

PARTNERING



WITH PARENTS

# MAKING THINGS HAPPEN

A Newsletter for Birth Parents by Birth Parents

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Special Issue

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*Mother and daughter Faith and Sharonmarie Faye  
Kilpatrick eagerly awaiting the return home of  
Sharonmarie's brothers and sisters*

**There's No Place Like HOME!**

## Our History and Our Mission

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 a proposal for three councils in each region for a total of nine. Currently there is one council in each Region: North, South, and Central.

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.

## Encouraged, Motivated and Focused

By Gregory Cox – Birth Parent Council Chairman

In the past year the mission of the Birth Parent Council and where the council was heading was unclear to me. I had no idea it would take the kind of commitment, energy, and time it has to help build the Birth Parent Council of Cook County. Now, I believe that birth parents' working with DCFS is history in the making. I must admit that all of the hard work we've done so far – planning workshops and trainings, making phone calls, locating additional resources and getting the word out about BPC events – was all worth it!

I believe when parents are educated about the DCFS process and the different programs they have to offer them it will make it easier to participate and to remain committed. I am still excited, encouraged, and motivated to keep the BPC going. We recognize that we are not only doing it for ourselves but for the fathers and mothers that need help and are praying that their children come home. The Birth Parent Council as a team desires that birth parents know the language of the different systems they encounter and take ownership of their responsibility as well as know the responsibility of the people on their team.

However, when building a team it is clear that some will get weary, lose focus, or even become overwhelmed with life's demands of family and work, and to those who feel this way I encourage you to take time out for yourself and do something for you. We've accomplished many things during this building process, but the work has just begun because there are still families that need to be reunited with their children. Therefore, we cannot quit because we would be giving up on ourselves and on those birth parents that will come behind us. The BPC focus for the next fiscal year is to reach out to more parents and increase membership of the Birth Parent Council. With hope and pray more families will be reunited and remain together. If you are a parent and are interested in working with us, please contact our Core Council at 312-328-2828 daily between 9 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. We welcome your membership.

*Mr. Cox is the first chair of the Core Birth Parent Council and has gained custody of all of his children. He is passionate about families in the system and works diligently as the Chairman of the Birth Parent Council of Cook County.*



### Cook County Birth Parent Council Officers

(Left to right) Donnella Bishop-Ward; Verna Townsend, Co-Secretary; Theresa Cope, Secretary; Gregory Cox, Chair; and David Israel, Co-Chair

## A Piece of My Journey

By Ramona Randall

Anyone who has ever been involved in the system as a birth parent; no matter what stage, be it a new open case, going back and forth to court, or just getting your children back, you know that it is a complicated and stressful journey. So, in saying this I hope that this little piece of my testimony encourages you way deep down inside.



I was a crack addict for 12 years. I went from being on the Dean's List in college with three beautiful children to homelessness and all the other not so nice activities that go with being a female drug addict. By the time I was ready to change I had three children in the system. My mother, God bless her, had raised my first five children. During my process of recovery, I realized that I was separated from the part of myself that was a mother. I was used to selfishly doing what my addiction demanded and my patience for parenting was REALLY low!

I knew I would need help in making the adjustment so I asked for therapy. You see, I not only had to fight to get my children back, but I also had to go home to children I had abandoned and a mother who had become the authority in their lives. The process was not easy, but it has been well worth it. Of the three children in DCFS custody, I only had one returned to me by the courts. I gave one child up for adoption because I had gone back to using and by the

time I was ready to fight for her she had been with a foster parent for a while and I didn't want to take her from the only home she had ever known. It was the right decision at the time and I knew her foster mother loved her very much. My other child was my son's twin. She died at the age of five months. My son who is now home has adjusted very well. It was consistent visits with my son, taking the responsibility for change, therapy, and the desire to find my purpose in life that has brought me to the place I am now. It has been three years since I began this journey and even though it is challenging it feels good to be living life with my children. We are still healing and that's a worthwhile process. I encourage anyone who is on this journey to ask for the help that you need even if the people you are working with haven't offered it. And most of all believe that if you are doing all you can then you will reap the rewards of your effort. In the difficult times remember your goal and keep your faith. I thank God who has brought me to this point and will take me and my children on in this journey called life. God Bless You All!

## Blessed to Give Back



My name is Letitia Franklin and God has blessed me to give back to families involved with DCFS where I'm needed. I have a total of six children, however five of them were adopted. By working the system to the best of my ability with the help of a good team and hard foot work in a recovery program I have also been blessed with the future of being a mother to my last child who was successfully returned to me in 2007. I am pleased that God gives me the strength to share my experience, strength, and hope and I am honored to serve. Here are some Tips For Parents that I found helpful in the return home of my child:

- Accept responsibility for your behavior
- Work as a team with case-worker, caretaker
- Keep your own documentation of all meetings and services
- Maintain open and honest communication with everyone involved in case planning
- Keep your eyes on the prize but by all means stay focused
- Stick with the winners, stay positive
- Share your experiences and support other parents

God Bless You all!

*Ms. Franklin is the Chairman of the Birth Parent Council Support Committee and also serves as a member of the Core Council. She presents at new Child Welfare classes and conferences on a regular basis.*

## BPC Highlights

In June 2007 the Birth Parent Council of Cook County held its first INSTITUTE DAY at Haymarket Center with 100 birth parents in attendance. Juvenile Court personnel, DCFS officials and many others presented information to empower parents while going through the process of regaining custody of their children. Take home information and exhibits further enhanced their knowledge of resources and agency procedures.

Birth Parent Greg Cox presented the keynote address. Ramona Randall welcomed all attendees and Rayvese Woodfork-Smith managed the registration process. Ms. Natasha Oglesby created the conference theme: Making Things Happen Through Self-Empowerment...Keeping Our Kids, and our first newsletter was created by Mr. LaVell Bolden.

## Celebration and Planning Meeting

A Celebration and Planning meeting was held December 6, 2007 to bring birth parents and Steering Committee advisors together to create an annual in-service training plan for 2008. In addition, each region was recognized for their membership and commitment to the Birth Parent Council. 25 members also received Certificates of Recognition and Birth Parent Council Officers were officially elected at this event.



Look for announcements and flyers announcing future Birth Parent Council events!

## In Service Trainings

In Service Trainings that educate parents on the different aspects of having an open case with DCFS have been planned to equip parents with the tools to navigate the system successfully. Our first in-service training on Court Appearance was held March 27, 2008 with many parents in attendance. This training was well received by all who attended. Monique Smith, a child welfare administrator and Ramona Randall, a birth parent and council member presented at this training session.



## Stepping Into the Future

The Birth Parent Council is stepping into the future of change by speaking to those who affect what happens with parents involved with DCFS. In March 2008, birth parents shared at a new training for caseworkers known as Foundations Training. Caseworkers were told by parents what “makes a good caseworker” by presenting their experiences and suggestions.

Also, on May 22, 2008 Juvenile Court officials, i.e. Judges, Public Defenders, etc., sponsored a dinner with birth parents. The purpose of the meeting was for the court personnel to hear parents’ questions and concerns regarding the Juvenile Court process and develop an Orientation Handbook for future parents involved in the Juvenile Court and DCFS. Attendees included DCFS Director Erwin McEwen and Assistant Director Velma Williams. The Juvenile Court Attendees were Carol Casey, Office of the Public Guardian; Revelle Peritz, Office of the States Attorney; The Honorable Mary L. Mikva, Circuit Court; Susan Storcel, Child Protection Mediation; Lanetta Haynes, CASA Cook County; Crystal Gray Woodfork, Office of the Public Defender; Ronald Maimonis, Conflict Bar Panel; and Michelle Jackson, DCFS Regional Counsel and Moderator for the evening.

## What Fatherhood Means to Me

By Rev. Terry LeNoir Sr.



First things first, fatherhood has to be grounded and rooted in prayer, love, and patience.

As a father of nine children five were taken away I had to pray to make it from day to day, case worker after case worker asking God if this is the one or do we seek another. Two years after we got the right case worker the boys came home. Showing love for your child/children at a distance loosing the ability to hold them close to you afraid of what the system will think, can be and is disheartening.

One of the most important roles as a father is to be a teacher of and to the children that God has blessed us with, it has been said many times that only a man can teach a boy how to be a man, but the teacher has to be living as a real man himself fit to teach. Sadly there are many grown men that take on the helpless role in the home and wait for the mother figure in their life to take care of them. That mother figure can be any female that is knowingly willing or unknowingly enabling this grown man to pass on his fear of the world, and their fear can be defined as Forget, Everything, And, Run. This is learned behavior that must be broken so as not to continue to pass on this cheater trait to our sons,

thereby handicapping them and binding them to a life of dependence on someone to take care of them. This most often leads and lands them in the care custody and control of a state facility where they become housed property of the state. As a father we need to teach our boys to love one another as Jesus loves us, and to be respectful at all times and in all places whether the father is there or not. With these two character traits as the foundation of learning our youth become teachable, first at home then at school, and finally even on the street and not to negative influences from the street.

Finally a father must have the patience of Job and must be able to show love to his family and to the world around him. How can a father teach a child something that he himself does not possess? In most cases as fathers we can only pass on what we learned from our fathers good, bad, or indifferent. Now we come to another interesting point, if you grew up without a father or a father figure in your life. How are you to raise a child, or assist in the raising of the child if you in fact have not had the benefit of being raised by a man, or a father figure in your life?

In summary fatherhood has to be a good mix of God, prayer, love, patience, respect, and understanding put it all in a pot



add some water stir simmer do not let it boil over and we can be a father, and a better father to our children.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter, stay tuned for more on fatherhood this is not the end but the beginning of a wide range of topics from play time to helping around the house to reading with and to our children. Being active at school and how to let your child know that you will always be there for them even when you can not physically be there.

### 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, [atramonarandall@yahoo.com](mailto:atramonarandall@yahoo.com).

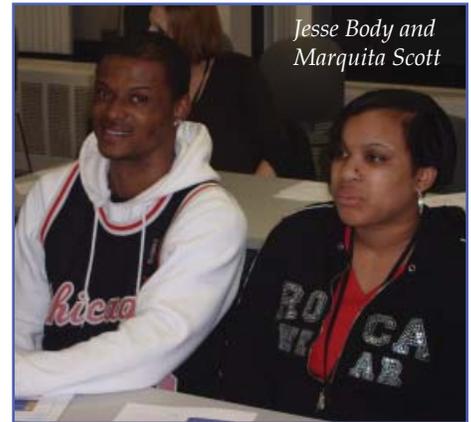
# Birth Parent Council Activities



*Ramona Randall,  
parent trainer*



*Rayese Woodfork-Smith, Cynthia Hoyle,  
and Letitia Franklin*



*Jesse Body and  
Marquita Scott*



*Theresa Cope*



*Letitia Franklin, parent report to group*



*Valerie Galvin*



*Letitia Franklin, Rayese Woodfork-Smith,  
Cynthia Hoyle, Donnell Bishop-Ward,  
and Marsha Harris*



*Michael Byrd and Marilyn Arnold*



*Monique Smith*



*Greg Cox, Rayese Woodfork-Smith  
and Ramona Randall*



**We are never without options, despite the challenges life brings.**

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



## REGIONAL MEETING SCHEDULES

### Cook North

Meets every 3rd Thursday  
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.  
St Vincent DePaul Center  
2145 N. Halsted

### Cook Central

Meets every 4th Thursday  
5 p.m. - 6:45 p.m.  
Marrillac House  
212 S. Francisco

### Cook South

Meets every 4th Tuesday  
5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.  
Kennedy King College  
6301 S. Halsted

## BIRTH PARENT COUNCIL

Ramona Randall  
Media Chair

## 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 or was formerly involved with DCFS. We currently have three Regional Councils which meet on the Southside, Westside, and Northside of Chicago (see schedule listed in left column). These Councils were created to provide support for parents who are going through the difficult process of regaining custody of their children, to provide support for parents and identify issues for Administrative intervention.

In addition to the Regional Councils we have a Core Council. This council meets once a month with DCFS personnel and more often when needed to discuss the concerns brought to light at the Regional Councils and to plan activities and strategies 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.

## RESOURCES

### Furniture & Clothing

#### **The Bottomless Closet**

445 N. Wells Ste. 301  
312-527-9664  
Free – Referral Required

#### **St. Vincent DePaul Thrift Stores**

9321 S. Western 773-881-0600  
5413 S. Kedzie 773-434-0109

#### **Marillac Thrift Store**

773-638-0186

**Salvation Army** 312-738-4360

### Food Assistance

#### **Greater Food Depository**

773-247-3663  
[www.chicagofoodbank.org](http://www.chicagofoodbank.org)

#### **Angel Food Network**

[www.angelfoodministries.org](http://www.angelfoodministries.org)

### Employment/Job Fairs

[www.chicagojobresource.com/  
jobfairs.com](http://www.chicagojobresource.com/jobfairs.com)

### Fatherhood Initiative

North, Floyd Garrett, 773-451-1353  
Central, Ken Butler, 312-401-0434  
South, Don Waddell, 773-375-0700

### Support Groups

Project Butterfly, 312-328-0886  
Catholic Charities, 312-655-7191  
Salvation Army, 773-725-1100  
Salvation Army Family Services,  
773-275-6233

### Education

Black Star Project, 312-842-3527  
[www.Blackstarproject.org](http://www.Blackstarproject.org)

### Recreation

#### **Chicago Park District**

312-742-5381  
[www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com)

**YMCA**, 312-932-1200

[www.ymcachgo.org](http://www.ymcachgo.org)

### Paternity Testing

Rutha Johnson 773-928-4659