



From the Commissioner

This issue of “DCF Spotlight” highlights the many ways the Department of Children and Families and our partners raise awareness, protect children and strengthen families throughout New Jersey. You will read about the department’s child abuse prevention month efforts, DCF’s growing partnerships to recruit loving foster and adoptive families, the upcoming National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week, and our most recent Federal Monitor’s report.

In honor of April being Child Abuse Prevention Month, we encouraged our partners to learn more about our prevention campaigns and services available in local communities – including hosting various open houses at our Family Success Centers throughout the state. While April has come to a close, I continue to encourage you to check our Web site – www.nj.gov/dcf - for regularly updated important information for families, advocates, providers, staff and community leaders all year round.

I would like to take this opportunity to laud Governor Jon S. Corzine for making the right choices for New Jersey’s most vulnerable children and families, while remaining committed to tightening the state’s belt during these tough economic times. This proposed Fiscal Year 2010 budget recognizes that many of the residents who are hardest hit by this crisis are the very families we serve each and every day here at DCF. I will be testifying on behalf of DCF before the Assembly Budget Committee on Tuesday, May 5 and before the Senate Budget Committee on Wednesday, May 13.

In addition to the support outlined in the budget, the result of the Governor’s commitment has been evident in the five consecutive positive reports released by the Federal Monitor. Last week, the Federal Monitor released her most recent monitoring report on the progress of child welfare reform in New Jersey. The report noted significant progress, not just during the six month monitoring period, but in every area of the Modified Settlement Agreement (MSA) during Phase I – July 2006 through December 2008.

While we must celebrate the findings in this report, we remain steadfastly committed to our efforts already well underway for Phase II of the MSA – which requires DCF to meet specific performance and outcome benchmarks that measure improvements in results for children and families.

I am confident we will continue this positive momentum that this department has had from its very inception. Please enjoy this issue of “DCF Spotlight,” and as always, thank you for your continued commitment to New Jersey’s children and families.

Kimberly Ricketts
Commissioner

DCF Stressed Education, Awareness During National Child Abuse Prevention Month

April marked National Child Abuse Prevention Month – a time and opportunity to spread the message that child abuse and neglect can be prevented if we all do our part to support children and families in our own communities and help them to thrive.

In the last few years, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has made unprecedented strides to expand child abuse prevention and family support services and increase access to resources that are designed to strengthen families and prevent child abuse or neglect.

“By ensuring that parents have the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to care for their children, we can help prevent child abuse and neglect by strengthening families and communities,” DCF Commissioner Kimberly Ricketts said.

Throughout April, DCF focused on raising awareness of New Jersey’s outstanding network of Family Success Centers through the department’s Web site and local open houses.

The centers, located in neighborhoods throughout the state, serve as one-stop shops that provide wrap-around resources and supports for families before they find themselves in crisis. Centers operate from locations like store fronts, schools, converted houses, office buildings and houses of worship. They are based out of welcoming, homelike settings that reflect the community, engage residents and offer direct services, activities and resources that promote family well-being and empowerment.

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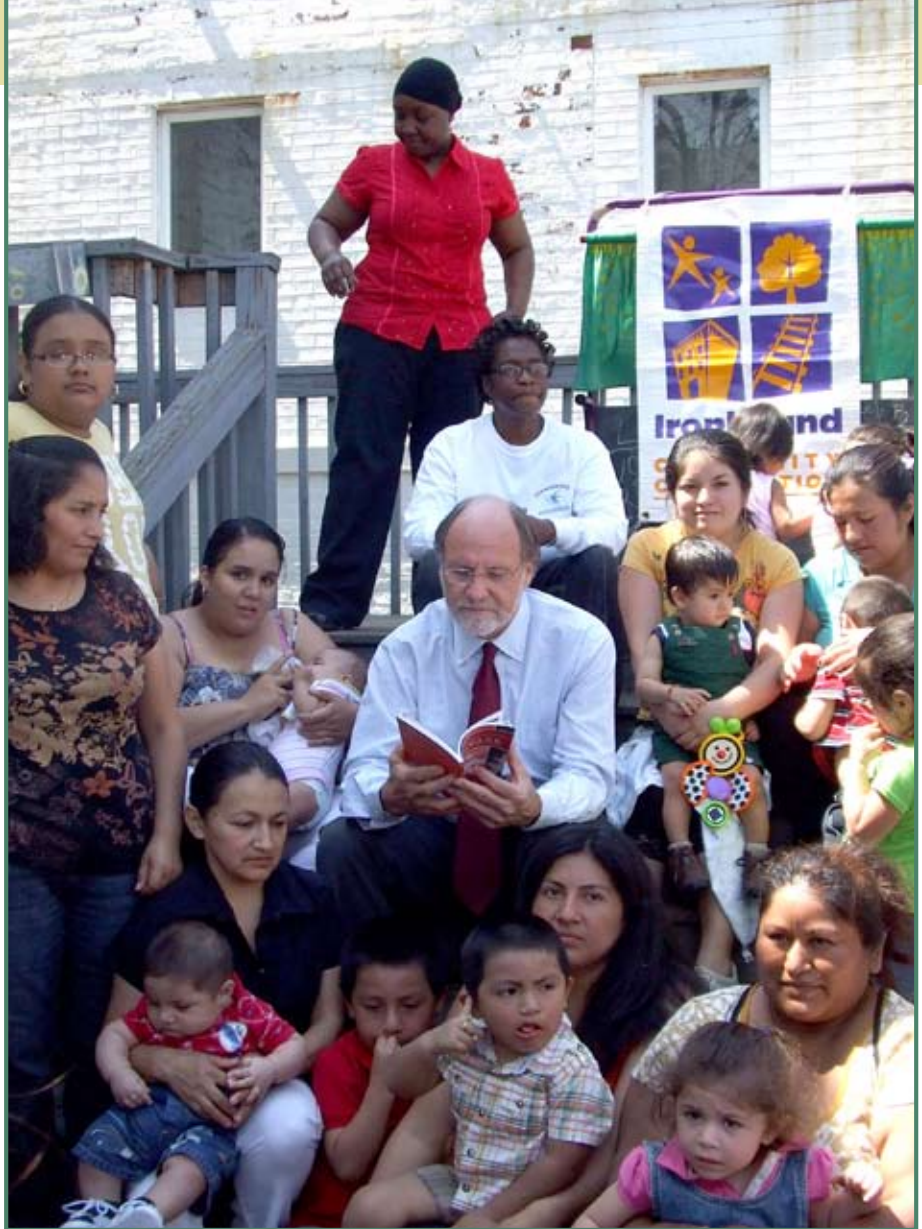
Open houses are a way for staff to reach out to the local communities served by the centers, and help teach the public that the centers are safe, warm and welcoming places in the community to which any family can turn, not only in times of need, but as a regular part of day-to-day life. The DCF Web site (www.nj.gov/dcf) features information about all of the department's supported prevention programs throughout New Jersey – including a link for DCF's Community Program Directory. This directory represents an ongoing commitment to increase access to resources that are designed to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect.

The directory features contact information for programs centered around family support services, domestic violence services, early childhood services and school linked services, as well as information on county welfare agencies and the statewide youth helpline.

DCF is engaged in a number of ongoing campaigns aimed at informing the public on ways to best keep children safe – including the launch of a new public service announcement on NJN focused on preventing Shaken Baby Syndrome. The PSA focuses on parents struggling to cope with a crying baby, a leading trigger for abuse that causes Shaken Baby Syndrome.

In upcoming months, DCF plans to partner with YMCAs to promote water and pool safety to help raise awareness and prevent child drownings. DCF will also be partnering with the New Jersey Coalition of Automotive Retailers in a effort to remind New Jerseyans never to leave children alone in vehicles – as the temperatures inside a car can rise to deadly levels in a short time.

Stay tuned for these exciting and important events. Together we can prevent child abuse and neglect and keep our children safe and our families strong.



Governor Jon S. Corzine meets with children and families during a Family Success Center open house in Newark, held during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Coming soon:
DCF Case Practice regional
information sessions for
community partners.
For more information, visit
www.nj.gov/dcf/notices.

Child Advocacy Center Opens in Monmouth County

Monmouth County now has a brand new child-friendly space for abused and neglected children after opening the doors of the Monmouth County Child Advocacy Center (MCCAC) for the very first time.

The MCCAC, like all child advocacy centers, will bring together representatives from various areas of the child protection system – such as law enforcement, government services, mental health professionals and physicians – to minimize trauma on child victims while preserving evidence that can be used to prosecute alleged offenders.

The development of the new MCCAC was made possible by a true and ambitious public-private partnership – including \$500,000 in state capital funding through Governor Corzine's FY07 budget. The grant was one of five awarded to New Jersey counties to establish or expand existing child advocacy centers

"Our governor proves time and time again that he is more than capable of making the right choices in tough fiscal times, and this center is just one example of those right choices," DCF Commissioner Kimberly S. Ricketts told people gathered to celebrate the opening of the center this month.

In addition to state capital funding, the project received financial assistance through the fundraising efforts of the Friends of the Monmouth County Child Advocacy Center, a non-profit organization that has raised more than \$3 million for the development and awareness of the center. The Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders also dedicated \$750,000 and donated county property for the site. United States Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert



DCF Commissioner Kimberly S. Ricketts helps cut the ribbon during the grand opening of the Monmouth County Child Advocacy Center.

Menendez also helped secure a \$200,000 federal grant for the worthy project.

"It is these types of private, community, local, state and federal government partnerships that continue to move child welfare reform forward and improve the lives of the youth and families we serve each and every day," Commissioner Ricketts said at the ribbon cutting event.

Before the development and expansion of child advocacy centers, child victims were often made to retell their stories of abuse to different professionals in various settings. All counties in New Jersey now have some form of a child advocacy center or a multi-disciplinary team within the prosecutor's office, to deal specifically with cases of child abuse and neglect.

Children's Mental Health Awareness Week 2009

The Department of Children and Families is using this year's Children's Mental Health Awareness Week – May 3 through May 9 – as an opportunity to promote positive mental health, well-being and social development for New Jersey's children and youth.

DCF, and particularly our Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS), hopes that during this week and all year round, New Jerseyans recognize that mental health wellness is essential to the overall health and well-being of our children.

DCBHS has been committed to providing services to children and adolescents with emotional and

behavioral health care challenges and their families in a family-centered, community-based environment.

In fact, the majority of youth served by DCBHS are at home or in their own communities. DCF has made significant strides in ensuring there is capacity here in New Jersey to serve the state's most vulnerable youth – bringing the number of children sent out of state for services down over 75 percent in the last three years.

Please visit our DCBHS Web site for more information on programs and services available in your area: www.nj.gov/dcf/behavioral.

2009 Statewide Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

Governor Corzine addressed approximately 850 attendees of the 2009 Statewide Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect last month, which included professionals in the fields of law, medicine, social work, psychology, juvenile justice, domestic violence, law enforcement and child advocacy.

The Governor told attendees that the state's child welfare system is not only improving, but it continues to demonstrate that sustained, real reform can happen in New Jersey.

"The last time I was at this conference in 2006, the Department of Children and Families had been created only a few months prior," said Governor Corzine. "We were taking our first steps in turning New Jersey's child welfare system around. Since then, the Department has focused its attention on the fundamentals of child welfare while achieving impressive results on behalf of



Governor Jon S. Corzine praised DCF staff for their unwavering commitment and dedication to the wellbeing of children and families during the New Jersey Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect.

some of our most vulnerable children."

Governor Corzine noted his visits to local DYFS offices throughout New Jersey, and interactions with case-workers, and expressed his recognition of how challenging their jobs can be. But, he has also seen their unwavering commitment and dedication.

"It is that commitment that will help us meet 21st century challenges while continuing to improve the lives of children and families who enter the DCF system," Governor Corzine said.

Federal Monitor Releases Fifth Report

Lauds Department for Continued Progress in Child Welfare Reform



Governor Jon S. Corzine and DCF Commissioner Kimberly S. Ricketts listen to Jonah Gensler, Director of Family Services for the Ironbound Community Corporation, speak about the important role of Family Success Centers, during an open house held at one of the neighborhood based centers in Newark.

Governor Corzine and Commissioner Ricketts celebrated New Jersey's fifth overall positive monitoring report by attending an open house at the Ironbound Community Corporation's Family Success Center on Elm Street in Newark.

The report shows improvement and progress for not only the most recent monitoring period, covering from July 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008, but it also summarizes the department's progress throughout all of Phase I of the Modified Settlement Agreement, from July 2006 to December 2008.

The Federal Monitor noted in the report that, "DCF has been dedicated to reaching all of the goals in the MSA and is to be commended on the substantial progress it has made during Phase I."

The department's progress shown in this most recent report can be accredited to the strong and consistent support of Governor Corzine and the Legislature, a talented leadership team and the ever-committed workforce at DCF.

The report notes continued progress with respect to finalizing adoptions, recruiting net gains of foster and adoptive family homes, and continuing to maintain manageable caseloads and meet the workforce targets. It also lauds the department's progress with respect to

(continue on page 5)

(continued from page 4)

Federal Monitor Releases Fifth Report

developing and maintaining child abuse prevention and family support services statewide. The Family Success Center at Elm Street is a perfect example of how services in the community can help support families in need.

Families who attended the open house with Governor Corzine and Commissioner Ricketts talked about how they each found the center, and how it has since helped them not only with immediate issues like securing housing or help with the energy bill – but also with building their community.

A perfect example of the kind of enrichment and empowerment that can happen at a Family Success Center are the parent leaders here at Elm Street. They banded together and took initiative to connect with other communities by teaming with parents from a neighboring Family Success Center in Kearny to start their own youth karate program.

The department has also made perhaps its most significant progress in the area of health care service delivery for children in care and the ongoing development of our child health units.

As noted in the monitoring report, this work is beginning to yield real progress:

- Nearly 100 percent of all children placed into care received their pre-placement assessment in a timely manner
- 92 percent of those exams occurring in a non-emergency room setting.



A little girl enjoys hot dogs and family activities during the open house at the Family Success Center at Elm Street in Newark.



Governor Jon S. Corzine speaks with families, during an open house held at a neighborhood based Family Success Center in Newark. Governor Corzine visited the center to meet children and families, and speak about the progress of the child welfare reform effort.

DCF has also been committed to making strides in ensuring children receive comprehensive medical exams, a huge turnaround from 2005 when the vast majority of children did not receive those exams at all, let alone within a desired timeframe. Between July and December 2008:

- 79 percent of children received comprehensive medical examinations within 60 days, up from 27 percent from the previous monitoring period.

While there is still much work to be done, DCF remains confident that this momentum will continue, as will the improvements to providing children in out-of-home placement with the quality medical care they need and deserve.

On January 1, 2009, DCF began Phase II of the Modified Settlement Agreement, which builds on these successes and requires the department to measure meaningful outcomes for children and families. The expectations are higher and the standards are more stringent – focusing on specific worker caseloads and specific child and family outcomes such as reducing the number placements, timeliness of permanency and preventing instances of re-abuse.

The department remains committed to not only sustaining our previous and current successes, but to continuing this hard work and moving the reform forward to demonstrate real outcomes for the children and families we serve.