

# Children's VOICE

January/February 2009

## Better Parent-Child Visiting

New Opportunities  
Child welfare under the  
Obama Administration

Rural Adoption  
Finding families for  
82 foster children

Win-Win Internships  
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# Children's VOICE

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### Children's Voice

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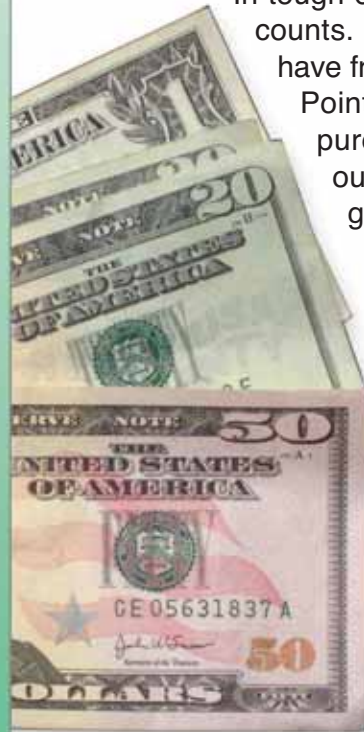
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# LeadershipLens

*Christine James-Brown*



In the human services community, the issue of treatment versus prevention—addressing immediate needs and finding long-term solutions so fewer people experience needs—always challenges us. It is especially challenging for those of us in the child welfare community because we are responsible for the safety and well-being of our most fragile and innocent citizens. We know there will be difficult choices to make, especially as human needs increase and the resources to address these needs decrease amid economic instability. In situations like the one we face today, it is tempting to pull from prevention and focus all available resources on required treatment.

A new administration, however, brings new opportunities. In his testimony before Congress, former Senator Tom Daschle talked about health reform and the need to focus our health care system on prevention. He described health care as a pyramid: With primary care at the base of the pyramid, you work your way up to levels of more sophisticated health care, such as heart transplants and MRIs. As Daschle explained, most countries start at the base of that pyramid and move up until funds are depleted. In the United States, however, we start from the top and work our way down until the money runs out—and the money does run out. We need to change that focus to make prevention and wellness pervasive in all departments and all parts of life. This analogy also applies to child welfare.

CWLA's public policy and members service work will need to focus on both the short-term needs of helping our members thrive and continue to improve outcomes, and the long-term issues of how the child welfare community and

the nation as a whole can place greater emphasis on prevention. Like the banking and auto industries, we are in a time of transformation; the consequences of our failure, however, are much greater.

We are fortunate to have extraordinary new child welfare legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success Act, which, over time, will improve the lives of thousands of children and youth already in the child welfare system. Budget-challenged states may be hard pressed to take advantage of this new law. CWLA will help our public and private members find more efficient ways to operate and to maximize revenue opportunities created by Fostering Connections in the short-term and especially the long-term.

We will also lend our expertise and voice to those issues that will prevent children and families from entering the child welfare system. Anti-poverty programs, job initiatives, parenting programs, health and mental health care, and education are all critical to supporting families and helping children grow up to be strong and self-sufficient citizens. It is necessary to split our time between pulling children and families out of the water and building dams so that others do not fall in. The reality is that we simply have to reduce the number of children and families in need of treatment. At the same time, the system needs to be retooled so the extraordinary expertise among treatment providers can be applied to keeping families strong. Since we are not likely to get the multi-billion dollar boost the banking and auto industries received for their

retooling, we will need to take another path—one we can create together.

The call for the White House Conference on Children and Youth helps people understand the critical link between abuse and neglect and issues like poverty, health care, education, and parenting. Although designed to be viewed through the perspective of our most vulnerable children and families, the desired outcome of the White House Conference is the commitment by all services that touch children and families to work in a collaborative, child-centered, evidence-based way to ensure that all children and families reach their full potential.

A nationwide conversation about how all systems can better address the needs of the child welfare system will create a

broader base of support and bring more partners to our work. Additionally, if these systems focus on addressing the needs of our most vulnerable children and families, they will in turn improve their service to all children and families. The call for the White House Conference is in fact an important effort to make the focus on child and family well-being and prevention pervasive, as Daschle said. I hope those who are interested in strengthening the American economy, concerned about the breakdown of the American family, or want to address critical issues like poverty and health care will join us in calling for the White House Conference because it effects all of these areas of urgent national need. ■

***Like the banking and auto industries, we are in a time of transformation; the consequences of our failure, however, are much greater.***

*Christine James Brown*

## Extended Mentoring as Motivation

*WAY Program at Children's Village is a reward to youth who work for it.*

**Y**outh in care are surrounded by supportive adults and have the chance to forge relationships with residential care staff, foster parents, caseworkers, and others as a way to learn and heal. But too often, a youth's discharge means a disconnection of these personal ties. The Children's Village (CV), a CWLA member in Dobbs Ferry, New York, harnesses the positive power one caring adult can have in shaping a child's life. A nationally recognized, community-based, paid mentorship program begun 25 years ago provides that caring adult to the youth CV serves.

CV operates two aftercare programs: a one-year program offered to all youth and a specialized program, the

time before aging out, follow-up community-based programs become even more critical. For the child welfare system to do right by these young adults, "aftercare" needs to be recast as "community care."

"Being successful in an institutional setting is meaningless if the gains aren't translated into life at home," says Richard Larson MSW, Director of Aftercare at CV. "Counselors who work in the home, in the neighborhood at off hours, are the key relationships that make success possible for young people and their families."

Youth in the one-year program work with a CV aftercare specialist, who acts as a counselor. To take full advantage of the progress made during that relationship, the same counselor continues to work with youth who become WAY Scholars, but his or her role loses some of its formality, looking more like mentorship than counseling. This key element of the CV approach—retaining their paid professional specialists as mentors—is a departure from traditional mentorship, which pairs youth with members of the community who do not necessarily have child welfare training.

WAY Scholars come from both CV's residential school and foster care programs. Each year about 25 youth join the longer-term WAY Program, and about 100 scholars are enrolled each year. The competitive process, which includes an application and interviews, is part of the

motivation the program creates; it is part of the design to inspire teens to embrace changes they need to make in their lives. There are basic qualifications all scholars meet: youth must be at least 16, passing in school, have some work experience, and have a positive relationship with at least one adult. They must also show they've successfully taken on



*WAY scholars Lorenzo H. and Shariff G. enjoy a game of Taboo at a game night sponsored by a foundation that funds the WAY Program. The WAY Program fosters social interaction with new people to help youth develop self-confidence and learn from people outside the foster care system.*

Work Appreciation for Youth (WAY) scholarship program. Staff at CV believe the term "aftercare" can be misleading. It implies "care" is already over, and now some quick, standard work is needed. As budget pressure leads to shorter stays for youth in residential treatment programs, and many of those entering the system are older youth who only stay for a short

more responsibilities during their time in residential care, as well as once returning to their home communities.

CV had to make strong commitments to the program to make it work. Students who become WAY Scholars can receive services for up to five years, and funding for the program is entirely private. This means the CV Board has to be supportive and agree to active fundraising. There are also personnel at CV whose sole focus is the aftercare program. A high school support coordinator manages the transition for youth returning to their home school, and 11 specialists, who each have at least a bachelor's degree, work a maximum of 14 caseloads.

Specialist Clara Martinez-Bello has seen the change in youth first-hand: She was working with two brothers who were very combative when she first met them. "After some time, they became much more outspoken about how they really felt," she says. "This was something I couldn't get from them in the beginning, when they came across as extremely withdrawn and angry." The relationship with staff, including Martinez-Bello, has helped both brothers mature; they are now living at home, doing well in community schools, and

working at summer jobs.

Success like this is not taken for granted, but it is the norm in CV's programs. The agency keeps track of the progress their students make during and after their time as WAY Scholars. "We find that more than 90% of our youth stay in school or have jobs. This lets us know that they are on their way to self-sufficiency," said Regis McDonald MSW, Vice President at CV.

As the WAY program moves forward, CV is looking to overcome some of the challenges it faces. Finding funding is difficult, especially during downturns in the economy, but through its success, CV hopes to prove to policymakers that aftercare is a crucial piece of the puzzle—and one that deserves more financial support. CV has spent the last 25 years reshaping the way aftercare is approached and practiced. As these and more problems surface, the agency continues crafting innovative solutions and better ways to help the youth it serves. ■

## Water, Water Everywhere

The lack of clean and accessible drinking water is the second-largest worldwide killer of children under age 5, according to the Tap Project. Last March, the Tap Project asked 2,350 restaurants to invite their customers



### TAP PROJECT

(UNICEF) provide safe, clean drinking water to children around the world. For every dollar raised, a child will have water for 40 days. The Tap Project will take place again this March; visit [www.tapproject.org](http://www.tapproject.org) to learn more and get involved. ■

to donate \$1 for the glasses of tap water they would normally receive for free. The money helped the United Nation's Children's Fund

## Care Through College

Of 25,000 teens who age out of foster care each year, 70% report they want to go to college, but only 13% do, and half of those students drop out in the first year, according to an article in *Market Watch* from the *Wall Street Journal*. To ease the burdens on college-bound foster care alumni, North Carolina has started NC Reach, a program that funds the full cost of education at state-affiliated universities or community colleges for resident youth who aged out of the system at 18 or who were adopted after the age of 12. Visit [www.ncreach.org](http://www.ncreach.org). ■

## Snack Time Redefined

The federal Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program helps schools provide alternatives to chips and candy for their students. Piloted in 2002 with 25 schools in 5 states, the 2008 farm bill expanded the program to all 50 states, according to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, which reported that nearly \$49 million would be spent on the program this school year, \$50-75 per student. Money goes to states, which distribute it to schools or districts to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. Participating schools must have at least 50% of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Visit [www.fns.usda.gov/FDD/programs/dod/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/FDD/programs/dod/default.htm) for more. ■



# National Newswire

Children's Issues in the News

## NEBRASKA Legislators Reconsider Unlimited Safe Haven Law

For 71 days last fall, events in the middle of the America echoed across the rest of the country. From September 13 to November 22, 36 children were left at Nebraska hospitals in 27 cases of Legislative Bill 157, a state "Safe Haven" law that allowed parents or guardians to leave children in the custody of hospital employees without facing prosecution for abandonment.



The intent of Nebraska's law, like that of similar laws on the books in all of the other 49 states, was to protect infants who might otherwise be abandoned. But LB 157 did not limit the age of children who could be left at hospitals. In fact, a 1-year-old girl who was left with her eight siblings was the youngest child transferred to hospital workers' custody; the average age of children left was 12.8 years.

Senator Arnie Stuthman introduced the bill in the Nebraska legislature January 8, 2007, and it carried over when the group reconvened in 2008. Stuthman's original presentation included both hospitals and fire stations as safe haven locations, and applied only to infants up to 3 days old. "My real intent for this bill is two things: number one is the safety and protection of the infant, the baby, and also protection of the mother. These mothers that are in this situation, to me are not criminals. They should not have to be prosecuted," Stuthman said during debate.

To garner more support, Stuthman agreed to an amendment that modified the bill to its form as passed,

limited to hospitals and without a defined age for the children covered. Senator Pete Pirsch sponsored the amendment and addressed other legislators' concerns about using the term *child* instead of a concrete age. Pirsch said it should be taken as the "ordinary and common meaning," and added the age "probably would be interpreted by a court as equivalent to a minor child." In general, Nebraska law views a *child* as a youth who has not reached his or her 14th birthday. Pirsch explained that a legislative working group did not want to send the message that Nebraska would stop caring about a child's safety once the child reached a specific age.

Stuthman added an explanation in the final reading of the bill, embracing the new language but retaining his original intent: "We had a little bit of a debate and disagreement... Concerns about, is it 72 hours old, is it 80 hours old, is it 30 days old, is it 50 days old, how can



you determine that? That is one of the reasons behind inserting the word *child*, that is one of the main issues. But a child can be a broader age, that could be involved. My main emphasis is on the small child, the protection of that small child, and the safety of that child."



In closing remarks before the bill's final reading and passage in early February, Stuthman promised the legislature would return to the law and try to address any "situations" its application may create. It turned out to be a prophetic statement, after Governor Dave Heineman approved LB 157 on February 13 and it went into effect July 18.

On September 13, an 11-year-old boy and a 15-year-old boy were left at hospitals in separate cases. A week later a 13-year-old girl was turned over to hospital staff. A few days after that, national attention focused on Nebraska when, in three separate cases, an 11-year-old boy, a 15-year-old boy, and nine siblings ages 1 to 17 were brought to hospitals in the Omaha area. Soon parents from other states brought their children to Nebraska hospitals, apparently attempting to bypass the age limits in the safe haven laws of their home states.

At the end of October, when 23 children (only four of who were under age 10) had been left, Governor

Heineman called a special session of the legislature to rewrite LB 157 to include an age limit. Before the session convened there was majority support for setting the limit at infants 3 days old, but during the week of debate in mid-November, that expanded to 1 month old. The special session's LB 1 is worded identically to LB 157, but adds "thirty days old or younger" to the earlier bill.

Throughout the fall, with many of the parents explaining they had been unable to find appropriate services to keep their families together, it became clear that more services, and better promotion of and access to them, might solve at least part of the problem. A Children in Crisis task force met during the break, and legislators have pledged to address this and other underlying causes of the situation in the current regular session.

*Following up on this topic, we will explore Nebraska's experience and the national implications of safe haven laws in the next issue of the Voice.* ■

## GEORGIA

In November, Mark Washington was named assistant commissioner for Georgia's Department of Human Resources (DHR),



Mark Washington

responsible for both the Division of Family and Children Services and the Office of Child Support Services. Washington was formerly commissioner for the

Kentucky Department for Community Based Services.

"Mark has been an innovator in child welfare," DHR Commissioner B. J. Walker said in a press release. "He's developed award-winning approaches to child welfare case management, including being the first in the U.S. to develop a unique research and evaluation unit for Kentucky's child welfare system." ■

## NEW YORK

The *New York Times* reports that, following a 2005 law, the state is making a push to expand special education programs. Last fall, plans to open Westbrook Preparatory School were approved; the \$2.5 million institution for 24 middle and high school students will be New York's first residential school for youth with high-functioning autism, according to the *Times*. Birch Family Services is also planning to start a residential program this year. Currently, school districts' options are limited, and many are forced to send students out of state to fulfill their responsibility of providing an appropriate education for all students. ■



## CALIFORNIA



A recent ruling by a federal district judge determined that the state is in violation of the Child Welfare Act for its low payments to foster parents, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Ruling in favor of the foster caregivers who brought the suit, the judge noted that in some cases California is paying only 60% of what is required to be eligible for federal matching funds.

While the ruling did not order higher payments, the article explained that the judge asked the state to create a system to determine the actual cost of care for California's 75,000 foster children. ■

# A Rural Miracle of Adoption

By Kathleen Belanger



*Diann Sparks was the first parent from the Bennett Chapel community to adopt from the foster care system. Her sons Randy (left) and Nino (right) are thriving. When asked what the future holds for her family, Diann replied, "I want to adopt another child!"*

## How one small community found families for 82 Texas foster children

When Mercedes was just 2 years old, she lost her mother. Without anyone else to care for her, she was placed in foster care for two years. Mercedes remembers being alone, even on the playground. "One day, a lady came to see me at school," she says. "Then she started coming every day. One day she asked me why I was playing all by myself, and she said, 'I'm going to adopt you one day.' When I first came [to the Martin home] I was afraid. They introduced me to my sister and brother and I started thinking,

'This is a family.' It took me a while, but by the time I was 8, I wasn't afraid at all." Now Mercedes laughs as she recounts her years in her family, her love for her parents, Donna and W. C. Martin, and her home in a loving community. At 16, she's a junior in high school and hoping to graduate a year early. She has dreams to be an anesthesiologist or a pediatrician, but definitely not a social worker—too much paperwork!

Since 1997, 28 families in the Possom Trot, Texas, community have adopted 82 foster children, including Mercedes. Bennett Chapel Missionary Baptist Church provided the fertile grounds and the homes to accept, nurture, and raise these children. Is this a unique event, or a brilliant adoption initiative whose elements of faith, community, creative problem solving, and collaboration can lead other communities of faith to adopt the many children languishing in foster care?

Bennett Chapel Missionary Baptist Church is located on a dirt road in an unincorporated community known as Possum Trot, approximately five miles from Shelbyville (population 215), and 15 miles from the county seat, Center (population 5,678). The closest “major” city is Nacogdoches 40 miles east (population 29,953). The families of Possum Trot know each other, and church is central in the lives of many. Pastor W. C. Martin leads the church, and his wife, Donna, is referred to as the “first lady.” Her role, as she explains in the new book *Small Town, Big Miracle*, is “to pray for people, encourage them, go to prayer meetings, help lead the worship service, visit the sick, be strong for others, give people hope.” But in 1996, the death of her mother, Murtha—who had shown love even while raising Donna and her siblings with little money, no electricity, and no running water—left her empty and hopeless. While grieving the loss of her mother, Donna looked to God for help; it was then that she felt inspired to foster and adopt children in need.

## Getting Involved

Donna knew nothing about child welfare, foster care, or adoption. She found a number in the phone book and located the nearest training for fostering and adopting. The closest PRIDE training was more than 60 miles away from her home, but she and her sister, Diann Sparks, attended the required three-hour trainings for 13 weeks. They learned about abuse and neglect, the difficulties of fostering and adopting, and techniques to handle children who have suffered. But they also learned that in 1997 there were 21,007 abused and neglected children in substitute care in Texas, many free for adoption and waiting for adoptive homes, disproportionately African American. Midway through the training, CPS adoption caseworkers came to be linked with prospective parents. Donna remembers spotting Susan Ramsey immediately, saying to her sister: “She’s our worker! I just know it!” At the end of that session, Donna and Diann were introduced to Susan, the child welfare worker who would connect them to their children and become an indelible member of their community and resident in their hearts.

Diann, a single woman, adopted the first child to come to the Bennett Chapel community, 4-year-old Nino. “I had no idea that so many children didn’t have [permanent] homes. I thought everyone was just like me, with a mother and a dad,” she says. She also had never considered adoption

herself. She lived in a two-bedroom mobile home, and never dreamt that the state would approve such modest living quarters. “But Susan didn’t come in with white gloves on. She



The Bennett Chapel  
Missionary Baptist Church.

came in with love and concern for me and the children. She knew that I could take care of Nino,” Diann says. The Martins, birth parents of two, adopted two children after that, Mercedes and Tyler. They struggled to parent children with numerous difficulties, who had never experienced constancy in care. Diann then fostered two brothers, Randy and Joshua, but found as a single parent that she could only provide adequate care for one. “But those children had been through so much already,” she says. “I

just couldn’t let them go!” Diann eventually adopted Randy and the Martins adopted Joshua, a situation that everyone, including the boys, has remained happy with since.

Other members of the church and community began to wonder if they, too, should adopt. Pastor Martin, a caring and charismatic leader, gave encouragement and discussed challenges from the pulpit, and the children and parents were living testimonies to the triumph of love. Pastor Martin asked for training closer to their community, but CPS said they could offer training at the church only if 10 more families were interested. Twenty-three families signed up for training, and eventually, over the next 10 years, 28 families—members and friends of Bennett Chapel—adopted 82 children in foster care.

In the fall of 1999, Bennett Chapel began to receive attention from the outside world. Following an article in the *Houston Chronicle*, Bennett Chapel was highlighted on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, and later on *Good Morning America*, *48 Hours*, and *The 700 Club*. A church in California provided financial assistance when it was most needed by the families and continues to partner with Pastor Martin. In 2004, Fox Network’s *Renovate My Family* chose the Martins’ house for renovation, but expanded the focus to include the surprise construction of a 10,000-square-foot Pineywoods Outreach

Center equipped with science, library, recreation, and multi-media facilities with afterschool and summer enrichment activities. Last fall, the center housed 200 evacuees from Hurricane Ike.

## What We Can Learn

Although the adoptive families have been through serious struggles, had to reinvent new lives to care for all the children, and even have had serious health repercussions, not one of the adoptions has been disrupted, and all of the children are faring well. Two are in now in college, two are MVPs in basketball, and two are MVPs in football. They are class leaders, members of the honor society, and junior ushers at church. They sing in the choir and participate in teen activities.

According to recent Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System statistics and estimates, 129,000 children are waiting in the U.S. foster care system with adoption as their goal. Nearly one-third (32%) are African American, disproportionate to the population. And yet nearly all the children adopted through Bennett Chapel, and nearly all adoptive parents, are African American. How have these outcomes been achieved in such a small community?

## Faith and Adoption

According to Robert Hill, researcher and author of *Synthesis of Research on Disproportionality: An Update*, “Faith-based beliefs are responsible for many positive outcomes for African American children and families. The Black Church has always served as an extended family to provide vital emotional, social, and economic support, and it was an African American priest—Pastor George Clements—who in 1980 started One Church, One Child to encourage more black congregations to adopt African American children who were languishing in foster care,” Hill continues. “The outstanding accomplishments of Bennett Chapel, with the enlightened support of progressive child welfare administrators and agencies, continue this strong tradition.” Ruth McRoy, Ruby Lee Piester Centennial Professor Emerita and Senior Research Fellow of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, agrees. “Reverend Martin and his wife truly practice what they preach. Through opening their home to children needing permanence through adoption they modeled ‘saving a generation’ ministry. Bennett Chapel families followed suit and opened their hearts and homes to children needing families,” says McRoy. “They are truly making a difference for children and demonstrating that African American families can and do adopt....

We can learn much from Bennett Chapel about recruiting adoptive families.”

The strong faith tradition of African American communities may not only encourage adoptions and provide social support for families, but may also help improve outcomes. Recent research that included Bennett Chapel families supports these conclusions, finding that faith was related to reduced stress in adoption, possibly providing effective religious coping strategies when facing adoptive stressors. “Religious faith often inspires people to sacrifice their own self-interests for the interests of others,” says Harold Koenig, Director and Founder of the Center for the Study of Religion/Spirituality and Health and Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University. “That motivation—serving others for faith-based reasons—often protects people from psychological and social stresses, and in this instance, could protect them from the stresses involved in adoption.”

## The Rural Advantage

While rural communities tend not to provide the economic, human, and physical capital more readily available in urban centers, they often provide a wealth of social capital. Being rural, community members know each other very well, have systems of relationships that can be traced back hundreds of years, and are used to coping with challenges and resolving problems fairly independently, with novel solutions that are



not dependent on resources. Unconsciously, they build their own pre-adoptive, adoptive, and post-adoptive resources from all parts of their community, in venues that more traditional models may not consider. And when a resource is not available, it is just one more hardship with which they are

already used to dealing. “Especially today, when innovative public sector solutions must be found to do even more with ever less resources, rural communities must find ways to link public, private, and philanthropic investment streams,” says Charles Fluharty, Founding Director and current Vice President for Policy Programs at the Rural Policy Research Institute. “The collaborative, integrative, and innovative spirit which is the hallmark of Bennett Chapel highlights why rural places are a unique laboratory, and perfect incubator, for extraordinary solutions to serious and complex social service challenges.”



Donna Martin with her daughter, Mercedes.

## Faith and Rurality at Bennett Chapel

More specifically, the families of Bennett Chapel believe that every child is God’s child, so that all have an obligation to provide the same love and care to the child as they would to God. They also believe that God can do anything, and as a rural community, are willing to be part of a miracle. Parents and children effectively use religious coping strategies to deal with everyday problems and major difficulties, and they believe a child is not limited to the fears, pains, medications, or behaviors that he or she begins with. It is not behaviors or scores that are the ultimate target, but the ability to give and accept love, to treat others with love and respect, and to love and accept oneself that are the mainstays of their faithful lives. “The hardest thing is when they regress,” says Donna. “They start asking why they’re here and think they aren’t making progress. So you cuddle them up in your arms and walk them through their blessings. You remind them of what used to happen and show them that those things aren’t happening any more!”

One need only look at Glen and Theresa Lathan. The Lathans had one birth child, a nephew, and the child of a friend living with them when they considered adoption. Even as they were being trained and assessed in 1998, the child welfare worker called Theresa and asked them to consider adopting five sibling girls. “I thought she was crazy,” says Theresa. The worker persuaded them to have the girls visit for a weekend. When it was time for the children to return to foster care that Monday, the girls wanted to stay with the Lathans. “Two weeks later they were ours,” says Theresa. The Lathans eventually adopted three more children. With two children now in college, Theresa still washes four loads of

clothing every day. “You never stop washing, you never stop cooking, you never stop cleaning,” she says. “The girls tell us all the time how much they love and appreciate us.”

The Lathans, along with 27 other families in this rural community, reached out to care for children because of their great compassion and their even greater faith. Are they really unique? Is there no

other rural church or small community that would do the same? To date, no other has. “The families of Bennett Chapel are an example of the diverse solutions to rural service delivery challenges which are being developed in creative, place-specific models across the geography of rural America,” says Fluharty. “Sadly, sufficient research has not been done to enable us to lift up and replicate these very special initiatives, so that other rural communities, and our urban counterparts, can benefit from these successes.” But the Martins are hopeful. They continue to visit interested churches, and offer their help and support. Donna’s advice—“fall in love with Jesus; then everything else will be all right”—shows her enduring commitment to adoption and the strength she finds in her faith.

At a recent visit to Possom Trot, Diann reminisced as she watched Nino, now 16 years old, play basketball. Nino is tall, smart, handsome, a fine basketball player, and a wonderful son. “When I first brought Nino home with me, everyone asked, ‘Who would give up a child like that?’ I couldn’t understand it. And then one day Nino asked me, ‘Momma, why did it take you so long to come and get me?’ I told him, ‘Nino, it took me this long to find you,’” she says. “It’s a blessing from God that these children came into my home. Now that they’re with me, I’ll never let them go.” ■

*Kathleen Belanger PhD is an Assistant Professor at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Her dissertation, The Impact of Religiosity, Religious Support, and CPS Support on Special Needs Adoption: Child, Family, and Parent Outcomes, focuses on issues raised by the Bennett Chapel adoptions. She also researches, publishes, develops, and evaluates programs related to rural social services, rural cultural competence, and racial disproportionality in child welfare. She can be reached at 936-468-1807 or kbelanger@sfasu.edu.*

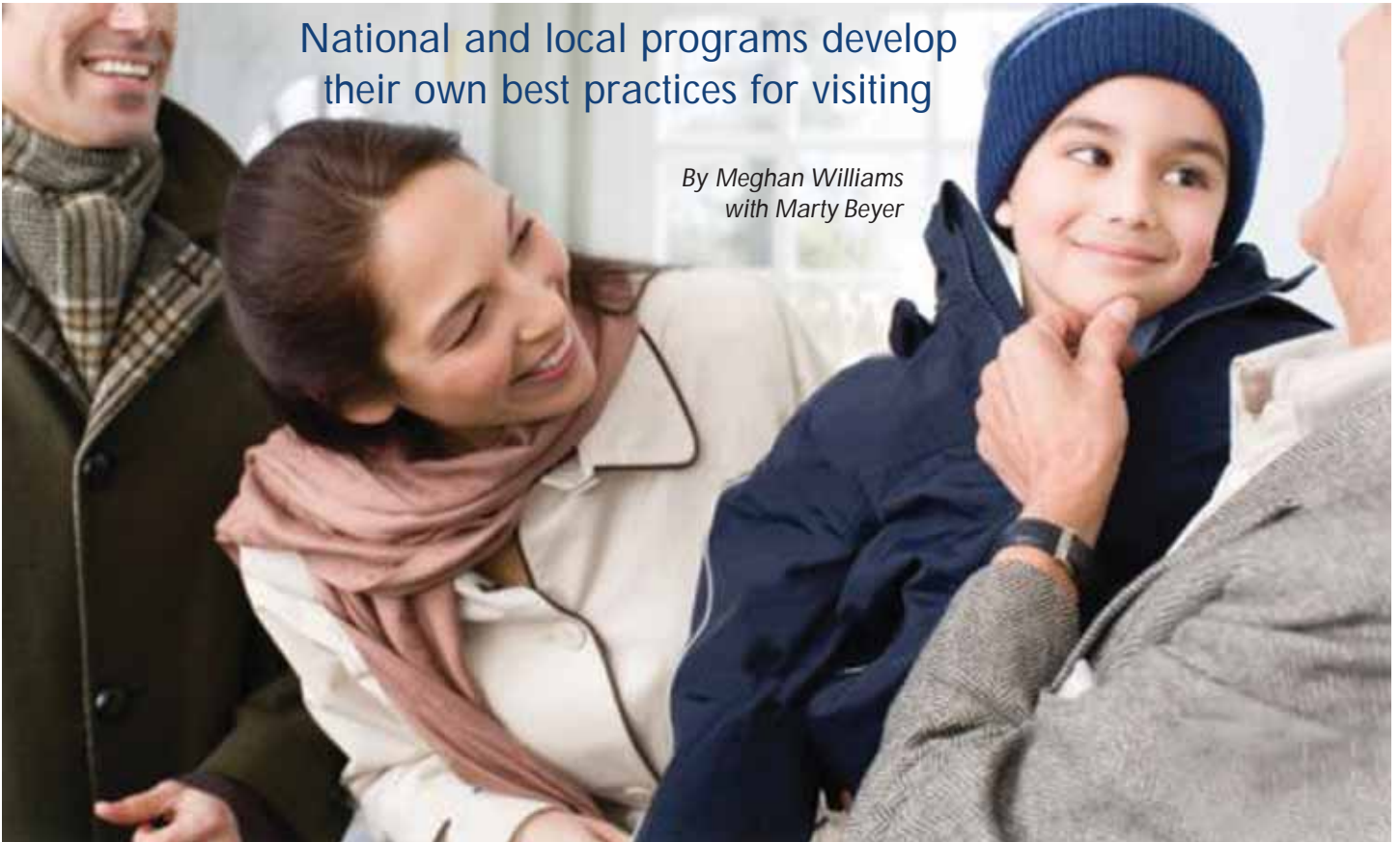
*For more information about Bennett Chapel Family Ministry, or to purchase Small Town, Big Miracle, visit [www.bcministry.org](http://www.bcministry.org).*

*Next month, the Voice will publish a follow-up article about rural cultural competence, worker support, and a flexible agency.*

# Exploring Options for Better Visiting

National and local programs develop their own best practices for visiting

By Meghan Williams  
with Marty Beyer



*This is the second of two articles about changes to parent-child visits.*

In response to an emerging consensus about the importance of allowing children in care to visit with their birth parents, there are several programs that aim past the limited policy and create better practice. Visit coaching and therapeutic visiting are two systemic approaches; Reunity House in New Jersey and Families Together in Rhode Island are well-known local innovations.

## Visit Coaching

Working with major system reforms in Oregon and Alabama prompted child welfare consultant and author Marty Beyer to think about improving visits. “We interviewed a bunch of families whose children had been in care longer than six months,” Beyer explains. “Among the interview questions was

‘Why did the child come into care?’ It was really impressive that none of the parents could answer that question.”

She knew it was important not just for visiting, but also for the post-reunification parent-child relationship, that parents could identify the unique needs of their children. Beyer felt parenting classes were too broad in approach and supervised visits didn’t contribute to progress; she settled on the idea of a visit coach to support parents as they took back responsibility for their children.

Which does a visit coach more closely resemble—the first-base coach for a baseball team who stands on the field and offers real-time guidance, or the head coach who watches from the dugout, saving critique for after the game? It depends, Beyer says. She likes to think a visit coach is more like a soccer coach, giving individualized instruction.

“When people first hear about visit coaching, they will say, ‘oh, I already do that,’ and what they mean is, ‘I tell parents what to do during the visit,’” Beyer says. “That’s not what visit coaching is.”

Beyer used her experience with families to give an example of how a case might unfold: A young mother, upset by her newborn's removal, confronts her caseworker at supervised visits. The mother wants more visits and a different placement for the baby, who cries frequently. A visit coach would help the mother put aside her own frustrations and focus on the baby's needs, suggesting visits in the morning when the baby is less cranky. The mother may also propose a quiet, private room and soothing music to calm the baby, which the coach could arrange.

Visit coaching is based on a belief that parents can overcome anger, sadness, and other obstacles to make visits happy for their children. The program aims for interactions similar to those the family enjoyed when they were living together.

## ***Supporting Parents to Support Children***

Coaching comes from “a child-needs-focused approach rather than a parenting approach to visits,” Beyer says. This shift in perspective means visit coaching is fundamentally different from supervised visits and parenting classes; Beyer believes in many cases it can replace both.

Instead of viewing the agency as owning the visit—setting the time, place, frequency, and conditions—families are coached to make visits as homelike as possible. Parents are encouraged to make visits a celebration of the family by including favorite activities: taking pictures, making a scrapbook, telling stories, singing songs, and so on. A 15- to 30-minute meeting with the coach before and after each visit provides time to plan ahead and reflect. By planning their own visits with a coach's guidance, parents practice the lifelong habit of identifying a child's needs and adjusting parenting to meet them.

Stella Husbands, a family visiting specialist at Richmond Hill Family Center in New York, has been visit coaching the past two years but has 11 more years of experience with visiting in general. She believes the planning meetings help parents think about their goals with their children and how to achieve them. “By having a post-visit and a pre-visit, it makes a big difference,” she says. “In the pre-visits we normally try to find out if [the parents] have any plans or anything they would like to do.”

Siblings may compete with each other for their parents' attention, but coaches help parents spend a little special time with each child during every visit. Special visit planning also occurs in visit coaching with infants and teenagers. Visit coaches support parents in attuning to their infants by emphasizing that reciprocal communication with newborns develops attachment, and they facilitate improved communication between teens and their family members and other adults to build connections that endure after they leave foster care.

Coaching helps the parent and foster parent encourage the child to live happily in two different families, which relieves painful “loyalty” pressures. It is important not only for the foster parent and parent to communicate but for the child to see them interact in a friendly way. When caseworkers and visit coaches include parents and foster parents together in regular discussions, everyone has a shared understanding of a child's difficult behaviors and can use the same approaches in managing them.

One of the challenges of visit coaching is helping parents not get discouraged—change takes time, time when they feel they are losing their children. Many parents are themselves debilitated by trauma, learning disabilities, and poverty, and they are fragile as they “start over” in alcohol and drug treatment and domestic violence programs. Husbands said she works with case planners to find out what other issues the

parent is working to overcome, and she helps parents see the importance of solving their problems. “What I do as a visit coach is encourage them,” she says.

When they have a visit, parents may be overwhelmed by their mixed feelings of pleasure, sadness, awkwardness, and defensiveness, as well as competitiveness with the foster parent. Even though they enjoy their children, visits make many parents feel inadequate and powerless, and separating from their child in visit after visit is very painful. Coaches help parents work through these obstacles and emotions so they are able to return consistently over the



*A mother and son take a break from building with wooden blocks at the Providence Children's Museum.*

long months that their children are in care. Parents benefit from the visit coach's validation of their complicated feelings about visits, but the coach's primary goal is to help the parent understand what the children are feeling and what they need.

## Implementing Visit Coaching

Implementing visit coaching with families when their children enter care, or in preparation for home visits prior to discharge, requires leadership for an approach entirely different from supervised office visits. Visit coaches need to be trained to resist directing visits or telling parents how to parent, since it's unlikely to be productive.

"Imagine that you've been doing something all your life without anyone telling you how to do it," Husbands says. "Of course we have a little resistance."

Her agency does visit coaching for a family over a period of 90 days, with one visit a week in a private room. This is an improvement over their previous practice of biweekly visits, when a private room was not guaranteed; parents have appreciated the change. "Some parents say yes, they do feel much better, they do like coming here," Husbands says. "They are much more receptive to visit coaching."

Training for visit coaching can include a diverse group, with more potential coaches than visit supervisors—MSW interns, foster parents, parent advocates, parenting class teachers, and others. Caseworkers may want to be trained as coaches for some of their families, and welcome separate coaches working with other families.

Coaches should meet with parents 15-30 minutes before and after each visit to help the parents control their feelings and review their children's needs. Revised documentation means an individualized format for coaches to write notes about each visit that document the child's needs and what the parent did to meet each one, as well as a parent self-assessment.

Coached visits occur outside of the agency much sooner than unsupervised visits, because the coach stays with the family. Parents can get involved in their child's school and attend extracurricular activities and medical appointments with a coach. Visit coaching playgroups of young children are also a way for parents to learn from each other.

Above all, visit coaches learn to be comfortable in a supporting role, guiding parents to recognize and fill



A father and daughter learn about bones and x-rays at the Providence Children's Museum.

the needs of their children during and after their time in foster care.

## Therapeutic Visiting

In its application, visit coaching resembles therapeutic visitation; "they're definitely very closely linked," says Marian Silverman, director of therapeutic visitation at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. She's worked with Beyer in the past, and currently works closely with the Administration for Children's Services and BridgeBuilders, a community organization. Like coaches, therapists are "part of a team with the parent," and they help keep the focus on the children's needs, but can also counsel parents when they want to talk about issues outside of visiting.

Therapists are also able to work with special populations of parents. "Therapeutic visitation can provide a service to families that are a little bit more difficult to work with, either because there's some sort of personality issue or mental health issue," Silverman says. It can also be a tailored approach for parents who may have two of three children back but need help to fully reunify their families.

Silverman emphasizes that therapy can come into play at any point in the process. "It doesn't always have to mean that the parents are so far off [from reunification] that we got them," she says. "Sometimes people definitely use us as a last resort...but that doesn't always work out anyway." She added that some judges require therapeutic visiting sessions as part of a visiting plan.



## Families Together

Nearly 10 years after finishing her master's degree, Heidi Brinig started working at the Providence Children's Museum—as an intern. “That was the way to get my foot in the door,” she explains. She had been a children's outpatient therapist in foster care, and saw the museum as a great potential resource for a therapy program. But to design something she had to know how the museum worked, so the director and the board agreed to an internship that let her work in every department.

Brinig also consulted the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to get a better grasp on the system. “I gained a thorough understanding of what was needed not only for the families, but also for the workers,” she says. She came up with a program—a therapeutic visiting session for families to play and learn together at the Children's Museum during its regular hours—and piloted it in February 1992.

The families DCYF currently refers to the program are on the road to reunification; most have been in the system at least four months and have a permanency plan. But Brinig is making a push to offer Families Together sooner, to parents whose children were removed fewer than 60 days before. She feels an earlier start may help put families on the right track.

Several years ago the Families Together program added a component; in addition to the clinicians who work with the families at the museum, there are consultants who work with DCYF social workers to bolster their visit training. Consultants help social workers meet with families, develop a visit plan, and document visits. Brinig is happy to have discovered a way to aid social workers. “They have incredibly complicated and difficult jobs, and if we can support them and that improves their practice, I'm all for it,” she says.

Brinig is not shy about sharing the lessons learned from the program. “We have certainly contributed to change how visitation is viewed,” she says. Families Together staff has worked with DCYF to design a visiting room in Federal Hill House, a Providence community center. They also collaborate with the Rhode Island College of Social Work on training for new social workers.

After receiving national attention and awards, Families Together wants to spread the program. “We developed a toolkit for children's museums that may want to replicate Families Together,” Brinig says. She mentioned a handful of children's museums in New England that are working to partner with their social services systems on similar programs: The Long Island Children's Museum, the Children's

*Children and families alike enjoy the hands-on exhibits at the museum, including Water Ways.*



Museum of the Arts in New York City, The Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut in Niantic, and the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia.

After starting as a one-woman operation, Families Together has expanded to include five full-time staff, three part-time staff, and three interns. Over almost 17 years, about

walked him to see his father. "The little boy looked at me and said, 'Is this my dad?' The dad started to cry, and the child started to cry," she says. "This child and father embraced in a way—it was one of the most touching moments I have ever experienced.... It gave me such an affirmation of what we were there to do."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PROVIDENCE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

*The Providence Children's Museum offers hands-on exhibits to help children learn.*

1,300 families have gone through the program. "I've learned something from every family that's come through this door," Brinig says. "We try to bring out the best in every one of them, and hopefully we succeed."

She specifically recalled a father and young son meeting in the museum after years of very scarce contact. The little boy had been removed from his mother's care, and she was unable to meet the goals of her case plan. The father, who had not been involved in the process before, arrived at the museum early so staff could explain what was expected during the visit. When the boy came in, Brinig took his hand and

visited program within a plan developed with the families.

"We really want to address the underlying issues that led to the removals in these families," Kerr says. To that end, Reunity House hosts parenting classes, and has an in-house intensive outpatient program to treat drug addiction; it's part of an effort to have as many services as possible at one site, Kerr explained, making it easier for parents.

Ideally, Kerr would like to see families immediately after they become involved with the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS); "the sooner the better," she asserts. Commonly, families have already been in foster care four to

six months before they are referred to the Reunity House program.

Kerr explains that the therapist's role changes as each case progresses. "The therapist is in the room [at Reunity House] with the family when they start," she says, explaining that therapists actively model positive behavior and intervene if necessary. Parents meet with the therapist after a visit to discuss what happened and to set goals for the next week. Kerr said it is imperative that parents help plan visits so they are better prepared to plan life after reunification. She said New Jersey policy was recently revised to include more family involvement in the process.

A second phase of visiting includes longer visits out in the community. "The parents then start practicing," Kerr says; they may experience the child misbehaving at a restaurant or having a tantrum when it is time to leave a park. Overnight visits at Reunity House come later: "The family is getting ready for reunification, it's going to happen in the next month or two months," Kerr explains. She believes overnight visits—something of a litmus test for reunification readiness—are too often overlooked, and without them, parents can be overwhelmed when their children come home.

Parents are responsible for planning everything that happens from Friday evening to Saturday afternoon—making mealtime, bathtime, and bedtime go smoothly. "[It's] a snapshot of what it's going to be like when their children come home," Kerr says. Each family in the program gets one overnight visit to Reunity House, but often judges will ask for an additional one or two.

Reunity House videotapes the overnight visits and usually one of the earlier daytime visits, so the therapist and parents can review the tape and identify problem areas. "It's pretty powerful," Kerr says, recalling one mother who was surprised to see how harsh she seemed. "She actually was shocked: 'Is that what I sound like?'" Therapists hope to see parents applying the skills they have learned throughout the program and responding to their child's needs. But the overnight visit is not a final exam. "There's still time to work on things," Kerr says. "They're still having their weekly supervised visits."

After families are back together, Reunity House's work still is not done—and that's why more than 90% of families who go through the program remain stable, according to Kerr. She calls it the after-care phase, when staff members



A dragon greets visitors from the roof of the museum.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PROVIDENCE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

make in-home visits in the few months after reunification, "the most fragile time for the families." Parents get help with concrete issues, like arranging for daycare, and more intangible things, like helping children transition back into their birth families while they still have an emotional attachment to their foster families. Staff also provide referrals to community services the family may need.

Last year, two more Reunity Houses opened, in East Orange and Patterson, New Jersey. The South Orange program serves about 70 families a year, East Orange serves 80, and Patterson serves 35. "We've always believed in the program and wanted to expand it," Kerr says. ■

Meghan Williams is a contributing editor for Children's Voice.

Marty Beyer is a child welfare and juvenile justice consultant with a PhD in clinical/community psychology from Yale University. Her child welfare publications include *Visitation as a Powerful Child Welfare Service* and *Visit Coaching: Building on Family Strengths to Meet Children's Needs*. She invented visit coaching, and was invited by the New York City child welfare agency to train their staff and private foster care agencies in the practice. She can be reached at [martbeyer@aol.com](mailto:martbeyer@aol.com).

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# Down To Earth Dad

Patrick Mitchell



## 'Clueless' Parents Are Hungry for Good Information

I have a new reason to worry about dads and kids since Heather Paradis MD told me about the study she led with the University of Rochester and the Children's Institute in Rochester, New York. It turns out nearly one-third (31.2%) of parents of 9- to 13-month-olds have a mistaken understanding of when babies should be potty-trained, start talking, play cooperatively with others, and learn right from wrong.

The 10,000 survey-takers—98% of who were moms—showed confusion about developmental milestones. Children's cognitive stimulation, as well as social and emotional growth, may be impaired because of the confusion, the study suggests. "Take the toilet training question, for instance," Paradis told me. "If you have the expectation that a 12-month-old child is going to be successful at toilet training, I think that sets a parent up for frustration when their child is not able to achieve that." (Most children aren't ready to be potty-trained until they are between two and three years old, she notes.)

This frustration, born of low parenting knowledge, doesn't bode well for children. "Low parental knowledge was independently and strongly associated with poorer quality interactions with a child and less cognitive stimulation," Paradis says. "Improving parent knowledge may represent an opportunity for intervention that could demonstrably enhance parent-child interactions."

Paradis was intrigued by the apparent disconnect between what child- and family-serving programs, practitioners, and pediatricians think they're providing to parents of young children with regard to information on developmental milestones, and what they're actually providing in terms of usable information. "The biggest surprise is that even though there are numerous parenting books telling people what to expect when they're pregnant, once a baby is born, an astonishing number of parents are not only unsure of what to anticipate as their child develops, but they are also uncertain of how much they are to help their babies reach various milestones, such as talking, grabbing, discerning right from wrong, or even potty-training. Some parents expect too much of babies too soon and grow frustrated," she says. "Others underestimate their child's abilities, preventing them from learning on their own."

Results from the study—*A National Perspective on Parents' Knowledge of Child Development, Its Relation to Parent-Child Interaction and Associated Parenting Characteristics*—concern me in two ways. First, if so many moms are ostensibly clueless about developmental milestones, then how many dads are missing those milestones? And my other concern is that these weren't just first-time parents; many had other kids already.

According to Paradis, getting creative in the way information is presented to parents is necessary. "This is a wake-up call for pediatricians and parent educators. The medical community in particular needs to adapt to the technologies, and we've been lagging behind, relying on traditional

(print) methods of information. There's definitely a movement from within the pediatric community to examine the way that we deliver well-child care to kids and incorporate the use of media and digital technology," she says. She suggests that telephone recordings while parents are on hold waiting to talk to receptionists at doctor's offices and websites like [www.KidsHealth.org](http://www.KidsHealth.org) are examples of resources for parents that can showcase developmental milestones in non-print ways.

"In the old days, one's extended family network provided the bulk of the parenting information a new parent received," Paradis says. "Nowadays, though, with family members being relatively more fragmented and living geographically separate from one another, outside sources like books, the Internet, videos on parenting, and non-family members in their community play a much bigger parent-education role than in the past. Giving parents information when it's appropriate is the key." ■

A regular contributor to Children's Voice, Patrick Mitchell publishes a monthly newsletter, *The Down to Earth Dad*, and facilitates the *National Dads Matter!™ Project* for child- and family-serving organizations. He provides keynote addresses and trainings, and conducts *Family Storytelling Night™* events for programs and schools. To reserve Patrick Mitchell for speaking engagements, or to implement the *National Dads Matter!™ Project* for your families and community partners, call him toll-free at 877-282-DADS, or e-mail him at [patrick@downtoearthdad.org](mailto:patrick@downtoearthdad.org). Website: [www.DownToEarthDad.org](http://www.DownToEarthDad.org).

# Exceptional Children

## *Navigating Learning Disabilities & Special Education*



*Ellen Notbohm*

## The Teacher and Learner in All of Us

**B**y learning you will teach; by teaching you will learn. This old Latin proverb embodies the notion that learning is circular, that we are all both teachers and learners for all of our lives. To be effective teachers, whether community professionals, instructors in the classroom, or parents in the home, we must continually learn from those we seek to guide. How can it be otherwise? Children are not prepackaged fare. No single method or tactic is a sure thing and achieving success is too often a matter of discovering what doesn't work, as much as discovering what does.

lay aside our egos and become child-centered in our approach, to value the process as well as outcome, and to be willing to go off the beaten path. It challenges us to place less value on data and scores, and rather turn our efforts towards relationship-building, cooperation, and igniting the thrill of exploration and discovery. Circular learning acknowledges that true teaching isn't only about putting information into the minds of our children. Rather, it is striving to bring something out of every learner. That 'learner' is not just the child; it's you, and me, and every-one with whom the child will interact. The key to successful teaching in any venue is the recognition that the most meaningful learning is achieved in social context that prepares children for "real life."



Teaching is more difficult than learning, observed German philosopher Martin Heidegger, because "what teaching calls for is this: to let learn." As adults, we bear the burden; we must relinquish all our conceits and presumptions in order to let ourselves learn what we need to know to be able to teach a child. Circular learning challenges us to

to become a part of the world at large," she says.

Lynas' community classroom provides a model applicable to any social unit, as students help one another move toward successful transitions, fall into consequence, or reap rewards—together. "They discover for themselves that cohesive action yields consistent positive reinforcement and reward," she



says. This is a lesson in how our social-driven society works in the larger context—in situations such as business promotions, interpersonal relationships, team sports, political or social activism, and in the greater global community. Teachers can reinforce this lesson by assigning peer buddies, maintaining a structured and consistent system of expectations for the entire class (so that everyone is modeling at all times), commending effort and not just outcome, and focusing on what the child can do rather than cannot do. These tactics are the building blocks of a solid circular, interdependent learning community.

Promoting a cycle of encouragement and reward is key; taking responsibility for one's self should be the first step, not the end goal. "Life rewards us for acting responsibly, but we benefit more fully and more wholly when acting cooperatively," says Lynas. Whether classmates, teammates, or families, the group who together reaps either reward or consequence learns that they have the power to create the most successful environment when working as a team.

The challenge for adults as teachers is a familiar one: to maintain consistency in conveying to children the importance of community and their responsibility to each other. There is also personal challenge: to remind ourselves as teachers not to

become frustrated if some children do not ever fully "get it." The need to continually reinforce the idea of cooperative community does not suggest that the system is not working. Rather, it reinforces the very concept of reinforcement and how necessary it is to ensure success in other aspects of the children's lives, not only when in the classroom or home.

Recognizing the teacher that lies not only within each of us but within each of our children is the foundation of any success we will achieve. It speaks to trust, respect, and the value of every individual, without which real learning cannot flourish. The first yellow brick in the road is that wonderfully empowering acceptance that every moment is a teaching and learning moment in which we are all both teachers and students. It's an invitation to a dynamic partnership, to create multi-dimensional spheres of learning for all of us. ■

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This article was adapted from the book *Ten Things Your Student with Autism Wishes You Knew* (2006, Future Horizons, Inc.) by Ellen Notbohm.

Three-time *ForeWord Book of the Year* finalist Ellen Notbohm is author of four award-winning books on autism, including the acclaimed *Ten Things Every Child with Autism Wishes You Knew*. For book excerpts, to learn more, or to contact Ellen, visit [www.ellennotbohm.com](http://www.ellennotbohm.com).

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# Creating a Win-Win Internship

American Humanics partners with universities and nonprofits to facilitate internships and expand the workforce

By Richard Potter

**R**achel Dotson found the less traveled career path to youth work through a part-time job with Middle Way House, a domestic violence shelter in Bloomington, Indiana, in 2004. Funded by Federal Work Study from her university, the experience affirmed Dotson's passion for working with children.

The staff at Middle Way House recognized her talents, knew she would fit in with the employees and residents, and offered her a full-time position. For the next three years Dotson led the agency's children's programming. She left last year to become director of program services for Girls Incorporated of Monroe County, Indiana, but Dotson didn't forget the way that she entered the field: She immediately went to work to recruit interns for their summer camp programs. "Interns get to know nearly every aspect of the organization," she says. "Even though they are here for a short time, when they leave they are real advocates for your organization, and a great talent pool when the time comes to hire someone full-time." One of Dotson's best sources for interns is the American Humanics program at Indiana University-Bloomington.

American Humanics (AH) is a national alliance of colleges, universities, and nonprofits dedicated to preparing and certifying future nonprofit leaders. The organization was founded in 1948 by H. Roe Bartle, a 30-year Boy Scout professional who later served two terms as mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, where AH is still based. He envisioned AH as a training and recruiting arm for the Boy Scouts, but he welcomed other youth and human service agencies' participation from the start.

Today AH is a blend of coursework and internship experience that prepares college students for careers with nonprofit organizations. Nearly 3,000 students enroll each year, typically in their junior year of college. They can usually complete the coursework requirements in tandem with the baccalaureate degree. Those who fulfill an internship at an approved agency earn the nationally recognized American Humanics certificate in nonprofit management and leadership.

"A strong internship adds value to the education of the student," says Kala Stroup, President of American Humanics, Inc. "The experiential component is an essential element of the American Humanics certificate. We have been committed to the value of the internship since the very beginning."

In the last two decades AH has gone from working with 10 national nonprofit organizations and a dozen universities to its current size: The alliance includes nearly 70 academic partners



LEFT: Ann Yebei, intern Kim Mathews, and Destani Pence take a moment to pose for the camera at a Girls Inc. picnic. Mathews served as the teen program director during her internship, and would like to join Girls Inc. full-time after graduating college.

and 22 core nonprofit partners, and AH also facilitates the Nonprofit Workforce Coalition. The key factor in this growth was a partnership formed in 1994 with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which had been exploring ways to make nonprofit studies more accessible to an ethnically diverse body of undergraduate students. A \$2.5 million contribution from Kellogg, as well as \$1.2 million from the David & Lucile Packard and Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundations, helped further AH's mission.

## Internships: The Link Between College and Career

"Funds provided by Kellogg and other foundations helped American Humanics establish a solid curriculum and build a national presence," Stroup says. "With funding from the UPS Foundation we were able to publish *The Nonprofit Career Guide*, a first-of-its-kind textbook to help students of all ages envision their futures as nonprofit professionals. Our focus today is on helping nonprofits establish internship programs."

In *The Nonprofit Career Guide*, author and AH consultant Shelly Cryer highlights the National Association of Colleges and Employers' latest survey of recruiting practices, which found that employers offered full-time jobs to nearly two out of three of their interns, and that more than 70% of those offers were accepted. Nearly half of the interns came on board as full-time hires. Overall, employers reported that about 30% of all their new college-graduate hires from the Class of 2006 came from their own internship program.

"These figures are for all sectors combined," Stroup explains. "But nonprofits have some catch-up work to do. What if hospitals had no interns preparing to be future doctors? What if schools had no student teacher programs? A strong internship program is one of the best ways to recruit the right people to the right job and keep them there; it benefits the intern, the agency, and the sector as a whole."

Linda Maynard has always enjoyed working with children. In high school she worked as a babysitter, and in college as a youth counselor. Her interest in youth led her to the American Humanics program at Missouri Valley College in Marshall, where she earned the AH certificate and a bachelor's degree in youth agency management. To fill Missouri Valley's requirement for a 600-hour internship, Maynard chose to work at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Eastern Missouri in the summer of 2005. Her main focus was the Amachi program, a statewide initiative to match children of incarcerated parents in one-to-one mentoring relationships with volunteers. Shortly after she completed the internship, Maynard's supervisor resigned. "I was invited to join the staff full-time, and basically designed my own job description," she says.

At Big Brothers Big Sisters, Maynard applied classroom learning in volunteer management to help reduce the time required to process an adult volunteer mentor, resulting in a shorter waiting list for children. She now oversees the entire waiting-list process for the local agency. Thanks to fundraising knowledge gained in college, she also manages a number of grants. Recalling her own successful internship experience, Maynard hired Mary Schroeder, a senior in the AH program at Lindenwood University in Saint Charles, Missouri, as a marketing intern last summer.

"One major hurdle that I'm still trying to clear is the cost of my education," Maynard says. "As a summer intern I worked 50 to 60 hours a week in order to meet the 600-hour

## Finding Funds

Funding an internship program can be a challenge, especially when the program is just getting off the ground. Here are three resources that may prove helpful; for more information, see Shelly Cryer's book, *The Nonprofit Career Guide*.

### AmeriCorps\*ProCorps

is an AmeriCorps initiative administered by American Humanics that places students and alumni of AH-affiliated campuses in paid AmeriCorps positions as volunteer coordinators and at-risk youth workers. AH ProCorps members can serve in full-time (1700 hours), half-time (900 hours), or quarter-time (450 hours) positions and earn an AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$4,725. The education award may be used for future tuition expenses or applied to federal student loans already incurred. Visit [www.humanics.org/procorps](http://www.humanics.org/procorps).

The federal government recommends that colleges allow Federal Work Study students to work off-campus in community service positions. Currently, schools are required to spend 7% of their total allocation on such positions. Some schools may require off-campus employers to contribute up to 25% of the wages, but others fully subsidize them. Federal Work Study programs are managed by different departments on different campuses—organizations interested in participating might start at the office of financial aid or career services. Visit [www.ed.gov/programs/fws](http://www.ed.gov/programs/fws).

### The NextGen Leaders

Program is a competitive academic award administered by American Humanics for students enrolled in the AH program. NextGen Leaders receive a stipend of \$4,500 during the internship, along with access to a network of nonprofit leaders serving as mentors. By 2012, AH will recognize 1,000 students with the NextGen Leaders award. Of the 250 NextGen Leaders recognized to date, nearly 50% are students of color. Visit [www.humanics.org/nextgen](http://www.humanics.org/nextgen).

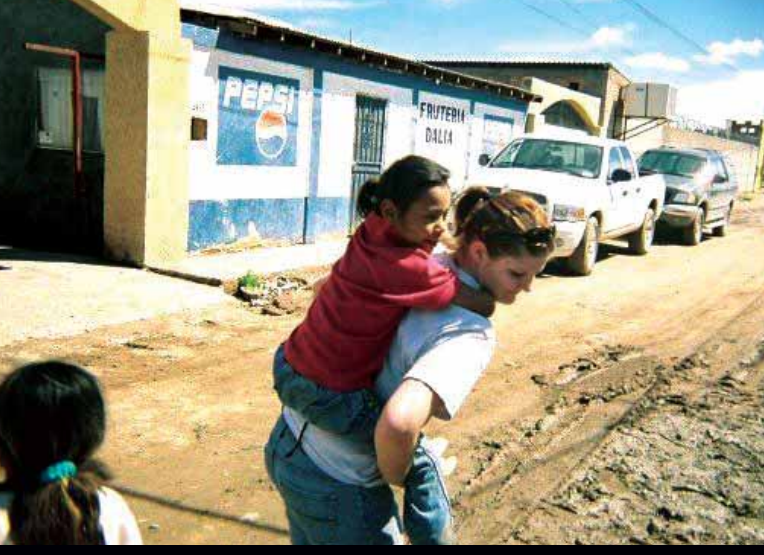


PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN HUMANICS



PHOTO COURTESY OF LACY HATMAKER AND AMERICAN HUMANICS

“We invited Humanics to apply for this grant primarily with the AH students in mind, after learning that the unpaid internship is one of the biggest barriers to completing the AH certificate and joining the nonprofit workforce,” explains Robert Long, recently retired Vice President of Philanthropy and Volunteerism programs with the Kellogg Foundation. “But a long range, secondary objective is to demonstrate to nonprofits that a well-managed internship program that pays a living wage is a good, long-term investment. It will improve both employee recruitment *and* retention.”

The NextGen Leaders program complements the AmeriCorps\*ProCorps program, established in 2005, in which an AmeriCorps member receives a salary from the nonprofit agency plus an education award of up to \$4,725 based on hours worked in an internship position. To qualify, the intern’s activities must be focused on volunteer management or working with at-risk youth, and the internship site must be approved by American Humanics.

Kim Mathews, a junior at Indiana University–Bloomington, took advantage of both programs last summer. Working a total of 450 hours with Girls Inc. of Monroe County, Mathews earned \$4,500 through NextGen and an AmeriCorps education award of \$1,250.

“If I hadn’t received NextGen and AmeriCorps funding I probably wouldn’t have done the internship—it wouldn’t have been financially feasible,” Mathews says. “I probably would have ended up getting a regular full-time job.”

Mathews is one of the interns Dotson hired through AH. Based on the internship experience, Mathews would like to work for Girls Inc. after graduation. “I feel like I grew so close to the organization. I knew going in that I really supported the mission and the goals and the vision,” she continues. “But actually being there for as long as I was and getting to meet all of the girls, and the parents, and the other staff, and seeing how mission-based they were, it was very, very inspiring. I would definitely, *definitely* want to work there again.”

The Girls Inc. internship is designed so that each intern gains experience planning and evaluating a specific program. “Kim was our teen program director,” Dotson says. “She did a lot of research and made community connections to set things up for the teens, as well as just spending a lot of time with the girls and building those relationships. Kim took on a huge amount of responsibility for an intern.”

The time spent making community connections has piqued Mathews’ interest in fundraising. “One of my minors is fundraising and resource development,” she says. “That’s something that I think would be a really challenging but rewarding experience.”

The internship was a win-win situation for Mathews and the agency. Dotson knows not all experiences will be so positive, but these exceptional successes lead her to wholeheartedly endorse the concept of nonprofit internships. Girls Inc. of Monroe County hosted three American Humanics interns last summer, according to Dotson. One of the interns learned a lot about the

TOP: Arizona State University American Humanics student Jessica Brzuskiwicz participated in a service project trip in Agua Prieta, Mexico, where students helped build houses.

BOTTOM: Monica McNeeley, interning at the Children and Youth Center in Brussels, Belgium, helps a young girl make picture frame magnets for the Boys and Girls Club National Kids Day.

requirement. Since the internship was unpaid, I had to take out student loans to cover my living expenses. Then I cashed in a 401K account to relocate to St. Louis.” Maynard has no regrets; she loves her job and finds the work very rewarding. “But if there was a way to help interns and new hires cover living and relocation expenses, that would be a good thing.”

## The Affordable Internship

In response to such concerns, American Humanics introduced the NextGen Leaders program in January 2007. Funded in part by a \$5 million grant from the Kellogg Foundation, NextGen is a competitive academic award that pays AH interns a \$4,500 stipend upon completion of the internship. Over five years AH will award 1,000 NextGen Leader stipends. Of the 250 NextGen Leaders recognized thus far, nearly half are students of color.

organization and enjoyed making community connections, but discovered that working with children is not one of her passions.

“Which is a wonderful thing to get out of an internship!” Dotson adds enthusiastically. Regardless of whether an internship leads to full-time employment, the intern gains experience, the agency gains an advocate, and the sector adds to its future nonprofit workforce. “I would be much more likely to hire someone from another community who had a similar internship on their resumé,” Dotson says.

Like many nonprofit agencies, Girls Inc. of Monroe County does not budget for internship stipends or hourly wages. They try to take advantage of programs like NextGen, ProCorps, and Federal Work Study, but there is no guarantee that students with access to these funds will be available from year to year. “It would be so helpful if we knew that we could count on at least one intern per year so that we could budget our staff time with that in mind,” Dotson says. “We’re stretched pretty thin in fundraising, and it’s challenging to find grants to fund staffing. But if grants were available, our staff would be very open to focusing those resources on the internship program.”

There are no formal requirements for an agency to host an American Humanics intern. The key to generating interest is to promote the agency on campus. One of the best ways to get noticed by faculty and students is for a staff member to volunteer as a guest lecturer at an AH-related class or event. The AH website includes contact information for all affiliated colleges and universities.

## Plans for the Future

The Kellogg funding for the NextGen Leaders program also includes a modest amount for program evaluation. In accepting the stipend, NextGen Leaders agree to maintain contact with AH for at least five years. “This will allow us to track career paths, identify weaknesses and strengths of the internships, determine which competencies are best developed through the internship, and promote best practices for recruiting and retaining a diverse, talented workforce,” Stroup explains.

Based in Kansas City, American Humanics is part of a collaborative that includes leaders from William Jewell College, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and the local Council on Philanthropy. “One of our objectives is to create a training program for nonprofits that wish to establish an effective internship program,” Stroup says. “The pilot program will help us develop a credential to demonstrate that a nonprofit agency’s internship program consistently meets nationally recognized standards of excellence.”

AH has made good progress at the national level, securing scholarship funds and drawing attention to the need to prepare next generation nonprofit leaders. The focus is now on the regional and local level, where the passion that drives the future leader intersects with the needs of the community. Mathews’ experience with Girls Inc. illustrates what AH has in mind.

“There was a 9-year-old girl at summer camp who was terrified of the water, just absolutely terrified,” Mathews recalls. She decided to try and help the little girl and test skills she had learned from college coursework in psychology and youth development. “To be honest, she had a lot of textbook, early childhood problems. She was kind of a complicated child to deal with,” Mathews explains. “I managed to get her in to her ankles and I said, ‘You know, maybe this is something that you can teach yourself this summer. Why don’t we make it a goal that every time we come back you can go in a little bit further, just until you’re comfortable, and we’ll see what happens.’”

The young girl agreed. Every week they would hold hands and go a little bit further into the water. By the end of the summer the girl was swimming without a life jacket, she passed her deep-water test, and she could go off the diving board and the slide.

“Seeing her accomplish that really inspired me,” Mathews says. “Instead of telling her mom, ‘Your daughter got into trouble again today,’ being able to tell her, ‘Your daughter learned to swim today, she took off her life jacket,’ and just seeing how proud she was and how proud her mom was, it was so inspiring. If you want to make the biggest impact on people and help to shape society and make it a better place, the number one place to start is working with children.” ■

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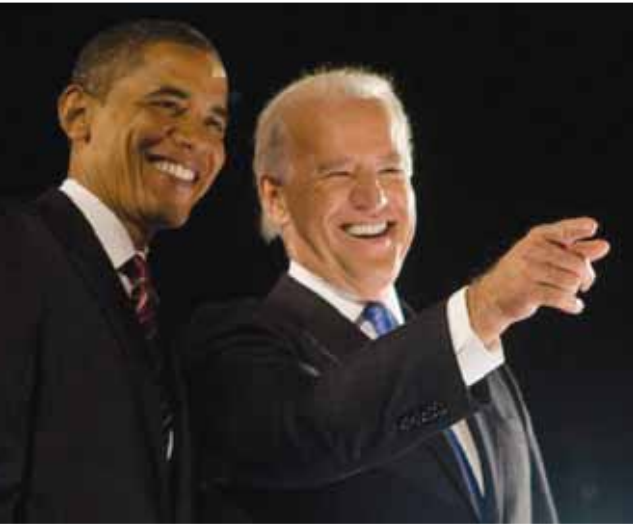
PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN HUMANICS

*Tomika Anderson, an AmeriCorps intern with the Student Conservation Association, helped teach hundreds of children about fire education and prevention at Camp Smokey at the Cal State Expo in Sacramento, California. Anderson now works for American Humanics.*

## More Resources

*The Nonprofit Career Guide: How to Land a Job that Makes a Difference* by Shelly Cryer, published by Fieldstone Alliance in collaboration with American Humanics, provides a comprehensive overview about work in the nonprofit sector. With it, readers will find the competitive edge needed to land a great job and build a rewarding career. Order from bookstores or directly from the publisher at [www.nonprofitcareerguide.org](http://www.nonprofitcareerguide.org) or call 800-274-6024.

# ★★ WITH CHANGE COMES ★★ OPPORTUNITY



By Elizabeth “Libby” Foster



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AS THE OBAMA  
ADMINISTRATION  
AND A NEW  
CONGRESS BEGIN  
WORK IN  
WASHINGTON,  
WHAT LIES AHEAD  
FOR AMERICA'S  
CHILDREN?

Last November 4 culminated in the historic election of Barack Obama as the 44th President. His message of change transformed and united Americans, and broadcasts of his victory caused celebrations around the world. Kenya, the homeland of his father, declared a national holiday. People danced in the streets and honked their car horns in major world capitals, and in Chicago over 125,000 people stood in Grant Park to watch Obama accept election to America's highest office. "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer," he began.

Across the United States, smaller celebrations marked other victories. The Democratic Party took about 58% of Congress, but people on both sides of the political spectrum

stressed the importance of unity and support of the new President. "We have witnessed tonight in America a revolution of values, a revolution of ideals," said Congressman John Lewis (D-GA). "There's been a transformation of America, and it will have unbelievable influence on the world." And former President Bush pledged "complete cooperation" in the transition, calling Obama's victory a "triumph of the American story." Then again on January 20, Obama—the son of a white Kansas woman and a Kenyan man—took center stage as he was sworn into the office of the president. Millions flocked to Washington, DC, and along the train route that brought Obama to the inauguration, wanting to participate in the momentous occasion.

The Obama Administration brings with it big expectations, including the prospect of major child welfare reforms. Looking ahead, President Obama and his administration

will likely focus on child welfare-related issues such as better health care, combating poverty, and expanding early childhood initiatives. In considering the future for child welfare issues, it is important to take a moment and reflect on the successes of the recent past. The 110th Congress passed two historic pieces of legislation last October that will affect the lives of millions of people in this country, including some of our most vulnerable children in foster care.

## Mental Health Parity

In the 110th Congress, many legislators resolutely advocated for the passage of full parity for mental health benefits, as well as substance abuse disorder benefits that were not covered by the 1996 Mental Healthy Parity Act. The passage of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-343) was a long-fought victory. Employers with more than 50 employees who offer mental health benefits will now be required to offer equal coverage for mental health and substance abuse treatment as for physical health. Although the legislation became effective the day former President Bush signed it last October, most changes will not take place until January 1, 2010.

## Fostering Connections

The most significant child welfare bill of the past three decades, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) was introduced in the House by Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Jerry Weller (R-IL). In the Senate, Finance Committee chair Max Baucus (D-MT), ranking member Charles Grassley (R-IA), and John Rockefeller (D-WV) were the leads on the legislation. It was passed by bipartisan majorities in both the Senate and House and signed into law by former President Bush on October 7, 2008.

“This is an historic moment for foster children and families,” said Christine James-Brown, President and CEO of CWLA, shortly after the law passed.

“Not since the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 has this country had a bill that speaks directly to the needs of the more than 513,000 children in foster care.”

Implementation of the new law began immediately. Over the past several months, CWLA has examined the legislation and assisted member organizations with interpreting it. Additionally, CWLA is working on collecting resources to

support its member agencies with each phase of implementation. “We are going to be able to take better care of America’s most vulnerable children because of the major reforms contained in this legislation,” said Rep. McDermott. “And, we are clearly telling these children that they are not alone in America, and they can grow up in a loving, caring home with a chance at the American Dream.”

The de-linking of eligibility for adoption assistance from the no-longer-existing Assistance to Families with Dependent Children standards is an example of how the law will be phased in over time. Starting this October, de-linking will begin for children 16 years old and older. For every year following, the age of children will drop by two years and continue until eligibility for all children is de-linked by 2018.

Youth-related provisions in the law include the expansion of foster care for youth up to age 21 and providing new case management procedures to ensure youths’ smooth transition out of foster care. Although many states already have programs that allow youth to stay in foster care after they turn 18 years old, they have had to finance these programs without assistance from the federal government. The Fostering Connections Act offers states the option of extending foster care until 21 years old. New programs that promote a safe and stable exit from care are called

for in the law, and states will be able to receive federal funds to finance such programs.

It is critical for the new administration to implement this bill in a timely and orderly fashion so that public and private agencies will be able to enhance their services and improve outcomes for children and families. CWLA has been working diligently to create a White House Conference for Children and Youth in 2010. That conference would play a critical role in assuring the efficient implementation of P.L. 110-351.

## White House Conference on Children and Youth

It is important to understand the White House Conference would not be a singular event, but rather a series of

meetings across the country. As James-Brown explains, “It’s an opportunity to bring people in communities together to think about not what is the child welfare system per se, but how can we do a better job of providing safety and permanence and well-being for our children.”



CWLA has been working intensely on gaining support to reestablish the conference. Sixty-nine members of the 110th Congress and more than 700 organizations have signed on in support. During the 111th Congress, the legislation on the White House Conference was reintroduced in the House (H.R. 618) by Congressman Chaka Fattah (D-PA) and Congressman Todd Platts (R-PA) with bipartisan support. CWLA will be looking for additional supporters of the White House Conference legislation among the new members of

Congress. As a senator, President Obama signed on as a co-sponsor in April 2008, and CWLA is encouraged that this important conference will be part of his agenda.

Approval of the legislation is the first major step in reestablishing this conference. The last session of the 110th Congress ended without a vote, overshadowed by the economic crisis and economic recovery plan. Another priority is continuing the ongoing work surrounding health care for uninsured children.

# A CONGRESS IN TRANSITION

## Have We Lost or Gained Key CWLA Partners?



### Leaving Partners

- Rep. Jon Porter (R-NV) lost his seat. He was a sponsor on the White House Conference for Children and Youth.
- Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL) retired. He was a key advocate on the Fostering Connections legislation.

### Gained Partners

- Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) returned to Congress. She is the original sponsor of the Senate version of the White House Conference on Children and Youth and a leader on child welfare issues.
- Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) is the new chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which is important for Medicaid and SCHIP. The committee will play a key role in health reform and the possibility of a universal health care system.

### Partners With New Job Titles

- President Barack Obama resigned from the Senate and moved on to the White House. On April 15, 2008, he became the 13th senator to cosponsor the Senate version of the White House Conference on Children and Youth.
- After eight years in the Senate, Hillary Rodham Clinton was selected as Secretary of State. On April 15, 2008, she became the 12th senator to cosponsor the Senate version of the White House Conference on Children and Youth.

*From left to right: Sen. Mary Landrieu, Rep. Jon Porter, Rep. Jerry Weller, Rep. Henry Waxman, and former Sen. Hillary Clinton, and Sen. Barack Obama.*

## Health Care

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) provides health insurance to more than 6 million children whose families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid and those who do not have private coverage. As a federal-state partnership, the federal government matches states' SCHIP spending. However, as a capped block grant, there is a finite amount of federal dollars available for the program.

SCHIP was created in 1997 and approximately \$40 billion was appropriated for the program's first 10 years. After several attempts in 2007 to improve and expand SCHIP, Congress extended SCHIP through March 31, 2009. The extension made it possible to maintain coverage only for those already covered. Though SCHIP has played a valuable role in ensuring access to health care for low-income children, there are still almost 9 million children without coverage. The 111th Congress has taken swift action regarding health care for children. Both the House and the Senate voted to expand and extend SCHIP, which will provide health coverage to almost 4 million more children.

Throughout their campaign, both President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden made health care reform a priority. Obama has stated that he wants to create a universal health care system by the end of his first term. Children would be mandatory beneficiaries under his proposed new health care system. Both Obama and Biden voted to re-authorize and expand SCHIP in 2007. As supporters of Medicaid and SCHIP, it is hopeful that major health care reform will start with this administration. Shortly after his election, Obama announced plans to create a White House Office on Health Reform. He asked Jeanne Lambrew to serve as the deputy director. As an advocate for the uninsured, Lambrew was a key creator of SCHIP and is considered an expert on Medicaid.

Federal Medical Assistance Packages (FMAP) are federal-state matching programs for Medicaid. In tough economic times when unemployment is high and Medicaid rolls increase, the percentage of federal dollars can be increased to reduce the financial burden on states for their Medicaid programs. Many members of Congress and advocates, including CWLA, have been seeking a temporary increase to FMAP. The House passed an economic recovery package (H.R. 7110) containing a temporary FMAP increase last September.



The Senate attempted to do the same in both September and November to no avail (S. 3064, S. 3689). Even the state governors asked the federal government for \$40 billion over two years to help support their Medicaid costs.

CWLA supports Medicaid and SCHIP as essential programs for protecting the well-being of children. CWLA supports the expansion of SCHIP to include more children and offer more services such as dental and mental health. Looking forward to issues of education and poverty reduction, many opportunities for improvement exist under the Obama Administration.

## White House Office of Urban Policy

During President Obama's campaign, issues related to urban centers and poverty became a focus. It appears that the White House will have a new Office of Urban Policy to address these issues. The office will target problems in high-poverty areas and focus federal spending on programs shown to be most effective. Another initiative of this new office will be to create Promise Neighborhoods. Community-based programs that have been proven to address and combat concentrated and intergenerational poverty will be the models for services in the expected 20 Promise Neighborhoods. These programs will offer services for children ranging from recreational activities to academic support.

The Office of Urban Policy will also address the education sector. During his campaign, Obama promised to improve urban schools by offering more service scholarships for potential teachers who commit to working in underserved districts. Obama also made plans to expand early childhood education with a new Zero to Five plan. This plan would require billions of dollars of funding to expand programs such as Early Head Start and create a Presidential Early Learning Council. Other issues to be addressed by the new office include reducing high school dropout rates, ending the cycle of youth violence, expanding high-quality afterschool opportunities, expanding the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, and creating the Nurse-Family Partnership, which would provide home visits for low-income mothers.



The Obama presidency and administration brings many possibilities for child welfare. “President Obama exudes the type of leadership, dedication, and commitment necessary to address the needs of neglected and abused children in this nation,” says James-Brown. “We look forward to working with his administration and pushing forward on legislation paramount to the well-being of children.” There exist some temporary opportunities even within the financial crisis and recovery efforts, however, there is hope that child welfare issues will become a larger priority during the next four years. As President Obama said several months ago, “Today we begin in earnest the work

of making sure that the world we leave our children is just a little bit better than the one we inhabit today.” ■

*Elizabeth “Libby” Foster is an intern in CWLA’s Government Affairs division. She is a Master’s in Social Work student at the National Catholic School of Social Service at The Catholic University in Washington, DC.*

## CWLA MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION

When you need expert guidance and support in the areas of communication, group facilitation, planning, program administration, research design, or analysis, call CWLA, the nation’s leading child welfare organization.

Our diverse team of experts has the resources and know-how you need as a CEO or manager. With decades of experience as direct-service social workers, administrators and CEOs, planners, and researchers, CWLA consultants draw on our vast resources to stay abreast of practice innovations, legislative changes, and promising program and management models.

CWLA provides in-person and over-the-phone consultation in areas like

- crisis management;
- developing and implementing program improvement plans;
- implementing and evaluating practice decisionmaking tools;
- evaluating programs, agencies, and systems;
- facilitating systems integration;
- marketing and customer service;
- strategic planning;
- fundraising;
- board orientation and development;
- leadership development; and
- continuous quality improvement.

As a benefit of membership, CWLA private and public agency members, except Supporting Advocates, are eligible for 24 hours of consultation annually. Additional consultation is available at a discount. For information on becoming a member, go to [www.cwla.org/members](http://www.cwla.org/members).



For more information, contact CWLA at [www.cwla.org/consultation](http://www.cwla.org/consultation).  
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# Children at the Crossroads:

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### SYMPOSIUM TOPICS

- This We Believe: Taking a Stand for Children and Families
- Children Growing Every Which Way
- Educating Children To Be Moral
- Helping Children Reach Their Full Potential
- Collaborating To Benefit Children

### TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED

Representation from Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Teach for America.

### GUEST SPEAKERS

**Gregory Michie**, renowned educator, author, and professor, will provide insight into the challenges of, and opportunities for, creating change in urban schools. Author of *Holler If You Hear Me: The Education of a Teacher and His Students* and his most recent book, *See You When We Get There: Teaching for Change in Urban Schools*.

**Michael Geisen**, 2008 Teacher of the Year, United States, will discuss how America's current system of educational accountability needs a much broader view and approach—one that reflects how true accountability comes from within and recognizes students as creative beings, not as future products, statistics, or "just kids."

## Congressional Recognition

CWLA presented New York Congressman Charles B. Rangel (D) with the Champion for Children Award during a press conference in New York City at the end of October. The award is given to individuals who have made extraordinary



Charles B. Rangel

contributions and advances to improving the lives of children and families. Rangel chairs the House Ways and Means Committee, which is involved in foster care, adoption assistance, and independent living issues. Additionally, Rangel also commissioned a report from the General Accounting Office to explore the disproportionate representation of African American children in foster

care. He was also instrumental in the 110th Congress' passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.

"Congressman Rangel's commitment and dedication to improving the lives of children and families has been an invaluable asset to CWLA and its member agencies throughout the country," CWLA President and CEO Christine James-Brown said when announcing the award.



Linda Spears, CWLA's Vice President of Public Policy and Public Affairs, presented the award to Rangel Thursday, October 30, at the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building. Several member agencies were able to attend, including Children's Village, Children's Aid Society, MercyFirst, New York Foundling, Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, and Jewish Board of Family and Children Services. ■

## Hope in the New Administration

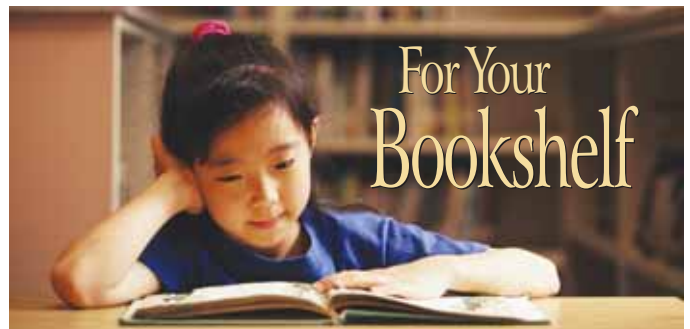


Barack Obama

Less than a week after Sen. Barack Obama (D) was chosen to become the 44th president in the November election, CWLA delivered a comprehensive briefing and set of recommendations to the President-elect and his transition team. *Hope for America's Children, Youth, and Families* covers five main areas: preventing child abuse and neglect; permanency for children and families through reunification, kinship care, and adoption; the health of children and families as tools for prevention and permanency; youth in transition; and the fundamental building blocks of a successful child welfare system.

"We offer this document as a detailed blueprint that, carried out over both the short and long term, can create a strong vision for this country's most vulnerable children and families—and all of America's families," the introduction reads. "CWLA envisions a future in which families, communities, organizations, and governments ensure all children and youth benefit from the resources they need to grow into healthy, contributing members of society."

To read the document, visit [www.cwla.org/advocacy/preselect08cwbriefing.pdf](http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/preselect08cwbriefing.pdf). ■



## For Your Bookshelf

Two new CWLA publications will make their debut at the National Conference February 23-25.

*Child Welfare* journal published a special issue in January/February exploring mental health concerns for foster care children and alumni. All nine articles in the issue stem from a conference to develop a consensus around guidelines for screening, assessment, treatment, and related issues. The special issue is one of six issues that *Child Welfare* publishes each year. To subscribe, visit [www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm](http://www.cwla.org/articles/cwjabstracts.htm).

Additionally, James L. Gritter's third book for CWLA examines the next step after open adoption. It is *Hospitious Adoption: How Hospitality Empowers Children and Transforms Adoption*. Building on his previous books, which promote the inclusion of birth parents, Gritter takes the approach that practicing goodwill, respect, and courage within the realm of adoption makes the process move smoother and enriches children's lives.

Copies of these and many other CWLA publications will be available for purchase at the National Conference at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, February 23-25. ■



# NEWS FROM THE HILL

## Advocacy Day

Just a month into the new Congress, CWLA's Advocacy Day provides a chance to speak with legislators about the issues affecting children, youth, and families. Advocacy Day is Tuesday, February 24, the second day of the National Conference, and begins with presentations from leaders of Congress about their priorities for the year and a briefing from the CWLA Government Affairs staff. Lunchtime offers specific state and regional caucuses where participants can discuss the issues, cover talking points, and hear advocacy tips. Buses will take participants to Capitol Hill in the afternoon to meet with their representatives and senators. Of particular importance to CWLA this year is building on the progress so far to reestablish the White House Conference on Children and Youth, as well as the new administration's response to passage of the Fostering Connections to Success Act.

For more information about Advocacy Day, contact Cristina Fahrenthold at [cfahrenthold@cwla.org](mailto:cfahrenthold@cwla.org).

## Supporting Children's Rights

On November 20, the 19th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child—the world's most ratified international human rights treaty—four panelists presented a briefing to encourage the U.S. Senate to accept the Convention. Focusing on the Convention's stance on children's health issues, representatives from the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychological Association, American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law, and CWLA discussed how ratification of the Convention would improve the well-being of children across national borders.

Each speaker gave supporting points from their expert perspectives. CWLA Vice President of Policy and Public Affairs Linda Spears explained that even without ratification, Convention recommendations have already made their way into practice through the CWLA *Standards of Excellence*. "Every single one of the guidelines we have in our *Standards on Health Care* comes from the CRC," she said. Echoing the other panelists, she said that unresolved childhood health

problems only become exacerbated later in life, and noted these problems are worse for children suffering trauma from being placed in out-of-home care.

Currently, the United States and Somalia are the only two UN members

that have not ratified the Convention, although the United States played a key role in drafting the document from 1979 to 1989. ■



*Meg Gardinier, chairman of the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, introduces the panelists, including Linda Spears, Howard Davidson, and Jennifer Kasper.*

## On the Line with



[www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio)

Scheduling is tentative and subject to change.

## CWLA Radio: Speaking for America's Children

The weekly radio broadcast, "On the Line with CWLA," provides a forum for child welfare experts, CWLA agency members, and child-focused political figures to share their thoughts on compelling current topics. Programs are broadcast live every Wednesday from 2 to 2:30 p.m. EST at [www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/CWLA-Radio).

Visit the page to listen to previous shows, set reminders for the next broadcast, and get programming updates. Selected upcoming programs include:

**March 11:** The Court's Role in Facilitating Permanency for Children in Foster Care

**March 18:** A Conversation with William Bell of the Casey Foundation

**March 25:** Social Work: The Past, Present, and What's Needed for the Future

**April 1:** Girls Health Screen Project for Girls in Juvenile Detention ■

# EndNotes

“I know it when I see it” would never work as a definition for a child’s well-being. Fortunately, the Welfare Information Network provides a list of resources for a variety of indicators of child well-being that are increasingly being used by governments and nonprofit organizations alike on the federal, state, and local levels. In addition to describing the demographic characteristics of a population, statistical indicators help measure the impact of welfare reform and other policies and practices. Child well-being indicators cover a host of variables, which indicate health status, cognitive functioning, and social and emotional maturity. Visit [www.financeproject.org/Publications/indicatorsofchildwellbeingresource.htm](http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/indicatorsofchildwellbeingresource.htm) for a list of electronic resources and publications, as well as brief summaries on what some states are doing to implement their own indicators.

*Sustaining Grassroots Community-Based Programs: A Toolkit for Community- and Faith-Based Service Providers* is a new resource from the Substance Abuse and Mental



Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). **Community- and faith-based treatment providers** play a key role in getting critical services for people affected by substance abuse and mental health disorders, and SAMSHA designed this toolkit to help these organizations plan for long-term survival. Grassroots organizations, which operate with time-limited grant funding and categorical funding, often have to search for funds to cover program expenses. The toolkit offers tips and planning worksheets to help achieve sustainability within six booklets: strategic planning; organizational assessment and readiness; effective marketing strategies; financial management; fund development and fundraising; and results-oriented evaluations. Visit <http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/prevline/pdfs/SMA08-4340.pdf>.

The American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law and Casey Family Programs, with the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania and the Juvenile Law Center, collaborate to maintain the Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (FCE) website at [www.abanet.org/child/education](http://www.abanet.org/child/education). As part of the mission to provide research and resources for policy and legal questions about **education for foster children**, the site includes a searchable resource library and chronicles recent relevant publications. The Legal Center FCE also sponsors periodic conference calls, which are open to anyone interested, and is linked to the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, of which CWLA is a member organization. ■

Colombian pop singer Shakira took the opportunity of the 18th Ibero-American Summit, held in El Salvador in October, to address Latin American leaders and urge them to give more support to **children in poverty**. According to an Agence France-Presse (AFP) article, the summit was planned to focus on youth facing poverty, but the global economic crisis took over the agenda. Still, participating nations signed agreements to help underprivileged youth. Shakira commented on the link between the two issues:

“We know that in this world financial crisis, hunger will spread in the poorest layers of our society and thousands

of children risk dying from hunger,” she said, according to the AFP piece.

Shakira started a children’s charity in Colombia in 1997, and helped launch the Fundacion ALAS (Latin America in Solidarity Action).

AFP reported that she presented a project that would provide food, health, and education to 22 million poor Latin American children under age 6. “In a country like mine, when a child is born poor, people die poor. But I’m fascinated by the fact that through education you can transform lives, you can end this cycle of poverty,” Shakira told Reuters. ■



Colombian singer Shakira and Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

A study published in *Pediatrics* this fall examines what type of family settings correlated to **injury in toddlers**. Recognizing that injury is the leading cause of death for U.S. children, the study used a sample of 3,449 children enrolled at birth in 15 cities; they were followed until age 30 to 33 months. Part of the motivation for the study was

the growing number of grandparent caregivers, which a U.S. Census Bureau estimate puts at nearly 1.8 million. According to the study's abstract, there

were fewer injuries requiring medical attention among

children in their grandparents' care, and more injuries in children who

were living without their fathers or with unmarried parents. "Household composition seems to play a key role in placing children at risk for medically attended injuries," the conclusion reads. "Risk Factors for Unintentional Injuries in Children: Are Grandparents Protective?" is in Vol. 122, No. 5 of *Pediatrics*, and online at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/122/5/e980>.

Acting Surgeon General Steven K. Galson has been crossing the nation to build participation in the "Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future" initiative to combat **childhood obesity**. The Childhood Overweight and Obesity Prevention Initiative was launched by First Lady Laura Bush in November 2007, and as part of it, Galson has recognized over 30 local programs across the country with "Community Champion Awards" for helping children stay active, encouraging healthy eating habits, and promoting healthy choices. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest 17.1% of children are overweight, with another 16.5% at risk of becoming overweight. For more on the initiative and the Community Champions recognition, visit [www.surgeongeneral.gov/obesityprevention](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/obesityprevention). ■



## Research Report

Doing their best to overcome the tough economic times, the National Center for Children in Poverty offers a two-for-one deal: a general report and state profiles. *Staying Afloat in Tough Times: What States Are and Aren't Doing to Promote Family Economic Security* examines three areas of **state-level fiscal policies that help families** avoid and cope with economic difficulties: work attachment and advancement, income adequacy, and asset development and protection. The study shows a wide disparity between states' policies, and the 50 individual state profiles allow further examination of the differences. For the report, visit [www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_833.html](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_833.html); for the state profiles, visit [www.nccp.org/profiles/fes.html](http://www.nccp.org/profiles/fes.html).

As part of a full report entitled *Developmental Status and Early Intervention Service Needs of Maltreated Children*, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute published a snapshot highlighting **intervention services for infants and toddlers**. The snapshot notes that states are required by law to provide early intervention services to infants and toddlers in substantiated maltreatment cases. The institute says that because maltreated children are at greater risk for developmental delays, getting screening and intervention services sooner could help prevent those delays. Download the snapshot at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~snapshots/Snap54.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~snapshots/Snap54.pdf) and see the full report at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/devneeds>. ■

## Did YOU Know?

For the first time since the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System data have been reported, at the end of Fiscal Year 2007 the estimated number of children in care dropped below 500,000, to 496,000. The total number of children served in FY 2007 is estimated to be 783,000, the lowest number since AFCARS data have been reported. This information is according to the Children's Bureau *Trends in Foster Care and Adoption* report updated in August 2008. Visit [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research). ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIEL HANSEN



# OneOnOne

## Questions and Answers with CWLA Staff

**Terri Braxton, Vice President, Business Development**

### As a fund developer, what are you most excited about right now?

I'm excited about the new initiatives we have going on. Our call for the White House Conference on Children and Youth has been going on for the past year, but it's getting closer and closer to the legislation passing. We're developing materials to help communities begin conversations about what the White House Conference would mean for children and families and what communities can do to influence policy and legislation for abused and neglected children. We have several hundred organizations already signed on to support the bill.

I am also excited about the new legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, which is the most comprehensive and important child welfare legislation passed in recent years. There are several opportunities for CWLA to get our programs and products out to our members and the general public in regards to this act. We have an excellent training curriculum for the relatives who will be caring for children separated from their parents because of abuse or neglect. The new law will enable many states to provide the same services and support for kinship providers as they do for foster parents. But kinship parents' training needs are different from a foster parents' training needs. Our PRIDE curriculum, *A Tradition of Caring (Kinship PRIDE)*, provides the tools and skills that kinship parents will need to safely nurture and protect their children. Most agencies only use our regular PRIDE to train kin, but the *Tradition of Caring* curriculum is completely focused on kinship care. It will also be available in Spanish! Also, we have several training modules that will be able to help families caring for relatives deal with specific issues that kids may bring into their home around behaviors and behavior management.

### Why are you hoping the White House Conference will happen in 2010?

I see, as most child advocates do, that this is an opportunity for children to be on the public's and policymakers' radar. The success of Fostering Connections is just step one—there's much more that can be done. The exciting thing about the call for the White House Conference is that it gets child welfare on the tips of the tongues of many regular people who aren't usually in the role of being child advocates. Everybody cares about children and wants them to be successful. The call for the White House Conference is going to bring child welfare to the forefront, and get communities to care about what's going on with their children and gain power to influence positive change.

**“The call for the White House Conference is going to bring child welfare to the forefront.”**

### What can CWLA do to help members save money amid the economic recession?

We know that our members are already having challenges meeting budget demands and raising money. Part of what CWLA does for our members is to help them both save money and make money. One thing we offer is our shared purchasing program, Consorta. We are trying to get information about Consorta out to our members and help them understand that we can help them get discounts on many of the products they buy. Additionally, our consulting and training services help people work smarter and more efficiently in their organizations. We have plenty of information on workforce development and employee retention, which is important because it costs a lot of money to recruit and replace good employees.

### CWLA is working to update its Standards of Excellence and expand the National Data Analysis System (NDAS). How will this help CWLA members?

When you're a high-performance organization, you can market yourself better and differently, and more people will want to use your services. For public agencies, using best practices to find success with their children can help them get reunified faster or find permanency sooner. Providing good

outcomes for children will save money in the long run, as kids come out of the system. More adoptions will provide more adoption incentive money. More children going home will enable states to spend less money. If the *Standards* are used to help kids who age out of care live independently, that certainly saves money for society as a whole. The major objective of our *Standards* is to help agencies have better outcomes, and when you have better outcomes, you're able to save money. If you're an organization that needs to contract with other agencies, the better your outcomes, the more likely you are to get business.

NDAS is such a valuable service for our members and for the general public, particularly when advocating for a specific issue or service. Having access to data comparing your state to another state can help justify why you should get funding or why a policy should be enacted or terminated. We are currently working on ways to expand NDAS to include information on counties as well. That way, agencies will be able to compare their county to neighboring counties, or be able to see which counties are similar to their own demographically, across the country. That will be an incredibly valuable service to our members, as well as students studying child welfare, federal and state policymakers, and the general public.

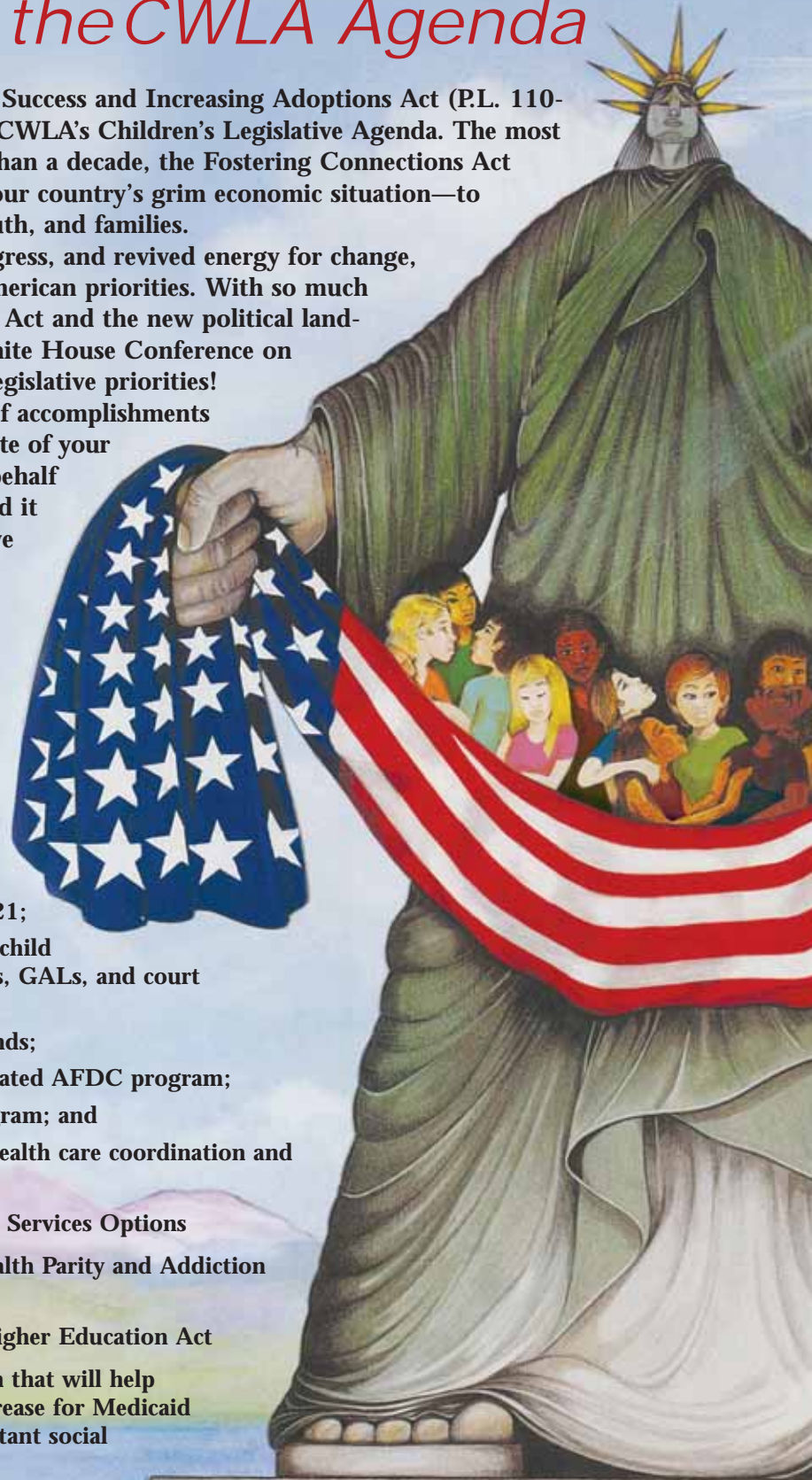
# WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN & YOUTH

## *Advancing the CWLA Agenda*

**E**nactment of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (P.L. 110-351) significantly advanced many areas of CWLA's Children's Legislative Agenda. The most momentous child welfare legislation in more than a decade, the Fostering Connections Act provides considerable opportunities—even in our country's grim economic situation—to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families.

2009 brought a new President, a new Congress, and revived energy for change, community involvement, and refocusing of American priorities. With so much momentum behind the Fostering Connections Act and the new political landscape, NOW is the time to re-establish the White House Conference on Children and Youth, to guide our remaining legislative priorities!

CWLA wishes to share this impressive list of accomplishments and advancements with you, as it is a true tribute of your advocacy. Every time you raise your voice on behalf of children and youth, someone is listening and it is our collective voice that brings about positive reform. CWLA encourages you to continue to work with us, so that children and families are truly made a national priority!



### ENACTED:

- ✓ Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which
  - Provides first-ever federal support for relative caregivers;
  - Offers a state option to continue federal support for youth in foster care up to age 21;
  - Opens Title IV-E training funds to private child welfare agencies, court personnel, attorneys, GALs, and court appointed special advocates;
  - Grants tribes direct access to Title IV-E funds;
  - De-links adoption assistance from the outdated AFDC program;
  - Reauthorizes the Adoption Incentives Program; and
  - Promotes educational stability and better health care coordination and oversight for children in foster care.
- ✓ Preservation of the Medicaid TCM and Rehab Services Options
- ✓ Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act
- ✓ Loan Forgiveness for Social Workers in the Higher Education Act
- ✓ Provisions in the economic recovery legislation that will help children and families, such as a temporary increase for Medicaid and Title IV-E and additional funds for important social programs such as TANF and Head Start
- ✓ Reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

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