



Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies
E-Newsletter – May27, 2004

Special Edition: *Spotlight on Child Welfare*

REGISTER FOR THE CORNWALL CENTER'S SPRING CONFERENCE

The Role of the Village:

Community Strategies to Strengthen New Jersey's Child Welfare Safety Net

Tuesday, June 29th, 2004

8:30 AM to 4:00 PM

Center for Law and Justice

123 Washington Street

Newark, New Jersey, 07102

Call: Irene Welch at 973-353-1750 x221 or email at irenew@andromeda.rutgers.edu

It Takes a Village

The tragic life and death of 7 year-old Faheem Williams cast a harsh spotlight on New Jersey's system of child protective services. Revelations about the conditions under which he and two other siblings lived left everyone asking how such a thing could happen. The realization that intervention had been possible, but missed, was untenable. *Where was the Village?* As initial shock became outrage people from all sectors called for swift action to correct the failures that allowed this dreadful end.

In the eye of the storm, State leaders responded by installing new leadership, increasing external oversight, devising programmatic reforms that include narrowing the agency's scope to better focus on child protective services, and the like. But other notable tragedies and near tragedies continue to call into question the capacity of any one entity—no matter how well organized—to nurture and protect our children. What is missing in the equation? *Where is the Village?*

How do children simply disappear from daily interactions and no one ask, "Why?" What happens to children when their parents are unable to care for them? What supports are available to family caregivers to prepare them to step in? How can we strengthen "the Village"—each of us as responsible members of the community—to anticipate and respond? What can we each do, everyday, to ensure the safety of our children?

These are among the questions that will be undertaken in a day long conference sponsored by the Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers-Newark. *"The Role of the Village:*

Community Strategies to Strengthen New Jersey's Child Welfare Safety Net will take place on Tuesday, June 29th, 2004. The conference is free of charge and open to all interested parties.

The conference aims to stimulate community-based partnerships to support safe, healthy child welfare policies. Participants will explore relevant issues and facilitate the development and implementation of an effective, community-enriched, child welfare action plan. The conference will bring together a broad cross section of community groups and individuals to discuss current and future strategies that will improve the lives of children and families.

The conference is not an occasion to point fingers. Rather, it is an opportunity to expand upon, refine, and bolster the existing system of child protective services.

Conference Agenda. The **opening session** will focus participants on the importance of child welfare issues by looking at them through the eyes of young people who have gone through the system. A **morning panel discussion** will explore: (1) the factors that lead children into the child welfare system, and (2) understanding the needs of children in the system. Panelists will include private citizens who have first hand experience with child welfare policies and programs, representatives from social service agencies, state and/or local officials, and social policy analysts.

The **keynote** will be delivered by **Shay Bilchik**, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of America. Mr. Bilchik will address the role of community partnerships to support child welfare policy planning and implementation and how community participation can enhance the New Jersey Department of Human Service's child welfare reform plan that is currently under review.

The **afternoon panel discussion** will focus on ways to address the needs identified during the earlier sessions, as well as ways to reduce the number of young people entering the child welfare system. Panelists will include representatives from advocacy groups, social service providers, social policy makers, and legislators.

The day will conclude with a **Town Meeting** to develop an action plan. Conference participants will help develop specific actions and strategies to fortify the child welfare safety net. The strategy will serve as the cornerstone for a continuing collaborative effort to improve child welfare policy locally and across the state.

Confirmed panelists include: **Edward Cotton**, Director, New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services; **Cecilia Zalkind**, Executive Director, Association for Children of New Jersey; **Kevin Ryan**, Child Advocate, New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate; **Alexis R. Colander**, Director, Educational Support Services and Parent Relations, East Orange Board of Education; **Margaret Woods**, Co-Chair, Essex County Save the Children Task Force; **Phylis Peterman**, Chair, Rutgers-Newark, Department of Social Work; and **Randi Mandelbaum**, Director, Rutgers School of Law Child Advocacy Clinic.

Lunch will be served but **seating is limited**. RSVP by June 18, 2004 to Irene Welch at 973-353-1750 Ext. 221 or email: irenew@andromeda.rutgers.edu.



FOCUS: National Problem, Local Solutions

Today, more than half a million children in the United States are in foster care, placed there by public authorities because they could not live safely with their own families. Foster care is vital to protecting seriously abused and neglected children. But too many children languish for years in foster care, moving from one temporary home to another. . . . We usually think of the "cost" of foster care in terms of dollars and fiscal implications. But those most involved with, and affected by, foster care made it clear that the system exacts a daily price on their lives.

-----Source: Hochman, Gloria, Anndee Hochman, and Jennifer Miller (2004). Foster Care: Voices from the Inside. Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

Children in the child welfare system are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems compared with all children in parent care and even compared with children living in high-risk parent care. Compared with children in parent care, children placed with foster parents or relatives are more likely to have high levels of behavior problems, to have been suspended or expelled from school, and to have received mental health services.

-----Source: Kortenkamp, Katherine and Jennifer Ehrle. (2002) The Well-Being of Children Involved with the Child Welfare System: A National Overview. Report Pub. ID# 310413. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press

Earlier research suggests that grandparent-maintained families are more likely to be poor than parent-maintained families . . . Census 2000 showed that, on average, 19 percent of grandparent caregivers had incomes below the poverty level in the United States in 1999. While not a direct comparison, only 14 percent of families with related children were living in poverty.

-----Source: Simmons, Tavia and Jane Lawler Dye. Grandparents Living with Grandchildren 2000. Census 2000 Brief (October 2003). Washington, DC: US Census Bureau

Facts and Figures. The factors that lead children into the child welfare system are many. According to the New Jersey Department of Human Services' (DHS), Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), two categories, **abuse and neglect** and **family problems**, are the primary reasons for children entering the system. Family problems range from extreme poverty to mental and physical incapacity, domestic violence, and parental incarceration. In its 2000 statistical report on the occurrence of child maltreatment DYFS reports that these two categories combined account for 94% of all DYFS referrals. In the year 2000, there were 39,176 referrals from abuse/neglect and 34,604 categorized as family problems. Essex County has the largest child population in the state and the largest number of abuse/neglect and family problem referrals (9,357 or 12.7%). In five counties more than two thirds of all neglect referrals were substantiated: Camden (67.8%), Cape May (71.9%), Essex (67.1%), Monmouth (72.2%) and Ocean (70.0%). <http://www.dyfs.nj.state.us>.

A Call for Change. Against this backdrop of statistics the state has faced a series of high profile cases and legal challenges. In 1999, Children's Rights, Inc., (CRI)—a national advocacy organization that promotes and protects the rights of abused and neglected children in government custody—filed a federal lawsuit against the state on behalf of the thousands of New Jersey children who are or will be involuntarily placed under DYFS custody. Claims were also

advanced on behalf of African-American and Hispanic children who are or will be in DYFS custody who risk being denied or delayed placements or adoption based on race <http://www.childrensrights.org>. The suit was settled in June 2003. CRI Executive Director Marcia Robinson Lowry terms the settlement agreement the strongest that she has ever seen for the benefit of children. “The state has acknowledged it needs outside expert assistance to ensure immediate and real change in the lives of foster children. The settlement also requires that the state provide the necessary resources to make sure the children get what they need,” she stated.

While the case was pending scores of New Jersey children were placed under state surveillance and/or custody and foster care. The needs of some, like Faheem Williams, the 7-year old boy found dead in a relative’s Newark, NJ home, were somehow overlooked. DYFS closed the abuse complaint without investigation and follow up. The needs of others—like those of a four foot tall, fifty pound, 19 year-old Collingswood youth found rummaging for food in garbage cans—went unaddressed. He and other apparently starving male siblings were removed from their adoptive family home where DYFS caseworkers had logged numerous visits without challenging explanations about their apparently malnourished condition. Still others—many who exhibited signs of abuse or neglect intelligible to the trained eye—escaped detection, often with tragic results. In all, 123 children died of abuse or neglect in New Jersey from 1998 to 2003—37 of these occurred in the year 2003 alone.

Falling under sharp criticism for its handling of some of these cases, the state responded by realigning its resources. In summer 2003, the state allocated \$22.35 million for hiring staff and acquiring space and equipment. \$1.5 million was allocated to recruit additional foster parents. The state purchased automobiles, cell phones, computers, and a new computerized information management system. The \$26.8 million Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) is expected to connect DYFS workers in the field with vital information and resources <http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/Press-2004>.

Pursuant to the CRI settlement agreement, the state impaneled a task force of child development experts to oversee implementation of a sweeping system-wide reform plan. Funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (<http://www.aecf.org>), the panel is independent of local, state, and federal government. It has far-reaching authority over all aspects of the child welfare system. The panel is authorized to ratify the reform plan, establish specific legally enforceable outcome measurements for the state, and determine whether state progress is untimely and/or insufficient—a finding that would entitle plaintiffs to seek court enforcement.

“A New Beginning.” (Then Acting) DHS Commissioner James Davy unveiled the proposed reform plan, *“A New Beginning: The Future of Child Welfare in New Jersey,”* on February 18, 2004. A subsequent revision was issued on May 3, 2004. The plan embraces a shift toward new paradigms in public administration that cannot advance without multilateral intergovernmental action combined with public and private partnerships. For instance, the plan creates a new division designed to partner with community leaders and organizations to develop and expand prevention models and to decentralize ready access to local services for families <http://www.njamha.org/njchildwelfarereform.htm>.

“If Not Now, When? . . . If Not Me, Who?” For its part, the state has acknowledged its culpability for the past and responsibility for the future. Still, in this age of an increasingly global economy and unbounded information technology, a devolving government becomes more accountable and transparent to its constituents. A structure, once hierarchical, must adjust to encompass multi-level clusters of citizen operated networks. In hosting, *“The Role of the Village,”* the Cornwall Center pursues a multilateral bond to seal a brighter future for New Jersey children. The conference will explore both the factors that lead children into the child welfare system and their needs. It will also focus on the ways to prevent children from entering the system, as well as, strategies to help where out-of-home placement cannot be avoided. Equally important, the conference will explore the needs of care givers and ways in which they can be assisted as well. Conference participants will help to generate an action plan that will focus participants on continuing collaboration and community involvement.

Ours is a national problem that is ripe for local solutions. We invite the participation of the entire community to address this important challenge.

Parts of this article were contributed by Fayth Ruffin, a Graduate Assistant at the Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies. Ms. Ruffin is an attorney and a Ph.D. student at the Center for Global Change and Governance at Rutgers University-Newark.

Recent State and Local News on Child Welfare

“In child welfare, DYFS gets a resounding F: Agency ranks last among states on new federal test,” Star Ledger, Saturday, May 22, 2004. <http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-15/1085201528142590.xml?starledger?ntop>

“Troubled hospital for kids to stay open: Advocates fault plan for Brisbane reforms,” Star Ledger, Friday, May 21, 2004. <http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1085121289144680.xml>

“Religious groups endorse DYFS reform plan: Church leaders join Davy in calling on the Legislature to approve \$125M in funding,” Star Ledger, Thursday, May 20, 2004 <http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1085034863174900.xml?starledger?ntr>

“DYFS to try smaller child welfare offices,” Star Ledger, Saturday, May 08, 2004. <http://www.nj.com/news/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-15/108400509393070.xml>

“Child advocate abuse hotline expands hours,” Star Ledger, Friday, May 07, 2004. <http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1083922322102201.xml>

“N.J. hastens hikes in foster care pay: Officials push up date for stipend increases,” Star Ledger, Wednesday, May 05, 2004. <http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1083746226197580.xml>

“Big plans to assist abused children: Newark center seeks a major expansion to lead the nation,” Star Ledger, Tuesday, May 04, 2004.

<http://www.nj.com/news/ledger/essex/index.ssf?/base/news-5/108368006340030.xml>

“County family courts add safety measure,” Star Ledger, Sunday, May 02, 2004.

<http://www.nj.com/news/ledger/essex/index.ssf?/base/news-5/1083486930230890.xml>

“Kids' deaths prompt DYFS to revamp policy: Abuse claims involving parent's partner would get 'high-risk' label,” Star Ledger, Thursday, April 29, 2004.

<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1083227632290940.xml>

“Lipman Hall asks shift to corrections facility: DYFS scurries to find care for boys at center,” Star Ledger, Tuesday, April 27, 2004.

<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-1/1083047460286170.xml>

Resources

For other relevant information visit these websites and hotline numbers:

New Jersey Department of Human Services

- Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS)
<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dyfs/>
- NJ Safe Haven Infant Protection Act
<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/childrenservices/safehaven.html>
- New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect
<http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cap/>
- New Jersey Foster Parent Handbook
<http://www.njfostercare.org/FosterHand1.htm>
- New Jersey Partnership for Children (Children’s System of Care Initiative)
<https://www.njkidsoc.org/>

| Hotlines | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1-877-NJ FOSTER | To receive information on becoming a foster parent |
| 1-800-99-ADOPT | To receive information on adoption |
| 1-800-792-8610 | New Jersey DYFS Child Abuse Report Hotline |
| 1-800-THE KIDS | DYFS Family Helpline |
| 1-877-839-2339 | Safe Haven Infant Hotline |

Other New Jersey Agencies

- Association for Children of New Jersey
- <http://www.acnj.org>
- Essex County Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
<http://www.casaessex.org/>
- Prevent Child Abuse – New Jersey Chapter
<http://www.preventchildabuseNJ.org/>
- New Jersey Association of Children's Residential Facilities

- <http://www.njacrf.org/>
- New Jersey Child Support Services - Administered at the County Level
<http://www.njchildsupport.org/csspg.html>
- The Garden State Coalition for Youth and Family Concerns
<http://www.gardenstatecoalition.org/>

National Agencies

- American Bar Association Center on Children & the Law:
Links of Interest to Child Advocates
<http://www.abanet.org/child/links.html>
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
<http://www.aecf.org/>
- Child Abuse Prevention Network
<http://child-abuse.com/>
- Child Abuse Victims' Resources
<http://mova.missouri.org/missing>
- Children's Rights Organization
<http://www.childrensrights.org/>
- Child Welfare League of America, Inc.
<http://www.cwla.org/childwelfare>
- Child Rights Information Network
<http://www.crin.org>
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/>
- National Coalition for Child Protection Reform
<http://www.nccpr.org/>
- Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care
<http://pewfostercare.org/>
- U.S. DHHS Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws>

Data Resources

- Child Trends Data Bank - Children in poverty
<http://www.childtrendsdatbank.org>
- US Dept of Health and Human Services - Children and Families - Data on New Jersey (as of 1999)
<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cwo99/statedata/nj.htm>



The Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies circulates the *Cornwall MetroNews* e-newsletter to: 1) inform readers about important local, state, and national issues and, 2) showcase the work of the Center and members of the Rutgers-Newark community. The Center's primary geographic

focus is Northern New Jersey, with special emphasis on Newark and the Newark metropolitan area.

If you would like to add an item or add/remove a name from our distribution list, please contact Katherine Accousti. For story ideas and suggestions please contact Donita Devance-Manzini.

*The following individuals contributed to this edition of the **Cornwall MetroNews**: Katherine Accousti, Donita Devance-Manzini, Fayth Ruffin, and Irene Welch.*

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