



April is Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month

It Takes a Community to Protect a Child

By **CRYSTAL WARD ALLEN**
PCSAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"It takes a community to protect a child." This is a message PCSAO has promoted for years, to focus our attention on the joint responsibility of everyone to ensure children are safe and cared for in their own homes and community.

Sure, child protection officials immediately respond when a child has been abused or neglected, but there are so many ways for each of us to proactively support children and families to avoid the trauma and risk endured by children needing child protective services.

As a daughter and large family member, mother, community member, and professional, I personally see prevention oppor-

tunities every day. Some I miss and later reflect on, some I have positively acted on. But for today, I will try very hard to embrace opportunities to prevent child abuse and neglect. Here are a few of the opportunities I'll commit to embracing – take a few moments to make your own list:

- Model my own actions as a parent after the many positive interactions my own mother continues to show me – listening to my woes, and providing unconditional love and acceptance.
- Offer the same support and love to my own extended family – even to the extent of being available as a caregiver if ever needed (just as my Aunt Lucy raised my father).

- Encourage my own kids, now college students, in their successes and challenges in life, as they are both in that murky time of life – old enough to vote, but not old enough to legally buy alcohol. Provide a mix of support with personal responsibility for their actions.

- Continue to work in the community – I am involved with my local school district to support enrichment activities for large numbers of students, and often their families. I strongly believe successful engagement within their local school buildings is a key to healthy child development.

- Lead, as Director of PCSAO, to ensure

(See **PROTECT**, page 4)

2005 Heroes for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention



Dr. Ronald Hughes, Director of the Institute for Human Services, and founder and director of the North American Resource Center for Child Welfare, received the Peter Forsythe Award

for Leadership in Child Welfare in March, for his outstanding contributions to the field of public child welfare.

The Peter Forsythe Award is presented annually by the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, an affiliate of APHSA, to a person who exhibits leadership in the field of public child welfare, and in support of NAPCWA's mission. The award criteria include exemplary work at the national and regional levels in support of public child welfare agencies' efforts to protect children and support families. In accepting the award, Ron quoted Alfred Kadushin saying, "there are few jobs where, at the end of the day, you can say you have saved children's lives. Child welfare is one of them." ♥



Dean Sparks, Executive Director of Lucas County Children Services, was named Ohio Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers. As the state winner, he will be considered for honors at the national level.

Dean was selected for the award based upon his work as both an agency leader and a volunteer. In seven years at LCCS, he has brought many improvements to Children Services, including expansion of client services, national accreditation, and a communitywide public awareness campaign on parenting and safety issues. As a volunteer, Sparks coordinates the local mental health disaster response for the Red Cross, provided mental health diagnoses and grief counseling to victims, their families, and rescuers in New York City following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and provided assistance following a series of devastating hurricanes in Florida in 2004. He has also served with the Red Cross following earthquakes in Los Angeles, flooding in Florida and northern California and tornadoes and winter storms in Ohio. ♥



Maria Lawson, a child welfare specialist case-worker at Franklin County Children Services was selected to receive the 2005 Commissioner's Award from the Administration on Children Youth

and Families for Ohio for her significant contribution to child abuse and neglect prevention.

Lawson was also granted PCSAO's Case Worker of the Year award at the 2004 annual Conference. In 2003, Franklin County Children Services named Maria their Direct Service Employee of the Year. In their nominations, her colleagues and executive director praised her for her dedication to kids and their families. They say Maria's ability to develop positive relationships with children and families is her signature trait; that she is tireless in her efforts to reunite families and much more. ♥

Increasing Staff Safety in Child Protection

By JOHN SAROS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES
AND MARY KAY HAWKINS, DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

On October 16, 2001, tragedy and horror struck Franklin County Children Services with the full force and impact of a shock wave when Nancy Fitzgivens, a child welfare caseworker, was brutally beaten, choked and stabbed to death by a client in his home during a routine visit. The unthinkable had happened, creating a sense of insecurity and fear among all staff. It changed forever the sense of safety and security social workers had always enjoyed, establishing a new paradigm of threat and need for security measures. All of us were sustained through this tragedy by the heartwarming outpouring of sympathy and support both locally and around the state.



By JOHN SAROS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES

At the same time, we responded to this tragic event by investing ourselves in plans and activities to protect our workers. More than 20 safety initiatives followed the October 16 tragedy. These included such things as, a) an immediate directive from the Executive Director that instructed management staff to allow workers to conduct home visits in pairs when there was a safety concern, b) safety forums were conducted by a professional trainer to assist administration in obtaining information regarding worker concerns, c) the Safety Committee was restructured to better focus on worker safety, and d) meetings with the police and city prosecutor's offices were held to provide a more formalized response to threats from the citizens we serve. We worked diligently and continue to do so to create a culture of zero tolerance regarding any incidents of threats, intimidation or physical harm to any staff member. This is clearly stated in our Employee/Worker Safety Protocol.

Reporting these incidents is vital in identifying trends and developing interventions within an agency as well as statewide. Our agency tracks these critical incidents monthly by type, location and outcomes. My staff and I stand by to assist in providing Ohio public children services agencies with any of the tools and policies that we have developed to address staff safety.

In addition, PCSAO has been collecting and reporting on worker safety incidents across the state since 2002. The PCSAO HR Committee is currently reviewing this data with the intent of making it more useful. Suggestions and continued reporting via the PCSAO format is extremely valuable in achieving our goal of keeping our workers safe. Worker safety incident report forms and summaries are available online at http://www.pcsao.org/safety_incident_report.htm ♥

2004 Worker Safety Incidents: An Overview

PCSAO has been collecting and reporting on Worker Safety Infractions across the state since 2002. PCSAO recently released the 2004 Ohio Aggregate Data Report on Child Welfare Worker Safety Incidents. From this data gathering process, we have learned the following:

In 2004, there were 299 incidents reported to PCSAO that occurred in all county cohort groups (metro counties: 95, major metro counties: 72, medium counties: 54, large counties: 41, small counties: 20, and medium-small counties: 17).

The data indicates that verbal and/or written aggression was the preferred mode of striking out (140 reports for verbal/written threats, and 123 reports for verbal aggression). The predominant aggressors were clients (192 reported for adult clients, and 29 reported for child/youth clients).

The top three locations where infractions occurred were on agency grounds (96 reports), by phone and/or e-mail (64 reports), and in the homes of clients (63 reports). The predominant worker safety incident triggers occurred during visitations as part of child abuse and neglect investigations (47 reports), parent child visitation (45 reports), and routine home visits (44 reports). Although visitations triggered the highest number of incident reports, there were not significant differences between the type of trigger and the number of incidents reported.



By JEED JITPRASERT
ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR

Caseworkers endured physical incidents, including being bitten by dogs, kicked, punched, pushed, having their hair pulled and being stalked by clients. Workers were verbally attacked and threatened with death, poison, and bodily harm as well as having threats made to their home, property, and family by their clients. In several instances clients or those associated with clients threatened to bomb the agencies' buildings or a caseworker's home. There were some reports of the clients actually damaging the agencies' property by punching a hole on the wall or throwing chairs.

In 2004, there were 63 county agencies which participated in submitting worker safety incident reports to PCSAO (100% from major metro counties, 87% from large counties, 78% from metro counties, 71% from medium counties, 65% from small counties, and 57% from medium-small counties). Forty four of 63 counties which responded reported that there were incidents that occurred at their agencies.



More information about PCSAO Child Protection Services Standards for Effective Practice and the Worker Safety Reports are available online at http://www.pcsao.org/safety_incident_report.htm ♥



Agencies: Nominate Your Stars for the 2005 PCSAO Awards!

PCSAO honors outstanding individuals in child protection each year at our annual conference. PCSAO is encouraging all public children services agencies to nominate at least one person for each of the following awards:

- **Rising Up and Moving On award**
Celebrates the accomplishments of children served by Ohio children services agencies. *Nomination deadline is May 31.*
- **Family of the Year award**
Recognizes birth, kinship, adoptive or foster families who have overcome adversity or have helped create a safe and permanent home for a child. *Nomination deadline is May 31.*
- **Child Protection Worker of the Year award**
Celebrates child protective service workers who have positively impacted children, families and their agency. *Nomination deadline is June 24.*
- **Child Protection Supervisor of the Year award**
Recognizes outstanding supervisors in child protection. *Nomination deadline is June 24.*
- **Journalist of the Year award**
Honors a journalist who has contributed to better public understanding, awareness or involvement in child protection. *Nomination deadline is July 29.*

County agencies will receive award nomination forms in the mail. Nomination forms are also available online at http://www.pcsao.org/2005_conference.htm. PCSAO will recognize award winners at our 2005 statewide conference, September 21-23 at the Holiday Inn Worthington hotel in Columbus. Please contact Jeed Jitprasert, Conference Coordinator at 614-224-5802 or pcsao@sbcglobal.net for more information.

2005 PCSAO Statewide Annual Conference

September 21-23, 2005

**Holiday Inn Worthington,
Columbus, Ohio**

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Public Children Services Association of Ohio invites you to support the 2005 PCSAO Annual Conference in the following ways:

Sponsor: For \$600, a conference sponsor receives an 8 ft. display table (or equivalent space) in the upper atrium level of the conference center. This is the ideal place to showcase your organization, programs, and services. *Space is limited to the first 10 organizations that sign up, on a first-come, first-serve basis.* Sponsors will be listed and thanked in the conference brochure.

Exhibitor: For \$300, a conference exhibitor receives a 6 ft. display table (or equivalent space) at the lower conference level and hallway of the hotel. *Space is limited to the first 20 organizations that sign up, on a first-come, first-serve basis.* Exhibitors will be listed and thanked in the conference brochure.

Full-page ad in brochure: For \$200, your organization can purchase a full page ad in the PCSAO conference brochure. This 8 1/2" x 11" advertisement is the perfect way to show your support and get your message out to all the conference attendants. *Your ad should be sent to PCSAO by June 10.*

Conference patron: For \$50, patrons of the conference can place a handout at the registration table which will be available for all conference attendants. *Patrons must provide 500 copies of their materials to PCSAO by August 5.*

We hope you will consider being part of Ohio's most comprehensive statewide child protection training conference. Sponsorship opportunities are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. To reserve your space, please fill out the sponsorship application and send to PCSAO with your payment. Sponsorship applications are available online at http://www.pcsao.org/2005_conference.htm



Grandparent caregiver and advocate Lori Baker reads a poem to lawmakers, fellow advocates and the press before relating her story to the group. Pictured (left to right): Franklin County Children Services Director John Saros, PCSAO Executive Director Crystal Ward Allen, Baker, Rep. Jim McGregor, Representative Reidelbach's aide, Katie Eagan.



"This rule is disrespectful to families." Lucas County Children Services Executive Director Dean Sparks speaks out against the "Licensing Granny" rule as a relative caregiver and an agency director. Pictured (left to right): Sparks, Dwayne Pielich, Executive Director of the Belmont County Department of Job and Family Services, Belmont County Commissioner Mark A. Thomas, Saros, and Allen.

Opposing the Licensing Granny Rule

PCSAO held a press conference in March to oppose the federal proposed "licensing granny" rule that would end federal support for services to abused and neglected children living with relatives, unless those relatives became licensed foster parents. Rep. Jim McGregor hosted the conference and Rep. Linda Reidelbach and her aide also joined in opposition to this punitive rule.

PCSAO also met with our Congressional delegation, distributed educational materials and action alerts to our colleagues and grandparent caregivers, and discussed the issue with editorial boards from major newspapers around the state. Thanks to everyone who worked with us to understand and oppose this rule. ♥

Protect a Child (continued)

we don't just focus on responses to abuse and neglect, but we also work on policy development that helps families and children avoid involvement with our system. That means promoting early childhood programs such as Help Me Grow. It also means promoting supportive kinship policies and programs, like the Kinship Navigator Program and Kinship Subsidies, which empower relatives to support their own families, and minimize governmental intervention.

Of course, I'll continue to miss opportunities to prevent child abuse and neglect, but at least for today, I'm focused on what I can do. It really does take a community to protect a child, and I'm part of my community at so many levels. We all are. Let's celebrate this month together, and each make a difference in the lives of our children. ♥



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A Closer Look: The Overrepresentation of Minorities in Ohio's Child Welfare System

Minority disproportionality in the child welfare system is a nationwide problem that affects Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latino Americans in Ohio as well.

The Numbers

Most current research focuses on the overrepresentation of African Americans. In Ohio, African Americans make up 11.5% of the general population, but represent 42% of children in temporary custody and 52% in permanent custody. The national average for African American children in foster care is 35%. African American children stay in custody longer and are adopted at a lower rate than Caucasian children. The statistics are staggering. Researchers, as well as many in the field, are concerned.

External Factors

Unfortunately, none of the research has provided a definitive answer as to why the

disproportionality exists and research results can vary. Two main strains of thought exist. The first is that external factors are to



By ANNE SWARTWOUT
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blame. For example, a larger percentage of African Americans live in poverty, live in crime-ridden neighborhoods, are jobless, and belong to single-parent families. All of these are risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Some research concludes

that when these risk factors are controlled, we can account for the number of minority children in the system.

Another problem with the risk factors theory is that poverty stricken neighborhoods also lack the resources that families who have housing, substance abuse, and employment issues can utilize. One direct worker in a study pointed out that in a middle-income

Caucasian neighborhood she could refer a client and they would receive help in one day; while in a low-income African American neighborhood, a client could be on a waiting list for weeks or months. These communities are often geographically isolated from resources because no services are located there or in nearby communities. Clients and direct service workers become limited in what they can help clients accomplish. Some researchers imply that this is exacerbated by time lines imposed through the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, because workers must find alternative permanency solutions for a child, even if the family is waiting for services.

The lack of services for families is but one of the problems that poverty creates. Two more are cited as possible reasons for the overrepresentation of minorities. First, African American families living in poverty may lack resources, such as a private attorney or the ability to pay for private services, that could help them successfully navigate the child welfare system. Second, poverty increases the use of public services, such as TANF, public health care, and food stamps, which makes these families more visible to agencies that report them to the child welfare system.

Racial Bias

Another theory is that racial bias is to blame for the disproportionate number of minorities in the system. Studies examining this theory look at the five points where decisions are made about children in the child welfare system: reporting, investigations, substantiation, placement, and exits from the system. When abuse and neglect reports come in, minorities are reported more often than Caucasian children. When newborns tested positive for drugs, African American women were reported more often for abuse. Other studies show that the severity of

[See OVERREPRESENTATION, back page]

Cuyahoga County Symposium to Raise Awareness About Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare

Twenty eight percent of the children in Cuyahoga County are African-American, but African-American children make up 70% of the child welfare population in that county.

For two years a work group at Cuyahoga County Department of Child and Family Services has been examining the causes of this overrepresentation of African-American children in their custody, and how to control it. This summer, author, legal professor and social critic Dorothy Roberts will join the work group and community stakeholders at a symposium to address the issue. Roberts is expected to explore the role of racial bias in child welfare, which is the topic of her book, "Shattered Bonds: the Color of Child Welfare"

The symposium is the next step in addressing the disproportionality problem in Cuyahoga County and the rest of the state. Child welfare leaders and community stakeholders from across Ohio will be invited to join the symposium on July 21 in Cuyahoga County. Look for more details about it the next edition of the HeartBeat, or, contact Jerry Blake at Cuyahoga County DCF at 216-432-3510 with your questions. ♥

A Closer Look: The Overrepresentation of Minorities in Ohio's Child Welfare System (continued)

injury, prior reports, and a history of family problems were the factors in reporting abuse, not race.

For substantiation and investigation, the results are mixed again. Suggestions have been made that differences exist on what constitutes abuse and neglect. Others suggest that the assessment tools used can attribute to a racial bias. In a study, administrators felt that the number of minorities entering the system declined when they used a more culturally, ethnically, and racially balanced assessment tool.

Differential Treatment

More studies reveal that some differential treatment in placement areas that cannot be completely explained by poverty or other attributes does exist. For example, more Caucasian children receive services in their homes, while more African American children are removed and placed in foster care. Later studies controlled for other factors besides race and still found that even if both races had similar characteristics, African Americans were still being removed at a higher rate.

Services while in care also differ depending on race. African American parents with substance abuse problems were offered substance abuse services more often than Caucasian parents while Caucasian parents were offered parenting services more often than African American parents with parenting problems.

The services to children also differed. Caucasian children were found to be placed

more often with agencies that had superior ratings compared to African American children. Other studies found that Hispanic and African American children receive less mental health service, and when they do, it is of lower quality. Minority children were also found to have less contact with their direct service workers. Some believe that this is due to the preconceived notions that direct service workers have about minorities and that they lack knowledge and experience with different cultures and races other than their own.

African American children take longer to exit from the child welfare system. Some studies suggest that it is due to the fact that it takes longer for African American children to be adopted and this accounts for the disproportionality. African American children also have a longer time to be reunified with their families and adoption finalizations take longer that some researchers say is a direct result of the race of those children.

Next Steps

Disproportionality exists, but no one understands completely the reasons for this problem. External factors, workers' beliefs and attitudes, and systemic structure can or do play a part in the over-representation of minorities in the system. Now, states and Ohio counties are examining their practices and policies to begin to address this important issue. Cuyahoga County will lead this effort in Ohio with a symposium in July. *The sources used in this article are available upon request. Contact anneswartwout@yahoo.com.* ♥