

# AAAAC

African American Advisory Council

Winter/Spring • 2005

# Black History Month

Celebrating African-  
Americans Heroes

# From The Chair



Michael Burns

Once again we were able to have another outstanding annual conference because of great attendance and participation by staff. We continue to appreciate your support, ideas and feedback that is valuable to the conference planning committee in developing workshops and general sessions that enhance our ability to work with children and families. Despite the fact that Training was short staffed along with new personnel as a result of change in administration, the conference planning committee and training was able to maintain the standard that has been established for this annual event. However, in light of budget cuts, our conference will be downsized in 2005. We will only be able to have a one-day conference. As in the past, when faced with budgetary restraints, the AAAC will put forth its best effort to provide participants a great learning experience. The conference will offer an excellent opportunity to strategize and learn other ways to communicate with clients and consumers as well as provide creative methods (thinking outside the box) to obtain resources/services. You can read more about the conference in this edition.

It has been many months since the last newsletter publication by the Council; therefore I thought that now would be a good time to give an update on some of our activities during the past year. First, I would like to welcome our new members to the AAAC; they are Lawrence Kilonzo (Cook North), Jere Moore (Champaign), Gregory Smith (Cook North), and Robert Williams (Danville). We are very pleased to have these outstanding individuals as members and they have not wasted anytime in contributing to our work. Please feel free to speak to these individuals and all Council members about any issues/concerns that you may feel appropriate for the Council to address. In addition to these new members, Oscar Gipson was selected to fill the vacancy of an ex-officio slot. Oscar was a very valuable Council member prior to his retirement in 2002, and we appreciate his willingness to volunteer time on behalf of the AAAC.

The Council had a representative on each

of the eight Program Improvement Plan (PIP) work groups to assist in drafting recommendations for the Child & Family Federal Review. This was a very important effort and we appreciate the work that Legertha Barner, Jackie Bright, Vendetta Dennis, Lolita Dumas, and Wanda Williams contributed to the PIP. In addition to these volunteers, we had other members that contributed through their specific job assignments. They were Cretora Barnett, Diane Cottrell and Gregory Smith. Mary Dyer also participated on a workgroup on behalf of the Council's request. The PIP will greatly impact how child welfare will operate in Illinois for years to come and it was vital to have these individuals provide input from their knowledge and experience to this process. I would like to thank Deputy Director Erwin McEwen for including Council members on the workgroups.

In our first meeting with Director Samuels, we submitted a compilation of position papers on topics that the AAAC had developed for discussion. The topics were: Foster Care Recruitment and Retention, Post Adoption Services, Preventive Services, Service Delivery To African American Families, Status of Northern Region Agency Performance Team, Reunification of African American Families and the composition of the Death Review Team. It is highly likely that the budget for fiscal year 2005 will have some affect on how services will be defined in the topics listed. Additionally, there is likely to be new federal legislation that will impact preventive services and perhaps post adoption services. It is our intent to continue discussion on these topics with Director Samuels. You can read the position papers in this newsletter edition.

The Council has participated in a joint subcommittee with the Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC) on incarcerated youth under guardianship. A goal of this committee is to determine what the actual practices are in servicing this population and to find out the obstacles that case managers face in servicing incarcerated youth. A report from this joint effort

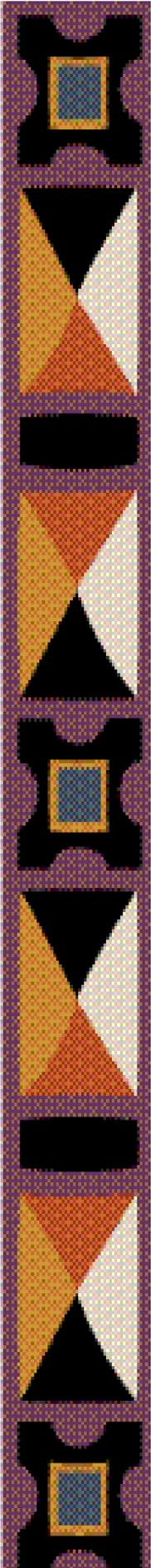
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# African American Advisory Council

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# History and African-American Heroes

By Russell K. Ladson

History can usually be defined as the story that is left behind after the actors are no longer around to speak for themselves. Hero may be found in the dictionary defined as “a person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life”... in the service of others. A hero is often one who has demonstrated a willingness to go the extra mile in circumstances where most others would not. They press on to accomplish something that they believe in regardless of the odds against them. History is generally created from two opposing points of view. We look to the past to learn. We look to the future to change. For African-American heroes the documentation of what we see is simply a case of “to be or not to be”....

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is universally accepted as one of the greatest heroes in recent African-American history. In January we celebrate his birthday. In February he leads the star-studded cavalcade

of African-American recognition gleaned from the history books, record books, and our memories. March closes out the ceremonial acknowledgements for another year. Seldom heralded are the thousands of average everyday men, women and children who lacked eloquence but whose abundant endowment of courage made the accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (and many others) possible.

February is Black History month. It is a time when African-Americans look back and reflect on the lives and struggles of its scholars, leaders, achievers and heroes. The noteworthy efforts of African-American workers at DCFS, on behalf of children and families, should also be considered and recognition given throughout the year. In child welfare, research is the history that informs our fears about the future of children who have experienced abuse and neglect. Intervention is a transient attempt to change a future that can be possibly predicted but cannot be assured. The fruits of a workers' well-intentioned act may go undocumented when case files are closed. After the



Russell Ladson,  
former AAAC member

# History and African-American Heroes

smoke of day-to-day mandates and directives has cleared, the only philosophy defining success may be “no news, is good news.” And, as time passes, the only history that identifies either client or worker as a hero (or probable success) may be the absence of a news worthy event that cannot be forgotten because the “perpetrator” was an abused child served by the Department of Children and Family Services.

Heroes are born out of struggle, crises and chaos. They are not perfect people, only people who have risen to a time that has come. Where sacrifice and struggle are conditions that are taken for granted, the term heroism easily becomes interchangeable with leadership. The real distinction of heroism is often determined by whether we choose to measure individuals by their human failings or by their positive accomplishments. Without eloquent presentations, historical documentation, descents from heaven, or ultimate acts of martyrism committed on behalf of someone or something we care about, recognition of heroism that is commonplace in our midst can be elusive.

In recent years, the United States government decided to confer

the Congressional Medal of Honor on seven African-American veterans who served in World War II. Six had died but one was able to wear the medal with pride for all of them. The Executive powers of government had refused to grant recognition to soldiers of color at a time when the recognition could have served as inspiration for their peers in the trenches beside them. They, like other African-American warriors, were left immersed in the daily struggle of survival, continuously exhibiting courage to overcome adversity, in obscurity.

This example of belated recognition in history offers some parallels to the recognition of heroism in the DCFS work experience. Child welfare is not an easy profession where one’s extraordinary effort can achieve long term distinction, especially in work environments where extraordinary effort is a norm. Practitioners of child welfare understand that miracles are required from somewhere each and every day. It

**Heroes are born out of struggle, crises and chaos. They are not perfect people, only people who have risen to a time that has come.**

is important that we take time, on an ongoing basis, to identify and appreciate those around us whose daily triumphs have been special.

Individuals usually achieve recognition as heroes as a consequence of a single event. In child welfare, the single event that gets noticed could be a simple footnote to a much more spectacular series of career accomplishments. African-Americans in child welfare should not depend simply on the past or external sources for examples of greatness. The kinds of challenges, that all DCFS workers and clients share and must continuously overcome, create opportunities to make history for African-American heroes every day.



The choir group Expressions of Excellence, comprised of Cook Central employees, entertains the audience at the African American Family Conference

# 12th Annual DCFS African American

By Cretora Barnett  
Conference Co-Chair

The African American Advisory Council hosted its 12th annual conference last April, and it was a resounding success. Over 375 child welfare professionals from DCFS and private agencies participated in one of the best conferences the Council has hosted. The theme was timely, the speakers and panel were some of the best this country has to offer, and most were local, but nationally known experts in their respective fields.

The conference started with an opening ceremony that was awesome. A processional of all the African American administrators led by “elders”, our most recent retirees who represent the wisdom of the agency. Each person was introduced to let the conference participants know who the newest and current leaders are in this new administration.

As always, the Council had a Libation Ceremony and the singing of the Negro National Anthem. Michael Burns, Chairperson, welcomed the audience to the conference and we heard from Deputy Director of External Affairs Bamani Obadele; Chief of Affirmative Action, Alice Kirby (now retired), and Director Bryan Samuels, who let us know where he planned to take the Department in the next several years. He made it clear that the adolescent population is a top priority, as he stated, “we are going to service the children we have now, in this system!”

Director Samuels assisted Chairman Burns in giving out the Outstanding Achievement awards to:

Dr. Juwanza Kunjufu was the keynote speaker for the morning and he then held a Mega workshop on working with African American youth, which brought the house down. He gave so much information it put most of us on overload. He had books and stats to back up his information and the crowd loved it.

The evening Cultural Presentation included musical renditions from our own Monico Wittingham, Expressions of Excellence, Global Girls under the direction of Marvinetta Penn; Dirkson



Conference participants attentively listening



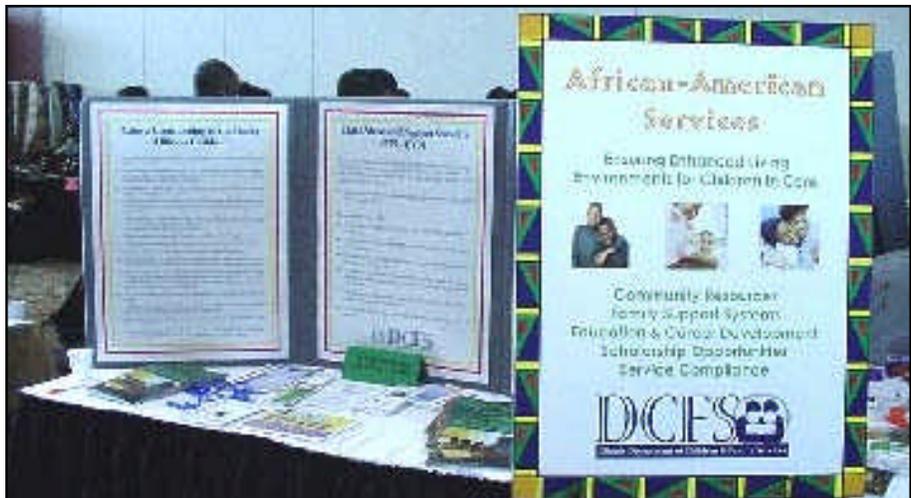
Fred Dyer, panelist



Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, Keynote Speaker



Bryan Austin, Chairman of  
Statewide Youth Advisory Board



Exhibitor display

# Advisory Council Conference



Director Samuels (from left), award recipient Ella Lee and Mike Burns.

Middle School Jazz Band featuring bass guitarist, Chad Collins (son of our colleague Linda Collins), directed by Jeff Brath and a special opera rendition from Mrs. David West.

In addition, a panel of experts moderated by Dr. Jaiya John, included Robert "Scoop" Jackson, and Fred Dyer; Sharva-Campbell Hamilton, Mark Sanders, Dr. George Smith, Derron Brewer and Bryan Austin tackled the panel topic, "Tapping the Potential." This was an extraordinary group. Each one "made it plain" for the audience. We were especially proud of our youth panelists Brewer and Austin.

After the panel and the questions and answers, again the panel received a standing ovation. They were candid, bright and imparted some very real and useful information. Most of the panelists then went on to do individual workshops that were packed. It proved that we are thirsty for good information. Information that really affects our day-to-day jobs. Useful information!

The luncheon was the culminating activity and once again, we were treated to the musical delights of the "Expressions of Excellence" choir. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Eric Whitaker, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health was quite honored that our young panelist, Derron wanted to introduce him. Dr. Whitaker spent most of the luncheon time chatting with Derron and Derron did not disappoint in his introduction. Dr. Whitaker provided some very interesting and timely information regarding health care for adolescents. He was knowledgeable, humorous, and spoke with a candor that was well received.

Michael Burns closed the conference out acknowledging all the hard work that the conference planning committee, headed by Frances Elbert, Chairperson and Cretora Barnett, Co-chairperson put in. He thanked the Training Division, the Hispanic Advisory Committee, The Division of External Affairs, the African American Administrators, and the Director for their support in helping to make this 12th annual conference such a success.

If you missed it, you missed a wonderful opportunity. However, there is always this year. Hope to see you then!



African American craft display



Greg Smith and Millie Tolliver - Council members



Michael Byrd



Conference participants

More photos on pages 8, 9 and 15

# Highlights from the 12th Annual African American Advisory Council Conference



# Highlights from the 12th Annual African American Advisory Council Conference



# A Rising Health Issue

By Patrice Sudduth, BSN, RN, MS.

Child Welfare Nurse Specialist

Illinois Department of Children and Family Services

According to the latest health care information, there is an alarming increase in the rate of reported incidences of HIV/AIDS related illnesses. In Illinois, these illnesses are affecting African Americans in greater numbers compared to the general population. In particular, the African American female population demonstrates the greatest increase in the infection rate of this disease. The morbidity rate of infection between 18-45 years of age in the African American female population has increased to over 50%. In addition, the male population is experiencing upward trends.

Given the number of "wards" assigned to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, this phenomenon has a direct and indirect effect on Illinois children and families. Although DCFS children range in age from birth to twenty-one (21) years of age, there is a concern that many of the

parents of these individuals may be in this "high risk population".

There are several factors to consider. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will be challenged by the increase in

served. Staff members will be given the responsibility of empowerment for the clients and families in how to live with HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS educational process will have to take on a universal focus in presenting a general awareness of this disease phenomenon. The key element in the educational process will be awareness, prevention, healthy life choices, safe sexual practices, proper nutrition, as well as abatement of alcohol and substance abuses.

A major concern is for increased resources for general and specialized health care. Those individuals affected by HIV/AIDS will require more visits to health care providers, and in some instances, increases in the amounts of medication that is required for healthy living. In addition, the Department of Children and Family Services will be faced with increasing tracking resources

to assure the timeliness of providing adequate health resources for clients. In the final analysis, government, and funding sources must be made aware of this developing trend, and initiate increased provision for addressing this developing health issue.

**The key element in the educational process will be awareness, prevention, healthy life choices, safe sexual practices, proper nutrition, as well as abatement of alcohol and substance abuses.**

the number of wards that enter the system. There will be concerns for creating the resources to educate and train staff members in understanding this phenomenon. In addition, DCFS will be challenged in disseminating information to the clients and families that are

## Just A One-Time Thing! An 'Expressions Of Excellence'

How many times have we started something with the understanding that it would be "just a one-time thing" or event? Isn't it wonderful how one time things can become the very motivation or force that drives you on your daily journey through this life? What comes to mind when you think of a one-time thing? For me it would be some type of volunteer work, or doing some type of community service work. I want to share with you another one time thing that happens to be a very special part of our lives at DCFS. Allow me to introduce to some of you for the very first time, an incredibly inspirational Choir known as the "Expressions Of Excellence" under the direction of Joyce Hall.

In the process of interviewing Joyce, it was clear to me that she isn't only humble, but she is also a very spiritual person, and she tends to shy away from the spot lights. However, it's like a shining star, the magnificence tends to illuminate without regard to earthly boundaries. For those of you who may not know Joyce Hall, she is currently a LCSW employed with DCFS as a Cook Manager of Diagnostic Facilities. In addition, she is a Minister, and the Minister of Music at her Church. Joyce has been singing since about the age of seven.

As impressive as Joyce may appear to be on paper, her professional career doesn't begin to mirror her contributions to those who know her as a friend; mentor; spiritual advisory; singer; a mother fig-

ure; and as a person who is passionate about her singing/choir and the choir's ministry. To quote Diann Cooper, "Joyce is a phenomenal woman."

The choir, "Expression Of Excellence" consist of several talented, warm, and caring people, who happen to also be employees of DCFS, with a range of departmental representation; Clinical Division, Field Operations, Child Protection, Clerical, and also a member who is currently a temporary employee.

Some of you may know the names of the choir members, but for those of you who might not, allow me to introduce: Katherine Bonner, Diann Cooper, Darius Shavers, Katie Thompson, and Tammy Wolfork. Some of the members were interviewed for this article. The most impressive part of my interviews with the various choir members was that each of them had very similar comments and compliments as it relates to why and how the choir came into existence. The choir members often expressed pride and joy as it relates to singing and performing for so many groups of people, i.e. singing at the Care Giver's Conference, and most recently, singing at this year's African American Conference. To quote Joyce, if I may, "this thing just sort of took off. It began in year 2003 at Cook Central as just a one-time thing. It was just suppose to be a group of people (DCFS Staff) singing on program

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# Get Your Winter Read On!

Reviewed by Tanya Smith

As the winter months have us homebound, please take some time out to read, read, and read.

There are several ways to get your read on. Join a book club, get books on tape, and definitely allow yourself some "me time" to just read. When you do decide to enjoy some reading, there are several books I will recommend to read this winter.

The first book on my list to read this winter is great reading to nurture your spirit and will challenge you to change your way of looking at life. This book is "The Purpose Driven Life", by Rick Warren. This book has been on the New York Times Best Sellers' List for quite some time. A New York Times book reviewer states that,

*"This book will help you understand why you are alive and God's amazing plan for you both here and now and for eternity. The author will guide you through a personal 40-day spiritual journey that will transform your answer to life's most important question: What on earth am I here for? Knowing God's purpose for creating you will reduce your stress, focus your energy, simplify your decisions, give meaning to your life, and most important, prepare you for eternity."*

The second book on my list to read this summer is one that will encourage you, uplift your morale and spirit, as well as change your outlook on life. It's a very small book of only 106 pages but one with a very powerful message. I was able to read this book in only an hour. It was fun reading and extremely insightful. Once you've read this book, you too will be recommending it to others who need the morale boost. This book is called "The Present". Spencer Johnson, author of the best selling book, "Who Moved My Cheese," also authored "The Present". A book reviewer stated that,

*"The Present is an engaging story of a young man's journey to adulthood, and his search for The Present, a mysterious and elusive gift he hears about from a great old man. This Present, according to the old man, is 'the best present a person can receive.'"*

*"Later, when the young boy becomes a young man, disillusioned with his work and his life, he returns to ask the old man, once again, to help him find The Present. The old man responds, 'Only you have the power to find The Present for yourself.' So the young man embarks on a tireless search for this magical gift that holds the secret to his personal happiness and business success."*

The third book on my list to read this winter is a totally different book altogether. It's a

book by African American author Marissa Monteilh. The name of this book is "The Chocolate Ship." This book is for those who can imagine what it would be like to go on a cruise ship that was black owned and marketed for African American customers. I truly enjoyed reading this book. This book is filled with love, intrigue, scandal, and mystery. The book is described as the following:

*"After three years together, Mia can't help wondering if she's got a real future with Miles - who's all that and then some, as long as the words 'love' and 'commitment' don't creep into the conversation. But the lady's willing to put her doubts aside until after the vacation they've planned together with a group of their closest friends: a luxurious Caribbean cruise on the maiden voyage of the Chocolate Ship. The brain-child of billionaire black entrepreneur Delmonte Harrison, it's the Love Boat with a soulful spin."*

*"En route to Paradise, anything can happen and anything goes. Wings are sprouted, taboos are tolerated, truths are revealed, hearts are broken and reassembled - and lovin' is served up as hot as Caribbean spice. All of a sudden Miles has a new crew of admirers. And Mia, who has caught the roving eye of the very fine Delmonte Harrison himself, is well on her way to discovering that temptation fever does not discriminate."*

I invite all of you to enjoy one or all of the books mentioned for this season. You will not be disappointed! Go ahead and get that read on!

## An 'Expressions Of Excellence'

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of the Black History/Heritage Celebration. The Choir was well received by many of the DCFS staff in attendance and from there, it was launched from the ashes of a hidden gem to a well-known shining star.

Joyce has made herself available to all three Regional site offices for rehearsals.

The members often sacrifice their lunch breaks so to be able to practice their craft. Many of the choir members stated that when they are together all of their professional titles are left at the doorstep, and all that truly matters is the joy that each of them receives from singing and from performing for the glory of God, and for themselves. Although, as Darius has stated, "it feels good to hear the applause from so many people", e.g. he cited former DCFS employee, Dany St. Preux's recent

memorial service as way of comfort for staff through song.

The Choir members also wanted to acknowledge DCFS management staff for supporting their commitment to sing and maintain this wonderful choir. Many of the choir members have expressed that singing also provides an outlet from the daily stressors of work.

Although many of the choir members initially met one another at work, what's also impressive are the friendships that have developed, and that will be long lasting, beyond DCFS and beyond the boundaries of this earth.

It has been truly a remarkable journey; from "just a one time thing" to the sparkle right center of Cook Central. Simply put, Joyce Hall, you and your choir members are truly an "Expression Of Excellence".

# AAAC Position Papers

The articles below is a compilation of six position papers that were developed by African American Advisory Council members for your perusal and consideration. These topics were sent to you as agenda items for our meeting held on November 20, 2003. We look forward to productive dialogue and resolution to the issues raised.

Excerpts from the position papers have been extracted for this newsletter. Complete copies can be obtained electronically by contacting Michael Burns or Frances Elbert.

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## Foster Care Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention of foster homes has been a vital concern of the African American Advisory Council (AAAC) for several years. It continues to be of major importance, particularly for African American children where there remains a need for viable foster homes located in their communities of origin. The Council found foster home recruitment and retention to be the number one priority in Regional Dialogues held in Cook Central, Cook North and Northern Region. It was also mentioned as a priority in each of the remaining three regions. In the dialogues, staff was asked to identify issues that they wanted the Council to address with the Department. Staff overwhelmingly voiced their frustrations with children being placed outside of their community of origin. It was learned that foster home conversion to adoptive homes had greatly reduced the availability of foster homes and efforts had to be undertaken to replenish this deficit. Quality homes need to be developed to meet the needs of the children in substitute care and for those who will be entering the child welfare system.

Another strategy has to include retaining or recruiting homes that will take the children we are servicing – the older child. Many homes are licensed, but have no children in them, because they choose not to take older children. Our licensing staff are being used to update/relicense and monitor these homes every two years, even though they have no children. This is not cost effective, and gives the appearance that we (DCFS and agencies) have more than enough homes to accommodate the children in care. A retooling and a re-emphasis must be placed on our needs as a Department. Just as there was a push for families to adopt, we need to implore some strategy to educate and support through incentives and education that we have older children that need lifetime commitments, also. With the right kind of support and services there should be viable homes for many high end “difficult to place” youth to find permanent homes.

## Adolescents and Post-Adoption Services

The African American Advisory Council has raised concerns regarding the increasing number of subsidized adoption and guardianship families within the last 3 years. The number of children receiving subsidies increased from 17,000 to 30,000 in Cook County alone. This is approx-

imately an increase of more than 58%. During this same time period, the numbers of referrals for services among these cases increased from approximately 67 to 100 per month.

The unit has been able to provide appropriate interventions for most of the referrals, but has fallen short on implementing a concrete plan on how to work with this growing population of adolescents, most being troubled teens. The Department’s initiative on permanency has been an overall success, however, much of the planning in placing adolescents with families without the necessary support has caused a tremendous hardship on families.

A longitudinal study needs to be done to determine if the adopted/subsidized children are fairing better in these lifetime commitments created since the Permanency Initiative; when many of these permanencies were made hastily, pressured, and without much forethought as to the impending needs of the children. Emphasis was often placed on numbers of completions/finalized adoptions versus well-planned and committed lifetime relationships.

If we are to be successful in keeping these families intact, we truly need to implement a solid plan to work with these families and teens. We cannot continue to say, “the families are responsible for their children because we no longer have legal”. We cannot sit on our laurels, saying we have achieved permanencies, when they are disrupting daily due to lack of preparation, lack of service intervention, and plain ol’ apathy.

We are responsible. The majority of these youth are African American; they are in our community. We, as African Americans must embrace our youth and families through family support and community resources. It is the Department’s responsibility to develop resources that meet the needs of these families and to educate the community about the services available.

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## PREVENTIVE SERVICES

### Intact Families and the “Remain Home” Permanency Goal

“It takes a village to raise a child”, is an old African proverb that is popular and sometimes overused. However, we, the African American Advisory Council (AAAC) believe it to be essential in the maintenance of the African American family. Research has shown that children tend to do best when raised within their families, and in accordance with this research data, Illinois has statutes in place that sanction the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to provide services to intact families. The statute specifically states that the purpose of intact family services is to “prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families by identifying family problems, assisting families in resolving their problems, and preventing the breakup of families when the prevention of child removal is desirable and possible and when a

# AAAC Position Papers

child can be cared for safely at home.”(20 ILCS 505/5(a)(3)(c)).

The AAAC would like to advocate and aid in the development of increased resources that would ultimately assist in more children remaining safely with their families of origin. Between January 2002 and October 30, 2003, within the State of Illinois there have been 6,652 family cases opened involving African American families, out of the number of family cases opened 4,608 were opened exclusively for intact family services. Given the disproportionate number of African American families involved with the Department, it would prove beneficial to families if more funding were targeted to expand upon the ‘village’ aspect of our community. We have listed options for various programs to be targeted for funding in selective cities, Peoria/Bloomington East St. Louis, Chicago and Rockford. Within 2004, the AAAC would like to initiate dialogue with the Director’s office, specifically addressing the need for more resources being allocated for the front-end of cases.

## SERVICE DELIVERY TO AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES

- Failure to utilize existing expertise of qualified African American staff with education and experience in more decision-making positions. Decisions and policies that impact on African American families should be greatly influenced by those who are closest to it.
- Development and implementation of culture specific treatment modalities; There is not enough effort being given to develop and support resources and programs that can be delivered by members from the African American community. Too often, our clients are measured and judged by people who are unaware of who they really are or the challenges they face as they struggle to fit in and survive within the larger society. They are measured by those that do not place any value on African American family systems and lifestyles.
- Increasing the number of African Americans to serve as committee chairpersons and/or co-chairperson on statewide initiatives and projects. There is a highly disproportionate number of persons of color that are involved in the Child Welfare system, yet very few people of color are selected to participate let alone serve in leadership roles.
- Eliminate the micro-management to current managerial staff that have clearly demonstrated managerial skills and competencies and place focus that is need-based and individualized, in an effort to improve performance and quality of service delivery.

## AGENCY PERFORMANCE TEAM, NORTHERN REGION

### STATUS REPORT TO THE AAAC

NOVEMBER 3, 2003

According to a statistical report compiled in September of 2000 by a representative from the Northern Region Business Unit, the POS agencies service approximately 40-50% of the children who enter the child

welfare system in the region. Also, enumerated in the report is the living arrangement and racial makeup of the children in care. During the month of September 2000 the Northern Region had a total of 937 open African American family cases, 482 were POS cases. The report listed a total of 2,012 open African American child cases, 1,430 were POS cases. Clearly, the numbers support the over representation of African Americans in the child welfare system specific to the Northern Region.

Traditionally, African American children are placed with relatives when they enter the child welfare system. In September 2000, a total of 925 children were placed with relatives in the Northern Region, 525 of those placements were African American children. Once again, the data supports the over representation of African American children in the system.

**“It takes a village to raise a child”, is an old African proverb that is popular and sometimes overused. However, we, the African American Advisory Council (AAAC) believe it to be essential in the maintenance of the African American family.**

In conclusion, it is imperative that the Department and POS providers support and maintain the African American family and children in placement by training, inclusion of cultural competencies when drafting policy and procedure, and open communication among all Department staff, service providers and caregivers. The African American Advisory Council serves as change agent to ensure that the needs of African American families are met.

*Millie A. Tolliver M.S.*

*Northern Region APT Liaison*

## THE DCFS REUNIFICATION GOAL: ARE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES DISSOLVING BECAUSE OF AGENCY POLICY?

Have the Illinois permanency outcomes for African American children been most success for reunification or for several other available options? Statistically, it has been shown that at present DCFS achieves as many adoptions as it does reunifications. This would indicate that we are just as successful in returning children home as we are in terminating natural parent’s rights to their children. This scenario would be deplorable except for the fact that the relatives with whom they were previously placed, adopt many children. This still leaves many parents without custody, jurisdiction or responsibility for determining the future of their children.

Now, since we are mandated to provide reasonable efforts to prevent placement and the destruction of these families. Concomitantly, we are mandated to show reasonable progress in restoring these families to minimum parenting standards. We should then surmise that our efforts to rehabilitate children and their parents in the 12-18 months mandated by federal law would have failed more than 3000 times. This percentage of failure would not be acceptable in either the medical or automobile industries. Why should it be acceptable in child welfare? Moreover, if nearly 60 percent of the families served statewide are in Cook County, then that would mean that 2,112 African American families in Cook County or Chicago could expect to become legal strangers within a 24-

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# Dedicated Council Member Embarks Upon Another Life Journey

by Valerie Davis

Frankie Beverly crooned his song about love as having “joy and pain” in such a melodious fashion that he became a favorite popular artist for Cretora Barnett. The joy we can all share with Cretora upon her recent retirement is for nearly a score of years of caring service to children and families in our child welfare system. She served well and is deserving of rest and opportunities of retirement. Cretora Barnett came to DCFS after a brief period as a private agency caseworker.



Cretora Barnett

She began her illustrious climb from a child welfare worker, to supervisor, to Child Protection. These years of providing direct service families in crisis lead to Cretora being appointed as a Resource Development supervisor; followed by her transfer to Administrative Case Review where she was an outstanding supervisor for Cook County and eventually statewide administrator for Reviewers.

Most of us watched and admired Cretora Barnett for her charm, intelligence and professionalism. At each point of her career development, Cretora brought her special brand of enthusiasm and elegance to the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Cretora writing and verbal skills are unparalleled in this Department. Consequently, she was recruited to host agency programs, private celebrations, and work committees. Cretora has been a long standing member of the African American Advisory Council where she served on various committees.

Cretora Barnett's skill in planning our thirteen conferences and subsequently guiding all our trainees through the tasks of a rigorous two days of instruction in a pleasurable fashion, left everyone with a desire to attend subsequent conferences.

We recognize that Cretora's desire to move to another path on her life's journey is painful because she cannot be easily replaced. The impact of the ERI program on this and other state agencies continues to leave gaps in the fabric of the programs we offer as a social safety net. Yet, we offer Cretora Barnett our love, support and best wishes for the glorious years that remain before her. We also say “thank you” for the “good times” you have brought to us all.

## From The Chair

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will be available by early 2005.

We have continued to make annual visits to each of the three downstate Regions where we have always received a very warm welcome from staff that assisted local Council members with hosting the meetings. I would be remiss if I failed to thank the staff in East St. Louis, Champaign and Aurora for the wonderful food they provided for the meetings. Much of our work for 2004 has been focused on Central and Southern Regions. As a result, a Multi-Cultural Task Force was created among staff from those two Regions to identify staff concerns and to make recommendation for solutions. These concerns have been discussed with Director Samuels; Deputy Directors Bamani Obadele; Arthur Bishop; Gailyn Thomas; Chief of Affirmative Action, Alice Kirby; and recently appointed Central Region Administrator, Robert Blackwell. David West, Chief of African American Services is also involved with the Task Force and works with the Council in bringing issues to the forefront. You will hear more details about the work and outcomes of the Task Force in 2005.

Speaking of 2005, our participation in Annual Black History Month activities is expected to continue its growth as programs and celebrations should be taking place throughout the state to commemorate contributions made by African Americans. We have decided to select a different site to highlight the Council's involvement with these activities each year. Last year we went to Danville, perhaps we

will travel to Decatur in 2005 to join in their festivities. Cook South has always held a great program and feast for the celebration. We would like to add a new twist this year at Cook South where we look at the dual role of child welfare staff as social workers planning for children while meeting the demands of raising their own children. We recognize that many of our colleagues have done a great job in this respect as they now have children that have become successful adults. We would like for some of these social workers/parents to invite their successful children to come and provide a brief overview of their road to success. Many of these young people can provide vital information that can be of use to us in servicing children within the child welfare system. Additionally, valuable information can be obtained to help staff with young children as they navigate through their dual role as social worker/parent. There is also the chance that young adults can establish an opportunity to network with each other. Who knows, maybe some new entrepreneurs will emerge from this group.

As you can see, we have had a busy year with interesting challenges on the horizon for 2005. It is our hope to keep the lines of communication open and the momentum going. Again, if you have any issues/concerns that are appropriate for the Council to address, please contact any member. Until next time...

PEACE  
Michael D. Burns

## AAAC Position Papers

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36 month period if expedited adoptions flowed smoothly.

Currently, we have teams across the state focused only upon front-end investigations. We have an electronic data system that helps decide when to remove children from their homes using decision trees and other sophisticated technologies. Do we have a comparable number of reunification teams? Do we focus our best and brightest minds on splitting the Gordian knot of red tape between placement and reunification so that simplified series of activities take caseworkers and clients to Family and Juvenile Courts across the state with a powerful message about the strengths of African American families? Or do some believe that African American families have no strengths? This rhetorical question is usually based upon income. "Those who have" get whatever they want or need. Does this mean that parents with funds for a lawyer or a powerful political ally will get custody faster than a TANF recipient without a safety net? Do we define minimum parenting standards as those in which the caseworkers were reared and espouse? Or do we accept minimal as just that without personal biases?

The Council promotes respect for and empowerment of African American families throughout this state. Our sincere hope is that this Administration will not focus entirely upon cost cutting measures that limit the placement of useful service for our clients within our community and on a level understandable to them. The faces and values of their therapists, consultants, and evaluators should be similar and non-judgmental. Their supporters may need to be accessible after 5:00 PM weekdays and on weekends when some of their challenges to progress arise. We must understand the angst of parents whose lives have never included awards, ceremonies and praise. We must develop a new paradigm for success for our African American families to experience a positive self-image and eventual reunification. Our policies and programs must support the sanctity of the family unit. This positive vision for the future is possible in Illinois that has continually been a leader in child labor, juvenile justice, and child welfare. The AAAC stands ready to assist this great effort in any way possible.

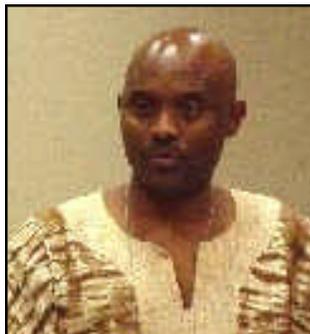
# 12th Annual DCFS African American Advisory Council Conference



Workshop scribe



Keynote speaker Dr. Eric Whitaker,  
Director of Public Health



Lawrence Kilonzo,  
new Council member



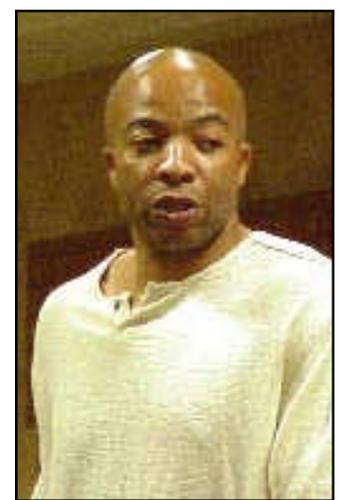
Participants in work shop



Afrocentric wares from exhibit



Panel discussion



Dr. Jaiya Jordan John

**The African American Advisory  
Council would like to congratulate its  
2004 Advisory Council  
Award Recipients**

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**Adrienne Taylor**

**Eva N. Foxworth**

**Cynthia Givens**

**Ella Lee**

**Rodney Spencer**

**Eddie Carroll**

**Lillie M. Estes**

**Reese Nicols**

**Terese Humes**

**Millie Tolliver**

**Jackie Bright**