

Strengthening Families

Winter 2010

"One measure of your success will be the degree to which you build up others who work with you. While building up others, you will build up yourself."

Jim Casey Founder of United Parcel Service & Casey Family Programs



Comments? Questions? Email:
Becky_O'Brien
@dcf.state.fl.us— Thanks!

A View from the Inside — Keeping Children Safe by Working with Families

Sabrina Ellis, a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) in Alachua County has a front row seat on the shift toward Family Centered practice and services. In fact, it is through the work of Ms. Ellis and her colleagues that the changes will be effective.

Ms. Ellis says that, "Being sure a child is safe is always the most important job I have. But, I love engaging with the parents so we're a team to get some help."

As a CPI for two and one-half years, Ms. Ellis sees an impact. She says, "We are more open and we're not just in the home to tell the parent what to do or else. I ask them, 'Tell me what you've done so far?' I tell them if I know what's going on, I can get them help and some services."

Ms. Ellis recalls one mom telling her, "All I know how to do is spank. I don't know what to do and finally someone is listening to me that I need help." And, that's the start.

Staff at Partnership for Strong Families are in the third month

of a three-year Federal research grant on using Family Team Conferences. Project consultant Mona Gil de Gibaja says, "We are hopeful that the rigorous evaluation being implemented will help us create a national model for evidenced based family engagement."



Using specially trained facilitators, parents are invited to bring relatives, friends and others who can help them make changes in the family's life to keep children safe. The meetings are held when a child has been removed or when the family situation poses continuing risks to a child. Cherie Watters, a Team Facilitator says, "When we see a family rallying to put the child's safety at the forefront you can see things going in a good direction."

Parents are encouraged to use the meeting to their benefit and often begin by talking about their family life: what has been good and what has been hard. That opens the door to making specific plans and tasks for the parents to keep children safe.

Tracking Progress for Children & Families

Partnership for Strong Families:
YTD: 116 Children Adopted and well on the way to exceeding the goal for the year of 160 children.

YTD: 46% reduction in number of children living in Out of Home Care since 2006 for both Circuits 3 & 8.

YTD: Re-abuse of children is decreasing, with 10.60 percent of children who were reunified with parents re-entering foster care within 12 months in the second quarter of FY 2009-10, compared to 17.96 percent in the second quarter of FY 2007-08.



New Ideas that Shape Our Work

Dr. Dana Christensen will be working with staff over the next four months to implement Solution Based Casework.

www.solutionbasedcasework.com

Go to the website and take a look! And read this little excerpt: "Solution Based Casework is a family centered practice model of child welfare assessment, case planning, and ongoing casework. It targets specific everyday events in the life of a family that have caused the family difficulty. Partnerships between family, caseworker, and service providers can be developed that account for basic needs and restore the family's pride in their own competence.

Three basic goals:

1. Develop a partnership with the family;
2. Focus on pragmatic everyday family life tasks.
3. Promote specific prevention skills tied to the family's tasks.

Developing partnerships that lead to identifiable solutions in everyday family life is the best way to prevent future relapse."

It is our goal to integrate Solution Based Casework into present case work to support workers and families. It is the next step toward Family Centered Practices that keep children safe. All supervisors, then all CPI's and FCC's, will be trained and coached as they make these changes that have proven so useful to others around the nation.

Family-Centered Beliefs

1. Safety of the child is the first concern.
2. Children have the right to their family.
3. The family is the fundamental resource for the nurturing of children.
4. Parents should be supported in their efforts to care for their children.
5. Families are diverse and have the right to be respected for their special cultural, racial, ethnic, and religious traditions; children can flourish in different types of families.
6. A crisis is an opportunity for change.
7. Inappropriate intervention can do harm.
8. Families who seem hopeless can grow and change.
9. Family members are our partners.
10. It is our job to instill hope.

John McMahon, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work

Casey Family Programs - A Valued Partner in Change

Entering our third year of work with Casey Family Programs, it is clear their support and leadership on issues has touched every aspect of child welfare services. Ester Tibbs, Circuit Administrator says, "Looking back, it's been the most productive consultative partnership, we've ever had a chance to work with."

From the first development of ideas in Foster Care Redesign, staff have had the benefit of a training and technical assistance on many topics. A determination to improve teamwork and decision making about the need to assess risk to children, led to funding support for a Decision

Team Consultant.

Next, an effort to address the needs of a vulnerable neighborhood with high numbers of child abuse cases, led to community planning for a resource center. Now open as the Library Partnership, it is a unique and well-received community center. Again, Casey Family Programs provided the funding support to start the effort and provided the technical assistance for planning.

As we have learned and improved our practices, our questions and issues have become more complex. Paul DiLorenzo, Senior Strategic Consultant at Casey Family Programs has facilitated help and training with:

- Issues of disproportionality of African American children in foster care
- Participation in a national project: Accelerated Permanency Project to help older youth in foster care
- A visit to Pennsylvania to learn from school based family resource center
- Facilitated Technical Assistance on Family Centered Practices for our team and two more sites in Florida to learn from other states
- A new initiative on early learning and brain development

Ms. Tibbs said, "It is hard to overstate the role Casey Family Programs has played as an agent for change in our community. Their assistance has helped our organizations, our staff and most vitally, the children we serve."

Success Stories at Library Partnership—Neighborhood Resource Center

Thank you to **Dollar General Corporation** for \$30,000 in donations of food, clothing, household, and personal hygiene items when a store next to the Library Partnership was closed for relocation. Store Manager **Carol Cue** was a great "neighbor" and arranged for the donation. All items were distributed to staff and partner agencies for use by families in our community.

In February, a single mother whose house burned down was living in a hotel when she came to ask for help. Within a week, staff

located an apartment that was affordable and appropriate. Donations provided food, clothing, and household goods. The mother and daughter expressed their gratitude to the Partnership Resource Center through their tears and laughter.

Another young woman recently agreed to provide a home for a two year old child that seemed destined to remain in foster care. While she is able to provide a wonderful home, a bed, and food she lacked the funding for toys, additional clothing, and all the items a 2-year old needs. Provid-

ing these necessities helped her see a future with this child. Now, she is hopeful she can adopt the child.

Other Markers of Success:

- ✓Over 500 new library cards issued
- ✓2,048 direct services to area residents seeking Assistance from the Neighborhood Resource Center staff July-December 2009.
- ✓A new Girl Scout troop formed
- ✓43 children in tutoring
- ✓UF's Mobile Health Clinic routinely parks out front to provide services

Author Shelley Fraser Mickle's New Book to Benefit Children in Foster Care

Area children will be the beneficiaries of a wonderful idea from nationally known and award winning author, Shelley Fraser Mickle. She will be donating proceeds from the sale of her latest children's book to benefit children in foster care.

Ms. Mickle writes, "When Ester Tibbs and Nancy Dreicer, met with me about my participating in a literacy project, I was flattered and excited. I have always believed that reading together is the best of all possible ways to initiate and sustain

a healthy relationship between people of all ages and backgrounds.

Through the sale of this book, I intend to donate a large percentage of the proceeds to the Florida Foster Care System and its focus on prevention. Promoting this book will also open many media opportunities to talk about foster care, its needs and successes. I am truly honored to be a part of this mission."

Jason and Elihu, written for 9-12 year olds, is a great fish-tale and the story of the life-lessons a young boy

gains while learning to fish with his grandfather on Orange Lake. Joining him are new friends: a brother and sister in foster care and a young girl with an irrepressible spirit recovering from a brain tumor.

Ms. Mickle formed *Wild Onion Press: Books Starring Kids with Physical Differences* last year. "Our books are not about children with differences, they are for children with differences — as well as for any reader looking for a rip-roaring adventure."

www.wildonionpress.com

Jason and Elihu A Fisherman's Story by Shelley Fraser Mickle

