This year’s national Foster Parent Conference was held in the beautiful city of Mobile, Alabama. It was a picture perfect place to host the 41st annual conference sponsored by the National Foster Parent Association. This historical city yielded many beautiful landmarks that have been restored after Hurricane Katrina. The conference was held at the lovely Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel.

Our representatives from Alameda County were Gwen Williams, Foster Parent Association President, Ramonia Polillo, fost/adopt parent, Charles Bracey, foster parent and First Vice President of our Foster Parent Association, and me. We had more fun than you could imagine. We met, wept, and laughed together with individuals from across the country and the United States territories. There were over 300 participants of foster/adoptive parents, kinship care providers, social workers, agency staff, presenters, and other child advocates. This conference was power packed with over 20 plus workshops, a meet-and-greet reception, an Awards Brunch, and a formal luncheon. The host city’s Foster Parent Association was gracious and warm during our entire stay. We really wish you could have been there!

We Wish You Could Have Been There!
As told by Theresa Johnson, Child Welfare Worker, Licensing Unit
(continued on page 6)
Dear Colleagues and Community Partners:

It’s an exciting time to be leading the Department of Children and Family Services. This July, we celebrated the fourth year of the Title IVE Waiver. Four years ago, we entered into a unique agreement to gain flexibility in spending so that we can improve outcomes for youth and families. As a reminder, our goals for participating in the IVE Waiver are the following:

- Increase number of children who can remain safely in their home.
- Increase number of children and youth in family settings.
- Increase number of children who safely and permanently reunify with their parents.
- Increase percent of guardianships and adoptions.
- Enhance the safety net for transition age and emancipating youth.

Each July, we review the previous year’s IVE Waiver projects and plan for the year ahead. This year, we look back at the opening of the Gathering Place, a family-friendly center for youth to visit with birth parents and other family members. We also reflect on increasing parent and youth advocates and providing child care subsidies for our resource parents.

For the upcoming year, we have added new strategies to increase opportunities for older foster youth, increase and improve foster parent recruiting efforts, and enhancing services for Native American youth and families. For example, we have funded a summer youth employment project for older foster youth that will provide summer employment and job training for up to 800 youth to work 20 hours per week. Additionally, we plan to build on our existing partnership with the Bay Area Collaborative of American Indian Resources to increase services for Native American families. We have also funded a program for parents under the age of 19 and have not completed their high school education. This Young Parent Opportunity Program provides case management and child care to help parents graduate from high school or earn their GED. These services provide opportunities to increase success and help youth and families thrive.

Michelle Love, Interim Assistant Agency Director

Michelle’s Message

The New Kin-GAP

by Selia Johnson

Did you know that there are three new requirements for relative guardians that currently receive Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP)? The first requirement was to inform the relative guardian of the changes that would provide more benefits to the Kin-GAP child. The changes are:

- Relative Guardians can ask for a change in the payment amount they currently receive in order to cover the costs of taking care of a child up to the amount the child would have received in foster care.
- Relative guardians can ask to have the payment amount changed at any point during the 2 year reassessment period if there is a valid reason.
- Relative Guardians can move to another state and continue to receive the Kin-GAP payment, under most circumstances.
- Relative Guardians can keep getting Kin-GAP for the child until he/she turns 21 if he or she has a mental or physical disability, under certain circumstances.

In order to apply these changes the Relative guardians will have to complete additional required state forms, the forms are:

1. Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Kin-GAP) Program Agreement Amendment (Form #SOC 369A). Newly created state form.
2. Statement of Facts Supporting Eligibility for Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment (Form # KG 2). An updated version of a pre-existing form in which Relative Guardians are familiar with.

The conversion of their existing Kin-GAP case will establish a new reassessment/renewal date 2 years from the date their Kin-GAP case was converted into the new program.

DCFS Press Editorial Board

Krystal Fortner
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Cerise Grice
Beth McAllister
Selia Johnson

Please provide comments and feedback regarding DCFS Press to Connie Linas at linasc@acgov.org

A BIG congratulations to you, Lori!!!

DCFS is excited for your leadership and vision as the Director of the Social Services Agency!!!
It all started in a little farming village in Laos, in a small home with no running water or electricity—in living conditions that are hard for most of us to imagine. This is what life was like for Seng Fong, a little Iu Mien girl who, with her parents, fled Laos for Thailand as a refugee in 1974. The relief was immeasurable, but much uncertainty remained, when her family finally arrived in the United States in 1979.

Seng’s family settled in Oakland, California. Oakland’s Iu Mien community was sparse in the late 1970s and services were inadequate, but as more and more refugees arrived in California, Seng’s family began to connect with the East Bay’s Iu Mien community and Oakland began to feel more like home.

As Seng matured, she realized that she wanted to give back to her community and help people in need realize that there are resources and there is hope for the extreme challenges that they were facing. The impact of her experiences as a refugee made her insightful, resilient and a passionate advocate. Reaching out to families in their time of need, crisis or trauma became her calling…and still is.

Seng began her professional career as a Counselor at East Bay Asian Youth Center in Oakland, a non-profit dedicated to providing multi-cultural supportive services to at-risk middle and high school age youth in low wealth neighborhoods in Oakland. In November 1999, she began her career at Alameda County Social Services Agency as a Social Worker III in the SSI Advocacy Unit and, about 18 months later, she transferred to the Department Children and Family Services as a Child Welfare Worker.

Fast forward to 2011. As I talked to Seng about her belief in families, the great work of the Department of Children and Family Services and her unwavering commitment to children, I was in awe of her many, many personal and professional accomplishments (not to mention being a loving, proud mom to two beautiful daughters, Kandace and Tamara). Seng is now a seasoned CWW in the North County Dependency Investigations Unit and finds it exciting to be in the front end of services, a part of the child welfare continuum where many critical decisions are made that can completely influence the direction of a case and the outcomes for the family.

Seng had many profound examples of success stories over the years, however, she decided to share one that was particularly meaningful to her. Two dependent minors were placed with their maternal aunt due to their mother’s substance abuse. The mother successfully completed a drug treatment program and Seng recommended placement of the minors with their mother. Ultimately, the minors were returned to their mother and they were ecstatic! Although the mother had a bunk bed, the top bunk did not have a mattress. Seng helped the family obtain funding to purchase a mattress and the bedding they needed. The family was so grateful to Seng for advocating for them and, despite their financial difficulties, the family showed their appreciation by presenting her with a gift card! Seng was stunned. She did not accept their gift but thanked them for their thoughtfulness. She explained that it is families like these who keep her motivated to continue this work despite the frequent challenges (faced by all) in child welfare.

Seng approaches all that she does with an adaptability to change, a positive attitude and she stays calm, focused, and professional with both clients and peers. She is an eager learner and is committed to increasing her knowledge base through continuing education, volunteer work and attending DCFS trainings. Seng has also trained many new Dependency Investigations CWWs—seizing the opportunity to support her colleagues and the Department. She has the capacity to relate well to her clients, she expertly tackles complex professional situations—working well under pressure, helping her clients who are experiencing difficulties in identifying interventions.

I reached out to one of Seng’s former colleagues to get a feel for what it is like to work directly with her. She described Seng as “a CWW who genuinely cares about each and every client. She consistently goes out of her way to make sure that a family gets what they need and, because of that, Seng’s clients truly appreciate her. She is objective, takes the time to listen, wants to understand their perspective, is always sincere and figures out a way to make things work.” For that, Seng Fong is a long distance gift to the Alameda County Department of Children and Family Services.
Do you know an Alameda County foster youth between the ages of 15-18 who can use the help of an Educational Mentor in achieving success in school? If so, please refer them to the Alameda County Office of Education, Foster Youth Services Mentor Program!

Foster Youth Services has expanded its educational support services by hiring three additional educational mentors who will serve foster youth ages 15 -18 who reside in Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, and/or San Joaquin counties. The Education Mentors will help facilitate student school enrollment and academic activities that will result in better educational outcomes for foster youth. **Referrals are being accepted now.**

**Education Mentors:**
Communicate school information and collaborate with child welfare workers and foster care providers; Function as an advocate for special education students; Work with individual students to meet their educational needs and goals; Assist in making sure the IEP is current.; Secure tutorial and other academic support services for foster youth; Facilitate student enrollment and monitor school attendance; Support the foster care provider in meeting the academic needs of youth in care.

**Education Mentors help:**
Foster youth who face multiple school challenges including those with learning disabilities. Youth eligible for services can be referred from: Foster Family Agencies, Foster Families Group Homes and Court Specified Placements.

**Education Mentors focus on:**
- School placement stability.
- Completed SST and/or updated IEP resulting in appropriate school placement.
- Improved grades and attendance.
- Student achievement in passing the California High School Exit Exam and high school completion (GED or diploma).

**For more information contact**
Elizabeth Tarango
Program Manager, Foster Youth Services
(510) 670-7752
lizt@acoe.org

**PLEASE SEND YOUR REFERRALS IN NOW!!!**

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**Transcript Analysis Services Are Available for Youth in Foster Care**

If you are in need of determining how many credits a foster youth has the Alameda County Office of Education Foster Youth Services (FYS) is available to assist. They will work to locate school records both within and outside of Alameda County and advocate for partial credits as well. Please take advantage of this invaluable resource as you work with school age youth in foster care.

**For transcript analysis assistance contact FYS at (510) 670-7752.**

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**CA Linkages Celebrated a Decade of Partnership**

In July 2011, 30+ Counties throughout California gathered in Monterey, CA to “Celebrate A Decade of Partnership” between the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids (CalWORKS) and Child Welfare programs. This Federal Demonstration Grant is concluding its cycle and the final Linkages Convening focused on the progress of the project since its inception in 1999.

The conference opened with remarks by Stuart Oppenheim, Executive Director, Child and Family Policy Institute of California and included an introduction of a Humorist (Comedian) Jack Gallagher and a host of pioneers for the Linkages effort. A video clip accompanied each Pioneer as they spoke about their interest in the concept of Linkages and their contribution to its formation in California.

The afternoon wrapped up with a reception and viewing of County Storyboards. Alameda County submitted the Storyboard below which highlighted the TDM (Team Decision-making Meeting) process.

Among 30 Linkages counties, 17 Storyboards were submitted. Although the Alameda County Storyboard received high praise and numerous votes, we did not win this time. Los Angeles County won first place and Stanislaus County won second place.

(continued on next page)
Leaders from San Luis Obispo County and Stanislaus County opened the sessions the next day followed by a Keynote address by Phil Basso, APHSA Organizational Effectiveness Director with remarks about the top ten things that are important in building and sustaining an effective organization.

The remainder of the next two days consisted of 16 group workshops highlighting various topics related to Linkages implementation, outcomes, lessons learned and sustainability efforts. Alameda County participated in a panel with San Francisco and Santa Clara and presented information about TDMs and SSIRS (Social Services Integrated Reporting System—a data tracking system.) Svetlana Lesova, Randall Hudson and Cerise Grice were the presenters for Alameda County. Their presentation opened with some general demographics of Alameda County, CALWORKS and Child Welfare cases, and Linkages data. That was followed by a discussion of the TDM process, the role of Linkages Liaisons. Coordinated case planning and a case example was shared. The presentation conclude with an introduction of the SSIRS system, its reporting capability and Alameda County’s plan for full implementation.

The convening concluded with an Overview and demonstration of the web-based Linkages Toolkit designed to assist counties in the development and sustainability of their Linkages practice and a family panel, where parents from three different counties shared their experience with Linkages. For more information about Linkages in Alameda County contact Cerise Grice at cgrice@acgov.org.

The Shirley Eastman Children’s Fund is a public philanthropic venture that was established to support holiday giving and summer camp opportunities for Alameda County foster children. The goals of the Shirley Eastman Children’s Fund are to provide:

- A gift for every child and youth in foster care during the holiday season
- Summer camp opportunities for foster children and youth.

In 2010, $10,500 was used from the Shirley Eastman fund to pay for 53 children to attend a summer camp. Thirty-one children attended Camp Mendocino, which is a 10 day overnight camp operated by the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco. The other 22 children went to Cal Camp, which is a 5 day camp in Boulder Creek run by the University of California, Berkeley. This year, a budget of $8,000 for summer camps means that slightly fewer children (49) have or will go to a summer camp. Fifteen children already went to Camp Mendocino and 34 will attend Cal Camp.

Any donation to the fund helps. With everyone chipping in, more and more children can attend a summer camp, and youth will receive a gift this holiday season. Your support can truly make a difference to a child. “Children and caregivers love these camps,” says Meredith Samp who is a Child Welfare Supervisor with Alameda County and coordinates camps for foster youth. “Workers tell me when they visit their kids after camp, the children are so excited to share the songs and dances they learned and it is such an amazing opportunity for our kids. Without the Shirley Eastman fund, none of these children would have had the camp experience. This is a chance for our foster kids, who have been abused, neglected, and generally dealt an unfair hand in life to have fun and just be kids.”

With the holidays in sight, this is a great time to send in your donation and help make the season special for a foster youth in need. If you are interested in supporting foster youth with a donation, 100% of your contribution will go to the Shirley Eastman fund, and your donation may be tax-deductible. Please send your donation to:

Alameda County Social Services Agency
Attention: A033
2000 San Pablo Avenue
Oakland, California 94612

Please make checks payable to the County of Alameda – Shirley Eastman Holiday Fund or the County of Alameda – Shirley Eastman Campership Fund. Specific questions regarding the fund can be addressed to Robin Luckett at 510-268-7927.

For more information about Linkages in Alameda County contact Cerise Grice at cgrice@acgov.org

Questions regarding the fund can be addressed to Robin Luckett at 510-268-7927
Okay, I know you’ve all been waiting with anticipation, so here are the answers to the photo contest that was in the last DCFS newsletter.

And the lucky winners are…

**First place**: LaWanda Polk!! She guessed eleven photos correctly! She received a $15 Target gift card for her effort.

**Second place**: Monica Ortiz!! She was close behind with ten, and received a $10 Target gift card.

Thanks to all who participated and remembered what it’s like to be a teenager.

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**(continued from front page)**

I was impressed with the keynote speaker, Derek Clark, author, singer, and songwriter, who is from our very own front yard of Tracy, California. Mr. Clark shared his thirteen years of heartfelt experience coping with adversity and overcoming hardship while growing up in the Alameda County Foster Care system. He spoke passionately about his sad and long childhood experience back in the day. Mr. Clark has written several books on his experiences such as *My Journey into Foster Care*, *My Foster Parents Saved My Life* and *I Will Never Give Up*.

I attended ten to twelve separate workshops during my three-day visit and would often end those days with the feeling of “information overload, no compute.” The workshop facilitated by Judge Britt Hammond from the Georgia Superior Court titled “Right to be Heard in Court/True Court Cases and How Not to Approach the Court System” was insightful. The workshop titled “Dishonesty/Stealing” facilitated by Pat Miller described the motives for stealing, the fun and benefits children gain from stealing, and the types of people who steal, was thoughtful. The workshop titled “Don’t Do Foster Care Alone” facilitated by Bill Hancock, founder/CEO of FaithBridge Foster Care, spoke about the under-utilization of community volunteers.

Gwen McWilliams said, “The workshop that was most interesting to me was the one on Parenting Siblings of Children with Special Needs.” Charles Bracey explained, “The conference was great. It was very informative, and I am truly thankful that I was able to attend. It was well worth me taking the time off work to attend…” Ramonia Polillo stated, “I know that children served by Alameda County Social Services are truly blessed to have the workers that they (we) have. After listening to disgruntled foster parents and social workers from around the world, it saddens my heart and spirit to know that not every child is as lucky as ours.”

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**DCFS Photo Contest**

*by Krystal Fortner*

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Thanks to all who participated and remembered what it’s like to be a teenager.
Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) staff members have been making great efforts to improve the lives of foster youth. Although sometimes it is difficult to see how those efforts directly affect a child’s life, some things make it quite obvious. One of the more noticeable examples: where foster youth are placed in out-of-home care. DCFS believes that children and youth are more likely to experience positive outcomes when placed in a family setting such as relative or foster home than youth placed in group homes. One reason for this is the increased likelihood that the youth in family homes will develop a lifelong connection, either with their caregiver or another member of the household. DCFS has been very successful in placing a larger percentage of the youth who are in out-of-home care in relative/Non Related Extended Family Member (NREFM) and county foster home placements.

Overall, there are fewer children in out-of-home placement today than a few years ago. In 2007, there were over 2,300 Alameda County foster children in out-of-home placement but that number has declined to 1,545 children as of July 2011. Of the fewer number of children now needing out-of-home placement today, their placements are more likely to be with a relative, NREFM caregiver, or a county foster parent. Back in July 2007, there were 988 children in the placement types of relative/NREFM and county foster homes (accounting for 42.4% of all placements). Now there are only 740 children (as of July 2011) in those placements, representing 47.9% of all children in care—an increase of 13%! This means that the strategies used by DCFS have helped to reduce the total number of children needing out-of-home placement, while the Department’s service delivery has improved for those children who enter foster care.

The efforts of DCFS have also ensured that children do not unnecessarily get placed in a group home, leaving those resources for children who truly need them. Back in July 2007, 353 Alameda County foster youth were placed in a group home. But as of July 2011, there were just 142 children in group home care. That is an amazing decrease of 59.8%, and the result of the efforts of staff in the Family Finding and Engagement Program, the Placement Units, and all DCFS staff and community partners who have recognized the importance of a child living in a family setting. Although group homes play an important role for those children who are not yet ready for a different placement, it is a last resort, and DCFS has been improving the lives of foster youth by ensuring their improved chances for success with a relative/NREFM or foster caregiver.

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent, please call us at (510) 259-3575 or visit www.pathwaytohome.org. There are youth in foster care who need you.