



E-Newsletter – September 28, 2004 Special Edition

Conference Follow-up: *The Role of the Village: Community Strategies to Strengthen New Jersey's Child Welfare Safety Net*

From the Director

Stephanie Bush-Baskette, Esq., Ph.D.

Greetings! The Joseph C. Cornwall Center's full day forum, *The Role of the Village* was a tremendous success. We appreciate our panelists –from government, the legislature, academia, non-profits, children and caregivers who are directly affected by this topic, and Shay Bilchik, CEO of Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), who gave a very informative and relevant keynote speech. I personally want to thank all of the Cornwall Center staff for their hard work and diligence. We are all very appreciative of the more than 160 people who attended the forum throughout the entire day. A special thank you is extended to Provost Diner and PSE&G for their financial support and their presence at the meeting.

Having served in public office, I know that far too often, we attend meetings and forums that provide us with excellent information that adds to our energy and interest to “do something”, but there is little structure provided to follow through on our good intentions. It is the Cornwall Center's philosophy that we don't simply “meet and talk and talk and meet” but that we take action. Therefore, as promised, we have reviewed the questions, concerns, information, and presentations that occurred at the Forum and have begun to develop various settings by which to continue in our quest to connect information with decision-making. Throughout this special issue of the Cornwall Center's newsletter, you will note references to events and meetings that have been or are being planned so that we can use what we learned from the forum as an important first step from which to move forward.

Already, we have met with a group of grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren and are directly impacted by many of the issues discussed at the forum. In order to hear more about the challenges they encounter, and to connect them with the services that currently exist and may address some of their needs, the Cornwall Center will soon host a forum that will specifically address the concerns of grandparents as kinship caregivers. Look for this information in future editions of the *Cornwall MetroNews*. This is just the beginning. We are also working with

community based organizations to support their identified research needs. We hope that interested faculty will continue to advise us of their interest in working on these projects.

The Cornwall Center is committed to improving the quality of life of those of us who live in the Newark metropolitan area by connecting research to decision-making by citizens, and elected and appointed policymakers. We look forward to your participation in any activities we have that you feel are relevant to you, your family, and your community. We also welcome your thoughts and suggestions for future forums and research.

Conference Recap: A Day of Learning, A Framework for Action

Conference In Brief: *The Role of the Village: Community Strategies to Strengthen New Jersey's Child Welfare Safety Net*, a full day interactive forum, was held on Tuesday, June 29, 2004 at the Center for Law and Justice, Rutgers University-Newark. The forum was conducted by the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies as part of its mission to share knowledge on topics of public interest and to facilitate the exchange of ideas among stakeholders.

Joseph C. Cornwall Center Director, Dr. Stephanie Bush-Baskette, greeted and welcomed the assembled for a day of learning and exploration into issues that affect child welfare policy locally and throughout the state. Dr. Bush-Baskette described what is meant by abuse and neglect and highlighted a pair of troubling statistics obtained from the Child Welfare League of America:

- **Nationally:** In 2001, 903,000 children were victims of abuse or neglect
- **New Jersey:** In 2001, 39,373 children were reported as abused or neglected—a rate of 18.8 per 1,000 children

Dr. Bush-Baskette opened the floor, asking the audience to share their reasons for attending and to describe what they hoped to get out of the forum. Common themes were: 1) the desire to identify and effectively respond to the needs of children and caregivers; 2) to increase the safety and wellbeing of children families, and, 3) to increase understanding of the unique needs of grandparents, and other kin caregivers and facilitate ways to better assist these families to provide care.

Personal Perspectives. Dr. Bush-Baskette then introduced two individuals to share their personal perspectives related to their experiences with the child welfare system. **Ms. Denise Dean**, a grandmother, talked about the many challenges faced by kin caregivers. Ms. Dean spoke of her experiences raising two of her grandchildren and highlighted issues of negotiating the child welfare system, the need for legal and other assistance, and the unexpected physical and financial burden caring for these children places on grandparent and kin-headed households. **Ms. Shonda Green**, a former foster child, candidly shared the poignant story of her family of nine brothers and sisters and their involvement with the child welfare system. She spoke of histories of abuse, separation from her siblings, and the effect of foster care placements with families that failed to meet her emotional and physical needs. Ms. Green concluded by challenging the audience to speak out and intervene when abuses are known, to take a hard look at the realities of

children in need, and demand answers by becoming involved and active in the fight to reform child welfare policy.

Framing the issues. With this as a backdrop, Dr. Bush-Baskette assembled the first panel to explore: (1) the factors that lead children into the child welfare system, and (2) understanding the needs of children in the system.

The panel was comprised of: **Louise Eagle**, an advocate and former Director of the Salvation Army Grand Families program. Ms. Eagle currently heads an advocacy and resource network, Grandma K.A.R.E.S. (Kinship Advocacy, Resources, Education, and Support); **Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver**, State of New Jersey General Assembly, representing District 34; **Dr. Phylis Peterman**, Chair of the Department of Social Work at Rutgers-Newark; and **Sh'corah Yehudah**, Coordinator of the Violence Prevention and Family Strengthening Program for the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN).



Panelists and speakers from morning sessions: (from left to right) Dr. Stephanie Bush-Baskette, Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, Louise Eagle, Sh'corah Yehudah, Shonda Green, Dr. Phylis Peterman, Denise Dean

Louise Eagle spoke about social forces that influenced the increase in grandparent headed households. These included burgeoning drug abuse in the 1980's that lead to deterioration of traditional family structures, incarceration, and child displacement; and the proliferation of HIV/AIDs. She talked about the affect that these conditions had on the psychological wellbeing of the children and the residual effects that complicate effective grandparenting. Ms. Eagle talked about systemic shortcomings which fail to acknowledge special needs of children in these situations or the sacrifices that kin caregivers must endure because their needs often do not fall within program guidelines. She spoke about the frustration and sometimes anger that kin caregivers,

especially grandparents, feel because so little attention is paid to their unique needs. She asked the audience to lend their support, understanding, and prayers and urged addressing the issues that underlie the problem—especially drug abuse—to stem the tide.

Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver encouraged the audience to look at the problems of children in the welfare system from a “broader global perspective,” starting at the federal level. She suggested the audience challenge leaders with traditional theories that work against the socially disadvantaged, saying, “. . .something that we continue to struggle with in this country is the bootstrap theory versus do you have a pair of boots.” She encouraged to audience to look at the range of factors—housing, education, employment, health, substance abuse, etc.—that effect children and families. She urged the audience to use their passion to advocate on behalf of children and families and to contact leaders and legislators to make a difference.

Dr. Phylis Peterman presented an overview of social work perspectives on child welfare policy and a brief discussion of some current research. Dr. Peterman talked about the role of licensing in helping to increase the number of systematically trained social workers who are better equipped to address the needs of children and families. Recent studies show that these better skilled social workers did a better job of assessing needs and identifying problems. However, she emphasized that skilled workers are often limited by lack of available resources—a need that often cripples successful intervention. Dr. Peterson talked about research into family preservation, the impact of parental incarceration on children, the role of welfare reform, and the special needs of children aging out of the child welfare system. She noted the importance these research efforts in helping to develop sound child welfare policy. She concluded that everyone in attendance was a potential researcher—“. . .every time you see a problem, every time you document something, that is pushing us toward research.”

Sh'corah Yehudah talked about her role as Violence Prevention and Family Strengthening in helping families to remove the barriers that keep them from effectively parenting and keeping their families in tact. The Violence Prevention Initiative focuses on all aspects of violence including self directed violence (e.g., substance abuse, suicide, depression-related issues) and that directed at others (e.g., gang violence, homicide, domestic violence). These issues are addressed in training modules that teach ways to identify and act to reduce harm. Ms. Yehudah also talked about programs to strengthen families. One such program, conducted over several weeks, helps children and caregivers work together to resolve their issues. She encouraged the audience to think of children not just at risk, but also that “They are our promise.”

Keynote address. Shay Bilchik, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of America delivered the keynote address. He spoke about the many changes going on in child welfare policy in New Jersey and the importance of public and private partnerships and community participation in correcting past failures. He encouraged the audience to revisit its thinking on child welfare—changing the dialogue from serving “wards” to serving “families”; using multidisciplinary approaches; and by using the first hand accounts of people like Shonda and Denise (from the earlier sessions) as the beginnings of solutions rather than problems.

Mr. Bilchik observed that even without major reforms most children will make it through the child welfare system—they might not be as healthy or whole as the optimum but they are, for the most part, resilient. He cautioned, however, that such blind neglect is unacceptable. He urged system reformers and stakeholders to “[build] on top of that strong face” rather than to rely too heavily on the resiliency of our children.

While acknowledging our history, Mr. Bilchik commended the state for its efforts to fix the problematic child



Shay Bilchik, Executive Director, Child Welfare League of America with Director Dr. Bush-Baskette.

welfare system.

He observed that the state had made great strides toward a “level of readiness and a positioning for moving forward that didn’t exist 12 months ago.” Two of the most promising aspects of the reform plan are the emphasis on community partnerships and an investment in the child welfare workforce. He commended the efforts of the state and concerned stakeholders alike to forge an innovative partnership. Calling the state’s reform plan one of the most far-reaching in the nation—if properly implemented and monitored—Mr. Bilchik urged the audience stay vigilant and continue to press for the needed reforms as proposed in the plan.

He concluded his talk by suggesting it is not enough to expect children and families to move themselves to reform. Movement needs to take place on all sides. The state is moving forward in a manner that is encouraging for children and families.

Exploring solutions. The **afternoon panel discussion**, moderated by **Richard W. Roper**, President of The Roper Group, focused 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. The panelists were **Edward Cotton**, Director, New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services; **Randi Mandelbaum**, Director, Rutgers School of Law Child Advocacy Clinic; **Kevin Ryan**, Child Advocate, New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate; **Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg**, State of New Jersey General Assembly, representing District 37; **Margaret Woods**, Co-chair, Essex County Save the Children Task Force.



Afternoon Panelists: (from Left to right) Edward Cotton; Stephanie Bush-Baskette, Richard Roper (moderator), Assemblywoman Loretta Weinburg, Margaret Woods, Randi Mandelbaum, Kevin Ryan

Edward Cotton described some aspects of the newly adopted child protective services reform plan. These include a single report hotline to replace 32 time and/or date dependent options, and an increased budget for preventive services, collaborations, and social workers. He also described a more integrated system of care that takes in a wide range of issues, e.g., employment, housing, mental health, alcohol and substance abuse. He also described revamping the system of intake to help social workers reduce the number of unnecessary temporary displacements and new mobile crisis teams.

Randi Mandelbaum spoke about the range of legal issues associated with child welfare policy. She believes that the new state plan and increased funding is a step in the right direction. She talked about the importance of prevention by helping families meet their basic needs as well as education and other issues. She talked about the need for collaboration at the state level. Even though the Division of Youth and Family Services may have responsibility for a child, many of the services the child needs are not under DYFS control thus potentially limiting their access or effectiveness. For example, services offered by the Department of Education and the Department of Health are not a part of the reform plan.

Ms. Mandelbaum suggested that there is a need to further develop a working relationship and with these Departments. She suggested the courts could have an impact on establishing some accountability among these groups.

Kevin Ryan explained his role as Child Advocate in the newly created State Office of the Child Advocate. The Child Advocates Office was established to monitor the activities of child welfare agencies in the state. His responsibilities extend beyond the Department of Human Services, DYFS, to include the juvenile justice system, day care centers, psychiatric hospitals, and developmental disabilities campuses and other programs targeted to child wellbeing. Ryan explained that the Office has civil authority at the systemic as well as individual level. As such, the agency is empowered to intervene and make a difference in children's lives on a smaller scale. He described initiatives that included: alleviating overcrowding in residential facilities; behavioral health issues; monitoring of legal issues; juvenile justice interventions; increasing understanding of educational barriers for children; and improving the number of enrollments and utilization of services for the state-sponsored health insurance, New Jersey KidCare.

Assemblywoman Loretta Weinberg spoke about her roles as Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee of the New Jersey State Assembly and Vice Chair of the Family, Women and Children's Issues Committee in the New Jersey State Assembly. She talked about a number of bills the legislature is working on to improve child welfare overall. She talked about initiatives to improve lead paint abatement, school-based youth and after school programs, juvenile detention centers, and substance abuse treatment (for adults and children). These issues are critical to the overall revamping of the child welfare system. Assemblywoman Weinberg commended Department of Human Services Commissioner Jim Davy, DYFS Director Edward Cotton, and Child Advocate, Kevin Ryan for the work they are doing to reform the system. She also urged greater cooperation between schools and child welfare agencies.

Margaret Woods talked about the Essex County Save the Children Task Force and its mission to engage in a process of educating members of the community around issues and child welfare primarily, but also in juvenile justice and education. She spoke about the need to reposition the community to accept its responsibilities. She recalled traditions within communities of color that reinforced child and families by sharing responsibility for rearing and discipline, as well as, watching out for needs as they arise—assuring that no child is left alone at night or not without food at the end of the month. She talked about the role of community collaboratives established to fill this role. Many such collaboratives are operating around the country and the positive results they have achieved. Essex County is poised to begin its own collaboratives and the Task Force is helping to make that possible. She closed by saying that through research and investigation we know what works. The task now is to continue to press for reforms and accountability through the legislature and government departments.

[Where do We Go From Here: Cornwall Center Commits to Follow up on Conference Findings](#)

As expected, *The Role of the Village: Community Strategies to Strengthen New Jersey's Child Welfare Safety Net*, gave rise to a wide range of topics that require further exploration and follow up. From both morning and afternoon lively town hall meetings, as well as the not-easily-

concluded Q and A periods, emerged general themes that serve as guideposts for future direction. The questions posed in these sessions included a range of topics that include: *collaborations and partnerships among villagers, community efforts and participation, distribution of resources, grandparents as caregivers, legal, legislative, mental health and substance abuse and research demands.*

The following are a **sampling** of statements, observations, questions, and suggestions, generated by attendees. **For** additional information we encourage you to visit the Center's website at www.cornwall.rutgers.edu and view the conference summary PowerPoint presentation: "Where Do We Go From Here?"

- *Help prevent child abuse and reduce the number of children flowing into the system by engaging the Department of Education to be more involved with non-profit and private citizen collaborations.*
- *Governmental entities need to streamline efforts through internal coordination so as to avoid duplication when collaborating and partnering with non-governmental service providers.*
- *Community orientation, education, and organization remain lacking regarding understanding child welfare issues and providing support for children in the community who suffer and protecting those citizens who report abuse and neglect.*
- *Grandparents play a monumental role in raising grandchildren who are often not under the jurisdiction of DYFS yet courts and agencies are non-responsive and insensitive to the needs of grandparents raising these grandchildren.*
- *Greater emphasis is needed on garnering involvement from fathers of children in the child welfare system.*
- *Inequitable distribution of resources throughout the state is shown in Essex County where a newly funded program generally displaces rather than supplements a pre-existing one.*
- *Family reunification is stymied by the absence of appropriate housing and access to mental health and substance abuse services.*
- *The Second Chance Act as well as the imposition of minimum/mandatory sentences impact children whose parents are under the jurisdiction of the child welfare system.*
- *DYFS social workers are underpaid and need training on methods for handling stress.*
- *DYFS needs to apply rules across the board and not use different rules for the same situation in different cases. More appropriate business hours for DYFS would be from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.*
- *Privately generated training should be provided parents and grandparents who must advocate and negotiate the child welfare system.*
- *Sustainable public, legislative and fiscal support is necessary to ensure adequate compliance with and monitoring of the child welfare reform plan.*

The Cornwall Center continues to serve as a nexus between policy-makers, community based advocacy groups, legal resources, and the growing organization of grandparents raising grandchildren. Please continue to visit our website and look for additional information on the Center's forums and other activities in coming editions of the *Cornwall MetroNews*.

Recent News on Child Welfare Reform

In 1999, Children's Rights Inc.,—a national advocacy group that promotes and protects rights of abused and neglected children in government custody,—filed a law suit against the State of New Jersey on behalf of children placed in Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) custody. Governor James McGreevey and Children's Rights Inc. reached a settlement in June 2003. In this settlement, it was decided that a court-appointed panel of five national child welfare experts would monitor the reform efforts and advise federal judge, U.S. District Court Judge Stanley R. Chesler, on the State's progress. More than a year later, on July 19, 2004, state officials agreed to a list of court-ordered reforms recommended by the New Jersey Child Welfare Panel. This agreement meant that the reform plan, announced in March, would be a legal commitment with sanctions if the reforms were not implemented.

Two days after it was announced, the State requested a meeting with Judge Chesler, attempting to limit the scope of the agreement and reduce the possibility of sanctions. The State's main argument was that some requirements do not fall under the control of DYFS, but under other branches of government. The move upset some advocacy groups and led them to question the State's commitment to the reform plan. The federal judge rejected the request for a meeting saying that issues would be dealt with if and when they arose but he would not address "hypothetical disputes".

"Judge rebuffs meeting on DYFS," Star-Ledger, Wednesday, August 11, 2004
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1092214470304721.xml>

"State balks on list of fixes for DYFS: It calls some mandates unenforceable," Star-Ledger, Thursday, July 22, 2004
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/109048295518580.xml>

"NJ agrees to tough list for DYFS overhaul," Star-Ledger, Tuesday, July 20, 2004
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/109030081395020.xml>

Other Related Articles

"Expansive DYFS reforms become law: Goal is to better protect children," Star-Ledger, Saturday, August 28, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1093668859142420.xml>

"State urged to settle case of malnourished boys," Star-Ledger, Thursday, September 2, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/10941053107610.xml>

"State to increase safe-haven advertising to protect newborns," Star-Ledger, Thursday, August 19, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/statehouse/ledger/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1092895966273930.xml>

"Accountability for the kids," Star-Ledger, Monday, July 26, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1090819371117260.xml?starledger?oed>

“Former foster child exhorts new DYFS caseworkers,” Star-Ledger, Friday, July 23, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-2/109057080250900.xml?starledger?ntr>

“Assessing families by the numbers: DYFS retrains its staff in structured decisions,” Star-Ledger, Tuesday, July 6, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1088753722261828.xml?starledger?oed>

“Caution on DYFS hotline,” Star-Ledger, Friday, July 02, 2004.
<http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-2/1088753722261828.xml?starledger?oed>

Resources

For other relevant information visit these websites and hotline numbers:

TO REPORT SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE CALL: 1-877- NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)

24 HOURS, 7 DAYS A WEEK

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.njfoστεrcare.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
1-877-KIDS VOICE	New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate
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
<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>

GAO LETTER REPORT

D.C. Child And Family Services Agency: More Focus Needed on Human Capital Management Issues for Caseworkers and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention. GAO-04-1017, September 24. <http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1017>
Highlights--<http://www.gao.gov/highlights/d041017high.pdf>

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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, Stephanie Bush-Baskette, Donita Devance-Manzini, Fayth Ruffin, and Irene Welch.

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