



MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

A Newsletter for Birth Parents by Birth Parents

May 2009 . Volume 3

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Birth Parent Council members (from left) Ramona Randall, David Israel, Rayvese Woodfork-Smith, Eric Prater, Cynthia Hoyle and Letitia Franklin

*"The race is not given to the strong
or the swift, but to the one who
endures to the end"*

Our Mission Our History

The ultimate purpose of child welfare agencies is to help families in crisis become stable and unified. In child welfare birth parents have been sorely overlooked which hinders and many times defeats the purpose. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) introduced the Partnering With Parents Initiative to address the concerns and needs of birth parents as the agency recognized the need for change on behalf of parents receiving child welfare services.

Its main goal is to give families a voice regarding the policies, programs and services provided to them. To that end, the Birth Parent Councils of Cook County were created which includes a Core Council and councils in each region for a total of four.

The mission of all councils is to identify issues concerning birth parents and present these issues to the appropriate government officials to bring about durable policy changes that will aid all parents with DCFS involvement, now and in the future. All members of the councils are birth parents.

YOUR ATTENDANCE IS IMPORTANT

By Gregory Cox
Birth Parent Council Chairman

I have attended several different events in the last fiscal year such as community forums, focus groups, and dinner with key players in the court system, as well as the 2008 DCFS Cook Regional Perma-
n e n c y
E n h a n c e m e n t

Symposium. All this along with Birth Parents participating in trainings for DCFS staff has given me the opportunity to take part in the change that is taking place.

Being approached by people that have heard and know about the work we are doing is exciting. Yes, I know this may not seem like a lot to some; but from where I came from - a life filled with shame, guilt and low self-worth, I will take every commitment that I can and if you don't or won't take yours, then yes, I'll take yours too!

Encouragement has come from people who have been with DCFS for many years. They are saying things like: "As long as I have been with the department I have never seen anything like this with parents getting involved or "This is the first time I have ever witnessed this, keep up the work." As birth parents, caregivers, and workers; we all want to do our best and yet we make mistakes; however, we still need someone to tell us we



Gregory Cox

are doing a good job to help us keep going and not quit. It just might be what I need to hear to keep me going. And so I say your attendance is important.

After listening to all of the data past and present I see that we are definitely going to need more help. One of the goals of the Birth Parent Council for this fiscal year is to strengthen what we have and to increase the attendance of birth parents. I encourage birth parents to get involved with your case, continue to participate, attend your Administrative Case Review (ACR) and all court appointments. Ask questions and don't quit. We need you and not only do we need you, but your children need you. It is one thing to show up and be seen, but it is another to help create new material like parent hand books and new curriculum that will be used to help the system reunite families sooner. Our goal is to see children not only come home but stay home.

Mr. Cox is one of the first men to go through the DCFS court process and gain custody of his children. He is passionate about families in the system. As Chairman of the Birth Parent Council of Cook County he works diligently to help those who have yet to complete the process of reuniting with their children.

Our Voices Are Being Heard



*By David Israel –
Birth Parent Co-
Chairman*

Hello to all who are reading this article. My name is David Israel and I was elected last year by Birth Parent Council members to become the

Co-Chairman of this organization.

My purpose in accepting this position is to bring unity among parents that may have to deal with the system. I want to inform parents that there is now a support system and resources

available to assist them while they navigate through the DCFS system.

I chose to become a part of the Birth Parent Council because of my first hand experience “at the hands” of the system. I too am a parent who has had my children taken from me.

Although recourse is offered within the system, until the Birth Parent Council was formed, there was no recourse outside of the system. I don't want to see parents go through what I have experienced. I want to educate parents on how to deal with issues when they arise and how to cope with the stress parents experience during the traumatic experience of losing and

regaining custody of their children.

It is also my intention to help ensure that parents who have children in the system have the “course of action” necessary to navigate through the system.

For the first time, voices are being heard from a parent's perspective. My job is to make sure that our voices continue to be heard. I will continue along with my fellow council members to help put things in place to give not only parental support, but also to help the system take a look at the old policies that are not working and to establish new ones that will.

Meet Some of Our Partners

Here are just a few of many people who work with birth parents and are committed to help make a change



Steering Council Members and Birth Parents Planning for 2009 at December 2008 Planning Meeting

Speaking Out: Parent Presentations

The Birth Parent Council is continuing to walk into the future by speaking to various groups and organizations who have heard about the work of the council. So far this year presentations have been made to the State Department of Alcohol and Substance Abuse – DASA and DCFS, the Child Care Association, The Public Guardian's Office, and the Latino Conference, with other presentations in the works. There is an ongoing opportunity for parents to present at

DCFS Training and Development classes for new case-workers so that they can be better prepared to help birth parents.

If you are a member of the Core Council and are interested in presenting at a Foundations Training please contact Marsha Harris – Birth Parent Council Coordinator at (312) 328-2828.

Ms. Tardy's Place

Losers do what they want to do; winners do what they have to do

This space is dedicated in memory of Ms. Tardy, who was a council member who unselfishly shared her experience, strength, and hope. She will always be loved and remembered.

How To Handle A Difficult Caseworker



By Leon Alexander

You listen without thinking about your position. You listen with a still mind; at least, so that you can hear what your caseworker is saying to you. This action in it self goes a long way towards establishing respect between both parties; this helps you understand your caseworker better.

Birth parents; for the sake of understanding, it is best that you develop a better knowledge of the caseworkers responsibilities; these include, mediating, negotiating and advocating matters that affect all persons involved.

Birth parents have to understand that the caseworkers view is influenced by the world they live in. In the early

days, children were seen as victims to be rescued from bad parents and bad environments before they too turned bad. City children were taken from their parents and sent out West. Families were broken up because parents were seen as the only cause of their own difficulties. There was no thought of reuniting the family.

The latter 20th century eventually brought a new kind of thinking. General systems theory advanced the ideas of the interdependence of all parts, or that a breakdown in any one part could affect other parts. In the late 1960's, these ideas evolved in social work as well. Note: But it has been hard for social workers to let go of the early medical model of cause and effect thinking.

I believe that if we listen more attentively, understand our caseworkers duties and responsibilities, as prescribed by law, the Bio-Parents will be more empowered and more effective in relating to what ever kind of person or caseworker they would come in contact with; it simply won't matter. I believe that if the caseworker is more

aware of how their environment affects them and they're careful not to lean towards that old thinking; the old medical model (cause and effect approach) and finally understand the bond between the child and the biological parents, and that they are interdependent; well then, our caseworkers will be more empathetic towards the Bio parents.

In closing, I believe that if we put these views together in the think tank of the Birth Parent Council and caseworkers, a foundation that promotes cooperation and harmony will follow.

Leon Alexander is a strong member of the Birth Parent Council whose voice speaks loudly for the cause of birth parents everywhere.

Action Tips:

- Your caseworker is mandated by law to provide you with appropriate services
- Know your rights and responsibilities
- Advocate for yourself to get the services you need
- Address problems by following the chain of command: caseworker, supervisor, etc.
- Talk to your lawyer about problems you are having with your case
- Document your completion of services/ Keep all paperwork and make copies.

For further assistance call: DCFS Advocacy Office
800.232-3798 or 217.524-2029

It's Not About Me

By Cynthia Hoyle

Hello, my name is Cynthia and I am a Birth Parent and an active member of the Birth Parent Council. I am also the mother of five children, all girls and a grandmother of three, all girls.

My story begins in 1995 when 3 of my children were taken from me due neglect and my substance abuse issues. My other two children went to live with their fathers.

For a year I did nothing at all to get my children back. I just went deeper and deeper into my addiction because I felt guilt, shame, and remorse.

In 1996 I went to a recovery home in Chicago and stayed there for about a year but about ten months after being there it hit me like a ton of bricks that something was missing from my life –

my children, all five of them.

So, I got busy doing the things I needed to do and not the things I wanted to do. The first thing I did was contact my caseworker. She was wonderful and never gave up on me. She walked me through the process and I began to take the initiative and do the things I needed to do to get my children back.

Yes, there were a lot of barriers but I never once let them get me down. I just looked at it as another opportunity to be responsible and to grow up.

In October of 1996 I moved back to Joliet into a women's shelter. One month to the day God blessed me with my youngest daughter who at the time was with her father. I was blessed with a job and continued to do what was required of me. I went on my vis-

its and participated in my children's lives by going to counseling, medical appointments and all kinds of functions. I took my paycheck and spent it on them.

Not long after God blessed me with an apartment. It was time to go to court and on April 22, 1997 God blessed me and gave me all of my children back. That day was the happiest day of my life. Today two of my children have gone to college and my third is currently in college. My fourth is a senior in high school and is applying to go to college. My fifth child is a special needs child and is in a school that meets her needs. The reason I say it is not about me is because God allowed me to go through this so when He got me out I would be able to show others that they too can do the same.

A Mother's Cry of Thankfulness

By Rayvese Woodfork-Smith

During the summer it is a time for vacations, lots of eating, replacing, refining and just plain renewing. It is a time when everyone, everywhere comes out of hibernation. We trust our children to play safely with the neighbors. Our children learn new things; maybe a word or a dance; or maybe a good old fashioned book to read. Never does a mother foresee her children getting injured in any way.

This summer my 22 year old son was shot because of a domestic violence relationship with an older woman. I en-

ured hearing doctors say several times that he wouldn't make it through the night. I am glad that God heard my prayers. Yes, I am grateful that my son was not counted a statistic. This was a child I had lost to the system and I fought to go through the system so I could care for, protect, and nurture my children.

This incident has taken me to another level in life. My motto has become "Keep It Movin through the Bruisin". I will fight for our children, I will fight for gun control, I will fight!

Do you have something to say?

If you have a personal story, helpful information, poem, or words of encouragement and would like to be considered for our next "Making Things Happen" issue, please contact Ramona Randall, BPC Media Chairman at (773) 322-0827 or ramonarandall@yahoo.com.

BPC Highlights

We did it again!! Our second annual Institute Day was held at the Ramada Inn on the South Side of Chicago in Hyde Park. 134 birth parents and many agency workers attended making it a great success. A talk-show style question and answer session was held after breakfast before workshops began. Workshop topics included; Parent Rights and Re-

sponsibilities and The Role of the Guardian and Public Defender among others. The day ended on a positive note with a certificate ceremony acknowledging both parents and agency staff who have worked hard to make the Birth Parent Council a success.





**Parents, Staff And Exhibitors At The
2nd Annual Cook County Birth Parent
Council Institute Day, June 20, 2008 at
the Ramada Lake Shore - Chicago**

Visitation

A Piece of The Puzzle

By Ramona Randall

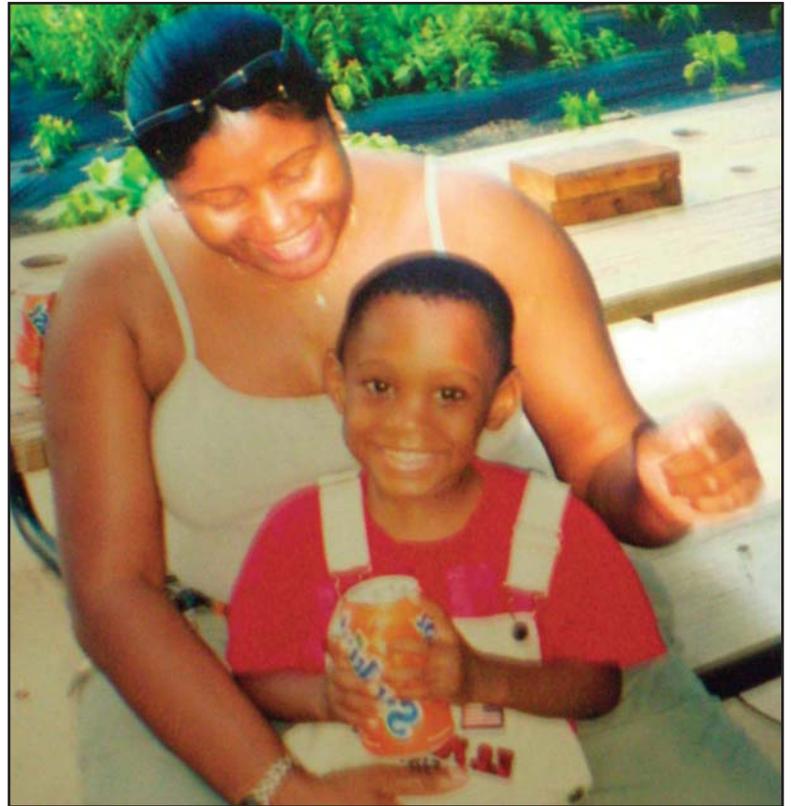
Visiting with my son Nathan while I was in treatment was very important to me. It helped me to bond with him and began the healing of my soul. I was able to overcome the shame of having allowed my son to fall into the system. Each visit became a memory that I focused on when things got hard and I was strengthened every time I was able to do those things that parents are supposed to do like change his diaper and give him a bottle. Now my son is at home running around my house...he is no longer visiting me, he is home. I encourage every parent to make the most of your visits with your children. You have a right to see your child.

Visiting Mommy...



In Treatment

I'm HOME!



Mommy and Sisters visiting me



At Foster Parents House

Fun At The State Fair

Birth Parents were invited to attend the Illinois State Fair this year. Busses were provided to transport parents and their children for a day of fun.

To quote one parent, "It was an enjoyable experience and a benefit for the children"



From A Child's Perspective

"When my mother first came home I was excited about her being home. I had so many expectations and I thought her being home would be ideal. As time went along I got the shocking reality check that we would have a tug-a-war before we got to know each other. Because she didn't know me and I didn't know her we often had many misunderstandings and disagreements. We argued and walked away with bad thoughts and horrible attitudes that affected the family. No



matter how much I didn't like the things my mother did or said she was still mommy. She was the person that gave birth to me. She was the one who remembered things about me from when I was little that I thought she didn't know. Soon we grew a relationship and although we had those trying times we were growing closer. Today I and my mom have a closer relationship. I can come and talk to her more than I could before and I feel that she does understand me more also. Sometimes we have our disagreements but we are able to deal with them in a better way. We communicate more and we share secrets. Although sometimes I know I don't show it I really do love and appreciate my mommy and look forward to our relationship growing stronger and our bond tighter."

By Sherin R. age 15

This is an eye-opening new section from the point of view of children who have been in foster care or whose parents or siblings have been involved with the child welfare system. We are looking for parents who have children who would like to share their thoughts and feelings about being in the foster care and/or have been reunited with their family.

A Special Thanks to all who contributed valuable resources for birth parents during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays!

Resources

Furniture & Clothing

The Bottomless Closet
445 N. Wells, Suite 301
Chicago, IL 60610
312.527-9664

Free Clothing to parents for Jobs

Referral required & cost charged to agency

St. Vincent DePaul Society Thrift Stores
9321 S. Western
Chicago, IL 60643
773.881-0600
Hrs: M-Th. 9am-4pm; F. until 5pm

St. Vincent DePaul Society Thrift Stores
4644 W. 147th
Midlothian, IL
Hrs: M-Sat. 9am – 5pm

St. Vincent DePaul Center Nearly New Thrift Store
739 W. Webster
Chicago, IL 60614
Hrs: M-F 9:30-4:30

Marillac Center Thrift Store
2859 W. Jackson
Chicago, IL 60612
Thrift Store: 773.638-0186
Hrs: M-F 9am-4pm

Salvation Army Family Service Division
Counseling, Emergency Shelter,
Homemakers
4800 N. Marine
Chicago, IL 60640
773.275-6233
Call Salvation Army Core for Coat Vouchers & Financial Assistance for Zip Code Referral to local offices

Case Services Assistance to Parents

DCFS Office of Advocacy - When there are questions about services

800-232-3798 or
217-524-2029

Office of the Public Defender – For Legal

Representation in
Juvenile Court
2245 W. Ogden Avenue, 7th Fl.
Chicago, IL 60612
312.433-7047

Heating Assistance

City of Chicago – One Time Help with Heating
311 or 877.411-WARM
Same as the Share the Warmth / CEDA
Can apply for both

Restoration Ministries – South Suburbs
Headquarters
Temporary Location During Construction
16400 S. State
South Holland, IL 60473
708-333-3370

Program For Men

Harvey House School of Ministry
Temporary Location During Construction
15030 Dixie Highway
Harvey, IL 60426
708-331-8026

Program For Women

Tabitha House
456 E. 163rd Street
South Holland, IL 60473
708-333-0607

Thrift Stores

South Holland Thrift Store
14950 Dixie Highway, Harvey, IL
708-333-8530

Harvey Thrift Store
351 W. 162nd St., South Holland IL
708-333-6822
708-333-8530

Food Assistance

Greater Food Depository
773-247-3663 for Zip Code Referral to Pantries
www.chicagofoodbank.org
312.527-9664
Fatherhood Initiative

North, Floyd Garrett, 773.451-1353
Central, Ken Butler, 312.401-0434
South, Don Waddell, 773.375-0700
Support Groups
Catholic Charities, 312.382-2503 starting March, 2009

Recreation

Chicago Park District
312.742-5381
www.chicagoparkdistrict.com

YMCA, 312.932-1200
www.ymcachgo.org
Paternity Testing
Rutha Johnson, 773.928-4659
Housing
IL Department of Human Services –
Housing Assistance

Homeless Prevention

1-800-843-6154

Effective 4-1-09

Food Stamps/Link Card Increases

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| One Person | \$200 |
| Two People | \$367 |
| Three People | \$526 |
| Four People | \$668 |
| Five People | \$793 |

Department of Children and Family Services



Save The Date!
Cook County Birth Parent Council
3rd Annual Institute Day

Theme – Reunification: “Avoiding Burn-Out While Waiting”

Friday, June 26, 2009
8:30AM – 4:00PM
The Crowne Plaza
733 W. Madison
Chicago, IL 60661

For More Information, Call 312.328-2828



REGIONAL MEETINGS Scheduled as Parents Register

Reaching Our Goal

COOK SOUTH
COOK CENTRAL
COOK NORTH

It is our goal to support birth parents as they work to regain custody of their children. The Birth Parent Regional Forums are a good way to get support from people who understand the challenges we face and to voice your concerns.

Let your voice be heard and use the contact information below to express your interest in attending a Birth Parent Regional Forum.

Call today to register.

Birth Parent Council Contact Information

Donella Bishop-Ward Program
Administrator
(312) 328-2828
Marsha Harris - Coordinator
(312) 328-2828
Gregory Cox - Chairman
(773) 314-7792

Membership Information

The only requirement to become a member of the Birth Parent Council is to be a parent who is currently or was formerly involved with DCFS. We are looking for birth parents who are interested in attending a Regional Forum designed to provide support for parents who are going through the difficult process of regaining custody of their children. The meetings are held on the Southside, Westside and Northside of Chicago when parents register to attend meetings.

The Core Council meets once a month with DCFS personnel and more often when needed to discuss the concerns identified by birth parents and to plan activities that address these concerns based on the needs of birth parents

It is our goal to create a strong membership of parents similar to the councils for foster parents and foster children that will have a positive impact on the way birth parents receive services. We respectfully ask that if you are a birth parent that you would become a part of this growing group of people who have something to say about ourselves, our children, and our families.

Something You Should Know...

JCAP - Juvenile Court Assessment Project

JCAP is a referral resource for those involved in an open case with DCFS. They provide drug and alcohol assessments and referrals for treatment services. Their offices are located on the Concourse level of the Juvenile Court Building. Any birth parent that's had Temporary Custody taken of their child and has a Permanency Goal of Return Home may contact JCAP for help.

Referral must be made by caseworker, parent's attorney or judge.

You Must be 18 years or older.

JCAP does not work with Intact Families, the children must be in care.

Cook County Cases only will be accepted.

Call Lameatrice Coger in the Intake Department at (312) 666-4688 if you have general questions about the program.

This publication is printed by IDCFS, Erwin McEwen, - Director

Visit Us On The Web...

Partnering With Parents
http://www.state.il.us/dcf/library/com_communications_statePWP.shtml