



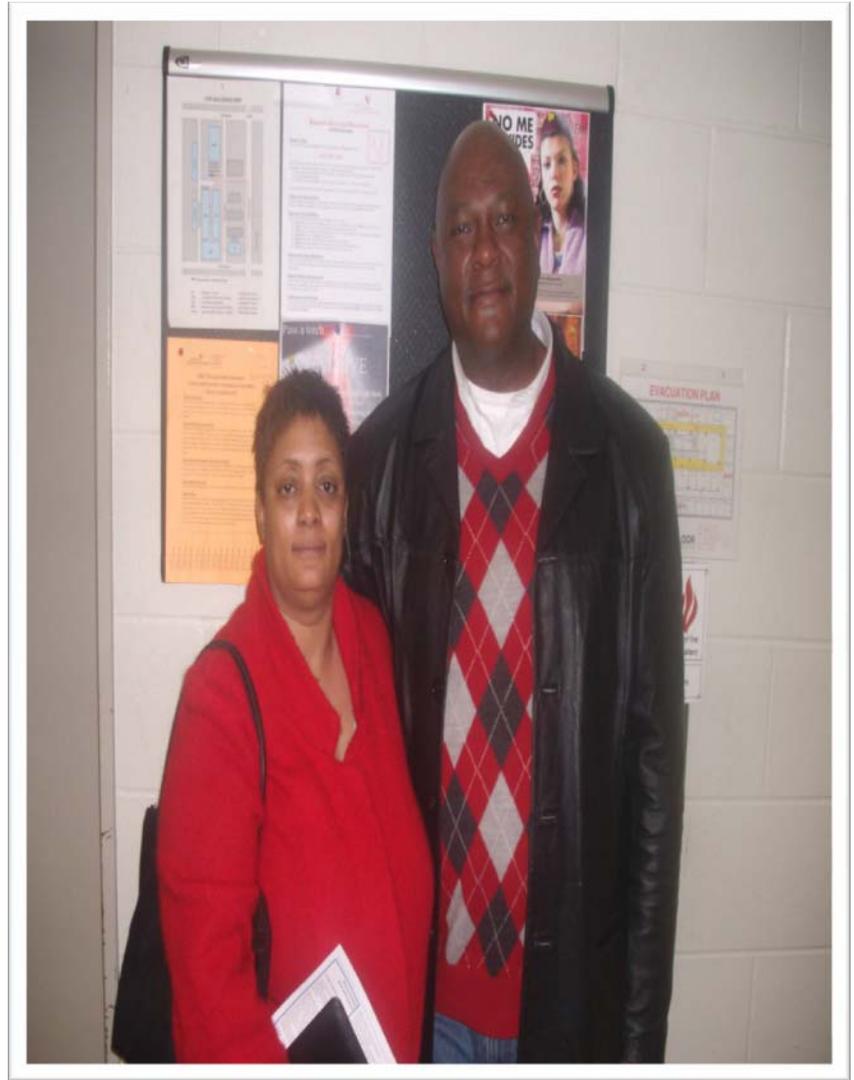
# Making Things Happen

*A Newsletter for Birth Parents by Birth Parents*

Summer 2010 • Volume 4

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Jacqueline LeNoir and Reverend Terry LeNoir

## Working For Change In:

**Our Lives  
Our Families  
Our Communities**

# My Vision: Making Our Families Whole

## ***Our History Our Mission***

The ultimate purpose of child welfare agencies is to help families in crisis become stable and unified. In child welfare birth parents have been sorely overlooked which hinders and many times defeats the purpose. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) introduced the **Partnering With Parents Initiative** to address the concerns and needs of birth parents as the agency recognized the need for change on behalf of parents receiving child welfare services. Its main goal is to give families a voice regarding the policies, programs and services provided to them. To that end, the Birth Parent Councils of Cook County were created which includes a Core Council and a proposal for 3 councils in each region for a total of nine. Currently there is one council in each Region: North, South, and Central.

The mission of all councils is to identify issues concerning birth parents and present these issues to the appropriate government officials to bring about durable policy changes that will aid all parents with DCFS involvement, now and in the future. All members of the councils are birth parents.



*By: Rev. Terry Lenoir, Sr.  
Birth Parent Council Chairman*

There are many things on the horizon for all of us. New and exciting initiatives that are under review or have been implemented such as Differential Response, a pilot program that will work with families who meet a certain criteria to address their needs without an investigation, the Strengthening Families Parent Leadership, a parent survey that will be used to get input from birth parents on how to make parent interaction with the child welfare system less traumatic, and a learning collaborative for engaging fathers.

As chairman of the Birth Parent Council (BPC) my primary goal is for us to be of assistance to the Department or an agency that has a contract with the Department as parent mentors and eventually as case management specialists.

I believe that all of us should be trained in all areas of off site work as well as on site work. Off site training would include any partnering agency that interacts with the BPC; such as Healthy Families, Strengthening Families, CASA, and the UIC steering committee social services studies. On-site work includes presenting at Foundations Training of future case workers and investigators for DCFS. My hope is that all BPC members would get involved with these agencies; so that when and if an opportunity becomes available we will be in a position to take advantage of any and all opportunities that might come as a result of our training. Yes, I do believe that we all will have an opportunity to become parent mentors that are thoroughly qualified in all areas of the child protective process to assist parents once their child or children are taken into custody.

None of this is going to happen over night but if we all work together on one accord we will get there. Keep in mind that we are doing things that have never been done before in the history of the department, and with Erwin McEwen as a Director who is not afraid to think outside of the box it is recognized that our voice is important in making our families whole, which is as it should be. As we move through 2010, and we break new ground, and make new history let's keep our primary purpose in mind to make our families whole again, and help bring our children back to a healthy home.

*Rev. LeNoir, Sr. has been a Birth Parent Council member for three years and is the father of five children. As our new chairman he carries on the passion for families which fuels his work on behalf of all birth parents.*

# Redefining Birth Parents

By: Ramona Randall,  
Birth Parent Council Secretary



A mother enters the courtroom after a week long binge on crack. Four days ago, she had taken her newborn son with her to a “friends” house, who was also addicted. That same day she argued with her addict boyfriend and went with the baby to see him, but he left her and his son outside in the rain, so he could continue getting high with another woman. She was devastated. Everything in her was telling her to go home, but the pain she was feeling would not allow her to. This mother who had a history of sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and rejection by her parents had been in treatment just a few months earlier trying to overcome many years of addiction. But now, here she stood, after leaving her baby at her “friends” house without a clue as to what happened to him. In that courtroom she stood embarrassed, ashamed, scared, and tired. Her mother who had gone to get her baby during those four days was there too and didn’t have much to say to her. She angrily asked her mother, “Why are you here?”

Most people reading this story would think how dare she be mad at her mother or she doesn’t deserve to get her baby back after leaving him like that. It has been 5 years since this mother stood in that courtroom. During those 5 years she has remained clean and sober, has been working full time for 3 year, and was promoted within her first year of employment. She is active in community service, and has regained custody of her son and guardianship of her older children, who were in her mother’s care. This success story is a possibility for all birth parents,

However, the possibilities of birth parents are many times overshadowed by the ugliness of the circumstances that bring them into the system. Family, neighbors, and some service workers often label them, and by doing so make what is already a difficult process an even harder one for parents who are willing to take responsibility and do what needs to be done. It should be understood that behind every ugly story there is the potential for success. The most precious stone in the world – diamonds – are not attractive when they are dug from the earth. They must go through a process using the right tools to shape them and polish them so that they shine their brightest. So too, must every birth parent, who is willing to take responsibility and go through services. This process should provide the right services that give parents a foundation from which to reach their potential and begin to walk in the purpose they were destined for. To every birth parent I say, do not allow your past to define who you are now. Take responsibility and redefine your destiny with positive choices. To every family, neighbor, and service worker ask yourself, “Why are you here?” If you have a personal interest in the life of a birth parent, then look beyond their faults and see their need, and if you can meet that need, do so. Together we can make a difference and redefine the lives of our children, ourselves, and our communities so that we can all shine our brightest.

Always Remember



THERE ARE NO  
STARS

ONLY

STARTERS WHO  
NEVER QUIT

*This section is dedicated in loving memory to those Birth Parent Council members who have passed away. Their contributions and spirits live on in our work.*

# BPC HIGHLIGHTS

## INSTITUTE DAY - 2009



**Registration Table**



**Opening Session**

The Birth Parent Council Institute Day is three years old and growing. A trend has begun with the success of our last institute which was held on June 26, 2009 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel located west of downtown Chicago. One hundred forty-five parents and staff were in attendance and not only received a wealth of information presented by child welfare officials and birth parents but also experienced a mini-skit acted out by Core Council members which showed how parents and children are sometimes affected when a child is taken into protective custody. Along with topics such as DCFS 101 and Juvenile Court 101, attendees were offered workshops on Separation Trauma and Strengthening Families. Our success was improved with the participation of agencies in the "Bring a Parent" campaign. A Safe Haven and Haymarket Center received awards for registering the most birth parents this year.



**Chairman Gregory Cox**



**Bob Dwyer, Kimberly Boone**



**Patrick Bitar**



**DCFS Director Erwin McEwen**



**Exhibitor – Chicago Park District**



**Exhibitor – Haymarket Center**



**Exhibitor – Chicago Children's Museum**

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We are looking forward to turning four at our next Annual Institute day at the Crowne Plaza on June 4, 2010 and we hope to see you there.

## Special Thanks from Gregory Cox Cook County Birth Parent Council – Former Chairman

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First I'd like to take this time to thank everyone who attended the Third Annual Birth Parent Council Institute Day: To the vendors who came with information and resources, and most of all to the birth parents who came, I say thank you. To all of the BPC members who faithfully attended the planning meetings by coming in early and staying late even after a full day of work sometimes, I commend you for staying committed to make sure this institute day was a success, you are awesome keep up the good work. To all of the presenters that came and shared their knowledge and information with us we are grateful to you. To DCFS staff, Donnella Bishop-Ward, BPC Director, Marsha Harris, BPC Coordinator and Marnie Winston, secretary and the entire Steering Council for their hard work, making sure that the BPC continues to be seen as a council that is moving forward and thriving to help other birth parents get all of the information and resources they need to reach a successfully closed case, I say thank you.

I would also like to thank DCFS Director Erwin McEwen for coming and giving us an update. I must admit I am excited that we are able to report an increase in birth parents attending this year. My word to parents is keep fighting, don't quit, attend all court appointments, get the information that you need, ask questions, stay involved with your case, and get involved with the Birth Parent Council.

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*The Cook County Birth Parent Council would like to thank Mr. Gregory Cox for his years of leadership as Chairman of the Birth Parent Core Council. He was there from the beginning as the concept of forming a council with birth parents as its members was being formed into what it has become today. Empowering parents through knowledge and training has always been the driving force of Mr. Cox's service and it was his thoughts that have given us our Annual Institute Day which has become a source of enlightenment for all who have attended.*

## **SPEAKING OUT: Parent Presentations**

The voices of birth parents are being heard and helping to bring about change in the way services are provided to families. On October 20, 2009, the University of Chicago held an information gathering meeting two Core Council members. Reverend Terry Lenoir and Letitia Franklin attended. The insight and experiences they shared will be used to develop the University's Social Work curriculum. This will take our voices into the classroom where the provision of services to parents ultimately begins. Birth Parent Council members also attended the Strengthening Families Summit held on October 15, 2009 and learned that they are seeking to develop Parent Leaders. Birth parents continue to speak at new caseworker Foundations Trainings which remains an ongoing opportunity for Core Council members. This is an exciting time for us and we look forward to letting our voices ring with the sound of positive possibilities.

## **REGIONAL MEETINGS:**

Our Cook South Regional Meeting is growing with five faithful members getting together every month to continue talking about birth parent issues and add their voices to the many seeking to make a difference in the lives of our families.



**Sharhonda Gilliam, Judith Flenoryl, Constance Ashley, Theresa Leggins and Juliette Brown with special guests Rev. Terry LeNoir, Sr. and Anais Marshall**

# ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING



**Steering Committee Members greeting parents**

Our annual planning meeting was held at DCFS offices located on the south side of Chicago on December 17, 2009. Much information was gathered as twenty-two parents and eight staff discussed current parent issues. We were blessed by a heartfelt solo sung by council member Theresa Leggins expressing gratefulness for what she has received as a member. It was a productive meeting and the information that was shared will be used for upcoming workshops and trainings.

There has been a passing of the baton with the election of officers at our Annual Planning Meeting. For the next three years Reverend Terry Lenoir, Sr. – Chairman, Leon Alexander – Co-Chairman, Ramona Randall – Secretary, and George Lyke – Co-Secretary will serve as officers of the Cook County Birth Parent Council. We want to give a special thanks to Gregory Cox and David Israel who served from their hearts as former Chairman and Co-Chairman of the council. They have moved on to answer another call on their lives, but still remain supportive members of the Birth Parent Council. We look forward to new and exciting things with our new leadership.

## **NEW OFFICERS**

**Reverend Terry LeNoir, Sr.  
Chairman**

**Mr. Leon Alexander  
Co-Chairman**

**Ms. Ramona Randall  
Secretary  
Media Chairman**

**Mr. George Lyke  
Co-Secretary**



***Back: Rev. Terry LeNoir, Sr., George Lyke,  
Leon Alexander Front: Ramona Randall***

# My Father, Your Father, Our Fathers

*Gregory Cox formerly served as the Chairman of the Birth Parent Council for two years. He currently represents the National Fatherhood Initiative and travels state-wide to help reach out to fathers.*



I am excited to report that I have been involved with the Quality Improvement Center (QIC) on Non-Resident fathers and the child welfare system. One of the great things I think is so awesome is when we begin to talk about engaging fathers and getting them involved in their child welfare case.

**“My father”** (biological) was in and out of the home, he drank and drugged, and I must admit that with what I now know about Alcoholism and Addiction; I can say his name is T----- and he was a addict. As a result of his addiction he wasn't available to our family and we suffered, and yes; we lacked some things financially. We suffered... he didn't work but my mother did, for long hours, and pretended like she wasn't (working) to get Public Aid to provide for and meet the needs of the family. She was very resourceful and used the resources available to her in her community.

Emotionally we suffered; my father wasn't able to connect with me or my brothers by asking us about our day before and after school, or about our goals and dreams. Spiritually, we suffered; he wasn't there to teach us about prayer and how to love others. He left a void.

There came a time when I would need the help of the resources in the community due to becoming an addicted father myself. But I got treatment, I got help, I got sober and clean from the drugs. I felt a void and that was my children being in the child welfare system. I did what I needed to do for me. It was time for me to do what needed to be done for my children - be a father.

**“Your Father”** may have been at home and you have a different report; your dad was the provider of the home and just maybe your story is different and that's good. Successful fatherhood has been linked to improved physical and mental health, self esteem, gender identity, responsible sexuality and financial security for children.

Children need their fathers and we need **“Our Fathers”** to get involved in the life of their children. I'd like to challenge all case workers/caregivers to work harder at engaging our Non-Residential fathers. Everybody wins in the end. The children have more family connection, the worker can rejoice that a family has been reunited, and the father void is filled.

# MY COME FROM PLACE

By: Cynthia Hoyle

I come from a place that was once filled with a lot of laughter,  
Until that turned into a whole lot of shame and pain...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.  
Somewhere along the way I crossed that invisible line and  
everything as I once knew it to be,

Got turned upside down, inside out, in a matter of time...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.  
It had got so bad for me that one day I woke up and it was 5 kids later by 4 different men,  
Once again I was all alone without no coping skills, no mentors, no role models,  
Or even people who just cared...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.

The "Alphabet People" came into my life and did for me what I could not do for myself  
And removed my children, So now I am free from responsibility  
To do what I want right then and there...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.

Was to live a life of Incomprehensible, Animalistic, Demoralization  
I then resorted to eating out of the garbage, sleeping in abandoned buildings, not taking a bath,  
My hair was so matted to my head that it looked like reefer,  
I was so skinny that I wore 2 or 3 pairs of pants in the summertime, Thinking I WAS SO FINE!  
Now funny as it may sound to everyone around  
It's my truth and that's how I got down...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.

**TODAY, I am not confused, I AM A MIRACLE**

HIS mercy and grace covered me and my children, all untouched and unharmed  
And that was GOD'S CHOICE YOU SEE, had nothing to do with me.

GOD began to put people in places so when I would cross their paths  
They would give me just what I needed  
And those people were truly, Heroes, Mentors, Role Models  
People who cared enough to help me help myself

Today life is good because my Come From Place is Here  
Where I am supposed to be...MY CHOICE YOU SEE.



*Cynthia Hoyle is a member of the Birth Parent Council who is passionate in her service to birth parents*

# **SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW**

## **Governor Quinn Signs Child Welfare Reform Laws**

### *Bills Begin New Era of Protecting Children, Strengthening Families*

CHICAGO – August 25, 2009. Governor Pat Quinn today signed a series of bills that enhance and improve child welfare services in Illinois. Together, these bills enable the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to better support families in need, strengthen relationships between parents and children, and build better futures for youth transitioning from state care to adult independence. “We best protect children when we support and strengthen families,” said Governor Quinn. “These important bills begin a new era of child welfare in Illinois, where we reach out to families to provide a helping hand before a crisis occurs, and help each child in our care achieve their dreams.”

The Differential Response Program Act (SB 807), sponsored by Rep. Mary E. Flowers (D-Chicago) and Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago), allows DCFS to take a more flexible, supportive approach to helping families in need. In cases where a family is in need of help but the risk of harm to children is low, DCFS will be authorized to conduct a less disruptive family assessment, rather than a formal departmental investigation. The Department can then tailor additional, individualized services to support the family and protect the children. The bill is effective January 1, 2010. “This legislation brings us closer to the day when families voluntarily turn to DCFS for help in raising their children safely and successfully,” said DCFS Director Erwin McEwen. “When DCFS is seen as a resource for positive change, children and families win.”

The Foster Child Successful Transition into Adulthood Act (HB 4054), sponsored by Sen. Hunter and Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D-Chicago), allows emancipated youth who are still under the age of 21 to receive assistance from DCFS. Research has shown that young adults coming out of foster care have better outcomes when they continue to receive state support during their transition to adult independence. DCFS programs for 18 to 21 year olds reduce the incidence of homelessness and incarceration, and increase achievement in education and employment, also saving taxpayers further expense in the future. In addition, it assigns a case manager to each eligible youth to develop a personal development plan to increase their self-sufficiency skills. The bill is effective January 1, 2010.

The DCFS Service Plans Improvement and Foster Permanency Changes Act (HB 529) allows the court and DCFS to review children who are age 13 and over to determine whether the parents whose rights have been terminated can be restored. Reinstatement will not automatically return a child to the custody of the parent, but will allow the court to oversee services and visitation, helping the child understand and manage relationships with their biological family. The Act recognizes the importance of lifelong bonds between parents and child, and allows the child welfare system to work with biological parents toward the child’s best interests, even in cases where placement of a child with the parent is not possible. The bill, sponsored by Sen. William Delgado (D-Chicago) and Rep. Flowers, is effective immediately.

“We are honored that Governor Quinn chose SOS Children’s Villages Illinois as the site to sign these important pieces of legislation. These bills will continue Illinois’ proud tradition of leading the nation in providing the highest quality services to transform children’s lives,” said Tim McCormick, CEO of SOS Children’s Villages Illinois.



## Membership Information

The only requirement to become a member of the Birth Parent Council is to be a parent who has or was formerly involved with DCFS. We are looking for birth parents who are interested in attending a Regional Forum designed to provide support for parents who are going through the difficult process of regaining custody of their children. The meetings are held on the Southside, Westside and Northside of Chicago when parents register to attend meetings.

The Core Council meets once a month with DCFS personnel and more often when needed to discuss the concerns identified by birth parents and to plan activities that address these concerns based on the needs of birth parents

It is our goal to create a strong membership of parents similar to the councils for foster parents and foster children that will have a positive impact on the way birth parents receive services. We respectfully ask that if you are a birth parent that you would become a part of this growing group of people who have something to say about ourselves, our children, and our families.

### **REGIONAL MEETINGS**

Scheduled as Parents Register

#### **COOK SOUTH**

**6201 S. Emerald Chicago, IL**

#### **COOK CENTRAL**

**212 S. Francisco Chicago, IL**

#### **COOK NORTH**

**2245 N. Halsted Chicago, IL**

*It is our goal to support birth parents as they work to regain custody of their children. The Birth Parent Regional Forums are a good way to get support from people who understand the challenges we face and to voice your concerns.*

*Let your voice be heard and use the contact information below to express your interest in attending a Birth Parent Regional Forum.*

***Call today to Register***

773.371-6097

***Birth Parent Council  
Contact Information***

**Donnella Bishop-Ward  
Program Administrator**

**(773) 371-6122**

**Marsha Harris – Coordinator**

**(773) 371-6125**

**Rev. Terry LeNoir – Chairman**

**(773) 317-9197**

**Ramona Randall – Media Chair**

**(773) 322-0827**