alameda County unrelated to the youth’s placement through an expansion of $20+ million in new mental health services. Additionally, the same checks and balances still exist within the court system, department and community oversight.

Q: RE: Voluntary Diversion cases: is KinGAP available to them after one year? If not, are relatives assessed for financial stability and advised of the lower funding via TANF?

A: KinGAP is not available to voluntary diversion cases. We do not assess the relative's financial stability. They may be eligible for assistance as a non-needy caregiver if they become the child's Legal Guardian in Probate court.

Q: Please speak to what impact, if any, you expect the Waiver to have on the disproportionate representation of children and youth of color in foster care.

A: The flexible funding provided by the Waiver allows us to expand upon our prevention work, for which we would otherwise have little to no funding available. The decisions and interventions that occur after we receive referrals can determine whether or not children really need to come into care. Additionally, we are working within the Waiver to further expand our family-finding and permanency efforts to address youth currently in foster care.

Q: How does DCFS plan to sustain funding for programs, staffing etc. after the Waiver ends?

A: If Waiver outcomes are positive, it might be possible to continue after the five year commitment. If it is not possible to continue the Waiver, it may still be possible to continue many of the programs. We are trying to institutionalize many of the programs into our general practice, however, our ability to fully fund everything we currently do in the future, with or without the IVE Waiver, will be a matter of state and local funding available at the time.
Homework Help for Kids and Teens:

- Homework Centers
- Many library branches have centers where homework help is provided to elementary, middle school and high school students after school hours.
- Generally open from 3:00 to 5:30 Monday -Thursday.
- Homework Help Web Sites
- Free daily online tutoring 1:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.
- En Espanol Domingo-Jueves, 1 p.m. –7 p.m.
- Offered to students Grades 4 – 12 and beginning college.
- Experts in various subjects provide free tutoring.

For additional information, visit the Alameda County Library website and click on the Homework Help links.

California After School Resource Center (CASRC)

313 West Winton Ave., Hayward, CA 94544
toll free 1-888-318-8130
www.californiaafterschool.org

- CASRC provides free access to reviewed instructional materials, trainings, program administration tools and technical assistance for after-school programs.
- You may borrow materials for free for up to four weeks with free delivery in California.
To receive their newsletter In the Loop and e-updates, register online.