

News from The CDSS/OCAP

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) is very pleased to partner with Parents Anonymous® Inc. in promoting Parent Leadership Month in February 2006. The Department is committed to strengthening families and preventing child abuse through the promotion and implementation of Parent Leadership strategies throughout the state. The purpose of Parent Leadership Month is to: (1) raise public awareness about the important roles parents play in shaping the lives of children and families; and (2) build successful partnerships between Parent Leaders and professionals to strengthen and support families and communities.

At the state level, we are currently working with Parents Anonymous® Inc. and the Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance Center (CATTa) to host a special Parent Leadership Month reception in Sacramento at the Child Abuse Prevention Council Statewide Summit on February 24, 2006. Be sure to watch for more information in the upcoming month.

We are encouraging the Child Abuse Prevention Councils (CAPCs) to also raise awareness about Parent Leadership in their local communities. Many CAPCs enthusiastically supported this initiative last year. We



CDSS/OCAP staff meet with members of the California Parent Leadership Team to discuss plans for the Parent Leadership Month reception in Sacramento.

The CDSS/OCAP, Parents Anonymous® Inc. and CATTa will host a special Parent Leadership Month reception in Sacramento at the Child Abuse Prevention Council Statewide Summit on February 24, 2006. Honor a Parent Leader from your community by including them as part of your team at this important Summit.

hope that this momentum continues and that additional CAPCs will join in this important effort for 2006. Some ideas of ways that you can participate and include parents in this effort are:

- Post information about Parent Leadership Month on your Web sites;
- Publish articles in newsletters highlighting feature stories that recognize Parent Leaders;
- Bring a Parent Leader to the Child Abuse Prevention Council Statewide Summit (CBCAP funds may be used to support this activity);
- Honor and recognize Parent Leaders at local meetings and events;
- Most importantly, partner with parents to plan all your Parent Leadership Month activities.

You can find additional ways to celebrate Parent Leadership Month in the *Tool*

developed by Parents Anonymous® Inc. Copies can be downloaded through the Parents Anonymous® Inc. Web site at www.parentsanonymous.org.

We hope you will join us in this major effort to recognize parents in their important leadership roles. Working together, we can help families achieve positive outcomes.

JOIN THE PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH CELEBRATION IN CALIFORNIA!



Each year In February during Parent Leadership Month, parents, professionals, policymakers, organizations and businesses in California have the opportunity to recognize and honor parents for their leadership roles in their homes and communities. Parent Leadership Month highlights the many opportunities available for parents and professionals to engage in partnerships with the goal of building and supporting strong, safe families. Annually, numerous co-sponsors from social services, education, juvenile justice, child care, mental health, health departments, and businesses, join together in this important initiative. A comprehensive *Tool Kit* to help you bring Parent Leadership Month activities to your community is available on-line at www.parentsanonymous.org. For more information about being a co-sponsor contact: Meryl Levine at (909) 621-6184, extension 220 or e-mail mlevine@parentsanonymous.org.

What Is Parent Leadership?

Parent Leadership occurs when parents gain the knowledge and skills to function in meaningful leadership roles and represent a “parent voice” to help shape the direction of their families, programs and communities. The term **Parent Leader** best describes those committed parents who work in partnership with professionals and share responsibility, expertise and leadership in helping to make their community’s social services, schools, health care systems and other services become more responsive to and supportive of children and families.

Who Is A Parent Leader?

The most effective Parent Leaders are those who have personal experience in child abuse prevention programs, schools or other systems they are working to change.

A Parent Leader....

- May be a parent, grandparent, kinship care provider, foster parent, or anyone else in a parenting role
- Has personal experience in using resources/services to strengthen his or her family
- Is speaking and acting from his or her perspective as a parent
- Is not speaking and acting in a staff role for an organization or institution

PARENT LEADERS SUPPORT PARENT LEADERSHIP MONTH

Here are some ways Parent Leaders can partner with professionals to help plan and organize events for Parent Leadership Month.

- Sign up on the *Parent Leadership Network* (www.parentleadershipnetwork.org) to share ideas about Parent Leadership Month
- Help find a venue for a conference or other event
- Offer to speak at a conference
- Offer to tell personal stories at an event (For example, A Day in the Life of a Parent Leader)
- Serve on a Parent Leadership Month committee
- Help raise money for an event or offer to find required in-kind services
- Help create promotional materials and/or distribute them (flyers, posters, pamphlets and other materials)
- Bring awareness of Parent Leadership Month to local organizations, schools, or community centers
- Offer to do television, radio or print interviews
- Help to establish relationships with business owners who might contribute money or an in-kind service
- Send letters to the editor of local newspapers
- Offer suggestions for the best ways to honor parents
- Help ask public officials for their support and for proclamations
- Write articles for agency newsletters, community newspapers, church bulletins, etc.

MESSAGES FROM CALIFORNIA PARENT LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

TRANSFORMATION

by Terena Scott, California Parent Leadership Team, Mendocino County

I keep hearing “people don’t change,” which may be true. But I know for certain people transform.

Transformation. The act of transforming, which is defined as, “a thorough or dramatic change in the form, outward appearance, character, etc.” When I went to the California Parent Leadership Team meeting in Sacramento for the first time, I saw the evidence of what transformation is on a very personal level.

I had only been on the Team for two months and only knew the woman who nominated me. The others were just voices on the telephone. I felt nervous and insecure and didn’t know exactly what the Team was or why I was there. I found a place at the table and looked around at the faces of each person, listening to them chat and greet each other happily after six months apart. There was a feeling of family, a strong camaraderie among everyone. One woman brought her new baby and the child was soon passed from person to person, each taking turns holding and playing with her so Mom could rest or have a snack. I wasn’t the only new person joining the Team and all the members worked hard to make sure we felt welcome.

When the meeting officially began, each member introduced themselves to us newbies, and told his or her personal story. Each story was powerful; lives of chaos, rage, violence, abuse, drugs and self destruction. I sat in awe, listening to the words, watching the faces, holding back my own tears. Over and over I heard the same thing; something or someone compelled them to transform. Somehow, amongst all that fear, they found hope and strength, which led to an utter transformation of their lives and the lives of their children. Most of the time, it was another person who held out a hand and said “I believe in you.” That belief created hope, hope for themselves, their children, and their lives. But these people took it even further. Not content to just transform their own lives, each person at that table is committed to helping others do the same. They are Parent Leaders in the fullest sense; through example and action.



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PARENTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

By Greg Colver, California Parent Leadership Team, Kern County



I’ll never forget the day I was asked to be a part of our county’s Parent Leadership Task Force. It was hard to believe that the same people who took my children into custody and asked me to leave my home because of my drug use, were now asking me to be a part of making changes in the way they delivered services. At the time, I had no idea what Shared Leadership was or how important it had become in California and nationwide to agencies that deliver services to children and families. I just knew the idea made perfect sense, so I attended the training that Parents Anonymous® Inc. was doing in our county.

After becoming an employee of the Department of

Human Services, they asked me attend the National Family to Family Conference in Denver, Colorado in June of 2005. The conference was titled *Putting Values Into Action: Youth And Parent Involvement*. This is where I realized how wide spread Parent leadership is. It is quite empowering to be in a room with parents from 18 states who have overcome so much and are now working to implement change not only in their local communities but throughout the country. Equally as powerful to see are the variety of agencies from the Federal Government to the local non-profit organizations, that are willing to utilize the experiences of the consumer to better serve children and families.

Across the country parents are working or volunteering

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NEW FACES...

by Kathy Dreyer, California Parent Leadership Team Co-Chair, Yolo County

Four bright new faces have joined the California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT). Following is a brief introduction of each of the individuals. I have enjoyed meeting and working with them, and am excited to see how they will make this Team even more vibrant and effective.

Tina Henry (Alameda County)



Tina joined the CPLT after being nominated by an Alameda Child Welfare worker who described her as being a “natural leader” who “helped start and facilitate a parent support group.” Tina is a single mother with three adolescent children. She was a consumer of child welfare services and had her children placed in the child welfare system due to substance abuse problems. She successfully overcame this difficult challenge and she has been in recovery for the last 4 years. She received services through a residential program for substance abuse and has actively participated in therapy, parenting classes and an aftercare program. Following her graduation from the program, she began working as a house manager at the residential drug program where she is able to help other women involved with Child Protective Services and dealing with substance abuse issues. Alameda County Social Services asked Tina to attend the Family to Family Conference in Denver, Colorado, this year, to share her experiences as a consumer of services through the child welfare system.

Tina indicated that she wanted to become a member of the California Parent Leadership Team in order “to turn the negative aspects of my past into a positive part of my future.” Tina’s passion is to strengthen services that support parents and children, and share her experiences with others to demonstrate that “there is always cause for HOPE!”

Vivian Hudspeth (Sacramento County)



Vivian is the mother of three children and a former consumer of Child Protective Services (CPS). Sacramento County Child Welfare Services (CWS) nominated Ms.

Hudspeth after she successfully worked to reunify with her children. Vivian participated in residential treatment, parenting classes and anger management classes. Her hard work, along with her commitment to her children and to helping others led to her nomination.

To this day, Vivian works passionately to help other parents reunify with their children and successfully navigate through the bureaucracy of child welfare. She is currently employed full-time as a Parent Mentor in the Sacramento County CPS through Americorps. In addition to her employment, Vivian has been involved in a multitude of leadership roles. Over the past two years, she has provided leadership and a strong voice for parents in the CPS system by serving as a parent representative on the Sacramento County CPS Shared Leadership Task Force. She has also served as a member of Family Support Collaborative Executive Committee for Birth and Beyond Programs; participated on the Child Welfare Services Redesign Committees including Family to Family, Linkages and Differential Response; is a member of the Sacramento County Dependency Drug Court Steering Committee; and has served on the hiring panel for CPS social workers

When asked why she wanted to join the CPLT, Vivian stated, “I have an open mind, a strong sense of leadership and a passion to give back.”

ON THE CALIFORNIA PARENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Nasa Ray Robinson (Los Angeles County)



Nasa was nominated by the Director of Neighborhood Services at Beyond Shelter, a social service agency that provides resources and referrals to the community of South Los Angeles. Child Protective Services intervened in Nasa's life in 1993 due to her drug use. She was placed in a homeless shelter with her children at that time. She received a variety of substance abuse and child abuse prevention services and when she completed her program, was hired by the homeless shelter as an Outreach Worker in her community. Nasa has since become an Outreach Crisis Worker at Beyond Shelter where they also recognized her leadership abilities.

Nasa has five children, works full-time and volunteers at her children's school and in her community. Ms. Robinson was nominated due to her tremendous leadership skills. She has been involved in the following Parent Leadership roles: Parents Anonymous® Parent Group Leader and member for four years; member of the Board of Directors for the House of the Redeemed; representative of CADRE – a community organization that promotes dignity and respect for the children that attend Los Angeles Unified School District; and President of Robinson and Robinson Handyman Service. She has won the Beyond Shelter's Inspiration Award and the Community Appreciation Award from the Restoration House Foundation.

Nasa Ray is dedicated to bringing more parent and family advocates into the Child Welfare System who've been through the process themselves, and can then advise other families of their options. She states, "I love to help people, give assistance, and advocate for parents dealing with the child abuse prevention system and the school system."

Steven Sias (Tuolumne County)



Steven was nominated to the California Parent Leadership Team by the Raising Healthy Families Program at the Infant Child Enrichment Services in Sonora. He was nominated because of his commitment to working with families and using his experience to aid other families who are navigating the Child Welfare System (CWS).

Steven is a single father with custody raising one son. He was involved with the child welfare system due to a severe breakdown in the family, in which drugs, alcohol, and domestic violence all played a major role. He participated in family reunification and maintenance through CWS, completed an anger management program, and two parenting classes. His son was in foster care for six months. Steven says "This was a major life- changing event for my son and I that led to my decision to seek a divorce, work hard to have my son returned home, and ensure his well-being and what was left of our family. I'm Wyatt's DAD, and he needed me to speak in his best interest. I figured I could make that difference if I tried."

Steven works hard for greater inclusion of fathers in the planning and service delivery of child welfare services, sharing the lessons he's learned along the way, and improving communications within families and the system. He is a member of the Tuolumne County Parent Advisory Council and the YES Partnership, a community collaborative for the prevention of child and substance abuse. Steven regularly attends his community's and regional Prevent Child Abuse council meetings, and was recently named one of several community consultants to assist in developing programs under the Mental Health Service Act in his county. Steven states "We need partners – parents partnering with each other, with agency staff, community leaders and politicians. It is my hope to be a role model and mentor to my son, friends, family and my community, and to assist in developing better policy decisions that affect all our lives."

MOVING PARENT LEADERSHIP FORWARD:

During this year, Parents Anonymous® Inc. will be providing Shared Leadership training and technical assistance to seven counties. Three of these counties will receive more intensive support. They are Humboldt, Mariposa and Tuolumne counties. Additionally, training and technical assistance will be provided to Trinity, Orange, Tulare and Kings Counties. Below are highlights of the Shared Leadership activities that resulted in Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties following their beginning trainings. Parent Leadership is taking off in these two rural counties.

Tuolumne County

In June 2005, Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff first began talking with Erin Pollen, a representative from the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) in Tuolumne County and Program Manager for Raising Healthy Families/ Infant/Child Enrichment Services (ICES), about their interest in expanding Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership opportunities within their community. To gain a clear understanding about the needs of this community and develop a responsive training plan, Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff first held a teleconference call with key representatives from Tuolumne County.

On July 15, 2005, Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff and California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT) member Pamela Maxwell co-led this first training entitled *Shared Leadership: Building Partnerships with Parents to Strengthen Tuolumne County Families*. There were 29 participants at this training, 11 of whom were parents. What a great beginning of parent provider partnerships! The training provided the participants with a sound understanding of: (1) the concepts and benefits of Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership; (2) how to work as a team to develop a strategic plan to ensure parent participation in the development of policy and service delivery for children and families; (3) how to identify and develop leadership roles and opportunities for parents; and (4) how to recruit and support parents in their leadership roles.

Following this first intensive training, Tuolumne County formed a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) which includes both parents and agency representatives. The PAC meets on a monthly basis and has established four committees. The committees include *Parent Leader Recruitment, Legal Issues and Political Advocacy, Parent Training and Support Groups, and School Connections*. In August 2005, the PAC established a Shared Leadership Plan, identified existing resources in their county, and discussed possible barriers and how to overcome them. Due to the active participation of the PAC, strong efforts



Members of the newly formed Tuolumne PAC
L to R: Trix Copps, Erin Pollen, Robin Perkins, Jessica Shapiro
and her daughter, Alissa.

are underway to identify roles and opportunities for Parent Leaders within local agencies. Parents are taking on leadership roles in areas such as:

- Advocates for low-income housing through the Supportive Housing Coalition;
- Serving on the Tuolumne CAPC as grant reviewers and helping with child abuse prevention awareness;
- Participating on the Maternal Child Health Advisory Board;
- Serving as “aides” in parenting classes;
- Attending staff meetings at the Raising Healthy Families Program and providing input on curriculum for classes and in-home parenting programs;
- Participating in Family Group Decision-making with Child Welfare Services
- Participating as members of family strengthening collaborations such as the Interagency Resource Council and the YES Partnership;
- Serving as Parent Liaisons in the schools.

One of the members of the PAC is currently working on an article for the local newspaper, *Sonora Union Democrat*, highlighting Parent Leadership in this county.

Tuolumne County has been extremely successful in supporting Parent Leaders through the PAC structure by providing child care, transportation costs and training. The PAC is currently exploring ways to continue funding the PAC structure on a long-term basis. Finally, following this first training, Steven Sias, a Tuolumne Parent Leader, was nominated and appointed to serve on the California Parent Leadership Team (read about Steven on page 5 of this newsletter).

COUNTY HIGHLIGHTS

Mariposa County

Mariposa County was also selected to receive two intensive Shared Leadership trainings and ongoing follow-up technical assistance. The Mariposa CAPC (Mariposa Safe Families) took the lead in introducing Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership to this rural and isolated community. Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff began working with the Executive Director of the Mariposa CAPC, Catherine Collier, in July 2005. Several representatives from the CAPC, Head Start, Child Welfare Services, and a Parent Leader participated in a pre-assessment teleconference call with Parents Anonymous® Inc. to identify the county needs and plan for the first training.

On September 23, 2005, the Mariposa CAPC hosted the first intensive training which included 25 participants, including 15 agency representatives and 10 parents. Several California Parent Leadership Team (CPLT) members co-led this training with Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff. CPLT Co-Trainers included Pamela Maxwell, Greg Colver, Mike Carll, and Steven Sias. During this training, attendees learned about the concepts and benefits of Parent Leadership and Shared Leadership, gained an understanding about the essential elements of working in Shared Leadership, discussed the wide variety of leadership roles available for parents, and identified potential challenges and strategies to address them.

In the later part of the training session, participants discussed steps to develop a plan to engage Parent Leaders in decision-making related to child abuse prevention services. It was decided that a Shared Leadership subcommittee would be established under the umbrella of the Mariposa CAPC Board of Directors. Parent Leaders and agency representatives at the training volunteered to serve on this subcommittee and a date was set for the first meeting. Following this initial training, the subcommittee began meeting on a regular basis. It was decided that some subcommittee meetings would be held during the evening hours to accommodate the needs of the



Mariposa parents and staff participate in Shared Leadership training.

parents. The Shared Leadership subcommittee is in the process of developing a Shared Leadership Plan that focuses on identifying ways to increase involvement of parents on planning and decision-making bodies within the community. Through this ongoing effort, Mariposa parents have begun to attend:

- Board meetings at the Mariposa CAPC
- Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- Alcohol and Drug Advisory Board
- Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council

The Mariposa CAPC Board of Directors has continued to display a strong commitment to working in Shared Leadership with Parent Leaders and has been eager to provide them with needed supports. The Board is currently discussing plans to cover transportation costs when Parent Leaders attend meetings and a mentoring program is also being developed to train new Parent Leaders. Most recently, the Board appointed a parent from the Shared Leadership subcommittee to serve as a member of their Hiring Committee.

Developing a solid Shared Leadership subcommittee structure through their CAPC is proving to be a highly effective strategy for Mariposa County child abuse prevention service providers and parents to strengthen their services and systems.

PARENTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Greg Colver

(Continued from page 3)

in many different capacities including policy change, program development research and evaluation, training and technical assistance and media interviews. Parents are involved in Child Abuse Prevention Councils, Citizen Review Panels, juvenile delinquency prevention, child care and education programs. Agencies like Mental Health, Department of Human Services, Social Services and many more are employing Parent Partners to work as advocates or liaisons between staff and consumers. The list goes on and on.

I want to thank organizations like Parents Anonymous® Inc. and the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention for continuing to make sure parents have meaningful Parent Leadership roles. I would like to thank Jolly K., the founding parent of Parents Anonymous® Inc., first for her courage to take a stand and stop the cycle of abuse, as well as begin this awesome adventure called Parent Leadership. And finally, a big thank you to all the local agencies and organizations that allow parents to partner with them and bring about positive changes for children and families in their communities.

TRANSFORMATION

by Terena Scott

(Continued from page 3)

At last, it was my turn to speak, and as I told my story and why I had joined the Team, I began to understand what the Team was about. We were all struggling with our lives and our choices and trying to create something new. And we had. Each of us had taken circumstances that should have crushed us and transformed those circumstances into the impetus to act and tell others "I believe in you."

I left the two-day meeting knowing I was stronger just meeting the Team members and spending time with them, and therefore better able to help others in my community.

Child Abuse Prevention Council Statewide Summit

Save the Date!

**Parent Leadership Month Reception
in Sacramento, CA**

February 24, 2006



**Strengthening Families
Around the World**

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