

AAAC Newsletter

African American Advisory Council • Spring 2014



KEEPING OUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

*Effective Recruitment and Supports on the Pathway to
Permanency for African American Children*

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From the Chairman

On behalf of the African American Advisory Council (AAAC) and Illinois State University (ISU), I would like to express our sincere appreciation for everyone who attended the Council's 21st Annual Institute in partnership with ISU. We were totally chartering in new waters as we had never held this conference outside of Chicago land or surrounding counties. Your attendance and participation was huge in making the event a success. We want to acknowledge the presenters who took the time to prepare informative workshops and who traveled from across the state to Bloomington/Normal. Our keynote speaker, Dr. Jaiya John, made the journey from Washington D.C. to deliver a phenomenal address that we have become accustomed to hearing, from working with him over many years. Oronde Miller also traveled from Washington D. C. He not only presented a workshop but also participated on a mega workshop panel with Dr. Doris Houston (ISU) and Dr. Venessa Brown (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville). We would be remiss not to thank the many vendors/exhibitors who transported their products/information to the venue and enhanced the event. We acknowledge the late Director Calica for his welcoming remarks along with his participation in workshops and engagement of participants throughout the day. We were saddened about the passing of Director Calica. We wish the best for his family. Last but certainly not least, the Council's planning committee and members will forever be grateful to Dr. Doris Houston, Dr. Jeanne Howard, president emeritus, Al Bowman, interim president, Dr. Sheri Noren-Everts and the many Professors and department directors of ISU who contributed to this collaborative effort between DCFS and ISU.

The conference focused on African American children's well-being and the pathway to permanency. AAAC has always sought means to improve permanency outcomes for African American children. The organization firmly believes that progress in reducing disparities and disproportionality will also lead to better permanency achievement for all children involved within the child welfare system. Therefore, we look for opportunities to support the Department's efforts, programs and strategies to shorten the length of time children remain in substitute care. The AAAC advocates supporting families in ways that prevent children from entering the child welfare system. Because of these beliefs, members of the Council have had several meetings with Daniel Fitzgerald, Office of Community Services, to discuss



Michael D. Burns

promotion of the Family Advocacy Centers (FAC) and improved utilization of those centers. We ask that you join us in making social workers, community agencies and families aware of centers in your service area. I have been fortunate enough to hear parents' testimonials on how these FACs helped them to resolve the problems that lead to their children being placed into substitute care. As a result, these parents were successful in achieving reunification with their children. These are the type of outcomes that we hope to see increase in the very near future.

I urge you to regularly visit the Illinois Permanency Enhancement website (<http://permanencyenhancement-project.org>) to see how local communities are seeking strategies to improve permanency outcomes through the Permanency Enhancement Action Teams. You can also review some of the information presented at the AAAC Conference.

By the time that you receive this newsletter, a new year will have begun and we hope that 2014 will be a great year for each of you and the children of Illinois.

Peace,

Michael D. Burns

Michael Burns, Chairman
AAAC

Observations from the 21st AAAC Institute Co-Chairs Robin Albritton and Tracy Marshall

The Twenty-First Institute was well-received and a great success. The institute's theme, "Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize: Effective Recruitment and Supports on the Pathway to Permanency for African American Children," was in keeping with the Department's mission to improve outcomes as it relates to safety, permanency and well-being.

The collaboration between DCFS and Illinois State University (ISU) was remarkable. Organizing the Institute Day



Tracy Marshall and Robin Albritton

would have been a formidable task without the assistance of ISU. We would like to commend Chairman Mike Burns for being a visionary and a constant advocate for children of color. A special thanks to all of the hard work of the planning committee for being steadfast with ensuring that the Institute Day was a success in spite of the changes in the organizational climate and budgetary constraints. It was an honor to be a part of such an extraordinary event.

21st Annual AAAC Institute Workshop Comments from Facilitators and Participants

Workshop 1A: Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize: Quality Foster Home Recruitment for the Children – *Presenters: Lisa Massa, Ronald Wynne and Tracy Wolf* - The Department is working on new approaches to recruit and retain foster parents utilizing a child-centered and family-focused model. We must develop relationships where everyone is involved. This includes the foster parents, youth, relatives, DCFS field offices, and private agencies. Tools are being developed to assist with identifying relatives willing to provide foster care and proper matching. (*Facilitators: Cheryl Dampeer and Marilyn Giles*)

Workshop 1B: An Anti-Racism Training Model for Illinois Court Personnel – *Presenters: Robert Blackwell and Terry Solomon* - Judicial Education must begin the conversation with the ideal of white privilege and denial. There now is an acknowledgement of some instances where courts have been viewed as a barrier to permanency and there are organized efforts to strategically address this issue. (*Facilitators: Millie Donelson and Angela Hassell*)

Workshop 1C: Improving System Responses to African American Males Involved with the Child Welfare System: Characteristics of Successful Engagement Strategies - *Presenter: Oronde Miller* – There has been a significant decline in the number of African American males entering into foster care since the year 2001. But these youth are still over represented in the child care system. There are two times more African American youth involved than their white counterparts. Many organizations and systems are inherently racist and must view those of color through an unbiased lens. Staff can begin by changing how servicing AA children and families is viewed. We should work on treating trauma, exposing structural racism and learning the implications of culture. (*Facilitators: Bremen Campbell and Shirley Barsh*)

Continued on page 4

Comments (*con't.*)

Workshop 1D: Enhancing Permanency and Racial Equity in Child Welfare - Moderator, Angela Barron-Jeffrey, Presenters: Julia Barbosa, Gloria Pounds, Pat Jacobs and Les Harris - Illinois has been a leader in the nation in innovative practice and policy reforms in child welfare for many years. One such practice is partnering with communities at the local level to affect change. The objective of this workshop was to provide an update on how local action teams in communities throughout the state meet, plan, and work in partnership with DCFS to improve permanency outcomes and reduce racial disparity and disproportionality in their local communities. The workshop provided information and dialogue on the role of advocacy and collaboration across systems, organizations and stakeholders to address permanency and racial equity for African American children. (Facilitators: Jacqueline Johnson and Thomas Jones)

Workshop 1E: Orientation to the “Get Real” Guide About Getting Your Kids Back - Presenters: Greg Cox, Melissa Neely and Kareen Nunnally - This workshop stressed the importance of Child and Family Team meetings, parent and child visitation, attending court, documentation, working with others, foster parents, and having support systems. This workshop was based on the written resource, “The Parents Get Real Guide to Getting Your Kids Back.” It stressed to keep the focus on positive outcomes that equate to achieving permanency for our youth. (Facilitators: Carole Freeman and Vendetta Dennis)

Workshop 1F: Serving Downstate and Rural Families Through a Lens of Empowerment and Resilience - Presenters: Dr. Cynthia Edmonds Cady and Dr. Kathryn Sheridan - Participants learned about unique protective factors and resiliencies that can be tapped into to serve and support diverse families and high-need communities in downstate and rural settings. Resources to empower ethnically diverse families, single parent households, meth-affected families and families living in poverty were highlighted. (Facilitator: Dr. Karen Stipp)

Workshop 2A: Creating a Mediation Program for Child Welfare Protection – A Downstate Perspective - Presenters: Judge Kevin Fitzgerald and Judith Sevel - Participants learned how the 11th Judicial Circuit Court of Illinois developed a child welfare mediation program. Using volunteers who are trained mediators, this program adapted its approach from the Cook County Model. This presentation provided a detailed description of how, over the course of two years, the major stakeholders have come to understand the benefits of mediation, primarily improving permanency planning for children. It was emphasized that parents can be heard, can be empowered to influence permanency and shorten length of stay in foster care. The model promotes the significance of communication in case planning, service provision, and engagements. (Facilitators: Vendetta Dennis and Jere Moore)

Workshop 2B: Recruitment and Kin Connection Project: Getting Connected – Staying Connected - *Presenter: Deborah Saucedo*

- The objective of this workshop was to provide an overview of the Recruitment and Kin Connection Project. Participants received information on practice methods designed to improve permanency outcomes. The workshop provided strategies to recruit relatives by discussing ideas that caseworkers can use when completing assessment by relative placements. (*Facilitator: Jackie Bright*)

Workshop 2C: The Significant Role Small African American Centered Community-Based Agencies Play in Helping African American Youth Achieve Permanency - *Presenters Tiffany Fincher and Randy S. Sadler*

- This was an informative workshop on the value of small African American community-based agencies and the challenges that they encounter in trying to be a quality service provider. Oftentimes, supports that aid children and families are provided by community-based agencies that may not have board-based funding sources; yet provide essential culturally competent programming. Illinois regions were well represented; the information was complete and the audience was interested. (*Facilitators: Jackie Johnson and Bremen Campbell*)



Workshop 2D: A Look Back to Progressively Move Forward – *Moderator: Linda Foster* – *Panelist: Christine Buckner, Shatrice Stafford and Tomi Mick*

- This workshop consisted of a panel of former youth in substitute care. Children advocated for themselves and appreciated having a say about their lives. The three young ladies who

presented should be commended for their courage to share their stories and experiences. Their stories can be beneficial to child welfare professionals in assisting current and future youth in care on their pathway to permanency. (*Facilitators: Shirley Barsh and Carole Freeman*)

Workshop 2E: Taking Permanency to Another Level through the Permanency Achievement Specialist Unit - *Presenters: Julia Camacho de Monzon, Jacquelyne Crane and John Horwath*

- The goal or concept of permanency is essential in case planning and seeking to establish lifetime connections for children. This unit is working to resolve barriers and bring urgency to permanency. They are outcome-focused and keep cases 17 months or longer to work out barriers. (*Facilitator: Marilyn Giles*)

Workshop 2E: Families for Kids Like Ours: Real World Strategies that Engage and Sustain Adoptive Families - *Presenter: Dr. Jeanine Howard*

- Children who age-out of foster care without permanency have a greater risk for poverty and issues with depression. Adoption is not promised like it was 10 years ago, and it is much cheaper to adopt than for that child to remain in foster care. Adoption is not the final story however; these families

require support to maintain permanency and stability. The presenter was very organized, knowledgeable, and insightful of the needs of adoptive services to families. (*Facilitators: Cheryl Dampeer and Millie Donelson*)

Workshop Participants' Comments



“I would have to say that I really enjoyed each of the workshops.”

They were not only informative and information applicable to what I do for our children and families; they were also enjoyable and held my interest.”

Latrice Palmer

“This was probably one of the best conferences that I’ve attended. The content was appropriate, the breakout groups addressed issues that are directly affecting our ethnic group, the presenters were knowledgeable, engaging and most were captivating. Keep up the good work.” *Javonna Smith*

“I attended two incredible workshops. I really enjoyed hearing the stories of the young people, their struggles and how they overcame their obstacles. I think it is very important that we, the professionals, hear these accounts, which give us a better understanding of how to be more effective. The Get Real workshop was also amazing. The presenters were dynamic and very passionate about their work. It only confirmed that I am on the right track when engaging my birth parents and guiding them towards reunification. The group is an excellent resource and support for parents.

There are no words to describe Dr. Jaiya John. He was so inspiring and his words encouraged me to continue to work towards

making a difference, despite the challenges faced while trying to provide needed services, support, inspiration and motivation to our young people.

Receiving an award was an incredible confirmation for me. I am humbled and overwhelmed with gratitude to have been nominated and recognized. I appreciate the time, energy, effort, perseverance, dedication and hard work rendered by the Council. The conference was outstanding!” *Sonya Baine*

Remembering the 21st Annual AAAC Institute



Newly Assigned IDCFS Guardianship Administrator: Debra Dyer-Webster

By Bremen Campbell



Debra Dyer-Webster, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' newly assigned Guardianship Administrator, began her DCFS career as a case manager and worked her way through the ranks. Prior to her current post, Mrs. Dyer-Webster served as Chief of the Office of Affirmative Action. Her duties included overseeing the investigation of internal and external complaints of harassment and or discrimination. She was the conduit to African American Services, Latino American Services, Asian American Services, and Indian Welfare Services and assessed and processed "Reasonable Accommodations" for staff.

Mrs. Dyer-Webster earlier served for eight years as the chief deputy general counsel of DCFS. In this capacity she directed and supervised the activities of staff attorneys engaged in conducting extensive legal research, writing legal opinions, drafting legislation and department rules and procedures, while assisting the general counsel in the development and implementation of legal strategies designed to minimize litigation risks. Ms. Dyer-Webster has also served as an assistant state's attorney in the State's Attorney Office of Cook County. As the lead prosecutor in a juvenile justice/child protection courtroom, she was responsible for conducting tri-

als and hearings, training prosecutors, and managing the day-to-day prosecutorial activities of the courtroom. Mrs. Dyer-Webster indicated that she attended law school to advocate zealously on behalf of her clients. However, in law school she realized that she could advocate for the innocent better at the front end – as an assistant state's attorney. She explained that as an assistant state's attorney, you have the discretion whether or not to prosecute based on the evidence present in the case.

Mrs. Dyer-Webster holds a juris doctor degree from the Chicago Kent College of Law at the Illinois Institute of Technology, a master's degree from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago, and a master's degree in education and a bachelor's degree in social science from Jackson State University.

In her current role as Guardian of DCFS wards, she acknowledged the enormous responsibility the job entails. She said she wants to ensure children are receiving needed services and decisions are always made with their best interest in mind. She said she takes the time to personally meet a child who is presented with unique issues. She recalled her predecessor, D. Jean Ortega-Piron, advised her to make decisions based on if the child was her own. She said she takes that advice to heart and thinks about her 10 and 16-year-old nieces when those situations arise.

"One evening, my family and I went out to dinner to celebrate a relative's birthday. While at dinner, I received a call from SCR regarding a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) on a 13-month-old ward. The facts of the case were simply HEARTBREAKING! I find being the guardian is just like life. There will be good times and there will be bad times, but hopefully the good will outweigh the bad."

Mrs. Dyer-Webster disclosed that she has always wanted to be in a field where she is helping others. Prior to employment with DCFS, she worked as a ninth grade school teacher. She listed her work as case manager as her most rewarding because she was able to assist families through their temporary difficulties.

She said she supports the AAAC's efforts to address disproportionality and disparities among African American and Latino children in care. She was involved with the Permanency Initiative Transition team and works with the Office of Racial Equity, whose mission is to strengthen the ongoing effort to erase racial disparities within the child welfare system. According to Mrs. Dyer-Webster, the services a child receives should not be based on race.

"Children are children and regardless of any trends, they have to have the basics – food, clothing, shelter and love."

"I've met some very talented people along my journey, many whom are still around and continue to advocate strongly for our families. I value their friendships and support and think that DCFS workers are wonderful."

Mrs. Dyer-Webster enjoys cooking and may have been a caterer if not for her work in the social worker and law fields. Whenever she decides to retire from DCFS, she hopes to resume her career as an attorney, but will work only "happy cases."

More Institute Photos



Interview: Arlene Grant-Brown DCFS Cook County Regional Administrator

By James Robinson



Ms. Arlene Grant-Brown is the current regional administrator for Cook County. Ms. Grant-Brown started her career in the private sector as a case manager. She has worked in child welfare for 33 years and has been at DCFS for 29 years. Ms. Grant-Brown has held the following positions at DCFS: child protection investigator, child protection supervisor, functional test manager for SACWIS, subject matter expert for Best Practice, special assistant to three prior Child Protection deputy directors, and Cook South regional administrator for child protection.

Arlene, you began your career here with the Department as a case manager, correct? (And now you're here).

I started my career at a POS agency as a case manager. While working at this agency I decided that I wanted to be a child abuse investigator.

Did you know at the time that you wanted to make a career in child welfare, in DCFS? No. Actually, I just fell into child protection. It was via conversation with you and Rudy Harris that helped convince me that becoming a child protection investigator with DCFS was a noble and elite position. I used to listen to the two of you talk about Child Protection and how much you enjoyed it.

What did you see yourself pursuing at the time? If you were not in this field, what do you think you would be doing today? I graduated with three majors and initially wanted to be a Child Psychologist. I really care about keeping children safe and that it is a fundamental and essential responsibility.

It is obvious that you value education as you have obtained a MSW since joining DCFS. Therefore I imagine that when given an opportunity to speak to youth, especially those involved with DCFS, that you stress and emphasize the importance of school and education? Absolutely! Many youth can choose to become mired in the trauma of abuse and/or neglect or they can try to seize opportunities presented to them to give it their all to set goals and succeed in school, college, learning a trade, etc.

Obviously, some need professional help to cope with the emotional part of the trauma. Unfortunately, too many of our wards are poverty ridden due to no or poor job skills and not a strong work ethic. Education is one very essential way to rise above poverty.

Since being a caseworker, you have held some important executive positions,. Was there one that you liked the most or felt that it was more rewarding to you? Yes, my current position because in this position I'm able to do more as my sphere of influence is much larger and I have the ability to impact the best interest of more children.

Recognizing that you are committed to the best interest of all children, however since this interview is from the African American Advisory Council, do you see yourself as continuing to be involved with efforts to address disproportionality and disparities among African American and or Latino children in care? Yes. I will continue to make race a non-issue when it comes to serving any child and certainly those taken into care of the state.

You have had an outstanding and extensive career in child welfare. As you look back over the years, are there any trends that stand out that will provide some insight on how you will serve as the Regional Administrator? The evolution of the safety assessment at DCFS has always been impressive to me. I believe I was an investigation supervisor when we first used CERAP in Illinois, and over the years I have been involved with the evaluation of it and on revision committees. Child safety (and the assessment of it) is one area in which the Department continually seeks to make improvements.

What advice would you give to young professionals who are now entering this field? To believe that they can make a difference and maybe the difference is one child at a time and one family at a time. To take every opportunity to gain skills and seek opportunities to use those skills and to approach the job without seeing any limits. Let nothing hold you back from trying to do the best job you can.

To believe that they can make a difference ...

AAAC Institute Participant Remarks



Greetings Mr. Burns,

I am sending this email to share once again my enjoyment at the 2013 - 21st Annual African American Conference. Thank you again for your commitment and dedication to assuring that this event takes place. This is my second year attending and I am looking forward to future conferences.

Highlights: Dr. Jaiya John was awesome, and Dr. Venessa Brown's speech during the Mega Roundtable Forum regarding "*Strapping on Your Eagle Wings*" encouraged me.

Workshop 2d: A look back to progressively move forward was so good that I wish there was additional time to hear more of the young ladies' inspiring stories. I read Christine Buckner's bio in advance and was looking forward to her story which made me so proud to hear of her accomplishments. I purchased the book "*What lays behind the smile*" written by one of the other young ladies and read the entire book that same night. (Please keep this workshop).

Workshop 1e: Orientation to the «Get Real» Guide about getting your kids back was also a good workshop. It is wonderful to know that there are parents who are inspiring other parents to make changes to get their children back. I was proud of those who received awards and networking/ meeting others is always a plus. Prior to attending this conference I felt burnt out at work however, on this day I felt appreciated for the work that I complete and that yes, "*little me*" has made a difference and I am important and my efforts matter.

Thanks again,

*Norma Looney, MSW
Case Manager Coordinator
Seguin Services
708-863-3803 ext.3212*



Meet: Marilyn Arnold

By Thomas L. Jones, MSW

Former Northern Region AAAC Member (transferred to DJJ)



Marilyn Arnold has rejoined the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services' team after a four-year tenure (2008-2012) with the Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health as the quality manager. She previously was assigned to the Northern Region as the Regional Administrator (2012). She began her career with the Department in 1986 as a child welfare specialist II. Subsequent to that, she worked with the Division of Quality Assurance for nine years as a management operations analyst and regional quality specialist. In May 2000, she began her tenure as the manager of Organizational Development, Communication and Training for the Department's Best Practice/SACWIS Project. She has also functioned as a special assistant to former Director Jess McDonald, which entailed oversight of Quality Assurance, Administrative Case Review and consultant to the Best Practice/SACWIS Project. In addition, Ms. Arnold was the associate deputy director over the Division of Administrative Case Review for five years.

Ms. Arnold is a certified peer reviewer with the Council on Accreditation (COA) for Children and Family Services. She is also a consultant with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. Additionally, Ms. Arnold has certification from the Center of Conflict Resolution (CCR) in Chicago as a certified mediator.

Her educational career includes a Bachelor's of Science from Illinois State University and a Master's in Social Work from Loyola University of Chicago. She has completed also Harvard University's The John F. Kennedy School of Government and Executive Leadership Program.

Prior to coming to state government, Ms. Arnold worked at Ingalls Hospital as a medical social worker. She was assigned to the pediatric unit and worked with DCFS staff on cases that were called into the hotline by the hospital. Arnold, along with consultation from the DCFS staff, developed the hospital's child abuse unit. As a result of her experience in working pediatrics and the professional relationships developed with DCFS staff, she developed an interest in pursuing child welfare as a career path. Subsequently she was hired by the Department and loves child welfare.

Ms. Arnold indicated during the interview that her most rewarding position within the Department was her admin-

istrative position with the Best Practice/SACWIS Project. The team was able to look at clinical practice in a broad spectrum within the Department. They were able to gather empirical data and make adjustments to rules and procedures. They stayed abreast of current practices nationwide. She really enjoyed her role and involvement with the SACWIS project. Staff was able to capture work efforts in a computerized system vs. manually writing case notes. This was a huge quality improvement effort by DCFS. She talked with staff across the state during the process and implemented some of their suggestions into the project.

This was a huge quality improvement effort ...

In her role as regional administrator, Ms. Arnold indicated that she has to be a leader. She lead by example and was supportive of staff. She had seven area administrators and 11 field offices under her leadership and managed direct service practices, which include permanency, intact and investigations. In this position, one has to be humble, listen to staff and implement their suggestions where appropriate. She realizes that being an RA is a huge undertaking and a lot of responsibility, but it is a worthwhile endeavor because you are trying to keep children safe and protected. She is also focused on meeting outcomes. She reported that although she managed a large amount of staff, they were good and competent, which made her job as an RA much easier. She encouraged her staff to work in consultation with the other Department disciplines and is aware of the value of working with external stakeholders and the community partners. Community investment is important in taking care of children and families.

Ms. Arnold acknowledges the importance of the African American Advisory Council. She will continue to support the efforts to address disproportionality and disparities among African American and Latino children in care. We all know the statistics that Latino and African American children come into the child welfare system at a much higher rate. She believes in working with the Department executive leadership and community stakeholders in addressing these concerns.

On January 21, 2014, Marilyn Arnold was appointed to a new role of project manager, working with the State of Illinois Framework GOMB (Governor's Office of Management and Budget) specifically to provide support to DCFS in the areas of enhancing access to timely and accurate data, review of business processes to identify system efficiencies, and developing action plans for technology improvements.

Someone You Should Know: Derek Hobson

By Relunda Washington

Derek Hobson is the regional administrator (RA) for the Southern Region, where he has led 17 offices, 34 counties and 268 staff since 2012. Derek is an experienced administrator with an extensive background in mental health services, conducting trainings, and a consultant to multiple agencies and hospitals within the community.

Derek was born in Alabama but his family relocated to Illinois when he was young. He was raised in East St. Louis and is passionate about child welfare in the area in which he serves. This area is home. He talked about the overwhelming amount of deprivation and this has captured his heart. Derek has Bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Biology from the University of Illinois with an emphasis in Chemical Engineering. His initial goal was to go to medical school to become a psychiatrist or neurologist. However, while in school, he completed an internship in pastoral care. This experience led him to choose the road of serving and helping others. Derek continued his education and obtained a Master's in Business Administration, Finance and Management from Webster University in St. Louis. He is the recipient of numerous professional certifications and awards. He has been honored by the Illinois Association of Minorities in Government, Professional Organization of Women, Alpha Phi Alpha Inc., and Illinois Professional Management. He is a member of Southern Illinois Child Death Task Force, Illinois Child Care Association Board, foster parent coalition of Southern Illinois and Permanency Enhancement groups. Derek is also a proud member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.

Derek began his career with Illinois Department of Children and Family Services in January 1985. He started as an investigator in the Southern Region. In 1990, he was promoted to contract administrator for the Southern Region. In this position, Derek administered grants and contracts to vendors, interfaced and contributed to program planning and analysis of grants and contracts, and built partnerships with staff and community stakeholders. From 1993-2006, Derek continued to grow within DCFS. He accepted a senior administrator position where he facilitated business functions of IT, daycare, procurement, facility management, and leasing. Derek was also responsible for developing the regional budget. During this time, he made it his mission to expand services and develop-



*—make sure children
and families are
your passion...*

mental programs that would benefit the families he served.

You would be surprised to know that with all the responsibilities that come with being RA, Derek still reads and reviews cases. He stated that it allows him the opportunity to stay grounded and insightful to staffs' needs; in order to better guide goal planning and direction for investigations and permanency/placement. For this interview, Derek and I sat in what he calls his "Planning Room." It is filled with several colorful pie charts, maps, and printed data percentages that visually help keep Derek focused on the goal.

Derek has previously served as a COA reviewer. This experience has given him a keen insight into how and why we do our jobs. One major goal for staff is to reflect accuracy in documentation and move children to permanency. Some of the specific identifiers to achieving this goal are to decrease the time children are in care from 4.5 years to 2 years. This can be done by working more diligently with the courts and other legal staff, developing contingency and concurrent planning, and recommending permanency into the least restrictive environments for our wards. The second goal is to equip and support staff with the skill set and knowledge to aid in the approach to permanency enhancements and achievements.

Derek's advice to current and future child welfare professionals is to "capture educational tools to do the best job you can do when engaging with people from diverse backgrounds; make sure children and families are your passion and that you want to service families; be prepared for the unknown; be prepared for the extra cases, extra information, extras that may bring one to tears, and have a positive attitude, good professional relationships, team support and outside support."

Derek is supported and loved by his wife Anita and their son, Eric. Derek takes pride in watching his son grow into a man. Eric is an accomplished violinist and drummer. Derek also mentioned that he stays grounded and rooted through prayer, exercise, meditation, music and rest. The family also enjoys traveling. Their most recent expeditions have included Ireland, Canada, and the Caribbean.

2013 AAAC Outstanding Achievement Awards

AAAC is proud to acknowledge awarding 178 department staffers since 1993 with an Outstanding Achievement Award during our annual Conference/institutes. It is flattering that co-workers take time to acknowledge one another not only for professional work performance but public service and community involvement. The “awards ceremony” is a critical portion of each conference/institute and we endeavor to continue these celebrations with your support. In celebration of our 21st anniversary, we are pleased to present another outstanding group of committed, preserving, devoted, loyal, dedicated, tenacious, and determined DCFS employees (and one honorary) with this award. The awardees are:



Sonya Baine



Bremen Campbell
AAAC Chairman Awardee



Dr. Anthony Grady



Linda Anna Marie Holmes



Dr. Jeanne Howard



Ramona Milam



Jerry Pierson



James Robinson
AAAC Chairman Awardee



Victor Silmon



Bernice Stallings



Patricia Young



Sonya Mallory (No Photo Available)



African American Advisory Council Members

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Tracy Marshall, Vice Chair
Angela Hassell, Secretary

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Jacqueline Johnson
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Ex-Officio:

Carole Freeman
Jere Moore

African American Services:

Rochelle Crump

Special Thanks to Our Recent Retirees

By Michael Burns



(left to right) **Legertha Barner, Lea Redmond, Jackie Bright, Carolyn Griggs**

Recently there were four Council members that took a combined 120 years of service with them as they retired from DCFS. Additionally they had served many valuable years on the Council and will certainly be missed by the organization. They were major contributors in many aspects of the Department such as adoption services (Legertha Barner,) foster home licensing (Carolyn Griggs), Administrative Case Review (Lea Redmond) and Operations (Jacqueline Bright). They each have held several positions along the way as they ascended to higher positions throughout their career. Ms. Barner worked as a Social Service Career Trainee, Post Adoption Specialist, Administrator of the Post Adoption Unit and Foster Home Licensing Manager for Cook County. Ms. Redmond was as a Child Protection Investigator, worked in the former Division of Training, Contracts and Grants, Office of Child Development and as an Administrative Case Reviewer. Ms. Griggs served as a Child Welfare Specialist II and a Public Service Administrator over a Purchase of Service Team, Intact Team, LAN Cluster Team and Foster Home Licensing Team. Ms. Bright served as a Child Welfare Specialist, Child Welfare Supervisor, Program Manager, Regional Admin-

istrator and the Associate Deputy of Permanency.

The array of experiences of these individuals were instrumental in the Council being successful in the annual conferences/Institutes, foster home recruitment, Permanency Enhancement Action Teams, Transformation Teams, hosting International Delegation social work students, Real Men Moving Forward, I am Queen, position papers and recommendations to Directors and Bureau of Deputies.

We wish for each of these individuals to have much success as they enter the next chapter of their lives. We commend them for their outstanding career in child welfare where they have been committed to servicing children and families of Illinois.



Retiree Banquet (Dec. 2013)

Standing Committees

Membership

Chairperson: Diane Cottrell

The African-American Advisory Council's By-Laws stipulate a membership consisting of a maximum of thirty-one (31) department employees. The Council is a statewide organization. Seventy-two percent of the members are from Cook County and twenty eight percent are from the remaining three regions, this formula reflects the proportion of African Americans within Cook and downstate.

African-American Advisory Council members are African American staff that was selected based on their expressed interest and willingness to work on African American issues in the Department. Employees may after two years of employment submit a brief narrative noting their interests in problems and issues affecting African Americans to the membership chair.

Individuals who submit narratives will be interviewed by the membership committee. The Membership Committee meets periodically to review applications when vacancies occur. The committee prepares recommendations for selection by vote of council members at the next regular meeting.

Conference

Chairperson: Robin Albritton & Tracy Marshall

This committee in conjunction plans the annual conference with the statewide conference coordinating committee. The committee determines the theme, workshop, keynoter, presenters, and the budget for each conference.

Newsletter

Chairperson: Bremen Campbell

The newsletter is a quarterly publication of articles submitted by Council members or agency staff. Each quarterly edition presents information about how staff can better provide services using new policies and protocols, reflect judicial rulings, and effectively implement new legislation and information on staff changes within the Department. Our Editorial Board reviews draft articles for professional content and relevancy to current events around the six regions. Sections of the newsletter include: viewpoint, book review, and resource identification. Those interested can submit articles to the chairperson of the newsletter committee Bremen Campbell, 15115 S. Dixie Highway Harvey, IL. 60426.

Legislative

Chairperson: Jere Moore

The objective of this committee is to monitor General Assembly Legislation affecting African Americans and child welfare programs. Members also confer with legislators and the Director's Legislative Liaison. The Chair may designate AD HOC committees, as needed which may include staff who are not members of the Advisory Council.

Training

Chairperson: James Robinson

The Training Committee was established to present information regarding the Council to Department new hires during their foundation training.

"Keeping Our Children First"



MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the African American Advisory Council is to advise and make specific recommendations with solutions to the Director and Bureau Deputies concerning the Department's provision of services to African American clients, staff and its contractual service providers in the following areas: recruitment, legislation, employment, community relations and development of professional issues.

Interested in Joining AAAC?

Contact Diane Cottrell,
membership chairperson

email: Diane.Cottrell@illinois.gov

Phone: 708-210-3716