



ADVOCACY NEWS



Fall/Winter
2006

Advocacy News is a publication of the Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center. FAPAC's mission is to improve the quality of life of the children in the DC child welfare system by empowering their foster, kinship, and adoptive families and by assuring the inclusion of the families' perspectives at every relevant table.

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Foster Parent Advocates in Action

Elaine Farley has been a foster parent since 1994 and currently is a FAPAC Board member and the PTA president for Park View Elementary School in DC.

Farley's advocacy work takes a great deal of time and energy as a member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Park View Elementary school, one of the oldest public schools in the city. She was elected president in 2005 and has been a member of the PTA since 1994, when her foster daughter attended.

Agenda topics such as fund raising and new ideas for the school are sometimes overshadowed by persistent realities brought up by parents and teachers. Issues include, over crowded class sizes, delayed building repairs, cut backs in music and art programs, shortened library hours, and reduced work schedules for special education teachers.



Elaine Farley

Farley states the importance of public schools in the neighborhood. "Having a school in your area is as American as baseball and apple pie; people really rely on things being in their community or environment. It's also convenient for working parents for drop off and pick up to and from school and after school programs."

Currently the school's future *itself* is uncertain. "For over a year there has been talk of Park View closing" states Farley. "At the beginning of this school year (2006-2007) it began to dawn on everyone." Farley adds, "We had a larger than normal turnout at our last PTA meeting. Three new teachers were hired at the beginning of the school year, since then, hours have been cut back for other long-term teaching staff. Our music teacher was let go. The typical classroom size is 30 students, and there is only one 5th grade and one 4th grade teacher." Building repairs include fixing peeling plaster, replacing rotting frames, broken sinks and toilets, dripping faucets, soot filled air circulation vents,

(cont. on p.3)

Kudos and Thumbs Up!!!!!!!

We acknowledge: CFSA partnership in hosting cross-training workshops with foster parents and social workers

We applaud: **Michele Rosenberg**, and **Norma Taylor**, CFSA Office of Training Services,

We acknowledge: CFSA taking their first steps towards resolving the long-term Medicaid card issue

We applaud: **Audrey Sutton** and **Uma Ahluwalia**

We acknowledge: The hiring of a Special Needs specialist through the Office of Clinical Practice.

We applaud: **Dr. Cheryl Williams**, **Dr. Roque Gerald**, **Cheryl Durden**

Applause and gratitude go to CFSA Administrator **Jesse Winston** for his dedication and commitment to follow through regarding distribution of placement information packages by social workers in his unit.

(For more information about these issues see FAPAC Advocacy Update, page 3).

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Letter to the Foster Parent Community From MAYOR ANTHONY A. WILLIAMS

Greetings readers:



It is an honor for me to write to all of you for the last time as the Mayor of the District of Columbia. The Foster & Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center is a crucial component in the ongoing effort to give every child in our city a loving home, and I sincerely thank you for your service to the children of the District. I believe that every child deserves a chance to succeed and that takes all of us: The Federal government; The District government; Non-profits; Parents; Teachers; Mentors and volunteers.

The great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individual concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity”. This is what foster and adoptive parents do every day.

Unfortunately, too many children in our city are still waiting for homes — **300 children in the District** don’t have identified homes. Another **750** children ages 12 and older have “non-family-based” plans. These waiting children tend to be older and are children of color. As we know all too well, the process of waiting can be devastating for a child.

However, the District continues to improve in finding homes for our children. At the end of August, Child and Family Services Agency was serving 4,523 children, including 2,410 (or 53 percent) in out-of-home placement. We continue to move more children to permanence more quickly through family stabilization and reunification, guardianship, and adoption. In FY 2005, 1,232 children reached permanence, and through August of this year, another 965 reached permanence. We are implementing additional strategies to support permanent outcomes for children that should significantly strengthen our efforts.

As an adoptee, and also as the Mayor of this wonderful city, I’m always happy to see organizations such as FAPAC working to protect our city’s children. I believe that every child deserves a chance to succeed in a loving, stable and permanent home. I now believe our city is committed to making this dream a reality for our children.

More than 40 years ago, my parents made the choice to open their home to one more child. In my life it has made all the difference. I’m an example of the difference a

caring family can make in the life of a foster child. Adoption changes lives. I know, because it changed mine forever. Indeed, when an individual provides a loving home to a child, they are really giving a gift to the world, as that child can grow up to have a positive impact on their community. I commend those of you who have opened your hearts and homes to our children. I know very well it is not always easy, but the reward of helping a child to fulfill their destiny is well worth it.

As my term comes to an end, I wish FAPAC continued success, as the stakes are quite simply the futures of our children. While much progress has been made during my administration, there is still much more to do. Rest assured, I will continue in private life to advocate for foster and adoptive parents, as well as their children. Again, thank you for all you do, and I look forward to working with you in this new phase of our ongoing crusade.

Sincerely,

Anthony A. Williams
Mayor



Training Means Much More Than Credit Hours:

FAPAC training workshops provide the opportunity for learning, growing, information sharing, and the chance to meet with highly skilled professionals in decision-making positions within the DC child welfare system. In addition, we offer a safe place to discuss and even disagree on issues, good food, childcare (at no cost to you), and camaraderie. In the last two months we have hosted two exciting training workshops. FAPAC thanks **Harvey Schweitzer** for his incredibly valuable September cross-training on Legal Issues and the dynamic panel at our October workshop on Effective Court Advocacy. This panel was truly special. The panelists were: Magistrate Judge **Karen Howze**, **Charmetra Parker**/AAG, **Maura Kennedy**/CFSA social worker, **Lise Adams** /GAL and Caregiver’s attorney, Children’s Law Center), and **Kenya Douglas**/ Adoptive parent.

SAVE THE DATES for our next training workshops:

January 20, 2007 Meeting the Mental Health Needs of our Children, a Cross-Training for foster parents and social workers;

also

February 23-25, 2007 Peer Advocacy Training weekend

Cross-training:

In September, FAPAC kicked off its cross-training project with a very informative training by **Attorney Harvey Schweitzer** entitled “Legal Issues In Child Welfare.” This is the first of many cross training opportunities we will offer, and are being implemented with the partnership and support of **Michele Rosenberg** and **Norma Taylor** in the CFSA Office of Training Services. The outcomes we hope to achieve with our cross training workshops include building partnerships and breaking down barriers between social workers and foster parents by shared learning experiences and dialogue, as well as assuring that social workers and foster parents will receive consistent information about policies, laws and services.

Medicaid:

The foster parent community has been crying out for years about the barriers to accessing medical services caused by not receiving Medicaid cards. FAPAC’s Health Access Survey conducted in 2005-2006 pointed to the fact that this problem has actually gotten worse in the recent future. Over the years this issue has been elevated to CFSA upper level administration many times. FAPAC is pleased to announce that we may have finally found our Medicaid hero. **Audrey Sutton**, CFSA Deputy director of Program Operations, with the support of **Uma Ahluwalia**, CFSA Interim Director, has put her energy into backing up her words of commitment towards resolving this issue and has made significant steps by locating many missing cards and distributing them. She is currently working on developing new systems so that children coming into care will have their cards distributed in a timely manner and so that children who have been in care without cards will begin to receive them.

(cont. on p.4)



Child Needs Provider Intervention Study (CNPI):

From October 15th through November 15th, CFSA is completing a study of a large sample of children in foster home care which include assessments of 230 children by CFSA and private agency social workers and the foster parents of those children. The assessments will be scored by staff at CFSA. The information from each assessment will be shared with CFSA Office of Clinical Practice and then put into a database.

CFSA will analyze the data to obtain overall patterns. The study will be used to find out the general needs of children and their foster parents in caring for them. CFSA plans to use data from the study as a basis to improve the process of determining foster parent board rates dependent upon the level of care needed by each individual child as well as to assist with leveraging resources throughout the District. The analysis of the data will be completed by January 2007. Implementation of the new assessment is planned to begin in the spring.

Placement Information Packages:

We are reaching the resolution of this long-term advocacy issue but are not quite there yet. As reported in our last newsletter, the packages are now ready to be distributed and clearly identifiable in their green folders. However, ensuring the practice follow through will be critical. We have been told by some of the workers under his administration that **Jesse Winston** has shown a strong dedication to getting this information out. We were told that he emails social workers when they have new placements to remind them about completing the package and keeps a stack in his office. Way to go, Jesse! We are grateful to you and your helping to make this process a reality.

Special Needs Coordinator:

FAPAC wants to acknowledge the Office of Clinical Practice for the addition of the new position of Special Needs Coordinator, to help identify and coordinate resources for children with special needs. We are delighted that one of her first focus areas will be helping to transition children who will need the services of DC’s Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration upon aging out of CFSA care. Historically, foster parents have often been left to navigate this process for the children in their homes without agency skill or knowledge in this area. Another significant focus area will be the identification and coordination of community resources for children with HIV/AIDS. Families needing to access this new available OCP support should try first through their social worker. If that is problematic or ineffective, you can call Cheryl Durden directly in the Office of Clinical Practice at (202) 727-7049.

(Farley, from p.1)

and installing better electrical and heating systems. Even though all classrooms do not have window air conditioning units, when all available units are in use, the circuit breakers are overwhelmed.

The city proposes to close the 91-year old school next year in order to begin renovation. During closing, students from Park View would attend Bruce Monroe on Georgia Avenue. Long term closings can have a devastating effect for the local community. Delays in repairs, soaring cost or other factors can slow or even derail the process. Currently H.D. Cook, another public elementary school, is closed for renovation. Delays have pushed the renovation start date 2 years. Work is to begin in January '07.

Recently, mayor-elect Adrian Fenty and Calvin Woodlawn, a representative from Councilman Jim Graham’s office and others attended a Park View PTA meeting. Farley was pleased to see concerned parents and teachers express their views about the possibility of Park View closing and consolidating with Bruce Monroe School.

Farley states, “After the meeting, members of the [Park View’s] PTA are allowing the city time to provide a detailed plan of the fate of Park View Elementary School. A variety of advocacy actions may be considered by parents and teachers, such as picket lines, letters and/or email writing, phone campaigns and requests for future meetings with elected city officials.”

30-day Medical Follow-Up Appointments

CFSA Office of Clinical Practice (OCP) needs your help to make sure your children have their necessary physical check-ups. We have learned from OCP that many of our children are not having their physical exams which are required within 30 days after their first (initial) placement. All foster parents need to be vigilant in making sure that they or their workers make these appointments for physical exams within the first 30 days children are in their homes, if it is the child's first placement in the foster care system. Foster parents who are not given a scheduled appointment by the social worker when the child is placed in your home can call directly to DCKids for an appointment at 1-877-932-5437 or 1-877-WDC-KIDS. For questions call Cheryl Durden in the Office of Clinical Practice at (202) 727-7049.

The Mockingbird family Model

The Mockingbird Family Model is a Resource Family Support Model based on the "extended family" concept where a "HUB" family provides respite and support to approximately six (6) to ten (10) Resource Parents (called Satellite homes). Together, a HUB family and the Satellite families constitute a constellation. On 10/27/2006, CFSA launched the Mockingbird Family Model pilot, starting with two (2) constellations. The pilot constellations consist of licensed foster homes in S.E. and N.E. The project size consists of one (1) HUB, four (4) to ten (10) constellation homes and four (4) to eighteen (18) children depending upon acuity level. Support Workers selected a foster parent from their caseload that they believe possess the skills to be the "HUB" parent. Once that selection was made, the foster homes were selected in close proximity to the "HUB" parent home and those homes constitute a "constellation".

The HUB Home Parent(s) role and responsibility is to provide supportive services to Satellite Families participating in the Mockingbird Family Model Constellation. These services include respite (both planned and emergency), advice, consultation, meetings, monthly activities for the youth in the Satellite homes and any support services needed by the Satellite families. The HUB Parent(s) is the key in the development of a healthy micro-community of caregivers focused on the health, safety, growth and permanence of participating children and adolescents while engaging in caregiver self-care that promotes healthy retention.

CFSA is very excited about the potential of this model to build a healthy community around children while providing support for families which could lead to increased retention.



Advocates Must Keep Informed: CFSA Updates CFSA Quality Service Reviews (QSR's)

Approximately two years ago, CFSA developed a new process to evaluate the needs of families and children. This evaluation activity is called the Quality Service Reviews (QSR's), and is conducted twice a year. This qualitative approach is designed to look at the outcomes for individual children and families as well as to identify the system's strengths and the areas that need improvement. The experience and outcomes for each child and family reviewed provide an in-depth understanding of the status of the child, caregiver and system performance. Child status encompasses safety, well-being, and academics. Parent and caregiver status covers support of the child, participation, and progress to case closure. System status includes engagement, leadership, teaming, assessment, case planning, and implementation.

To best utilize the QSR approach to assess, track and monitor the Agency's progress in regards to practice and service needs, a special unit was created under CFSA's Quality Assurance Division called Quality Service Review/Case Practice. Additionally, the approach is utilized as a learning and teaching opportunity to build practice among all levels of social work staff at CFSA. CFSA's partner agencies and other stakeholders also participate in this process through interviews, focus groups, as reviewers, and as group participants during the case story presentations where case practice themes and trends are devised for future implementation strategies. The most recent Fall 2006 QSR focused on the Teen/Youth population where 25 teen case stories were assessed. CFSA presented the case stories of these 25 teens in October. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of these cases are underway.

CFSA uses recommendations from the QSR to improve case practice and ultimately improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. CFSA will begin sharing results from the Fall 2006 QSR with internal and external stakeholders within the next few weeks. Please let FAPAC know if you would like to be more informed or involved in this exciting process.

(Medicaid, from p. 3)

As a rule, FAPAC does not usually "applaud" until an issue is fully resolved, because we have seen many good intentions that do not lead to actual issue resolution. However, this administration has been the first to really hear and believe the foster parent community about the significant nature of this issue. Therefore we applaud **Audrey Sutton** and **Uma Ahluwalia** for hearing, acknowledging, confronting and taking actual steps to resolve this serious problem.



Notes From Our Hearts:

In this newsletter edition, FAPAC staff would like to express our gratitude to a few special people who have worked hard by our side these last few months.

Nancy Smith: We are very grateful to have found a volunteer with the extensive experience and skills that Nancy brings us, and her generosity in sharing those skills with us. Nancy has been spending so much time helping FAPAC that we feel she is becoming our fifth staff member. Thanks for making FAPAC your new advocacy home, Nancy.

George Schutzer: George is our lawyer from Patton-Boggs who has led us through our separation from CCW. We appreciate his patience with our large learning curve of legal and administrative knowledge, and his diligence to assure that every “t” is crossed and every “i” is dotted with our separation. We could absolutely never have been successful in this crucial step without him. Words cannot express our gratitude, George.

Dr. Tracey Campfield: Tracey is one of CFSA’s Program Managers in the Office of Clinical Practice. As the PM responsible for coordinating Mental Health Services, she has a daunting task (and that is only one of her areas of responsibility). In the last months, Tracey has really been on top of her work with the Department of Mental Health to try to improve the mental health system for our children, and has also assisted the foster parent community by both training and trouble-shooting. Thank you, Tracey!

We would also like to use this opportunity to honor the memory of **Kim Neely**. Kim was the office manager of the Trellis Fund, one of FAPAC’s foundation funders. As office manager, Kim truly extended herself to the organizations that Trellis supports and helped to create a community among us. She was a truly special person and we will hold her memory as we move forward in our work.

Post-Permanency Coalition Developing:

FAPAC, along with the DC Metropolitan Foster/Adoptive Parents Association, CFSA and other organizations are working in coalition with the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) to develop an advocacy plan directed towards bringing more post -adoptive and post -guardianship services into the District to serve our families. If you are interested in joining our coalition, please call Margie at (202) 269-9441, extension #1.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Advocacy Center (FAPAC) Individual Case Advocacy Program.

Individual case advocacy is a big component of the work that FAPAC does. We advocate on behalf of the needs of the foster, kinship and adoptive parents of children from the District of Columbia.

FAPAC’s advocates **can educate** you about your rights as a foster parent for the District of Columbia, **advocate** for your rights to be upheld, **educate** agencies, attorneys, therapists and other related professionals about your issue, **bridge gaps** of communication between foster parents and agencies, and **provide you with support** to assist you during your crisis.

Please note: FAPAC advocates are NOT ATTORNEYS and we do not provide legal representation. FAPAC advocates are NOT CLINICIANS and can not force an agency to make a particular placement or promise specific outcomes of your issue and/or control the actions taken by agencies, attorneys and judges.

FAPAC individual case advocacy process:

- We have scheduled our intake days to be **Tuesdays and Thursdays**. If you give us a call on a non-intake days, we will give you a call on the following intake day.
- We will complete an intake form to discuss your individual case to find out what it is that you would like for FAPAC to do and get the names and contact information for all involved parties so that we can better advocate for you. Please note that we suggest that it is in your best interest to get into the habit of writing down names of everyone you speak to about any issue so you will have a record.
- Foster parents **MUST** sign a release of information form before we can move forward on your behalf. The release of information form authorizes FAPAC to meet with agencies, attorneys, therapists and other related professionals to discuss your individual case and also authorizes agencies, attorneys, therapists and other related professionals to release information to FAPAC.
- Once the intake is complete and a release of information form is signed, FAPAC conducts an internal office “staffing” to discuss what we can provide for you.
- After the “staffing,” we will contact you back to discuss next steps. This should only take a day or so.
- If your individual issue or concern is something that requires legal counsel, we have a list of attorneys whom we can refer you to while still remaining as a support to you throughout the process.

If you are in need of FAPAC’s assistance or support, please feel free to contact Kenya Douglas, FAPAC’s Case Advocacy Coordinator at 202.269.9441 ext. 3.

