

HONOR PARENTS DURING NATIONAL PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

(Continued from page 7)

- ▲ Inspiring parents to become leaders in their homes and in their communities
- ▲ Providing opportunities for parents to demonstrate Parent Leadership
- ▲ Identifying your agency as a community leader in moving Parent Leadership forward
- ▲ And more.....

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to honor Parent Leaders in your community, contact Parents Anonymous® Inc. today to see how you can become involved:

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The *Parent Leadership Express* is published in partnership with the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention.

SUGGESTED READINGS...

Media Guide for Professionals – Shared Leadership Series, Parents Anonymous® Inc.

This important publication, is a companion piece to the *Media Guide for Parent Leaders* (excerpted on page 3 of this newsletter and reviewed in the Spring 2002 issue). It is written for professionals and will assist the reader in developing effective skills for working with the media, including reaching out to create media opportunities, evaluating and utilizing media opportunities that are available, identifying and partnering with Parent Leaders, and developing a Shared Leadership approach to all media activities. It includes detailed information on:

- Developing Strategic Media Relations
- Media Interviews – Preparation, During and After
- Identifying and Supporting Parents throughout the Process

The guide emphasizes the benefits of partnering with parents when working with the media. Real-life examples from parents who have successfully resolved their own personal issues and concerns provide an essential resource for the media. This guide provides the tools to help professionals increase their media opportunities and consistently promote the voices of parents as a valuable media resource.

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Parent Leadership *Special Edition*

EXPRESS

Spring/Summer 2003

News From OCAP

The California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) has continued its commitment to Parent Leadership over the past two years by providing additional funds to counties, providing training and technical assistance through Parents Anonymous® Inc., and by modeling and implementing Shared Leadership at the state level. As a result of these efforts, Parent Leadership is becoming integrated as a key component of child abuse prevention activities at both the local and state levels.

Over the past two years, 33 California counties have requested and received funding from OCAP to support their Parent Leadership activities within their local communities. As a result of the intensive training and technical assistance provided by Parents Anonymous® Inc., many of these counties have begun to identify numerous ways to involve parents as decision-makers at a wide variety of levels within their prevention services system. Through these Parent Leadership roles, true partnerships are being developed and parents are being supported and trained so that they are better prepared to meaningfully participate on a variety of councils and commissions.

Through the combined efforts of OCAP and Parents Anonymous® Inc., a number of important goals have been accomplished;

- The first ever California Parent Leadership Team was established, creating a statewide structure to develop leadership roles for parents throughout California.

- The *Parent Leadership Express* newsletter was launched, creating an outlet for Parent Leadership information that is distributed to all 58 California counties.
- Parents began serving in meaningful capacities on three of the four Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group subcommittees, as well as on the state Prevention Advisory Council.

Due to the ongoing training and technical assistance provided by Parents Anonymous® Inc., the valuable activities of the California Parent Leadership Team, and the dissemination of *The Parent Leadership Express*, all 58 California counties have become increasingly aware of the concepts of Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership. We are excited that a significant majority of California counties have expressed strong interest in implementing Parent Leadership activities within their local communities. We are equally impressed that counties recognize that training and technical assistance are needed to effectively integrate parents into their child abuse prevention systems and to successfully sustain this effort on a long-term basis.

We look forward to expanding these efforts in partnership with Parents Anonymous® Inc. so that parents who are consumers of services continue to be involved as decision-makers in the policy development, program planning, implementation and evaluation of child abuse prevention services to ensure better outcomes for all California families.

SUPPORTING PARENT LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES

Supporting parents as they engage in meaningful leadership roles during difficult fiscal times is a challenge that many child abuse prevention programs are presently facing. As many counties address serious budget cuts, county and community-based agency administrators and staff struggle with tough decisions regarding the diminished resources to meet the service needs of families in their communities.

Keeping Parent Leadership a priority during these challenging times is critically important to good decision-making. We all know that the best decisions are informed decisions. When parents and providers share leadership and work together both become

informed about the needs of families and the challenges of the service delivery system to meet those needs. Parents and providers come to understand one another's perspective and, together, can make difficult decisions that are best for the families served. This shared decision-making not only ensures that families get the services they need, it also ensures that the decisions made are a shared responsibility within the community.

How can counties and agencies support active parent participation in creative and, perhaps, less financially costly ways? First, it is important to ask the parents

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GETTING THE MESSAGE HEARD

Tips for Parent Leaders and Staff

Parents who have used family strengthening services are perfect candidates to take on meaningful leadership roles in their communities and staff play a critical role in helping parents gain the skills to be successful leaders. Parents are sharing leadership with providers by:

- Serving on committees and councils that are dedicated to supporting families;
- Helping to set policy and making program decisions within the agencies they are involved;
- Teaching and co-training parents and service providers;
- Testifying before governing bodies;
- Meeting with key decision-makers;
- Speaking to the media;
- Writing opinion pieces or letters to the editor.

One of the most important skills a Parent Leader can have is the ability to effectively share their story and get their message heard. But how can staff support parents as they develop this important skill?

Whether it is an informal conversation with an agency director or formal testimony before the County Board of Supervisors, it is important that parents are able to tell their story succinctly and in a way that does not raise the listener's defenses, but that still elicits passion. Remember, when giving testimony before a governing body or speaking to the media, there may be only three minutes to get a point across. This takes practice! Parent Leaders may want to take time to write their story/message down in all its detail and then edit it until they feel comfortable that all the important elements are there, but in a concise format. They may want to practice telling their story with a trusted friend, another Parent Leader or an agency staff member with whom they are involved. For some Parent Leaders, practicing in front of a mirror really helps.

After parents get comfortable telling their story, staff can help them look for opportunities to get their message heard. Conversing with other participants during conferences or meetings can be an easy way to get one's foot in the door. One member of the California Parent Leadership Team struck up a conversation with a gentleman at her luncheon table during a conference. She told him of her struggles to find effective services for her family. Little did she know that he was the director of the social services department in her county and a key decision-maker. That brief conversation created an opportunity for a long-standing professional



CPLT members practice telling their stories to one another.

relationship in which this Parent Leader has been able to tell her story to many others in her county and become an influential part of the social service decision-making process.

Parents can also have a powerful impact by partnering with program staff as co-trainers. Parents can accompany staff during outreach presentations to other organizations. They can share their personal experiences and highlight how the family strengthening agency has helped them, or they can talk about the importance of collaboration between staff and parents. Many counties are now asking parents who have completed parenting classes to serve as co-trainers in those classes. As co-trainers, these parents serve as role models, provide support to other parents and play a key role in identifying the strengths and areas that need enhancement in the parenting curriculum.

Another very effective way for parents to get their message heard and to promote the services of the family strengthening agency within their local community is to ask parents to share their story with the media. They can be interviewed for an article in the local newspaper, by a radio station, or television. They can also write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper. Parents can share their personal experiences, which lends credibility, while effectively advocating for family strengthening policies and practices in their community or on the state level.

These are just a few examples of ways that parents can effectively tell their story and get their message heard. Whether Parent Leaders choose to become spokespeople for child abuse prevention and family strengthening in a public arena, or whether they choose to express their opinions on a more informal and private level, telling their story is extremely valuable and can help to create important social change that will benefit children and families in their own community and throughout California. Remember, staff can play a valuable role in this process by offering parents emotional and tangible supports.

Preparing Parent Spokespersons

Excerpted from the Media Guide for Parent Leaders
Parents Anonymous® Inc.

Parents can be powerful advocates for child abuse prevention by partnering with staff to educate the public, reach out to other parents in need of help and support, and shape policies and practices that impact families. When parents speak out through the media or at public presentations about the positive changes in their own lives, others gain valuable insights and are moved to take action to help themselves or their neighbors. Staff can offer tangible and emotional support during this process.

Staff may wish to ask the following questions of potential parents spokespersons to help them decide whether or not they are ready to share their stories:

- Is it the right time for you to speak out? Are you prepared for the attention that may follow? Is your life fairly stable right now?
- How much (or how little) do you want your name, face, or voice to be used publicly?
- What do you most want to share in an interview or speech?
- How does your family feel about your interest in speaking publicly about your life experiences? Do your family members mind if you refer to them in your talk?
- What effect will your exposure have on you and your family members, especially your children?

If parents are ready to speak out, staff may wish to offer them the following suggestions:

- Remember to speak from your heart and your own experience.
- Decide what you most want to say and then practice how you will say it.
- Use only two or three main points in your story.
- Put important points of your story on cards.
- Anticipate difficult questions. It is always OK to say that you don't know the answer to a question or do not want to respond.
- Always assume that anything you say to a representative of the media is "on the record" and might be repeated in a story.
- Be honest.
- Keep the focus on your own positive growth and change.

CPLT MEMBERS SERVE ON CWS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP SUBCOMMITTEES

Three members of the California Parent Leadership Team served with staff, administrators and consumers on three Child Welfare Services (CWS) Stakeholders Group subcommittees. The CWS Stakeholders Group was instituted by Governor Gray Davis to review the policies, practices and procedures of the California Child Welfare System, and to make recommendations for system reform.

Kathy Dreyer of Yolo County was first asked to join the subcommittee on Rules and Regulations in January 2001. According to Kathy, "It was quite an honor to be asked. I was a part of the group that was looking at the regulations related to Child Protective Services (CPS). We made recommendations related to accessibility of services and instituting logical requirements for parents that hopefully will be put into statute."

Kathy also served on the Partnership for Practice subcommittee that explored public and private partnerships between government agencies, community-based organizations and philanthropies to create best practices in child welfare. Kathy stated, "This has been an exciting opportunity to ensure that the voices of parent stakeholders are heard along side providers."

Art Hernandez of Riverside County served on the Successful Permanency subcommittee charged with making recommendations that will streamline the CPS process. "The Department is really interested in what this committee has to report," stated Art. "I have no doubt that the Department will make important changes to ensure that services become more responsive to the needs of families. I am pleased that family reunification is an important goal. Knowing that my voice is being heard and that changes can be made is empowering."

Sharon Angle of Sacramento County was part of the Response and Resolution subcommittee. "Our task was to make recommendations for change to the way that CPS responds to family needs, especially referrals to services within the community. I am pleased that professionals are willing to listen to the voices of consumers of services and feel that their input is valuable. My goal is to recruit more parents to participate on important subcommittees like these."

Before each subcommittees finalized their recommendations, Public Forums were held around the state to provide an opportunity for community input. The finalized recommendations will then be submitted to Governor Davis.

KEEPING UP WITH THE CPLT

California Parent Leadership Team members continue to be involved in numerous meaningful leadership activities in their communities.

Gwen Watson of Siskiyou County has been working with other parents to see that the childcare center at the College of the Siskiyou remains open in spite of state budget cuts. Gwen and other parents are working to help the community college find alternative funding sources for the center. Her commitment to the college does not stop there. As a re-entry student herself, Gwen knows the value of support for students returning to school and is helping to organize the effort to keep the Re-Entry Guidance Program open as well. In addition to working, attending college, leading student advocacy efforts on campus and raising her child, Gwen is hoping to also serve on her county's Child Abuse Prevention Council this year.

Maria Moreno of Ventura County was the only Parent Leader invited to participate in the State Social Worker Academy held in Ventura County where she spoke of her experiences with the Child Welfare System. Maria also serves on the Ventura County Parent Leadership Task Force of the Ventura County Human Services Agency.

Mike Carll of Calaveras County is a new member of the Calaveras Child Care Council and United Advocates for Children of California. Mike is also a member of his county's multi-disciplinary team, serves as the Community Services Advocate for Children's System of Care and co-facilitates a parent support group in his community. Mike is also serving on the State Prevention Advisory Council developed through the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP).

Kathy Dreyer of Yolo County currently serves as the co-president of the Yolo and Solano County Californians for Disability Rights. She is also a member of the First 5 Yolo County mini-grant review committee.

Cleopra Dyas of Los Angeles County is assisting Parents Anonymous® Inc. in developing Parents

Anonymous® groups for the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles County Probation Department. Cleopra also serves on the Board of Directors for S.O.A.R., a community based organization in Central Los Angeles.



California Parent Leadership Team Members at their May 2003 meeting.

Diane Davis of Lake County is in the process of founding a non-profit organization dedicated to treating individuals with environmental-related illnesses. She is also working with Parent to Parent to secure funding to support parent advocates.

Sharon Angle of Sacramento County serves as the Parent Involvement Coordinator for her county's mental health system where she supervises nine family advocates. Sharon chairs the Sacramento County Family Advocates Committee and is also a member of the Community

Advisory Committee for the Sacramento County Office of Education. She is also a member of the State Prevention Advisory Council.

JOIN THE CPLT

Are there parents in your county who have leadership skills and are committed to strengthening families in California? Let them know you believe in them by nominating them to serve on the California Parent Leadership Team. Make sure your county is represented on the Team and is benefiting from the additional knowledge and skills Team members bring back to their counties.

To Nominate a Parent Contact:

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SUPPORTING PARENT LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING ECONOMIC TIMES

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already involved. Not surprisingly, parents who have faced formidable obstacles and challenges in their daily lives can be very good at finding cost effective solutions to a myriad of problems!

Here are some of the things that California counties have already done:

- ⌘ With parent permission, letters were sent to a parent's employer letting them know that the parent was serving on an important committee to improve the community for children and families. The letter requested that the employer support the parent in their Parent Leadership activities by allowing them time off to attend meetings and if possible, by paying their wages during those hours.
- ⌘ Face-to-face meetings were scheduled less frequently and interim meetings were done by telephone conference calls. Parents and providers could participate without the extra expenses of childcare, mileage and meeting supplies, which are incurred when attending a meeting.
- ⌘ Face-to-face meetings were held at a location where childcare was already being provided. This way, the children of parents attending the meeting could be cared for at no or only a slight additional cost.
- ⌘ Face-to-face meetings and other activities were held at a time that did not interfere with parents' work schedules, which alleviated a need to reimburse parents for lost wages.

- ⌘ Parents took responsibility for securing volunteers to provide childcare at the facility where meetings or events were being held.

- ⌘ When childcare was not readily available, parents developed a co-op in which two parents per meeting took responsibility for childcare. The parents rotated responsibility each month so that all parents took a turn.

- ⌘ Parents volunteered to secure donations from local restaurants for refreshments.

- ⌘ Meetings that were scheduled around dinnertime were set-up as potlucks where those who could, brought a dish. This not only saved on refreshment expenses, it built camaraderie and gave the group a great idea for a fundraising cookbook!

- ⌘ Parent Leaders began carpooling to meetings and other agency activities, so instead of reimbursing many parents for mileage, mileage was only needed for one or two parents per event.

Many parents want to give back to their community. When decision-makers are sincere in their commitment to partnering with parents, parents will find a way to participate. The list above provides a few solutions that parents and providers have come up with by brainstorming together. We are sure that parents and staff in your county can suggest many more to make Shared Leadership work for you!

PARENTS AND STAFF LEARN TOGETHER AT CONFERENCES

Inviting parents to participate in staff trainings, workshops and conferences is a great way to support Parent Leaders as they increase their knowledge and skills. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for parents and staff to learn and work together. Each time a staff member is attending a training think about whether this is a good opportunity to include parents. Recently, in Ventura County, a parent participated with social workers in a workshop on "Working Effectively with Families." She was the only parent there. She said she learned so much about communication skills. The social workers raved about the added quality of the workshop by having a parent there.

Two California Parent Leadership Team members, Cleopra Dyas of Los Angeles County and Art Hernandez of Riverside County joined over 60 participants at a National Parents Anonymous® Inc. three-day conference. Both Art and Cleopra attended many workshops and received certification as parent trainers. "I got to meet other parents from all over the country," said Art. "We all come from different backgrounds, but we all have one common goal - to strengthen families and prevent child abuse."

There are many opportunities to include parents in training and most conference sponsors will waive or reduce registration fees for parents. Look for local training opportunities in your community or consider using your agency's training funds to support parents along with staff. Everyone will benefit from the experience.

MOVING PARENT LEADERSHIP FORWARD:

Parent Leadership is taking off in Fresno, Santa Barbara and Tulare counties. Below are highlights of the Parent Leadership activities in these counties to improve service delivery for children and families.

Fresno County

In Fresno County, Parent Leadership is already taking root within the Child Protective Services (CPS) system and Robert Armstrong, CAPIT/CBFRS Liaison wanted to ensure that community-based child abuse prevention programs were building on the Parent Leadership activities already taking place in the county. As Parent Leadership training plans were being developed in Fresno County, Robert coordinated with the Parent Leadership Task Force of the Fresno County Children and Family Services Department and Parents Anonymous® Inc. to capitalize on the valuable experiences of the Task Force. In a training for more than 50 parents and providers, Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff and Parent Leaders facilitated discussion about the benefits of Shared Leadership, the federal laws supporting its implementation, and helped parents and providers develop Shared Leadership plans for their agencies. Two parent members of the Fresno County Parent Leadership Task Force shared their stories and how they came to be Parent Leaders. Additional Task Force members talked about the benefits of parents and providers working together and the accomplishments of the Task Force.



Sherry Browning and Amber Lopez, Parent Leaders on the Fresno County Parent Leadership Task Force, share their stories and leadership experiences during the Parent Leadership Training in Fresno County.

For over a year, Fresno County's Child Protective Services (CPS) staff and parents have been working side-by-side to ensure that service delivery within CPS is better able to meet the needs of families. The Task Force has accomplished many things in a short period of time, including:

- A parent has been identified and is serving on the Early Childhood Outreach Program committee, which makes recommendations about early childhood services.
- A parent serves on the Child Protective Services Oversight Committee.
- Three parents are prepared to participate in new staff orientation.
- Two parents are co-training parent education classes run by the Department.
- Parents are being trained as mentors in Multidisciplinary Round Tables.
- Parents are serving as co-trainers in Family Reunification orientations.
- Parents and staff have developed a newsletter.

Fresno County is developing an innovative model of Shared Leadership. By ensuring Parent Leadership throughout its delivery system – from prevention programs to child protective services – Fresno County is developing optimal opportunities to learn from parents, make changes to their systems, and better meet the needs of families.

Santa Barbara County

Santa Barbara County recently demonstrated its commitment to Parent Leadership when the Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health hosted a Parent Leadership Training in May which was facilitated by Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff and Parent Leaders. Over 30 parents and service providers attended the training from a variety of community-based organizations including a family resource center, a housing program, a teen parenting program and a residential treatment facility for women and their children. Since parent participation was seen as a priority for this workshop, the training was held on a Saturday and childcare was provided ensuring that many barriers to parent participation were removed. After a lively discussion on the benefits of Shared Leadership, organizations identified opportunities for meaningful Parent Leadership within their

COUNTY HIGHLIGHTS



Participants identify Parent Leadership opportunities in their county.

organizations and developed an implementation plan. The training was so successful that most participants expressed a strong desire for further training. Nancy Madsen, Santa Barbara County Department of Public Health Supervisor, indicated that the county is committed to bringing additional training and intensive technical assistance to Santa Barbara County in order to further develop Shared Leadership within the county's child abuse prevention system.

Tulare County

Over 40 parents and service providers attended a Parent Leadership Training in Tulare County during April. The staff in the Department of Community Health, Prevention Services helped to coordinate the training and understood the importance of inviting a wide variety of community-based child abuse prevention agencies to participate in the training. Parents and staff represented such diverse programs as Head Start, substance abuse prevention, ESL classes and neighborhood safety/gang prevention groups. The group was enthusiastic and had great energy. They were committed to developing plans to implement Parent Leadership activities within their organizations. The Tulare County Health and Human Services staff volunteered to meet with the agencies represented at the training as well as others to discuss practical ways to implement Parent Leadership in their settings. Parents who attended the training will be provided with opportunities and ideas for how they can continue to get involved in meaningful ways within their communities. The training was so successful in Tulare County that they have already requested additional Parent Leadership training and technical assistance to help continue their great momentum.

HONOR PARENTS DURING NATIONAL PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

In February 2004, Parents Anonymous® Inc. will kick-off National Parent Leadership Month, a new and exciting, first ever initiative, which will be celebrated throughout the month of February and annually thereafter. Parent Leadership is important in that it recognizes the meaningful leadership roles of parents in their families, communities and on the state and national levels. Strong Parent Leadership is a vital child abuse prevention strategy. This annual event will acknowledge the strengths of parents as leaders and increase awareness about the important roles parents play in shaping the lives of their families and their communities. It will also highlight the many opportunities available for parents, professionals, policymakers and other community members to engage in partnerships with the goal of building and supporting strong, safe families.

Parents Anonymous® Inc will coordinate a wide variety of activities in partnership with city, county and state government, national, state and local child abuse prevention, education, juvenile justice, childcare, mental health, and health organizations in the public and private sector. By partnering together we can:

- ❖ Raise public awareness about the important roles parents play in shaping the lives of children and families.
- ❖ Identify and publicize opportunities in which Parent Leaders can participate in meaningful Parent Leadership activities within the community.
- ❖ Inform policymakers about the value of partnering with parents to build strong, safe communities.
- ❖ Honor Parent Leaders at events and conferences
- ❖ Enlist local newspapers, television and radio stations to promote the importance of Parent Leadership.

Benefits of Participating:

- ▲ Letting parents know that help and support is available
- ▲ Celebrating Parent Leaders in your community
- ▲ Educating your community about the benefits of Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership

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