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Dear Colleagues,

With the summer season upon us, I am encouraged to think about how in its simplicity, each season offers us so much to look forward to - a sense of a brand new day with hope and possibility. This is how I would describe the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at this very moment - about to embark on a brand new season, filled with elements of great promise for the state's children and families.

One such element is the new law signed by Governor Christie which realigns services from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to DCF, positioning the Department to support children and youth with developmental disabilities, behavioral health challenges and addiction service needs through its existing infrastructure of services and programs; and better serve children and families where child abuse and domestic violence co-exist. This realignment will help end fragmentation of services, create a seamless system of care and enhance our capacity to serve children and families through a more family-centered, holistic approach. The realignment also transfers the Division on Women to DCF including programs such as displaced homemaker and sexual violence services to the array of programs already offered by DCF.

Just recently, I took part in the graduation ceremonies of both the Violence Against Women Certificate and the DCF Fellows Programs. I am so proud of the hard work and commitment of those who participated in these two programs and I am confident that the knowledge gained will garner improved outcomes for not only those we serve right now, but also those we will be serving far into the future.

In addition, through the Department's Request for Proposal process we have now expanded our network of Family Success Centers in Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, Middlesex, Salem and Union Counties in an effort to better support children and families across New Jersey.

And finally, we have created a new Task Force on Helping Youth Thrive in Placement (HYTIP). Comprised of stakeholders, service providers and youth across the state, HYTIP is tasked to support youth in out-of-home placement and ensure they achieve rich and fulfilling lives.

You'll be hearing much more about our Family Success Centers and HYTIP in future issues of this newsletter.

There are many exciting initiatives on tap at DCF. I hope that you feel as inspired as I do about all the possibilities this new "season" brings to all those we serve.

Warm regards,

Allison Blake, Ph.D., L.S.W.  
Commissioner

# DCF News

## Elizabeth Bowman Appointed DCF Assistant Commissioner



DCF is proud to announce that Elizabeth W. Bowman has been appointed Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Performance Management and Accountability.

In this role, Bowman will serve as a member of the department's executive management team, and is responsible for providing leadership to the development and implementation of performance improvement and accountability work across the divisions and offices of the department.

Bowman will have direct oversight for DCF's Office of Performance Management and Accountability, which includes all quality assurance and program evaluation, information technology and reporting, child fatality and near fatality case practice reviews, child abuse investigations in institutional settings, and licensing

operations for adoption, children's residential treatment, and child care centers. Since 2010, Bowman has been DCF's director of Quality. Prior to joining DCF, Bowman worked as the Assistant Director - Office of Child Welfare Initiatives at the Rutgers University School of Social Work, Institute for Families; and Program Manager for the NJ Child Welfare Training Partnership.

Bowman also worked for DCF from 2006 to 2007 as a Training Manager for the NJ Child Welfare Training Academy. She began her career working for the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS), holding a variety of positions primarily in the field of educational program development.

DCF Commissioner Allison Blake said, "Beth has been an integral part of the DCF leadership team for the past two years. She has led DCF's efforts to expand our quality review work across the state, and most recently led the team working to help New Jersey successfully complete our Federal Performance Improvement Plan this past spring. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her new position which I anticipate will help DCF as we continue our efforts to become a more accountable and transparent organization."

## DCF Honors Fellows at Graduation Ceremony

Advancing organizational best practices, nearly 100 members of DCF recently graduated from the Fellows Program, an innovative program developed under the aegis of the federally-funded Northeast and Caribbean Implementation Center (NCIC) designed to provide an 18 month seminar series in which staff were exposed to best practices in utilizing data to support improved case practice and outcomes for children and families.



"New Jersey is truly honored to have been chosen as one of the first recipients of the NCIC grant," said DCF Commissioner Allison Blake. "The Fellows program has been an extraordinary opportunity for our staff to become the internal experts on utilizing information to improve our everyday practice," she added.

During the 18 month seminar series, the DCF Fellows learned to gather and assess information in a useful format and were exposed to a wide range of tools to help them utilize that information. Staff members were selected from across all areas of DCF to participate in this program.

Fellows graduate Carlene Bowman said, "The whole experience was really great. Finding information and learning how to analyze it and making that translate into our work with families and being able to help my co-workers see that it's not just about being 'compliance driven' but also understanding that better compliance means better work with the families we have was truly satisfying."

Commissioner Blake added, "The Fellows Program really is evidence that our organization is changing. It represents a child welfare system that has undergone a tremendous culture change - and that we have staff interested and committed to finding new solutions to old problems. This is true succession planning. I am excited about the Fellows' growth, the leadership potential and the tremendous impact that the Fellows will have on the families we serve."

# Summer Safety

## DCF Commissioner Urges Parents and Caregivers to be Vigilant Around Water This Summer



DCF Commissioner Allison Blake and Department of Health Commissioner Mary E. O'Dowd recently spoke to a group of students at the Raritan Valley YMCA about the importance of summer safety.

As the weather heats up, and families spend more time outdoors and near water, DCF wants to ensure that summertime is a safe time for children. DCF is reminding parents and caregivers to never leave children unattended near water and always child-proof backyard swimming pools. A child can drown in just a few inches of water and within seconds, often without any splashing or screaming.

"Far too many children die from drowning each year. These are preventable tragedies, and a sad reminder of how accidents can occur in a matter of moments," DCF Commissioner Allison Blake said. "We want to stress the need to be vigilant with children around water."

DCF is also reminding parents and caregivers to never leave children unattended in a vehicle, where temperatures can quickly rise to dangerous levels, especially in warmer summer months.

"Even on a moderate day, the inside of a car can heat up to dangerous levels in a short time," said Commissioner Blake. "A child left alone in a vehicle, even for a short time, is in danger of abduction, injury, dehydration and even death."

For the more information on summer safety tips, and copies of the DCF summer safety brochure, visit [www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf).

## Funding Awarded to Thirteen Counties to Improve Response to Child Abuse and Neglect

The Department of Children and Families in collaboration with the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN) recently awarded 13 counties funding to conduct a multidisciplinary training to strengthen the identification and reporting of suspected child abuse across the state.

The goal of this one-time funding initiative, which was made available through the Children's Justice Act (CJA), is to assist states in developing programs to improve their response to child abuse and neglect.

"The safety and well-being of every child is our number one priority," said DCF Commissioner Allison Blake. "But it's important to understand that we cannot do this work alone, and at the same time we must ensure that our community partners are well trained in how to identify and report suspected child abuse as required by law."

The initiative requires counties to target their training to a wide array of audiences, including the education community, as well as child protection, health, law enforcement and Regional Diagnostic Treatment Centers (RDTC).

Commissioner Blake said, "We see this as yet another opportunity for us to collaborate with individuals and professionals from a variety of fields and strengthen their capacity to protect children from abuse and neglect right in their respective communities." DCF and NJTFCAN anticipate that counties will conduct the multidisciplinary training in ways that best fits the unique needs of their communities.

Counties receiving funding include Camden, Cape May, Essex, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Sussex and Hunterdon/Warren.

# Federal Aid

## NJ to Expand Home Visiting Programs with New Grant

New Jersey will receive a more than \$9.4 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) which will support an expansion of DCF's Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program to help at-risk families with an array of health and social services. The grant funding will allow New Jersey to expand its home visitation programs for perinatal screenings and risk assessments to promote earlier identification and coordination of services for families who reside in at-risk communities.

Oversight and implementation of the MIECHV grant will be a collaborative effort between DCF and the Department of Health. DCF will expand its current network of nationally recognized, evidence-based home visiting models

that strengthen families by providing individualized support to pregnant women, parents and/or other caregivers of families with children from birth to age five. New Jersey's current home visiting models include Healthy Families, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, Home Instruction to Parents of Preschool Youngsters and Early Head Start - Home-Based Option.



## DCF Awarded Help Me Grow Grant

New Jersey became one of three states awarded the National Replication Center's Help Me Grow (HMG) Grant. The one-year technical assistance grant will help enhance DCFs' capacity to support infant and young children's healthy development. To ensure a successful and efficient system, the model is based on four core components including: child health care provider outreach, community outreach and support services, centralized telephone access and coordination, and data collection.

DCF's Division of Family and Community Partnerships' Office of Early Childhood Services (OECS), which coordinates prevention services to families with children ages birth to six, will take the lead in implementing the HMG system in New Jersey to ensure a seamless system of care and support services for at-risk children and their families.

The grant will determine the current status of developmental screening in New Jersey while coordinating with current screening partners, such as physicians, childcare providers, and home visitors, to improve service coordination and appropriate referrals to prevention and early intervention services for infants and young children.

"Help Me Grow is a great fit with our expanding work in early childhood services in New Jersey," said Sunday Gustin, program administrator for OECS. "As a result of this grant, families will have easier access to appropriate linkages for timely screening and needed resources to support infant/child development."

# DCF Photo Gallery



Women Aware held their second annual breakfast awards ceremony to honor individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of women who were victims of violence. We are proud to announce that DCF Division of Family and Community Partnerships Director, Lisa von Pier, has been inducted into this organization's Blue Bra Society.



Commissioner Blake attended an early Mother's Day celebration hosted by Mom2Mom, a 24-hour hotline run by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey for mothers of children with special needs.



Commissioner Blake was invited to be the keynote speaker at the Rutgers Masters of Social Work Graduation Party. She offered graduates insightful wisdom and lessons she has learned throughout her career.



Commissioner Blake paid a visit to the Hunterdon Regional Autism Center in recognition of Autism Awareness Month. The Autism Center works to improve the quality of life and long-term outcomes for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

# A Brighter Future

## Camden Teens Celebrate at the 7th Annual Teen Enrichment Prom



The theme of the evening was "THE TASSLE WAS WORTH THE HASSLE," and it couldn't have been more fitting for either the teens or the volunteers who worked tirelessly over the last few months in preparation for the 7th Annual Teen Enrichment Prom. After months of coordinating, collecting items, fundraising and donating

their time and talent, coordinators of this exciting even were able to finally see the fruits of their labor.

One teen claimed that the evening was "a beast." The teen's statement reconfirmed to all of the volunteers that the evening was considered an absolute success by all participants. The annual event is coordinated by staff from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) Camden County Local Offices, and many volunteers including the Human Services Police who helped create a memorable event for teens under DCP&P supervision, who may not otherwise partake in one of the most memorable moments enjoyed by many a high school teenager.



## DCF Launched its First YouTube Video

DCF recently launched The Keeping Your Case Open Until 21 video on YouTube produced with the goal of encouraging youth that are aging out of the state's foster care system to keep their cases open. This is one of many efforts that DCF is supporting to ensure that the youth voice is incorporated across the Department's work. Please take a moment to view the video today which is posted on DCF's website at [www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf).



Commissioner Blake congratulates DCP&P staff who recently received awards at the 2012 Recognition Brunch held by Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) of New Jersey.

# Provider's Corner

## A Life of Learning Has No Limits

Calvin's mother struggled to raise her little boy, who was born with a severe hearing impairment. He was 7 years old before she could get him hearing aids; he was 9 before he was enrolled in a school for hearing impaired children. After that, Calvin's schoolwork improved and he became more outgoing - milestones his mother was able to savor before she died a short time later.

Calvin moved in with his grandmother, and later an aunt, but he was physically



and emotionally mistreated by both of them.

Despite having hearing aids and learning sign language, it was still hard for him to tell people how angry, hurt and lost he felt.

He was a teenager when the state intervened and placed Calvin in foster care.

He eventually thrived in a loving home, where his foster mother became his strongest supporter and provided the structure he needed to succeed. When he turned 18, Calvin applied to Passages - Somerset Home's transitional-living program - so he could learn to live on his own. He was gregarious and friendly, but still had a lot of emotional issues to work through. His case managers helped him develop healthy ways of coping.

Calvin worked hard to graduate from high school while holding down a part-time job. He also "graduated" to My Place, Somerset Home's independent-living program, where he and four other young men are taking important steps toward adulthood.

One by one, Calvin is making his dreams come true. First on the list, buying a car - every young man's symbol of independence - with his savings and some help from a generous benefactor. He is attending college, something he never imagined would be possible. Next, he hopes to attend Gallaudet University, the only four-year college for students with hearing impairments in the country, and become an interpreter.

And after that? The sky's the limit.



## Somerset County Youth Advisory Board

The department of Children and Families Youth Advisory Boards (YAB) - located in each county - offer teens an opportunity to provide feedback and information on what it is like to be an adolescent in the state's child welfare system.

"It gives me a way to express my opinions to the people who make decisions about my life," said current YAB member 18-year-old Nick.

Members of the Somerset County Youth Advisory Board (YAB), headquartered at Somerset Home, wanted to tell other teens in residential care about the benefits of joining one of the boards. They decided to get their attention by making a video.

"Have a Voice" was written by Somerset Home's YAB members, and nine of them had starring roles. Local independent videographer Brian Stollery donated part of his usual fee for taping, adding background music and creating the finished product. The remainder of the cost was funded by a grant from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (formerly DYFS).

The day the video appeared on YouTube, everyone who worked on the project celebrated with a "premiere" party.

Sixteen-year-old Candace reported, "It was fun to do, and I was proud to be part of something that can help other kids like me."

The video is also available on DCF's website ([www.nj.gov/dcf](http://www.nj.gov/dcf)), Somerset Home web site, and on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.