



ChildWatch

The leading voice for Westchester's children since 1914

SUMMER 2007

Foster Care: A Positive Perspective

An editorial by Cora Greenberg, WCA Executive Director

In a recent fundraising letter, WCA highlighted our advocacy work to improve the lives of teens in foster care. We began the letter with a quote from Doug Nelson of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which said that youngsters who spend their adolescence in foster care are more “predictably headed for unhappy outcomes” than any other group in the United States. This comment, while based on fact, was used out of context and unfortunately paints a distorted and unnecessarily negative picture of foster youth and foster care.

Teens who come to foster care have often experienced a more troubled life than teens in general, and the experience of being in foster care can also create problems, especially if it involves multiple placements, poor staffing, or inadequate resources. But foster care—whether in a foster family, group home or residential center—can provide services youngsters need and the experience of a stable, nurturing living situation that many have never enjoyed. As advocates, WCA works to make sure that troubled families and children get the help they need; sometimes foster care is the help that is needed to save a child.

Luckily for me, I have friends who tell me when they think I've made a mistake. One of them, the director of a foster care agency, was upset by our use of that quote, which he pointed out unfairly stigmatizes foster youth and the agen-

“Foster care can provide services youngsters need and the experience of a stable, nurturing living situation that many have never enjoyed.”

cies that care for them. “This is the battle I fight every day,” he told me.

The battle is to make sure that this negative view of foster care does not keep youngsters in destructive home situations when they would be better served in the positive environment that foster care can provide. It's a fight to keep kids from being removed prematurely from foster care just when they have begun to establish trust-

ing relationships, attend school regularly, and form hopes and dreams for their futures. And it's a struggle to make sure that foster care services are adequately and appropriately funded.

No doubt young people who spend their teen years in foster care are statistically more likely to experience later difficulties than teens in general. But compare those difficulties to the problems faced by teens who are *not* removed from damaging and dangerous family situations, or by those who run away from family conflicts to fend for themselves on the street.

Foster care is not a panacea, but it can be the best choice for a young person who can not safely or sanely remain at home. At its best, foster

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care provides the safety, stability, structure, and emotional support that every youngster needs. Would it be better if every family could adequately parent their own children? Yes. Would it be better if families in trouble could get a wide range of services *early and with enough intensity* to prevent the need for foster care? Yes. Until both those ideals are in place, we will continue to need a strong foster care system.

So what can we do to make sure that every child in the child welfare system has the supports and opportunities that they need and deserve?

First, we have to recognize that one size does not fit all. When a child comes to the attention of the child welfare system and the family court, decisions about intervention or treatment should be based on the needs and circumstances of the child and his family *in the context of* the actual services available. While we might envision an ideal scenario of services, we must not hold the individual child hostage to this ideal vision, but act to create the best possible situation for that child with the resources that are available.

Next, we must ensure that all parts of the service continuum are valued, supported and meaningfully involved in planning services to particular children and their families, as well as the critical evaluation and design of the overall service system. If only surgeons are consulted for a diagnosis, chances are that the recommended treatment will be surgery.

Foster care deserves our attention and our help because foster care agencies are charged with carrying out our collective responsibilities to the children in public custody. This is an awesome responsibility, which the vast majority of voluntary foster agencies and foster parents do well.

They can't do it alone.

Foster children need families willing to serve as foster parents. Older youth need tutors and mentors and summer jobs. When they leave care, young people need landlords who will rent them apartments, businesses that will hire and train them, faith communities that will welcome and support them.

Foster care agencies need all of our voices to help make sure that public policies, regulations and funding adequately support the best care for young people.

Finally, we as a community—citizens, government administrators, elected officials, voluntary agencies, schools, community and faith-based-groups, businesses—must stop thinking about foster youth as someone else's children, someone else's problem. When we as a society intervene in a family, and especially when we determine that the children cannot safely remain in the physical custody of that family, we must accept responsibility for the children of that family *and make sure they have the opportunities and supports that all children need*, the opportunities and supports we strive to give our own children.

They deserve no less. ■

**BELIEVE
IN WCA**
**YOU BELIEVE IN
WCA'S MISSION...**

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WCA'S FUTURE?

One of WCA's major strengths is its independence. WCA is non-partisan and is not limited by ties to any political groups, organizations or funding sources. Why? Because WCA is supported by generous, caring and concerned citizens like you. As we prepare to enter our second century of advocacy for Westchester's children, we need your help to accomplish our vision and maintain the work already begun. Your continued support will help in many ways. Although you may already make a regular annual donation, please consider these options as well:

- including WCA in your will
- making WCA a beneficiary of your life insurance
- participating in our fundraisers
- including WCA in a profit-sharing plan

Thank you so much for your support. Because of you, WCA can continue to be the leading voice for Westchester's children. For more information, please contact Betsy Steward, WCA Development Officer, at 914-946-7676, ext. 13, or bsteward@wca4kids.org.

WCA Presents Award to Kathryn Wasserman Davis

On Tuesday, May 15, 2007, the Westchester Children's Association presented the first Edith C. Macy Award for Distinguished Service to Kathryn Wasserman Davis. The 2007 Advocacy Dinner at Tappan Hill was attended by more than 150 guests, supporters and well wishers who celebrated Mrs. Davis' lifelong achievements in philanthropy and advocacy. Davis, who celebrates her 100th birthday this year, served as WCA president from 1955-1961. With her husband, legendary financier Shelby Cullom Davis, she has supported a wide range of institutions and causes, with a particular emphasis on world peace and international understanding. In addition to an endowment gift of \$500,000 to WCA, Mrs. Davis has recently made major gifts to other Westchester institutions, including Scenic Hudson, Phelps Memorial Hospital and the Jacob Burns Film Center. ■



WCA President Maris Krasnow (r) presents honoree Kathryn Wasserman Davis with the Edith Macy Award for Distinguished Service.



Dinner guests Amy and John Wickersham (l), Joann Rooney.



Current and former WCA Board Presidents: (l to r) seated: Lou Muller, Kathryn Wasserman Davis, Katie Lobach; standing: Liz Mark, Lisa Katz, Maris Krasnow and Jackie Hilly.



Dinner guests Dru Van Hengel and Lisina Hoch.



WCA Executive Director Cora Greenberg (l) with Kathy Halas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Westchester.

WCA Auction Helps Foster Teens

As part of the Silent Auction at its 2007 Advocacy Dinner, WCA offered several donated items for which attendees could bid on behalf of a teen in foster care. Items included tickets to performing arts events, treats such as a trip to the beauty salon, and several academically oriented items, such as SAT prep courses, books and private tutoring.

One Princeton Review SAT prep course was purchased by members of the WCA Board and has been given to a young man living in a foster care group home in Yonkers. "We are delighted to be able to help a young person get one step closer to his dream of attending college," said Maris Krasnow, President of the WCA Board. ■

2007 Advocacy Breakfast



Karen Blumenthal, State Senator Andrea Stewart Cousins and WCA Ex. Dir. Cora Greenberg.



Felice Harris and Barbara Holland.

To Effectively Address Child Poverty, "Families and Policies Matter"

On April 5, 2007, the Westchester Children's Association held its annual Advocacy Breakfast at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in White Plains. This year's speaker was Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, the Virginia and Leonard Marx Professor of Child Development and Education and Co-Director of the National Center for Children and Families at Teacher's College of Columbia University, and a Professor of Pediatrics at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, also of Columbia.

Addressing over one hundred elected officials, children's service providers, advocates, educators, and

mental health professionals, Dr. Brooks-Gunn spoke about how "Families and Policies Matter: How to Enhance the Well-Being of Children in Poverty." She underlined the importance of school readiness and its role as an indicator for juvenile issues; because of this, early childhood care and education are increasingly important.

Dr. Brooks-Gunn offered suggestions to improve the quality of child care. She discussed the public policy surrounding child care and subsidies to it, and provided questions to ask concerning the improvement of all types of childcare centers. Her work



Dr. Jeanne Brooks-Gunn.

represents an important look at what research shows about early childhood care and education and its impact on children later in life.

The 2007 Advocacy Breakfast continued WCA's recent focus on early childhood mental health and development, a vital area for which WCA continues to advocate. ■

Summer Interns Advance WCA Projects

Once again, WCA's staff is enhanced this summer by several student interns. They bring outstanding intelligence, energy and commitment that help us move forward on many important projects.

Sarah Thompson is a senior at Cornell University, where she is double majoring in psychology and sociology. Sarah is interested in many children's issues, particularly education and children's mental health. She hopes to pursue these interests in the future by obtaining a Master's Degree in school psychology upon graduation from Cornell. At Westchester Children's Association, she is currently working on the Data Book project, which compiles information about numerous youth issues across all of Westchester County. Sarah's ability to intern at WCA is made possible by the Blumenthal

Summer Internship Program.

Jackie Zaneri lives in Mahopac, NY. This fall she will be a sophomore at Amherst College, where she plans to major in political science and possibly double major in German. Her interests include politics and government, international politics, and literature. At WCA, she has worked on the Data Book and on work concerning the 2007 county elections and her internship is supported through Amherst's Office of Career Services.

Marissa Nardi is a rising junior at Barnard College of Columbia University, where she is a pre-law student majoring in psychology and minoring in anthropology. Marissa is interested in a variety of children's issues, ranging from foster care to representation in the legal system. Previously, she was an intern in the office of County Legislator Michael



Summer interns Sarah Thompson and Marissa Nardi with WCA Deputy Director Allison Lake (standing).

Kaplowitz who represents her hometown of Somers. Marissa plans to become a litigation attorney with a specialization in children's advocacy. At Westchester Children's Association, she is currently working on the Data Book project and the parenting program study. Marissa's internship was generously funded by a grant from the Barnard College Office of Career Development. ■



WCA Welcomes Development Officer

On April 9th, we welcomed our new Development Officer, Elisabeth V. Steward,

who is usually called Betsy. A recent graduate of NYU's Certificate in Fundraising program, Betsy brings a variety of experience to her role at WCA. Prior to her enrollment at NYU, she was opera singer Elisabeth Van Ingen, and owner/operator of Computer Options, Inc., a software training company. A long-time resident of White Plains, Betsy and her husband, John Steward, have a son in White Plains Middle School, and a daughter who graduated from White

Plains High School. Having children in school has helped Betsy establish community connections. She recently finished her term as president of the Foundation for Public Education in White Plains.

Betsy has been enjoying getting acquainted with WCA's mission, goals, accomplishments, board, staff, and supporters. "It's been wonderful getting to know all the great people involved with this organization," says Betsy. "It is truly heart-warming to see all the people who really care about Westchester's children, and I'm very excited about helping to raise the funds WCA needs to continue its strong advocacy. I'm delighted to have been hired!" ■

In Memoriam

Eleanor Schwabe Wendeborn

Eleanor Schwabe Wendeborn, former Office Manager of the WCA's Guidance Center, died on February 14, 2007 at the age of 105 in Louisville, KY. Mrs. Wendeborn provided fifteen years of invaluable service to the Guidance Center, which was a direct service project of WCA that began 1944 and continued for over twenty years. She retired from the Guidance Center in 1966. The Center was the first free-standing clinic of its kind in Westchester County and was staffed with psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers who worked together to fulfill the needs of Westchester's children, regardless of income. In addition, the Center conducted research and pilot projects to determine the effectiveness of certain treatment and early education programs. ■



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works to ensure
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*healthy, safe and
 prepared for
 life's challenges.*

