



FAPAC—FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT ADVOCACY CENTER

advocacy news

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Healing Children by Empowering Families  WWW.DCFAPAC.ORG

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FAPAC news!



Bring the Music of Marilyn Home for the Holidays!

Marilyn Egerton, FAPAC's Deputy Director, has shared her beautiful voice, accompanied by extraordinary musician-ship, to produce a new CD dedicated to our families – children and families who come together for what might be a temporary time and share their love and lives with each other. The music includes jazz and blues standards that you know and love, inspirational songs, and original compositions by local favorites. The CD will be ready for the holidays and makes a perfect gift for your family and friends. Stay tuned for details! FAPAC has received incredible support given for this project from musicians George Stewart and Greg Reaves and recording (CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

kudos & thumbs up

Kudos to Susan Punnett, Executive Director of **Family and Youth Initiative (DCFYI)**. Operating as the sole staff member, Susan founded and incorporated DCFYI, built an office, hosted events to recruit and match families with older youth, assisted families to move towards permanency, and supported the work of partner organizations. We applaud Susan for her dedication, innovation, and amazing progress in one year. Learn more at www.dcfyi.org. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

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attorney corner

An Allegation of Child Maltreatment Has Been Made Against You: A Foster Parent's Nightmare What Do You Do Next?

By Harvey Schweitzer, Esq. FAPAC Consulting Attorney

Being accused of abusing or neglecting a child, any child, is a frightening experience. What if it happens to you? Although each situation is unique, "allegations" do have many common elements. You will want to know: What is the very first thing I need to do? Then what? The following list is intended to give you a sense of what you should be saying and doing.

Step 1. Remember: Allegations seldom disappear quickly. Prepare for the long haul. Be very skeptical if anyone tells you things like "Don't worry" or "I am going to close this out with no finding" or "My supervisor usually drops these."

Step 2. If you have a lawyer, call your lawyer ASAP. If you do not, and need support or referrals, call FAPAC. If you do not have a lawyer consider having a consultation with a lawyer. This will help you better understand what is happening and the risks you face. You will also be able to decide if you want to hire a lawyer. If you are facing criminal charges because the allegation is sex abuse or serious physical abuse then hiring a lawyer at the outset is a very good idea. You may also wish to hire a lawyer if you face a civil case of child abuse/neglect that could affect your custody of your own child(ren).

Step 3. Remember-You are not legally required to talk to anyone or cooperate in an investigation of yourself. However investigators will interpret refusing to talk or cooperate as a sign that the allegation is correct or that you are hiding something. As unfair as this is, this assumption is a common element of any allegation investigation. Tell the truth! And, be careful what you say. It can be taken out of context or misinterpreted. Remember, what you say early on will stay with the case forever.

Step 4. Find out if you are being accused of child neglect or child abuse. This may not be easy because no one may be willing to tell you. The answer will depend on the facts and the specific laws that define abuse and neglect.

Step 5. Find out what will happen to the victim/child and

to the foster children in your care. Will the child (ren) be removed? Why? When? Can this be challenged? If so, how?

Step 6. Do your best to gather as much information as you can as quickly as possible. Who is making the allegation? Who is the victim? What is it alleged that you did? Make notes! You will be hearing, doing, and saying a lot in a short period of time. Get a notebook and keep a journal with enough information so that you will not forget critical dates and events. Write down who you spoke to and how to reach them. This will also help you identify witnesses. Keep in mind that this journal may some day be seen by others.

Step 7. Get help early. Waiting does you no good.

Step 8. Keep in mind:

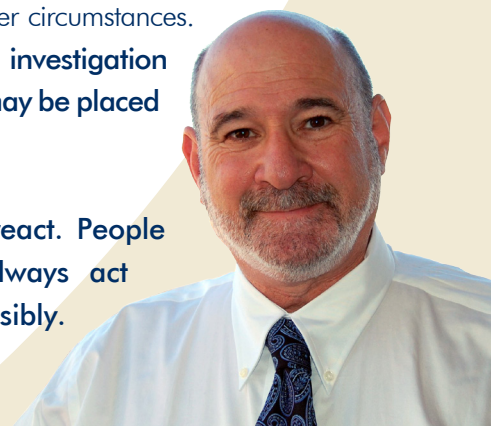
All allegations that are not frivolous or clearly fabricated must be investigated. The factual threshold needed to undertake an investigation is very low; if the allegation has any support it will be investigated.

The investigation must be undertaken and completed with specific time frames and you will be told of the result. If you have appeal rights you should be told of your rights. You will have a right to challenge the allegation in an administrative proceeding.

Many people, including social workers, think that whenever an allegation has been made the foster children in your home must be removed. **This is not true. Until there is a formal finding, removal is discretionary and each situation should be individually assessed by the responsible agency.** The most important issue by far is whether remaining in the foster home poses a risk of harm to the child. Once there is a formal finding whether the child must be removed or whether removal remains discretionary will depend upon the finding made and other circumstances.

Note that pending an investigation no additional children may be placed into the home.

Do not panic or overreact. People are watching you. Always act reasonably and responsibly.



hot issues

The new District practice model is based upon teaming. This means that foster parents should be included as respected and critical members of the professional team and should be included in meetings about the children in your home. To do this right, agencies will need to become more inclusive and foster parents will need to step up to the plate to participate. FAPAC encourages you to step up by speaking to your agency if meetings are being held at a time you cannot attend, and to make your best effort to participate as much as possible.

FAPAC thanks

Jenna Caudillo and **Anna Radjou** of **J.A. Creative** for our new newsletter design and their pro bono support of our newsletter. FAPAC encourages our community to patronize businesses that assist the work of supporting the District's families. Learn more about J.A. Creative at www.ja-creative.com or contact them at 703-863-3604 or info@ja-creative.com.

Laurie Ellington, of **Zero Point Leadership** for supporting our focused commitment to build stability and decreased placement disruptions for the District's children. Laurie's amazing training sessions during FAPAC's September 10 training, *Keeping Families Stable*, significantly deepened our

We are disappointed to report that the DC Adoption Scholarship funds are no longer available.

A change to the District's adoption subsidy policy led to a misunderstanding that caused some families to be mistakenly told that they would not be eligible for an adoption subsidy. If you find yourself in that situation, contact your attorney. If you do not have an attorney or need general information about the subsidy policy, you can contact the helpline at the Children's Law Center, at 202-467-4900, option 3.

participants' understanding of the causes of challenging behaviors and methods to address them. Laurie's training brings us to a new level of awareness of the impact of placement disruptions on our children.

Ariana Quinoes-Miranda, Chief of Staff in the **Office of the Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services**, for her participation in our September 10 training, *Keeping Families Stable*. FAPAC requested that Ariana, a former foster parent, give words of welcome at this event. After her introduction, however, Ariana chose to stay for the entire day, carefully listening to the comments, feedback, and suggestions of families.



every gift helps!

You can help us support the District's foster, kinship and adoptive families by making a donation today using the enclosed envelope. A gift of any size helps make sure we can keep printing this newsletter, and provide other support to you and your friends when you need it most. For example, \$25.00 buys art supplies for children's enrichment activities during training workshops. \$50 covers mailing costs for 450 newsletters. \$100 provides educational and fun child care for 15 children so that parents can take full advantage of important training sessions. Please consider making a donation via check made payable to FAPAC, on-line at www.dcfapac.org, or via the Combined Federal Campaign, #58191. Thank you!

FAPAC news! (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

engineer Tobarí Fingal. Night after night, these gifted musicians have donated their time and talents as a labor of love for Marilyn and for FAPAC's vital work in our community. Additionally, we would like to thank saxophonist Todd Pencham for lending his talent to one of the songs and composer John Stoddart for donating the use of two of his songs for the project. We are honored and touched by their generosity. We know that once you hear their work, you will be wanting more!

Clinical Rap Groups

FAPAC is thrilled to be partnering again with Post-Permanency Family Center to offer our unique Clinical Rap Group (CRG). Clinical Rap Group is a place for families to come together, under the trained guidance of a skilled clinician, to share about stresses and other issues related to their roles as foster, kinship, or adoptive parents. CRG is an eight-week series that combines peer and professional support. Food and childcare are provided, including homework time if needed. The next group will begin meeting in February. To learn more, please call FAPAC at 202-269-9441.

kudos & thumbs up (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Thumbs Up to Foundations for Home and Community (FFHC) for its procedures focused on preventing placement disruptions. A FFHC foster parent who is struggling can request a meeting in the foster home to bring the whole team together to try to keep the family

Keeping Families Stable/First Do No Harm

On September 10, FAPAC and agency partners—Family and Youth Initiative, Foundations for Home and Community, Kayla's Village, Kidspace, and Progressive Life Center—hosted Keeping Families Stable/First Do No Harm, a very successful event aimed at supporting family stability. Our day-long series of presentations and workshops brought families and workers together to kick off a District effort to stabilize families and decrease placement disruptions. The extremely informative and productive day included presentation of the national data on multiple placements and disruption; a comprehensive workshop on parenting traumatized children; a panel of youth, foster parents, birth parents, and social workers presenting their perspectives on building stability; and workgroups to brainstorm how to build our own DC model of supporting families to decrease placement disruptions. FAPAC has identified this as a top priority for our systemic reform agenda and is committed to working with families and agencies to build the capacity of the District in this critical shift of culture.

stable. As demonstrated by the appreciation expressed by FFHC families, this method has been effective to build teamwork and partnership as components to stability. **FAPAC applauds Rose Bruzzo, Angelia Baker-Matthews, and the FFHC staff** for their continued commitment to improving practice for children and families. Social workers or foster parents who want more information on the FFHC practice model can contact Tina Delancey or Stefanie Holmes at 202- 737-2554.



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