

Parent Leadership

EXPRESS

December 2006

News from CDSS/OCAP...

Statewide Parent Leadership Conference

On January 30, 2007, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) will kick off National Parent Leadership Month by hosting a **Statewide Parent Leadership Conference**. This one day conference will focus on engaging parents to be active members of advisory groups, governance structures, decision making bodies, and many other leadership roles. The target audience for the conference will be parents, public agencies and private non-profit organizations.



*Back row (left to right): Linda Ortiz, Connie Burgess, Nasa Ray, Patty Enciso, Art Hernandez, Greg Colver, Diane Davis.
Front row (left to right): Gwen Boyd, Kathy Dreyer, Elizabeth Humphrey, Lisa Nedd, Terena Scott, Tammy Ghasvarian, Roxanne Stutrud.*

The goals of the conference are to continue to increase awareness of the value of Parent Leadership and identify opportunities for meaningful parent participation at all levels, and to share promising practices on engaging parents from models currently being utilized throughout California.

In February 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger proclaimed February as Parent Leadership Month in California and it is anticipated that a proclamation will also be issued for February 2007. The conference will provide a wonderful opportunity to accept that proclamation and recognize selected Parent Leaders and acknowledge their contributions in building a system in California that supports and strengthens families.

Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership have become integral components of CDSS/OCAP funded projects and improving child abuse prevention and child welfare services in California. Over the past 7 years, CDSS/OCAP has been partnering with Parents Anonymous® Inc. to implement the *Shared Leadership in Action* Program throughout the state utilizing federal Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention funding. Parents Anonymous® Inc. has provided Parent/Shared Leadership training and technical assistance to numerous counties to help them develop Shared Leadership Task Forces and this has resulted in parents having a voice in the decision-making relating to programs

and policies affecting children and families. Parents Anonymous® Inc. also established the first California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT), a diverse group of statewide Parent Leaders, who work in partnership with staff to provide Parent/Shared Leadership training and technical assistance to counties, serve as role models to other parents and participate in planning and policy activities at the state and local levels to improve family support programs and child abuse prevention efforts. During the last five

years, there has been increasing emphasis on the part of federal grants and state Child Welfare Service Systems to engage parents in local processes. CDSS/OCAP is clearly committed to expanding Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership throughout the state and is strongly supporting its funded programs to build and expand partnerships with parents throughout the continuum of services at the practice, program and policy levels.

Save The Date!

Join with colleagues and Parent Leaders in a celebration of National Parent Leadership Month on January 30, 2007 at a one-day Parent Leadership Conference in Sacramento hosted by the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention. You will have the opportunity to learn about the important roles parents can play in local child abuse prevention programs and how public and private nonprofit organizations can meaningfully engage parents in planning, development, implementation and evaluation activities in their local programs and communities.

Sharing Leadership with Parent Partners in California Wraparound Programs

Written by Hermelinda (Linda) Ortiz, California Parent Leadership Team, (Orange County)



Hermelinda (Linda) Ortiz, is a Mental Health Worker II - Parent Partner for the Orange County Health Care Agency, Behavioral Health Department for Children and Youth Services. She is a member of the California Parent Leadership Team and serves on a state Wraparound Work Group. In the following article she shares her perspective of the Wraparound program.

What is Wraparound?

The Wraparound process provides individualized, comprehensive, community-based services and supports to children and their families. Wraparound is a team focused process that identifies, emphasizes and promotes the strengths of the members of a family as the starting point in developing an individualized family Plan of Care so children and families can remain intact and receive the services and supports they need. The majority of families involved in the Wraparound process have children who have been referred through county social services, probation, or mental health services and are currently receiving services within the system in some capacity. An expansion to include identified "at risk youth" for Wraparound referral is currently underway. The Wraparound process is a hands-on approach that provides supports to the family both on an emotional level and through the provision of practical, concrete resources. Two of the main phrases echoed throughout Wraparound include: "Whatever it takes" and "Think Outside the Box."

Who is the Wraparound Team?

The Wraparound team consists of the identified child and family members or close family and community relations; the referring parties (probation, social services, and/or mental health) and a private or public agency employed Care Coordinator, Parent/Family Partner and Youth Partner who are supervised by licensed Mental Health Professionals.

The *Care Coordinator* is primarily responsible for inter-agency communication and team meeting facilitation as well as maintaining and monitoring the progress of each family team. The *Youth Partner* works within the team framework with particular emphasizes on supporting the identified youth in voicing his/her concerns and needs as well as assisting him/her in working as a vital member of the team to attain the personal and family goals he/she helped to identify. The *Parent Partner* role focuses on supporting the parent(s). *The unique difference between the Parent Partner role and the others is that this individual is most often a person who has lived through and overcome difficult and*

potentially devastating life experiences and is now in a place to utilize their life experience to help other parents experiencing similar situations.

Why is the Role of the Parent Partner so Vital?

The Parent Partner role is unique in that the individuals involved in this role already possess demonstrated ability as "battle-tested leaders." They also hold a definitive advantage as they are "bridges" between lived "practicum" and the trained professionals who may lack this advantageous perspective. They are a strong unifying component within the team structure.

What are the Different Roles that Parent Partners are Fulfilling?

Throughout the state, from one Wraparound program to another, there is little known about how Parent Partners are functioning in their roles and what supports and training they need. Parents Anonymous® Inc. and CDSS/CFS have established a Wraparound Work Group to assist with: (1) the development of an online survey instrument to gain vital information about the roles, training needs, supports and challenges of Parent Partners within Wraparound Programs statewide; and (2) the planning of a one-day Summit to include Parent Partners and Staff from each county's Wraparound Program to discuss survey results, obtain vital information on the scope of work, needs, obstacles, successes and supports of Parent Partners and plan next steps.

It is natural then, that the California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT) is very interested in learning from and developing training and supports for this group of Parent Leaders. Through participation on the Wraparound Work Group, the CPLT will help to clarify the role and responsibilities of Parent Partners in the various counties throughout the state, identify areas in which Parent Leaders can be further supported and trained to expand their roles and strengthen their voice and abilities, and learn how to replicate the successes of the Wraparound program to support families and the community.

Online Wraparound Surveys Coming in January 2007

Under the direction of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Children and Family Services Division (CFS), statewide efforts are underway to gather information about the role, training needs and supports of Parent Partners within SB 163 Wraparound Programs throughout California. Parents Anonymous® Inc. is working closely with the CDSS/CFS and a state Wraparound Work Group to develop three surveys designed to gather information from Wraparound Program County Coordinators/Administrators, Program Staff and Parent Partners. Parents Anonymous® Inc. plans to post the three different surveys online throughout the month of January 2007.

Parents Anonymous® Inc. hopes to gather as much vital information as possible about the training needs, obstacles, successes and supports of Parent Partners. **County Coordinators/Administrators, Program Staff and Parent Partners in your SB 163 Wraparound Programs are urged to fill out these surveys in January 2007!** Hard copies of the surveys will be disseminated if needed. The survey tool for Wraparound Parent Partners will be available in English and Spanish.

If you are in a county that has one single SB 163 Wraparound Provider, Parents Anonymous® Inc. is requesting that a member of the Multi-Agency Team designate a contact person to disseminate information about the upcoming surveys and also ensure completion of them. If you are in a county with multiple Wraparound Providers, they are requesting that the designated SB 163 County Coordinator/Administrator facilitate the dissemination of survey information and ensure completion.

Parents Anonymous® Inc. will compile and analyze the results of the surveys and host a one-day Wraparound Summit on June 5, 2007. Wraparound Program County

Coordinators/Administrators, Program Staff and Parent Partners will be invited to participate in the Summit to learn about the survey results and discuss how to best support Wraparound Parent Partners and ensure that the parent voice is "heard." The group will be looking at recommendations regarding Parent Partner training curriculums, more Summits and conferences, more peer support and networking strategies, Parent Partner leadership development and roles, establishing Wraparound fidelity tools for Parent Partners, statewide employment standards for Parent Partners and

looking at next steps for ensuring successful participation of Parent Partners in Wraparound Programs statewide.

Please assist us in informing others about the importance of completing the online surveys by designating a contact person and including information from this announcement on your Web site, newsletter, e-mail groups and other forms of communication.



For more information, please contact:
Meryl Levine, Vice President of Development
Parents Anonymous® Inc.
909-621-6184, ext. 220
mlevine@parentsanonymous.org.

Thank you!

California Parent Leadership Team Gains Three New Members



Hermelinda (Linda) Ortiz was nominated to the California Parent Leadership Team by Olive Crest Treatment Centers, Inc. in Orange County where she previously worked as a Parent Partner in a Wraparound Program. Hermelinda is currently employed as a Mental Health Worker II - Parent Partner for the Orange County Health Care

Agency, Behavioral Health Department for Children and Youth Services. Hermelinda has personal experience with both the Mental Health and Child Welfare systems. When Hermelinda's sisters were taken into child welfare custody, she fought for custody of her sisters and at age 21, found herself switching roles from sister to caretaker of two younger siblings. As a parent of her own children, Hermelinda has been involved in the PTA and School Site Council at her children's schools. She also volunteers at her church in outreach and leadership roles and is part of the choir and lead worship team. Hermelinda has also been recently added to the Orange County Multi-ethnic Task Force and the Orange County Child Abuse Prevention Network.

Hermelinda participated in Shared Leadership Training provided by Parents Anonymous® Inc. last year in Orange County and feels that participating on the California Parent Leadership Team will help to expand Shared Leadership in her county and provide her with opportunities to help others. As a member of the CPLT, Hermelinda is serving on the Wraparound Committee and the National Center for Shared Leadership Advisory Committee. Hermelinda states, "I have a strong desire to help people who have yet to discover their own abilities and strengths. I want to be part of empowering individuals and seeing the results reflected in changed lives and productive families. I have a heart to serve children and the best way to do this is by strengthening their parents. I love learning and love teaching others (exchanging information; ideas)."



Lisa Nedd was nominated to the California Parent Leadership Team by the Alameda County Social Services Agency. She serves on the Parent Leadership Team developed through that department. She is also on the advisory board at Children's Hospital Oakland for the Center for Vulnerable Children. Lisa is an advocate and Parent Leader for

the Healthy Babies Project and won an award for "single-handedly raising \$70,000 for them to continue to help women that are struggling with drugs and alcohol addiction."

Lisa was personally involved with the CPS system due to her history of drug use and has utilized many services including Wraparound. She is the single parent of eight children. Lisa is presently a student at Merritt College where she has completed the Certified Nursing Assistant/Home Health Aide program and is working on becoming a Registered Nurse and getting her Bachelors's Degree in humanities. Lisa has volunteered to serve on the Wraparound Work Group and is helping to write articles for this newsletter, *Parent Leadership Express*. When asked why she wants to serve on the California Parent Leadership Team, Lisa states, "What I have learned about life, about CPS, about my responsibilities, can help parents and agencies learn the importance of working together."



Connie Burgess was nominated to the California Parent Leadership Team by the California Department of Social Services due to her strong leadership skills and involvement as a co-trainer with the department. Ms. Burgess gained her skills as an activist parent raising a child with

severe emotional challenges and special education needs. She is a seasoned trainer, facilitator, and keynote speaker focusing on multicultural competence, leadership, parent-professional teaming, and Wraparound systems change for children and families in need of services. She provides training and technical assistance nationwide focusing on leadership, systems change, cultural competence, disproportionate minority confinement, and she has provided consultation on the design and implementation of Caring for California Initiative, an agency-academic consortium improving the quality of care for California's children with serious emotional and behavioral issues. Involved in family advocacy issues and policy at the state and national levels, she has given legislative testimony, serves on federal peer grant review committees, is a member of the national advisory committee on the National Wraparound Initiative, and developed a small state family advocacy group into a multi-faceted, respected family-run organization with broad reach. Connie states, "The California Parent Leadership Team presents an opportunity and forum for me to work with others who have similar interests as I have and to share and expand my knowledge, particularly as it relates to leadership, cultural competency, and Wraparound."

Parent Leader Participates in Regional CAPC Meetings

Written by Roxanne Stutrud, California Parent Leadership Team, (Humboldt County)

In August 2006, as a member of the California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT) and a Parent Leader in Humboldt County, I began attending the monthly Regional Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) meetings for my region. The region includes Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. In addition to county CAPC representatives, the meetings are often attended by a representative from CATA (Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance), our region's consultant from the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) and other invited guests.

From the very first meeting I have been welcomed with open arms by the agency staff members in attendance. The meetings are extremely informative and a wealth of information is exchanged between the various county and



agency representatives. I feel honored to have been asked to participate in these regional meetings and feel I am able to bring valuable information back to other parents and agency representatives in my community. I also know I am able to bring my knowledge and expertise to these meetings for our region.

I hope that other CPLT members will be invited to participate in their Regional CAPC meetings. This "Shared Leadership" on the regional level is another avenue for making sure that we are strengthening our families, communities and state.

To learn whether there is a member of the California Parent Leadership Team available to participate in your regional CAPC meeting, contact: Meryl Levine at (909) 621-6184, ext. 220 or e-mail her at mlevine@parentsanonymous.org.

A Parent's Journey to Becoming a Leader and Healthy Parent!

Written by Kathy Dreyer, California Parent Leadership Team (Yolo County)



I was abused growing up. The parenting skills I learned growing up were not the ones I wished to repeat. Truthfully, I was never going to have children. But the life I now live is quite different from what I'd imagined.

I moved 500 miles away from my family of origin, thinking that distance would solve my problems. I was attending college but found myself falling back to the old rage and drinking. With the assistance of a psychologist, I came to see how my early experiences had influenced my perceptions and actions. I also decided to take classes that would teach me the lessons I'd not learned growing up. This was a difficult undertaking as I continued to struggle with my intense feelings. Even more difficult was identifying the skills I needed to develop. Still, I was determined to open the abscess of childhood wounding, allow it to drain and heal.

Because I was also diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, I decided to join a disability advocacy group. Within that group I met the man who became my husband. He had a 14-year-old daughter who lived with us. Parenting her was easy. After all, she had a mother living locally and a father, and I

was merely another caring adult who'd watch out for her.

Then I became pregnant with my own child. I realized that I needed the skills to provide the intensive parenting a baby required. After my daughter was born, I realized how much I needed support.

I decided to search for resources to help me and found it difficult to find the kinds of services that I needed. I became an advocate in my community and began attending meetings with various other agencies to let them know my concerns. Working in partnership with many community agencies, I was able to develop my leadership skills and help bring about change so that more parents had access to parent groups and parent education in my community. I was able to make use of these services too.

To summarize, I needed much help to get me to the place I am today. While I wish it had been easy to find the services that I needed, the process of advocating for what I needed and becoming a Parent Leader helped me to see how much strength I really had. I am grateful I recognized how my childhood experiences could negatively affect my parenting, how I could take an active role in securing the services that would help me learn better ways of parenting, and how I could successfully raise my daughter.

Moving Parent Leadership Forward:

During the 2006-07 year, Parents Anonymous® Inc. will be providing Shared Leadership In Action training and technical assistance to the following counties:

• Lake, Mendocino, Napa • San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura • Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino • Kings and Tulare

This article highlights how three counties, Humboldt, Alameda and Kern, have made great gains in developing roles for Parent Leaders and successfully reshaping and strengthening services for families.



Humboldt County

In Humboldt County, Roxanne Stutrud, member of the California Parent Leadership Team, has taken an active role in working with various community agency representatives from both the public and private sectors to develop a Shared Leadership Work Group in the local community. The Work Group meets on a monthly basis and has established specific ground rules to ensure that they are meaningfully engaging parents in the important work they are doing. During a training session with Parents Anonymous® Inc., the members of the Work Group identified the following seven priority areas that they are planning to address:

- Improve transportation services to assist families in accessing needed resources
- Establish Parent Mentor positions within the child welfare system and other family strengthening programs
- Increase trust and communication between parents and agency representatives
- Appoint parents to serve as board members on the Child Abuse Prevention Council
- Increase awareness of resources available for families in the county
- Plan activities to honor parents during California Parent Leadership Month
- Plan activities to increase awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month

The Work Group has already begun to gather various resource listings and are working to get this resource information posted on the United Way Switchboard, an information and referral web site. A key manager at Humboldt Child Welfare Services (CWS), who is also a member of the Work Group, recently submitted a grant to hire a Parent Leader for their agency. In addition, CWS has been involved in setting up Self Assessment Workgroups as part of their System Improvement Plan and they are recruiting parents to serve on these Work Groups. Overall, Humboldt County has made great strides in building the framework for Shared Leadership within their county.



Alameda County



Parent Leadership Makes a Real Difference

Written by Lisa Nedd, California Parent Leadership Team, (Alameda County)

In 2005, Alameda County Social Service Agency, Children and Family Services started a Parent Leadership Team. The Team consists of birth parents who have nearly finished or successfully completed the reunification program. In partnership with Child Welfare administrators and social workers, the Parent Leadership Team meets monthly to work on projects to help improve services that are being delivered to parents in the Child Welfare System. The Parent Leadership Team also participates in training to help Parent Leaders develop their skills. Some of the Parent Leaders have completed several trainings and workshops, such as Communicating Effectively, Group Process, Effective Meeting and Facilitation Skills and more.

Parent Leadership Team members participated in a six-week series of planning meetings with child welfare workers and supervisors to develop the curriculum for a Parent Orientation Program. The purpose of the Parent Orientation Program is to help parents through the Family Reunification process by increasing their understanding of the child welfare and juvenile court systems. The Parent Orientation Program is separated into three two-hour sessions which cover an overview of the Child Welfare System; Working with the Court and the Child Welfare System; and Resources in the Community. The purpose of the Orientation is to provide parents with support and information that will allow them to advocate for themselves and their children. Parent Leaders from the Parent Leadership Team co-facilitate each session with child welfare staff.

In addition, four of the parents from the Parent Leadership

County Highlights

Team have been trained to be Parent Advocates for new parents that are coming into the Child Welfare System. I am one of those parents. We help educate, mentor and support parents in understanding what is required of them to help them get their children returned or to safely remain in their home. Parent Advocates are birth parents who have been through the Child Welfare System themselves and have successfully reunified with their own children. They have come back to assist the agency to help engage birth parents that are new to the Family Reunification Program. The primary goal is to help parents get their children returned to them.

The Parent Leadership programs in Alameda County improve service delivery to families by involving parents in the planning and implementation of services. It builds better relationships between Child Welfare staff and birth parents and empowers parents to be self-advocates. For me, being a part of the Parent Leadership Team, co-facilitating the Parent Orientation Classes and being a Parent Advocate has changed my life and allows me to help change the lives of other parents. I was extremely honored when my county recognized my leadership skills and nominated me to serve on the California Parent Leadership Team.

When I do this work, it gives me such a wonderful feeling that is indescribable. I know that this is my calling because I have a great passion for what I do!



Kern County

Three years ago, the Kern County Department of Human Services (DHS) began implementation of a unique Parent Leader Program. With the vision and leadership of Beverly Beasley Johnson, DHS Director, a new direction took place. Valuing the life experiences of parents who had been involved in the Child Protective Services (CPS) system and believing that they can make a difference helping other parents in similar situations, a Shared Leadership Task Force was developed. The Task Force included several volunteer Parent Leaders who provided input to DHS. Through the efforts of the Task Force, four Parent Leaders were hired to help families navigate the CPS system in order to be reunited with their children placed in foster care. Recently, Parents Anonymous® Inc. interviewed the Parent Leaders, DHS Administration and Staff, community agencies and parents receiving these new services.

These Parents Leaders are extremely creative, committed and very caring to the families. They reach out to these vulnerable parents and offer them strength-based services. The Parent Leaders talked about their own personal growth and development – new knowledge and skills to help further their own career and future directions for themselves. Much appreciation goes to Charlotte, Eugene, Greg and Mickey, the Kern County Parent Leaders who receive reaffirmation of their personal accomplishments daily in this work.

There was unanimous agreement on the positive impacts of this unique program on both families and agencies. On nearly a weekly basis, agency staff receive personal letters and e-mails expressing the deep gratitude of CPS families for the support, encouragement and help received from the Parent Leaders. Parent Leaders have the ability to make important connections based on their personal experiences with similar life challenges. The previous success of the Parent Leaders creates enormous possibilities for others trying to make changes in their lives. Learning to navigate the system more effectively by understanding system expectations and legal requirements was a goal of their work. Reunifications were noted and many of these parents are now volunteering to help other parents through the Child Welfare System.

On the agency level, many enhancements were noted. Organizational barriers have been overcome and a culture shift at DHS has been achieved. Social workers documented the benefits to families and themselves of the work and accomplishments of Parent Leaders. Also Parent Leaders were credited with helping to improve the image of CPS in the community and also in reaching out to families in unprecedented ways during crises situations.

On the community level, negative stereotypes regarding parents struggling with drug abuse and child abuse issues have been modified. Parent Leaders made themselves available for families who needed help in the community as a prevention effort. Other agencies have sought out individual Parent Leaders to advise on policy issues and program developments.

Kern County DHS is committed to expanding the Program by creating civil service positions for Parent Leaders. Additionally, data is being collected to assess caseloads, services and measure outcomes. Further expansion of the work of Parent Leaders is being explored in areas such as partnering with community child abuse prevention programs and helping families help others. This unique program is an excellent model for other CPS agencies interested in embracing Shared Leadership to create better outcomes for families and communities.

How is Your County Honoring Parents during National Parent Leadership Month?



It's time to start planning your activities for National Parent Leadership Month in February 2007. There are many ways you can recognize and honor parents in your community.

- Get a proclamation from your public officials
- Sponsor parents to attend the CDSS/OCAP Statewide Parent Leadership Conference
- Help Parent Leaders share their stories in the media
- Ask a Parent Leader to attend a meeting or conference with you and share their story

For more information about National Parent Leadership Month, e-mail Meryl Levine at mlevine@parentsanonymous.org.



**Strengthening Families
Around the World**

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