

AAAC Newsletter

African American Advisory Council • Spring 2013



Remembering the 20th Annual AAAC Institute

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From the Chairman

On behalf of the African American Advisory Council (also referred to as the Triple A-C), I would like to thank everyone that attended our 20th Annual Conference. As always, your continued support and participation is greatly appreciated. The planning committee, lead by new co-chairs Robin Albritton and Tracy Marshall, did an outstanding job in preparation for a successful conference. We also extend a huge thank you to PSA Bremen Campbell for writing and producing the play, "There's A Blues Man in My Basement," for the cultural presentation. Additionally we appreciate the staff that volunteered to cast the play: James Bracey, Kimberly Harrell, Tamara Hill, Nemiah Matthews, Ramina Velez and Monico Whittington. You can read more about the conference in this edition.

While funding is very much the topic of discussion, we are continuing to focus on those things that we can do. I had the opportunity to be a part of Congressman Bobby Rush's Annual Fatherhood Conference planning committee. The purpose of this event is to provide information and dialogue on the importance of fatherhood. It coincides with the department's push to involve fathers in service planning for their children and engage them with their children.

One of the presenters was Mr. Kobie Brown, a noted writer and Executive of Sony Records. Mr. Brown's documentary "From Fatherless to Fatherhood" was the main feature of the conference and was very appealing to the fathers in attendance. It featured scenarios of several African American fathers that comprehensively portrayed the vital importance of fathers being fully engaged and involved in the lives of their children. It is a good documentary for organizations to use in their efforts to get fathers



Michael D. Burns

engaged and sustained with their children. This is just one example of how we can seek methods to assist children and families during this time of a dwindling safety net. As the council identifies resources that will be helpful to assist families, we will continue to share the information.

Although these are difficult times, the council will continue to follow its mission to advise and make specific recommendations to the director concerning the department's provision of services to African American clients, staff and its contractual service providers in the areas of recruitment, legislation, employment, community relations and development of professional issues.

Peace,

Michael D. Burns

Michael Burns, Chairman
AAAC

20 Years and Still Moving Forward

The African American Advisory Council was pleased to celebrate its 20th annual institute at the picturesque Hilton – Chicago/Indian Lakes Hotel in Bloomingdale. Amid the many changes underway within DCFS and state government, we have emerged to provide staff with information that will allow them to continue serving and protecting children and families. We pride ourselves in selecting themes which reflect the current state of affairs within child welfare. In spite of economic challenges, we must continue all efforts to positively impact the children and families we serve. Our 2012 theme: *The African American Family: Overcoming Economic Challenges to Build an Optimal State of Well-Being* was developed to provide staff with the opportunity to explore and become familiar with programs that can assist them in their case planning efforts in the years ahead. This year the conference planning leadership torch was officially passed to Tracy Marshall and Robin Albritton. These two ladies will assume leadership in upcoming planning. We know they will do an awesome job and wish them the best in the years ahead.

Twenty years of existence is a milestone in this day and time, but the AAAC is dedicated to

continuing our fight to ensure the concerns of African American children and families are not only heard but addressed in a caring and effective manner. Imani Josey, Miss Black Illinois USA, served as our mistress of ceremony. Ms. Josey has impressive credentials despite her young age. She graduated magna cum laude from Howard University and she is an award-winning playwright and former editorial intern for DCFS and Jet Magazine, and a member of the Chicago Bulls Luvabulls cheerleaders. We thank Imani for her support.

Our keynote speakers Clifton Davis and Dr. Boyce Watkins, were dramatic, inspirational and enlightening. Conference participants were thrilled to have an opportunity to take photos with Clifton Davis, best known for his role in the sitcom "Amen". His heart-wrenching speech was full of compassion as he shared portions of his life with his minister father, mother and eight siblings living next to the city dump. He encouraged staff to continue our individual efforts and perseverance in our work. He praised the importance of our work because lives can be changed for the better. Dr. Watkins was equally encouraging during the luncheon. He addressed the importance of supporting youth achievement by over-



Tracy Marshall and Robin Albritton

coming barriers of poverty, social injustice and racial inequality.

The session entitled "Poverty as it Relates to Child Welfare" and roundtable discussion on "Permanency and Advocacy, a Historical Overview" prompted a great deal of interaction among conference participants. Angela Baron Jeffries, director of the Center for Child Welfare and Education at Northern Illinois University delivered a fiery and passionate address which brought many to their feet. She vehemently enforced what many of us have said on many occasions: "as people of color we have to deal with desegregation, the war on poverty, civil rights, etc." We should not accept the notion of poverty and it is time to organize within our communities. She further reported about the effectiveness of the local Community Action Team in Northern Region. The existing team strategies

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20 years, con't.

have significantly increased reunification. The community outreach of the Action Team has transformed the thinking of judges and school participants.

A Triple A-C conference would not be complete without its cultural presentations. Ernest Craig served as the master of ceremony of a packed entertainment line up which included comedian Jayson Cross followed by a theatrical presentation. The script, entitled "There's A Blues Man in My Basement" was written, directed and produced by Bremen Campbell. The play was excellent, and the cast, James Bracey, Bremen Campbell, Kimberly Harrell, Tamara Hill, Nemiah Matthews and Ramina Velez had an outstanding performance. The evening concluded with a stupendous musical treat from the *Relative Minor Band*. If you were unable to attend, you missed a great opportunity.



Imani Josey, Miss Black Illinois USA and Clifton Davis

Workshop Review: Boys to Men: Iron Sharpens Iron

By Brenda Brown

There was a very positive response to Ricky Rodgers of African-American Men of Unity and Clayton Muhammad of Boys To Men (www.boy2menonline.org). Each organization works with young men (ages 7-18) in the school setting as well as with after school programs. Mr. Rodgers is a teacher with an alternative school through the Quad County Urban League. Mr. Muhammad is the community relations chief spokesperson for East Aurora School District 131. Both leaders and the organizations they represent are well known and respected by the schools and in the Aurora and Kane County communities which they serve.

Both presenters described their respective program services. Many of the participants were very impressed with these organizations and wanted to know if the leaders would be willing to expand the organization into the areas in which they live and work. They were also curious if the organizations were supported by any churches or fraternities and if they experienced difficulties in recruiting men to volunteer.

African-American Men of Unity works with boys who are experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties through their Rites of Passage Leadership Development and Manhood Training. The training teaches them to focus on being respectful and responsible both at school and

home. The organization's mission is to be a positive role model and father figure to the fatherless.

During the workshop, Mr. Rodgers offered many practical lessons the organization teaches, such as how they coach single mothers to censor how they communicate to their sons. An example is mothers telling their son that he is "the man" of the house. This sends a detrimental message. Rather, relaying to their sons that they are the leaders of the house denotes a more concrete message, which also conveys a sense of responsibility.

Boys to Men specializes in enhancing and shaping young men who possess leadership qualities. Secondary education is strongly emphasized and the youth are provided with supports that will help shape them into exceptional future leaders, knighting them to what the organization refers to as "phenomenal" status.

One former Boys to Men member went on to become a student council member at the University of Illinois/Urbana and is now a radio host personality for Disney Radio in Chicago. Another current 5th grade member recently won a national oratory competition. Boys To Men also stresses the power of dressing for success.

AAAC 20th Annual Conference Observations

Triple A-C members were asked to speak with those attending this year's conference to gain feedback regarding their impressions of our conference. We spent many hours planning for this event and wanted to hear from you. Here are a few comments from those who were workshop presenters, attendees, vendors or others.

As a presenter at the AAAC, I can proudly say that I was thoroughly impressed with the two-day forum. It appeared to be very organized, participant-friendly and focused on providing quality topics to assist staff members (DCFS and external parties) on how to provide quality services to the populations that we serve. I truly appreciated being asked to provide a workshop on father-related issues (*The Barber-shop Conversation*) and feel that the attendees really got a lot out of my presentation with Mr. Cox and Mr. Mitchell. Greg Smith was an excellent facilitator and staff made sure that our technical needs were taken care of effectively. Also the lodging and meals were fantastic. I give the conference a Grade A!

Khalid B. Scott, MSW, LCWS, QMHP, TASC, Inc., Recovery Coach Program and clinical supervisor

Many of the participants were emotional and displayed passion as it relates to the workshop's theme, engaging fathers in services and as equal partners as it relates to reunifying children with their family of origin. Participants were asked as an icebreaker question: "Who was

the most influential male/father figure in your life, and what adjective would you use to describe him". Many of the participants cried while sharing loving stories as well as memories of their father/father figures. They used adjectives such as: strong; wise; caring; smart; faithful; creative; dependable; and always supportive. Many indicated that their father figure still plays an important role in their lives today. Therefore, whenever they work with fathers, the biological father is seen as a parent and not as an annoyance.

Participants were emotionally charged when two biological fathers shared their experience/journey as it relates to being reunited with their children that were taken into care. Each man displayed determination and a desire to parent their children without the assistance of the biological mother, and at times with unfavorable caseworkers and judges.

Greg Smith

I really enjoyed the conference. It gave me an opportunity to connect with my peers. I enjoyed the presenter who talked about the houses that she manages with women who are incarcerated or are being released. The tone of the conference was what I needed, and I feel refreshed. It was wonderful to have the quality of speakers and the topics.

Maureen Jones, conference participant



The following questions were posed to conference participants:

What did this conference mean to you?

Response:

The conference allowed child welfare professionals to fellowship, network and to develop strategies that will enhance the lives of the population that they frequently serve. It also allowed for the work that many of the child welfare professionals do on a daily basis to be recognized by their peers and other key stakeholders. Lastly, it was a blessing, in that the conference energized me and gave me a renewed sense of purpose: to go back to my community and to do the work even better and smarter.

Question: Where do you see us going in the future?

Response:

With the current political climate and current budgetary concerns, it's difficult to say what the future holds. However, one thing that is likely to be true: that is, African Americans in the child welfare/social service profession

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will continue to advocate for children and families as it relates to their overall well-being, safety, and cultural enhancement.

In addition, it appears that the council will have to adopt new strategies as it relates to identifying services/resources for both the African American population and other key stakeholders. It appears that the transition has begun, with both Robin and Tracy taking the torch, which is a huge responsibility, but one that each of them are prepared for.

“State of Illinois Hiring Process: Important Items to Know”

The Office of Employee Services (OES) presenters for this workshop were deputy director Michelle Jackson, Esq. and Geny Chiaradonna, PSA. It was standing room only and they were bombarded with questions, in which they not only answered but gave examples of why certain things are done in order to be fair and select the best qualified candidate.

The most important advice from the discussion was to complete the entire application and when in the interview, listen so that you can answer the questions. *Although your knowledge on child welfare practice may be rated 10, if you don't answer the question you will get 0.* The workshop was a success and very engaging for the participants. We actually needed more time to answer questions and talk about promotions.

Another matter that was not covered in the workshop but I believe to be important is about the Exit Interview Survey. Com-

pleting the exit interview survey is important because it allows OES and the Office of Affirmative Action to review comments and make warranted recommendations to the director, Human Rights or CMS if internal changes need to be revised, amended or eliminated. Please make every effort to complete the exit interview if you are leaving the department.

“Pathways to Economic and Professional Growth in Today's Economic Climate”

Presenters: Evelyn Williams and Jataun Williams

This workshop had a two-fold focus of 1) assisting clients in taking advantage of workforce development programs; and 2) encouraging child welfare professionals to prepare themselves to weather the impact of the current economic climate. Evelyn Williams of Metropolitan Family Services Calumet Center provided information about resources that are available to assist clients in taking full advantage of the job skills programming. She discussed the assessment phase and benefits to clients who go through the program. She also discussed strategies that could be utilized to persuade clients to take advantage of such opportunities and improve their employment prospects.

Ms. Jataun Williams, a clinical service coordinator with DCFS followed, sharing personal experiences about the benefits of becoming a licensed profession-



al. This led to a passionate and emotional discussion about the need for professional growth, as well as the various available opportunities for licensed professionals. Ms. Williams encouraged staff to not only identify professional goals, but to take things further and develop a plan of action. She confirmed that the work as social workers is hard. However she left staff with the same thought that had been shared with her, “The work is hard, but take a nap to rest, get up, and keep it movin.”

“The Implications of HB 291 and Transitioning Youth from Juvenile Justice”

Presenter: Monica Mosley-Cantrell

I was thrilled to be invited to present at the AAAC conference and look forward to future invites. My topic of discussion was HB-291 and its effect on placement and what type of services are available. I was teamed with Gailyn Thomas who presented on DJJ. The first day of our presentation was excellent due to the fact that we had a variety of participants being case-workers and probation officers which allowed me to take the interactive approach with the group. The second day included more managers which consisted of more explanations of what HB-291 change in the law meant.

Deidra A. Davis: A Caseworker Who Made a Difference

My name is Maebelle. My co-partner Kristie and I founded It's Our Little Secret three years ago because we shared a lot in common with our tumultuous upbringings. What we shared as well was the drive and desire to want more out of life. We didn't allow our parents' behavior to affect who we could become. Of course, we did go through the stages of learning but we always evolved and made choices to move forward.

With that said, Deidra A. Davis became involved with my family when I was a teen. My father was physically and verbally abusive and because of the obligated loyalty I had to my family, I rarely spoke about it to my friends or classmates. It became apparent to a classmate that the bruises I had were not normal and she reported them to the school social worker. From that point, my life changed. That evening, a DCFS worker visited our home with two police officers. My father was an abusive man but he was very intelligent and knowledgeable of his legal rights. In turn, he threatened the DCFS worker and police officers of their possible trespassing and they had no choice but to leave. That evening I was beaten for their appearance. Although DCFS could not intervene that evening, I soon came to find that they would find another way to intervene.

I'm not sure how it all came about but I remember that we were mandated to attend counseling weekly with a psychologist, and a DCFS worker and a

CASA worker were assigned to my case. It was then that I met Deidra. Deidra visited once a month. I remember her asking me questions about our home, and I believe she soon became privy to the fact that I was telling her exactly what my father groomed me to say to her. However, she continued to come and support our family. On the last mandated visit, Deidra said profound words to me that continue to resonate with me to this day. She said "I know that you're parents are influencing you to say what they want you to say. One day, you will be 18 and you will be able to choose the life you want. You do not have to repeat the same cycle of anger and abuse with your own life. You can be anything you want and not be like your parents. Your parents are good people but they have made some poor decisions that are not yours or your fault. When you turn 18, you can achieve anything you want. Make your life better. Because YOU are in control. Be somebody and don't make excuses when you make mistakes, learn from them and move forward."

Deidra had no idea how positively she affected me that day. I was kicked out of my home on my 18th birthday, and from that point, I took Deidra's words and ran with it. Instead of attending college immediately post high school graduation I was in need of a job to survive. I was able to sustain three jobs to make ends meet. I started to exercise at a local gym and chose to work on my own anger issues. I sought

therapy and the built up anger of my childhood started to make sense. Getting kicked out of my home, having to provide for myself and having multiple responsibilities taught me to look at my childhood not as regret but as an experience that I choose to accept and not victimize myself.

There are many more life lessons I experienced much like anyone else. However, all the decisions I made came down to what Deidra said to me that day. She has always resonated in my mind. I've made many mistakes and have chosen to live, learn, and move forward. As an adult and as a parent I reflect on her words and I try to empower my children the way she empowered me.

Deidra is a very smart perceptive woman. She handled my family's case objectively. I didn't feel she placed judgment on my parents. She was aware of the culture clash my parents were experiencing with the American traditions. She spoke of different strategies to handle stressful situations relating to discipline approaches. I remember her being very empathetic to my parents struggling with the readjustments. I remember her reminding me of who my parents were and I must respect the rules that they set. She didn't lead me to go against my parents however made it known she was in place to protect me.

After that day, life happened and years passed. I have a wonderful

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Department Advances Efforts to Promote Racially Equitable Practice

Director Richard H. Calica recently announced the appointment of Robert Blackwell as external permanency affairs liaison to lead the department's continued efforts to promote racially-informed practice as the head of the Office of Racial Equity.



Robert
Blackwell

Reporting to Chief of Staff Gonzales, Blackwell will lead the department's external efforts to improve permanency outcomes through reunification, adoption and guardianship. The mission of the Office of Racial Equity is to strengthen the on-going effort to erase racial disparities within the child welfare system.

According to the department's FY 2012 annual report:

- African American children are almost twice as likely as white children to be reported as abused or neglected, while Hispanic children are half as likely to be reported;
- Roughly 30 percent of reported children are indicated as abused or neglected regardless of race. However, African American children are 50 percent more likely to be taken into temporary custody than white children, and Hispanic children are 50 percent less likely to be taken into temporary custody than white children;
- Although children who are white accounted for 57 percent of all indicated victims in FY 2012, 52 percent of the youth in foster care are African American.

Bob Blackwell first joined the department in 1984, serving in a variety of roles including special assistant to the director until 1992. Blackwell returned to DCFS in 2004 as the regional administrator of Central Region where he planned and coordinated service delivery of field operations and child protection services. Blackwell earned his Master of Social Work degree at the University of Illinois. He can be reached at Robert.Blackwell@illinois.gov or 217-524-9022.

Davis, con't.

family and my path crossed with Kristie. We started IOLS and it is our mission to empower children and teens. As a result, we have worked with DCFS on several initiatives, and on one visit to DCFS Elgin, I crossed Deidra's path. It was a very emotional encounter as I didn't believe I would see her again. We caught up and after talking to her, it became apparent that she had not changed at all. In fact, she was even more perceptive and more experienced.

This, among the other many reasons, is why Kristie and I have chosen to name our caseworker award in honor of her. Deidra A. Davis sets the example of what a social worker stands for. She is knowledgeable and experienced, and she handles cases objectively, not allowing past experiences to give bias to new cases and clients. She is straightforward and is relatable. She is empowering, supportive, and an inspiration. She is perceptive and I believe she

looks at new cases with fresh eyes. So many wonderful good intentioned social workers become burnt out for many different reasons. Some become tired of the same results and same heart wrenching situations. Others find ways to teach others to make the best of situations and to move forward. This is Deidra and that is why we honor the years of dedication and commitment to her clients. I honor and treasure the great influence she had in my life. We hope to motivate all the wonderful social workers within DCFS and other partner organizations who are *somebody to someone*. What they do and say can impact their clients for a lifetime. We want all social workers to remember that they are valued and, at times it is tough to stay resolute, but they CAN make a difference. Deidra did in mine.

Sincerely,
Maebelle Obispo-Emery

Someone You Probably Know...

DCFS employees are multifaceted, and there are those who extend themselves to provide services and support to children and families beyond their normal work hours. The person highlighted in this article is such a person. She is a native of Toledo, Ohio and has been employed with DCFS for 14 years. Someone you probably know is Deborah Perkins, child welfare advanced specialist of Cook South.

In 2012, Deborah received an African American Achievement Award from DCFS and was inducted into Central State University's Legacy Society. This society was established in 1887 to honor alumni and friends who have designated a planned or legacy gift to the university. Central State University is a historically Black university.

During her 16-year tenure as president of the Chicago Alumni Chapter of Central State, membership grew from 15 to over 200 paid members. For the past two years, Ms. Perkins has hosted a President's Reception and netted \$6,000 for the Dream Keepers Scholarship Fund. While focusing on increasing alumni membership, she was equally engaged in recruiting youth to further their higher education. She has recruited over 500 youth (including DCFS youth), many of whom she assisted in obtaining financial supports.

Deborah says she is a life-long learner and is currently working toward a doctoral degree at Capella University. In addition to maintaining a busy work and school schedule, she is actively



Deborah Perkins received a 2012 African American Achievement award.

involved in: the Illinois and National Association of Black Social Workers chapters; National Council of Negro Women-Chicago Midwest Chapter; Central State University, Dominican University and Concordia University alumni chapters and Lady Nina Ted Hat Society – Chicago.

We say great work to Deborah for these outstanding accomplishments.

Do You Know Your Black History?

1. Which European nation was the first to stop trading African slaves to the United States in 1794?
2. Who wrote the script for the 1975 hit *Cooley High*?
3. Denzel Washington played in what 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Charles Fuller?
4. Which state east of the Mississippi was the first to give Black women the right to vote, in 1913?
5. What was the nickname for the all-Black 332nd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Corps, which escorted Allied bombers through European airspace on 1,578 missions during World War II?
6. Besides being a movie director, composer, author and semi-pro basketball player, he was a photographer for *Life* magazine from 1948 to 1972.
7. Who holds the record of 100 points scored in a single NBA game?
8. What service did the first Black female millionaire, Madame C. J. Walker provide?
9. Who was the first Black female Grammy winner?
10. Who was the first Black Major League Baseball player?

Answers: 1. France; 2. Eric Monte; 3. *A Soldier's Story*; 4. Illinois; 5. The Tuskegee Army; 6. Gordon Parks; 7. *Willie*; 8. *Chamberlain*; 9. Ella Fitzgerald, 1958; 10. Jackie Robinson, 1947, Brooklyn Dodgers.

In Loving Memory of Carol Ann Winn

On May 7, 2012, the child welfare/social work profession lost a most dedicated and committed advocate. Carol Wynn earned a B.S. degree in social work from Norfolk State University and Masters of Social Work at the University of Tennessee. She began her professional career with Planned Parenthood in Nashville, Tennessee but moved to Chicago in 1981 and began working at the Bobby E. Wright Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center. She later worked at Sadie Waterford Manor as a social worker and established a private practice as a therapist. Carol was employed by Accounters Community Centers, the University of Chicago's Parent Health and Infant Development Initiative, and then became director of the Essex House at Mary Bartelme Homes. In each of these positions, she was a strong advocate for families and children. In 1989, Carol became the division director of foster care at Ada S. McKinley Community Services, Inc., where she was director until 2009. Carol's work with foster children was her life's passion.

Carol had a unique style all her own, incorporating many tribal fashions into her daily wear, always accessorizing with her precious stone jewelry and her bright red lipstick. She enjoyed the theatre and music. She instilled a keen understanding of black history and self-identity; making sure everyone around her was tied into their African American heritage. She enjoyed creative endeavors and was a collector of African-American and African Art, which she displayed gallery-style around her home.

Her dedication to excellent care and services to children was the guiding principle in all that she did. Carol presented nationally and internationally to share her vision for quality services for children in foster care and to urge others in the field to adopt her philosophy of compassion and excellence in foster care services. She was involved in many organizations as a committee and board member including: the National Association of Black Social Workers (of which she is immediate past president),

the National Association of Social Workers, the International Foster Care Organization, the Illinois African



American Family Commission, and the Southeast Community Youth Services Board. Carol served on advisory committees at Northern Illinois University, Chicago State University, the Chicago Sexual Assault Services Network ABJ Community Services, Inc., Coordinating Opportunities for Parenting Education, and the Community Mental Health Council's Professional Advisory Board. Carol was the 2009 recipient of the NASW Lifetime Achievement Award and the 2007 Phenomenal Woman Award from Chicago's Black Women Expo. Wherever she was involved, colleagues speak of how she changed their perspective on the practice of helping people. We will certainly miss Carol but will definitely cherish her memory.

Yolanda Jordan appointed to the Social Work Examining and Disciplinary Board

Yolanda Jordan, Northern Region placement manager, has been appointed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulations to the Social Work Examining and Disciplinary Board from April 2012 through 2016. The Social Work Examining and Disciplinary Board specifically focuses on social work licensure issues and enforcement of ethical social work practice in the state of Illinois. Ms. Jordan is one of nine board members.



2012 AAAC Outstanding Achievement Awards

AAAC is proud to acknowledge awarding 167 department staffers since 1993 with an Outstanding Achievement Award during our annual conferences/institutes. It is flattering that co-workers take time to acknowledge one another not only for professional work performance but public service and community involvement. The "awards ceremony" is a critical portion of each conference/institute and we endeavor to continue these celebrations with your support. In celebration of our 20th anniversary, we are pleased to present another outstanding group of committed, preserving, devoted, loyal, dedicated, tenacious, determined DCFS employees with this award. The awardees are:



Karen Birk

Karen Birk is a public service administrator with Field Operations at the Cook South - Emerald office. She has been employed with DCFS for over 11 years. In addition to managing her staff, she willingly

accepted the responsibility of working with another team. Karen has consistently exhibited excellent child welfare skills in the areas of leadership, judgment and assessment of case dynamics. Karen is a strong promoter of harmony among employees. In addition to her regular assigned duties, she has coordinated the development of team and regional activities in order to improve staff morale. Cook South implemented a committee known as "stress busters" which provides staff with opportunities to display creative artistic expressions via cultural activities. She willingly assumed leadership of this committee to ensure that this regional activity would remain an integral function throughout the past year. Mrs. Birk enthusiastically embraced her responsibilities, demonstrating creativity and extending herself beyond the call of duty within DCFS. During Black History Month, she and her team did a wonderful depiction of "Soul Train" followed by another creative table display commemorating National Women's History Month during its High Tea at Emerald.



James Bracey

James Bracey is married and proud father of a 9-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. He resides in Chicago but his active community involvement extends to East St. Louis, Illinois where he currently

serves as the national and state supervisor for youth at the John H. Johnson Boys Club. From 1999 – 2009 he made at least one trip a month to East St. Louis to ensure continued efficient operation. James has been

an employee of the department for 13 ½ years as a child welfare specialist from Cook South. James has a rather quiet and intense persona but connects very well with co-workers and especially with teenage clients. He does a great deal and often it is extremely beyond the call of duty.

It was reported that Mr. Bracey is devoted to his job and thinks outside the box to preserve a family. In addition to managing his case load, involvement in Christmas celebrations, and other events taking place at the Emerald office he was recently handed the baton to organize a Black History Month celebration for South Region. Each morning staff was greeted by a thought provoking reflection. He is co-convenor for the Progressive Partners Action Team which covers LANs 77, 79, 84 and 85.



Geneva Byrd

Geneva Byrd is from Springfield, Illinois and has been employed by DCFS for 18 years. She has worked as a child protection investigator, placement and intact worker, child advanced specialist for State Central Register (hotline) and currently is a child welfare specialist for CAYIT. She is known by her co-workers as the "placement queen." DCFS is most fortunate to have a motivated, determined fighter among its ranks.

In 2002, Mrs. Byrd was in a life threatening car accident but she was blessed to return to work ready to continue to make a difference.

Geneva often places the needs of others before her own. This was exemplified when a situation arose and a youth needed an emergency placement. All resources were exhausted but she stayed after hours and contacted "her resources" until placement was secured. The amazing part of this story is that sev-

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Achievement Awards, cont.

eral days prior to this situation arising, her brother had passed away of cancer. She worked through her own pain, grief and loss. On weekends she conducts youth groups and spends her time visiting nursing homes, volunteering with the American Cancer Society of Illinois and supports Make a Wish Foundation, Children Memorial Hero Society and the Family Resource Center.

Kathleen Clark

Kathleen Clark has been employed by DCFS for 30 years and is currently a supervisor in the Office of Quality Assurance where she promotes harmony and respect. She is very detail-oriented, meticulous and she oversees many phases of the design and implementation of the Outcome Enhancement process. Kathleen is a peer reviewer for the Council on Accreditation. Outside of her work at DCFS, she is an active member of St. Elizabeth Church. During holidays she feeds the homeless and is active in other church auxiliaries, one of which is the choir.



Theresa Ferguson

Theresa Ferguson is from Cook South Region. She has been working at DCFS for 21 years. Theresa has consistently exemplified relentless dedicated service her clients even under the most unfavorable

circumstances.

Juvenile Court judges and attorneys have given accolades as a result of her dedication, commitment and court testimony, which has clearly delineated concern for the well-being of children as well as knowledge of their issues. Based on this behavior, Theresa has received five Outstanding Positive Court Reports from juvenile court within a two year period.



Jacqueline Laurence

Jacqueline Laurence is one of those individuals who provides critically-needed support services for staff. This support is very valuable and keeps the agency humming. Jackie has the ability to move paperwork at

the speed of lightning. She is part of the Cook South staff and has been employed for 18 ½ years. In addition to being efficient, timely, and precise in the performance of her duties, she is witty and quick with a smile.

While her duties have changed over the years, things added, things deleted, this office associate has willingly accepted assignments beyond the scope and realm of her responsibilities. She has efficiently produced work products that exemplified her knowledge of office systems and she designs layouts to capture your attention quickly. Her determination finally paid off last summer when she was awarded her Baccalaureate degree from National Louis University.



Lisa Lunford

Lisa Lunford works at the Cook South–Emerald location and has been with DCFS for 20 years. Lisa began as a child protection investigator and now serves as a placement supervisor. She is noted for

always being available to her staff as well as clients. Lisa takes time to know each client and does whatever is necessary to assist both her team members as well as clients. Her assistance includes traveling long distances to ensure a Child and Family Team Meeting occurs. She has co-chaired the Regional Quality Council for several years and often volunteers to serve on other committees.

Her involvement outside DCFS includes being an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and serving as a charity event volunteer and participating in fund raisers throughout each year. Lisa is also the family member that steps in during crisis without hesitation.



Tanya Parker

Tanya Parker has been a child welfare advanced specialist for 11½ years and works in Cook North Region. She excels in all performance areas of her job due to her knowledge of department poli-

cies and especially a commitment to permanency for our families. For 11 months she was temporarily assigned as supervisor. During this time she was able to direct her colleagues in case management decisions while providing needed supervisory supports. When informed that her placement worker responsibilities would be expanded to include adoption, she stepped up without any hesitation. Tanya is one of those who continue to maintain contact with family members of closed cases.

Ms. Parker finds opportunity to work with ARC of Illinois, an organization that provides support to families of children with disabilities, specifically Down Syndrome. She is active with her community school and the local school council.



Deborah Perkins

See the "Someone you probably know" article on page 9.



Deborah Perteete-Anyanwu

Deborah Perteete-Anyanwu is an executive secretary in the Division of Child Protection in Cook South and has worked for DCFS for 32 years. She is always pleasant and calm. Deborah is one of the first

people to arrive at the office and you can always find her in the office after 5 p.m. Most importantly, Deborah is eager to assist other staff finding information or resources, answering questions or when they just need help.

Deborah has some level of active involvement in every major event or activity involving staff or clients at Cook South. She is the chair of the Employee Involvement Active Participation Organizational Op-

erations, which began December 1999. This group organizes fantastic events such as Mother's and Father's Day Brunches; Black History Month Luncheon, Summer Picnic, and ice cream socials, to mention a few. These activities promote staff appreciation, harmony and camaraderie. In addition, Deborah is also a fantastic cook and baker.

AAAC Chairperson's Award

Each year the AAAC chairperson gives awards to individuals who support the council's activities. This year two individuals were selected for their outstanding and extensive support.



Wasi Young

Wasi has been quite a presence since the inception of our conferences. Upon entering the ballroom on the first day of the conference you hear the beat of Wasi's drums, setting the at-

mosphere and tone of the upcoming activities. Wasi takes time to perform not only the African American Advisory Council Institute, but also at Real Men Moving Forward and I Am Queen, two other events held on behalf of African American men and women.

Wasi is an outstanding motivator of youth and always delivers a positive message when given the opportunity to speak. We are appreciative of his willingness to volunteer and give a hand whenever called upon.



Randy Sandler

Randy puts one in the mind of the "Energizer bunny." He is always in constant motion, moving, helping and assisting whenever and wherever possible. Mr. Sandler is a very strong and

committed advocate for youth. He has been a presenter in previous AAAC conferences as well as in Real Men Moving Forward conferences. He has a collaborative spirit and is a visionary, and the council has benefited greatly from these attributes.



African American Advisory Council Members

OFFICERS:

Michael Burns Chairman
Jimmie Whitelow, Vice Chair
Robin Albritton, Secretary

MEMBERS:

Legertha Barner
Jackie Bright
Brenda Brown
Bremen Campbell
Diane Cottrell
Cheryl Dampeer
Shirley Davis-Barsh
Vendetta Dennis
Millie Donelson
Marilyn Giles
Veronica Gray-Mattison
Carolyn Griggs
Angela Hassell
Jacqueline Johnson
Thomas Jones
Tracy Marshall
Sonia Phillips
Lea Redmond
James Robinson
Gregory Smith

Ex-Officio:

Carole Herman-Armstrong
Jere Moore

African American Services:

Rochelle Crump

Farewell to Frances Elbert

By Michael Burns

The African American Advisory Council's vice chairperson, Frances Elbert, retired in October, 2012 after more than 32 years of service with DCFS. Frances will be greatly missed by the AAAC and many of her colleagues.

Frances began her career in 1980 as a child protection specialist and held several important positions during her tenure with the department. She has worked in the Office of Child Development, as statewide teen parent coordinator, statewide liaison to the Department of Corrections (DOC) and served as the associate deputy director in the Education and Transition Services and Service Intervention divisions.

While working as a sexual abuse investigator, Frances played a major part in providing training to hospital staff regarding the use of anatomically-correct dolls. As the teen parent coordinator, she served on the Child Welfare League of America's National Committee on Standards for Services to At-Risk Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents. Frances assisted in the development of a training curriculum and conducted statewide trainings to DCFS and POS staff. While serving as the statewide DOC liaison, she enhanced the communication of DCFS youth involved with the Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Corrections. Frances is also the co-author of the international Ansell Casey Life Skill Assessment Supplement for pregnant and parenting adolescents.



Because of her many talents, Frances served in some significant roles for the AAAC. As the council's vice chairperson for over 16 years, Frances has been at the forefront for the organization's major efforts, including: serving as co-chair of many conferences; editor of the newsletter; facilitating trainings, especially the Regional Dialogues; and working with new members as they sought to find areas that they could contribute to the Council's work and mission.

It takes dedicated and committed individuals like Ms. Elbert to make organizations succeed in their efforts. We will always be grateful for the many contributions that Frances made to the department, the AAAC and the children and families of Illinois. We wish the very best in her retirement, and one thing that we know: whatever she does or wherever she goes, she will be known for laughter because nobody enjoys a good laugh like Frances.

The Permanency Enhancement Program Initiative Continues!

By Rochelle Crump, Chief of African American Services

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services continues its commitment to support the statewide Permanency Enhancement Program Initiative that examines child welfare disparities and disproportionality within the child welfare system.

The genesis of this initiative began with the first of four symposiums in March of 2007 with ongoing discussions between the Central Region, the Illinois African-American Advisory Council and our external “strategic partners” which included the African American Family Commission and Illinois State University.

The statewide curriculum re-

searches child welfare policies and practices and historic systemic racism within many systems, including courts and law enforcement. The process has strengthened a collaborative team of community stakeholder leaders and activists, service providers, child welfare professionals and agencies. The creation of sub-committees, community focus groups and training activities will also further the understanding and work of dismantling institutional racism and promoting racial equity within the child welfare system.

This partnership broadens the outcome expectations to achieve permanency goals of: reducing

the number of children entering the child welfare system; increasing numbers and shorter timelines of reunification and the adoption process; and reducing of the disproportionate number of African American children in the child welfare system.

It has been a priceless educational journey for participants engaged in the Permanency Enhancement Initiative. We encourage staff to follow the progress of this agency initiative by logging into the ISU website at <http://adoptionresearch.illinois-state.edu/PEP/about.shtml> for regional updates.

Remembering the 20th Annual AAAC Institute



About the African-American Advisory Council

The African-American Advisory Council is a statewide organization consisting of a maximum of 31 department employees, per the Council's by-laws. Seventy-two percent of the members are from Cook County and 28 percent are from the remaining three regions, reflecting the proportion of African-Americans within Cook and downstate.

AAAC members are, at this point, African-American staff selected based on their expressed interest and willingness to work for African-American issues within DCFS. Employees may become members after two years of employment and by submitting a brief narrative noting their interests in issues affecting African-Americans to the membership chair.

As vacancies on the Council occur, those individuals who have submitted narratives will be interviewed by the membership committee.

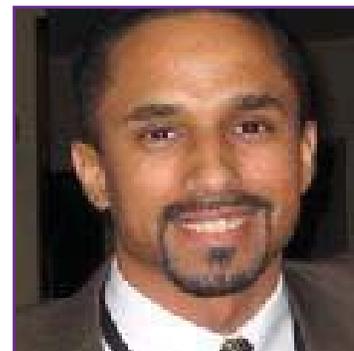
Mission Statement

The purpose of the African-American Advisory Council is to advise and make specific recommendations with solutions to the director and division deputies concerning the department's provision of services to African-American clients, staff and its contractual service providers in the following areas: recruitment, legislation, employment, community relations and development of professional issues.

Book Review: *Facing the Rising Sun* By Oronde A. Miller

"Facing the Rising Sun" Perspectives on African American Family and Child Well-Being is an excellent source of reading for social workers and others working in the child welfare system. Oronde and his brother were placed in foster care by their Caucasian mother in hopes they would be adopted. Their father, an African American, did not learn of this action until later and was informed by authorities it "was to late."

This book contains essays of the author's life experiences and the ideas and values that govern the work supporting African American children and families. The author states, "... any successful efforts by African Americans to reclaim and protect our children and families must begin with an acknowledgement that *ideas matter*." The ideas expressed in this book can be brought to realization if the worker would only act. Case managers, supervisors, administrators and all those with an investment in the true well-being of children in the child welfare system can benefit by reading this book. Our



Oronde A. Miller

ideas matter, they need only to be brought into being by actions. Take it from someone who has been there and experienced it. "Reviewing the Call for Activist Professionals"; "Permanency Matters! Affirming Every Child's Existence in this World" and "Affirming Every Child's Existence: Child Welfare Beyond Child Protection and Intervention" are just a few of his interesting and thought provoking essays.

Orondes' work is another means for motivating readers to realize our common goals and concerns we share in creating families and communities in which our children can grow and develop.

Interested in Joining AAAC?

Send a brief narrative stating your interest in problems and issues affecting African Americans to:

Diane Cottrell, membership chairperson

E-Mail: Diane.Cottrell@illinois.gov • Phone: 708-210-3716
15115 S. Dixie Highway, Harvey IL 60426