When DCFS began the Faith Initiative in 2004, a powerful partnership formed with a fervent commitment to increasing the number of county licensed homes available to serve foster youth.

Included in that partnership were the deep, rich resources and networks of the county’s religious organizations and their leaders.

That, and the Initiative’s determined team that can perform one of their recruiting “commercials” promoting foster parenting any time, any place.

The Initiative’s representatives, led by Deacon Earl Jacobs, make formal presentations to a wide variety of locations including places of worship, community events, schools, and businesses.

The informal presentations, the spontaneous recruitment opportunities, happen all over; at the grocery store, the dentist’s office, shopping, anywhere a conversation can lead to “what do you do?” and ideally end with “I’ve always thought about becoming a foster parent” and an exchange of information.

“It’s a constant recruitment,” says Felicia Brown, a program coordinator in the Faith Initiative Office.

“You’re talking to somebody and they say ‘hey, what do you do’? And then they say ‘tell me about it’. Usually you have one minute, sometimes 30 seconds and you’ve got to give a commercial and capture their interest and inform them at the same time,” Brown says.

There are currently 200 county licensed foster homes in Alameda County and approximately 1800 youth in care. The need for more foster parents is clear and pressing.

The Initiative’s messages aren’t only targeted at potential foster parents with religious affiliations. The Initiative’s efforts target the community at large.

“The work we’re doing is universal,” says Jacobs, the lead speaker for a crew of nine speaker liaisons under the leadership of Executive Director Raymond Lankford. “It has nothing (continued on page 4)
Dear Colleagues, Resource Families, and Community Partners:

Happy Foster Care Month!

May is National Foster Care Month, a time to honor and appreciate our foster parents, relatives and other caregivers. I hope you all join us at our annual Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner on May 14th.

There are multiple ways you can partner with DCFS to impact the lives of youth and families in Alameda County:

- Become a resource parent. Call our recruitment hotline at (510) 259-3575.
- 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.
- Make a tax-deductible contribution 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 the Shirley Eastman Fund at (510) 259-3575.
- Go to www.fostercaremonth.org and attend the events around the state to increase awareness and advocacy efforts to help meet the critical needs of foster youth.

I am so grateful to our resource families, staff, and everyone who contributes to our vision that all youth will be permanently connected to caring, committed adults.

Carol Collins, Assistant Agency Director

“There are two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition there”.

— Indira Gandhi
The Alameda County Disproportionality Project is now well underway. It has been approximately 15 months since the Project’s Core Team Meetings began with representation from the DCFS Executive Team, Program Management, Child Welfare Supervisors, Child Welfare Workers, community partners, the Youth Board and Parent Advocates. In February 2009, the Core Team identified their team name: Team RAISE (Racial Awareness in Social Services Everyday) and a team motto: Challenging Awareness and Responsibility for Equity in Public Child Welfare.

The first charge of Team RAISE was to identify a disproportionality practice area, which would serve as the specific test/focus area where disproportionality issues would be examined, evaluated and addressed. Team RAISE decided to examine practice at the beginning of the child welfare continuum; the focus area identified was the Prevention and Intake Division. The model for improvement, PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act), was designed to test and implement changes with the idea that small practice changes have a significant impact on child welfare. The PDSA cycle tests changes in the real work setting — by planning them, trying them, observing the results, and acting on what is learned. Prior to the first PDSA cycle, Team RAISE answered three questions, fundamental to practice improvement:

**What are we trying to accomplish?**

**How will we know that change is an improvement?**

**What changes can we make that will result in improvement?**

Since the inception of the Project, there have been approximately eight PDSAs within the Prevention and Intake Unit. One PDSA with particular significance focused on “Hot Words” (such as beat, drug user, volatile.) commonly used by both mandated and non-mandated reporters to describe individuals, their behaviors, their family, and their community. The potential impact of Hot Words is profound as they move from the screener narrative to the investigation narrative to court reports and beyond. They ultimately affect how the family is viewed, perceived and treated in the child welfare system.

As part of the Hot Words PDSA, Team RAISE identified goals — creating staff awareness regarding how language is a powerful factor that contributes to stereotypes, perpetuates negative characterization of individuals and families and adversely influences decision making in the child welfare system; established measures — practice change is monitored by the Prevention and Intake CWSs. For example, are Reporting Parties defining Hot Words to the CWW Screeners? Are Reporting Parties providing enough context to the Hot Words to justify a CPS intervention? Has decision making with the use of the SDM tool improved given that SDM definitions are congruent with the information provided by Reporting Parties? Finally, Team RAISE selected changes — all improvement requires making changes, but not all changes result in improvement. ERU Screeners prompt Reporting Parties to define any Hot Words they use. Although the use of Hot Words by reporting parties will continue, obtaining context and clarity is the key to understanding the allegation. The direct impact of this PDSA on disproportionality is a reduction in the number of referrals being assigned to investigate in Alameda County communities from which there is a high volume of calls to the CPS Hotline. Preliminarily staff feedback as well as data suggests that outcomes are positive.

Team RAISE has also received Eliminating Racial Disproportionality and Disparities Training sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. These Deeper Awareness trainings included the Race Matters (institutional, embedded racism and colorblindness) and the History of Race and Child Welfare presentations, group discussions, data presentations and interactive case studies. In March 2010, Team RAISE Leadership implemented the Department Wide Awareness Campaign in preparation for each Division to build teams, begin PDSAs and disproportionality awareness. Although, the California Disproportionality Project officially ends in June 2010, the Alameda County DCFS is committed to examining, evaluating and addressing racial disparity in child welfare until a quantifiable change is seen. Thus, the real work has just begun.
Raising a granddaughter was not in their long term retirement plans. With three adult sons, Red and Valerie Grizzell always wanted to be there for their paternal granddaughter Brianna, though they didn’t plan to raise her. When Brianna first entered foster care at age 3, they got a call. Brianna came to live with them, and they worked out a plan to adopt her. Unfortunately, after living with them for three years, family circumstances changed. For the next seven years, Brianna moved around, in and out of relative care and two potential adoptive homes.

Over the years, Valerie and Red were contacted a couple of times for possible placement again, but each time, circumstances in their lives or complications with placements made it not possible. They lost contact with Brianna for a period of time. Then, when Brianna was 13, her Adoptions Worker called them again. Though the answer had been “No…” in the past, the importance and value of not giving up on family is clear in this case. The social worker made another call to Red and Val, taking a chance that their situation had changed. This time, Brianna’s grandparents said “YES!”

In March, 2008, Brianna traveled back to Illinois to their home, with a permanent plan of adoption. In November 2009, Brianna and her grandparents took a long awaited drive from Illinois to Oakland to participate in Alameda County’s 10th Annual Adoption Day. Brianna’s birth mother and both sets of great grandparents were there to celebrate her adoption together!

Finding Forever Homes

(continued from front page)

to do with any particular religion. We’re selling an idea, the possibility of becoming a foster parent and providing the information.”

Religious leaders can be the toughest sell for air time, Jacobs explains. Time to speak during services is often tightly guarded by leaders who worry about “bringing the wrong spirit into their services”.

While the Initiative’s liaisons have been denied access to some places of worship, the ones where they have spoken to have always had favorable reviews of the Initiative and its representatives, Jacobs says.

The Initiative’s message is clear and direct: “Take a child in and let them know they are priceless and invaluable to the community,” Jacobs says. “The core point is that we have to find homes for youth.”

Both Brown and Jacobs have long histories of work with foster youth. Jacobs’ first exposure to the child welfare system was as a staff member at a live-in group home in Sacramento where at times he would work two weeks straight without relief. “It was an eye opener, a shock,” Jacobs remembers. “To see the conditions some of these kids come out of is shocking, it’s saddening.”

For 17 of his 22 years as part of the 7th Day Adventist Church on Oakland’s Market Street Jacobs has served as a deacon and gotten to know his church community through many children’s programs, health fairs and numerous home visits.

In the 1990s, Brown ran a psychiatric treatment center for emotionally disturbed boys in Oakland and continued to work with clients from the center as mentor after its closing. Like Jacobs, she was referred to the Initiative by Lankford who had worked for her as a counselor.

Brown is the lead for the Initiative’s “anchor sites”. An anchor site is contracted to help with foster parent recruitment, train its staff in recruitment and hold events for foster youth and their caregivers.

The Initiative’s staff and community collaborators work with birth parents as well and remind foster-adopt parents that the primary goal for the child is reunification whenever possible. They also work to support the relationships between foster and biological parents.

Jacobs describes the partnership with the agency as a “blessing” that has provided the faith based community with a tremendous opportunity to organize families and resources for children and youth in foster care.
Ever wonder what it takes to become an Alameda County Licensed Resource Parent? If so, you are not alone. Child Welfare Staff, Resource Parents and Community Partners have participated in a condensed and accelerated training. In February, 2010, a three part series called Mini-PRIDE (Parents’ Resource for Information, Development and Education) began with the purpose of sharing the highlights from the formal 24-hour PRIDE training series that Alameda County prospective Licensed Resource and Adoptive parents are required to attend. The training was also an opportunity for Child Welfare Staff to acquire tools from Mini PRIDE training to more effectively partner with our Resource Parents.

The first session, held on 2/18/10 addressed the Five Essential Competencies for becoming a Resource Parent, the challenges of fostering, adopting and concurrent planning, placement goals and guidelines for effective teamwork. In the second Mini-PRIDE session on 3/18/10, the impact of abuse and neglect on attachment for children involved in our system, separation, loss and grief and how to be a “Loss Manager” were addressed. The agenda for the last session on 4/15/10, included: cultural identity, self-esteem and the importance of family connections.

Throughout the Mini-PRIDE, there is a purposeful focus on working together as members of the Child Welfare Team in order to meet the needs of our children and to help them achieve a sense of permanence. To that end, the 43 participants, including seasoned Resource and Adoptive Parents, Community Partners, a Public Health Nurse, a Management Analyst, Child Welfare Workers, Supervisors and Program Managers from multiple programs, had a unique opportunity to interact with one another and share ideas and perspectives about their various roles and responsibilities.

Our Resource Parents need and deserve ongoing support, education, resources and networking, like the kind offered through PRIDE and the Mini-PRIDE training program. Their presence and “pearls of wisdom” shared at Mini-PRIDE is an integral part of the experience and is highly valued.

For more information about Licensed Resource Parent Orientation and PRIDE classes please call the Alameda County Adoption and Foster Care Hotline at 510.259.3575.
NEW LEVELS OF FUNDING FOR DUAL AGENCY CHILDREN

Senate Bill (SB) 84 established different funding amounts for children who are regional center clients and also receive AFDC-FC (Aid for Dependent Children – Foster Care) or AAP (Adoption Assistance Program) funding, effective July 1, 2007. Under the law, these children are considered “Dual Agency children”. SB 84 set basic funding amounts for Dual Agency children who are in an eligible placement, and it also provides an option for additional money, also known as a “supplemental payment”, for certain Dual Agency children with extraordinary care and supervision needs.

Eligible Dual Agency children who are younger than age 3 receive a different basic funding amount than children age 3 and older. Only Dual Agency children age 3 and older are eligible for supplemental payments. Counties and regional centers are to collaborate when determining a child’s eligibility for supplemental payments. To be eligible for a supplemental payment, a child must have:

(a) Severe impairment in physical coordination and mobility,
(b) Severe deficits in self-help skills,
(c) Severely disruptive or self-injurious behavior and/or
(d) A severe medical condition.

Caregivers who believe that a child in their care may be eligible for Dual Agency funds should speak with the child’s Child Welfare Worker.

PASSING THE TORCH: SSA Mentoring Program Celebrates its 10th year!

On January 28, 2010, the Social Services Agency (SSA) kicked off the Passing the Torch mentoring program. The program is in its 10th year and has grown since the first class held on December 18, 2000, which consisted of 24 participants compared to 86 at the event in January. DCFS had the largest number of new participants this year!

Passing the Torch is an eight month career-development program that partners eligible SSA employees (or mentees) with a mentor (generally a supervisor, department manager, or lead employee). The program is an opportunity for mentees and mentors to develop one-on-one relationships in which the mentee can receive support to help guide his/her professional and personal growth from an experienced mentor.

Mentees are encouraged to seek out mentors in roles that they aspire to obtain. If you would like more information about the Alameda County Social Services Agency’s employee mentoring program “Passing the Torch”, contact Thomas Vasquez, (510) 259-3864 or Tvasquez@acgov.org.

If you would like more information about “Passing the Torch” contact Thomas Vasquez, (510) 259-3864 or Tvasquez@acgov.org.

2010 PERMANENCY GUIDE

The 2010 version of Alameda County’s Guide to Permanency Options for Youth will be available in May. Our original Guide to Permanency Options for Youth was developed in 2005. The redesigned 2010 Guide includes legal updates and additional information to further assist staff and caregivers in making informed permanency decisions.