

WCA Film Event Spotlights Foster Youth Needs While Raising Funds



WCA Program Director Allison Lake (center) with guests Dr. Liz Alderman (left) and Lauren Meller Maloff.



Guest Speaker Daniella Rin Hover with daughter Skye (seated), WCA Board member Lenore Rosenbaum (left) and Barbara Doctor.

On March 7, WCA friends and supporters gathered at the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville to see *Bound and Determined*, a documentary about the struggles of young people leaving foster care and achieving their dreams of independence. Director Roger Weisberg introduced the film, and Daniella Rin Hover, the film's subject, spoke and answered questions about her experience in foster care.

The needs of foster youth have long been a concern of WCA, which completed a study and developed recommendations on this topic in 2002. This spring, Westchester County will launch a new initiative to help foster teens become self-sufficient adults, and WCA has been actively advocating for needed changes.

Finding mentors for young people leaving foster care was a key recommendation of WCA's study and one for which the organization will be advocating. In discussing the needs of foster youth, Ms. Rin Hover remarked, "It is crucial that all youth leaving the system have a support net. There should be at least one individual that is saying, 'I'll be here with you, no matter what.'"

Among those attending the event were administrators from the County's Department of Social Services and leading foster care agencies. Cora Greenberg, Executive Director of WCA remarked, "We were delighted to have so many people at our event who share responsibility for Westchester's foster youth." She added, "We hope that many more people will be moved to help, either by becoming a mentor to a foster youth, volunteering at a foster care agency, or offering an entry level job to someone leaving foster care."

The Film Event, which included a buffet dinner, Silent Auction and Boutique, raised funds that WCA will use to strengthen its advocacy for all Westchester's children. ■

Save the Date

WCA Annual Meeting
WCA Annual Meeting
Friday, May 13, 2005
8 A.M. Breakfast & Program
Crowne Plaza, White Plains

*"Neighborhoods and Neurons:
 New Knowledge Helps Communities
 Promote Children's Mental Health."*
 Peter S. Jensen, M.D. Director,
 National Center for the Advance-
 ment of Children's Mental Health,
 Columbia University

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Child Health Updates

As part of its regular meetings, the WCA Board of Directors invites experts on children's issues to make brief educational presentations. Here are summaries of two recent talks:

White Plains Hospital Adds Full-Time Pediatric Staff, Designs Kid-Friendly ER

White Plains Hospital will soon have full-time pediatricians on site 24 hours a day. Dr. Stuart Bookner, the new Head of the Department of Pediatrics at the hospital, explained to the WCA Board that the new staffing pattern, while very expensive for the hospital, will ensure that children who come into the emergency room or are admitted to the hospital will always have access to appropriate pediatric care. Also, the Hospital is designing a special children's section in its new Emergency Room where appropriate equipment and supplies will be handy and children will not be exposed to possibly upsetting adult situations. As he pointed out, "Children are not just small adults."

Several years ago, recognizing that some ambulance and ER staff was not trained or equipped to handle children, WCA began a long term campaign to ensure that all children needing emergency medical care would be treated by appropriately trained staff and with appropriate equipment in all settings. As a result of WCA advocacy, Westchester County now offers special pediatric emergency training to ambulance volunteers, paramedics and EMTs at the Grasslands campus. The White Plains

Hospital's decision to have around-the-clock pediatric coverage on site and a child-oriented section of the ER are major improvements for the many children cared for at this busy and growing institution. ■

County Health Department Target Kids' Fitness, Nutrition

To combat the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, as well as to encourage healthy habits for life, the Westchester County Department of Health (WCDOH) has launched *Fit Kids*, a program which helps local schools improve the fitness and nutritional status of their students. Dr. Cheryl Archbald, WCDOH Deputy Commissioner, and nutritionist Carrie Aaron-Young explained that the Department gives schools lesson plans and activity guides, and even lends pedometers to encourage students' physical activity and healthy eating.

County nutritionists are available to help schools plan healthy—and tasty!—meals and to choose healthier items for vending machines. They also make presentations to parents and students. One very effective visual aide is a series of empty drink bottles containing only the amount of sugar in each type of drink. For example, a bottle of cola contains 17 teaspoons of sugar. Seeing the sugar heaped at the bottom of the bottle really brings the point home that soft drinks are mostly liquid sugar! So far, about a dozen schools or districts have participated in the program which is available at no cost. ■

Karen Schimke Briefs Advocates on NY State Budget

Members of two WCA-led advocacy coalitions gathered on March 2nd to hear about New York State Budget proposals affecting children, youth and families. Karen Schimke, Executive Director of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) presented an analysis of the Governor's proposals, as well as an overview of the Albany budget process. Listening were more than 25 members of the Campaign for Kids and the Westchester Child Health Task Force, two coalitions dedicated to keeping children's needs at the top of the public agenda.

According to Ms. Schimke, Medicaid is the major issue dominating the Albany budget season. In Westchester, nearly 100,000 people rely on Medicaid, about half of them children. Because counties bear such a large portion of the costs of Medicaid, local officials have been pressuring state law makers to pro-



Karen Schimke, Executive Director of the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA)

Karen Schimke on the NYS Budget, continued

vide relief to local taxpayers. Ms. Schimke felt it would be likely that some accommodation would be made, but that local tax relief might come at a cost to low-income children's health care.

This year the Governor has also proposed consolidating most of the funding it gives to counties as part of TANF surplus funding into a block grant, called the Flexible Fund for Family Services, that each county could spend as it sees fit. This Fund would include funding for adolescent pregnancy prevention, child care, post adoption services and other family support services, among other programs. This plan is likely to engender a great deal of opposition from service providers who rely on direct state funding or categorical county funding for services to low income children and families.

"It is vital for all child advocates to speak up during the budget process so that children's needs are not forgotten," Ms. Schimke said. "If we all deliver the clear, consistent message that children should be our number one priority, we can be successful," she added. For more information about the state budget, log on to the SCAA website at www.scaany.org. ■

WB4K: Westchester Business for Kids

Local businesses can play a large role in helping Westchester's children. WCA's newest initiative, Westchester Business for Kids, allows businesses to become part of a special group of supporters. This program will allow WCA to develop stronger relationships with local businesses and demonstrate that anyone can be a child advocate.

All members receive a sticker/sign to display in their store window or office to show their support of local Westchester children, all WCA publications keeping them informed of important issues facing children, special recognition in the WCA Journal, Annual Report and website, invitation to all WCA events, and priority in event sponsorship.

The annual membership fee is \$150 and can be made by check or credit card. For more information, contact Pat Mackin at the WCA office (914-946-7676)

The following is a list of WB4K's charter members:

- **Affinity Health Plan**
- **Casa Rustica Bonita, Mount Kisco.**
- **Community Choice Health Plan**
- **Hudson Health Plan**
- **La Dentelliere, Armonk.**
- **Lerner and Sipkin, CPAs, New York, NY.**
- **People Magazine**
- **Westmail Press, White Plains**

Westchester Children's Association works to ensure that all children are healthy, safe and prepared for life's challenges.

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Advocacy 101: How to Be an Effective Child Advocate

Have you ever wondered how to turn your concern for children into effective advocacy? WCA's newest website addition, Advocacy 101, is full of practical tips and suggestions about child advocacy. It describes what child advocacy is and why it is vital to a thriving community. It also goes into great detail about how one can communicate with elected officials through visits, phone calls, letters and email.

“We often hear from Westchester residents who are passionately concerned about a children’s issue but unsure how to influence public officials to make needed changes,”

said Cora Greenberg, WCA Executive Director. “The Advocacy 101 feature on our website is meant to help child advocates take the step from concern to action.”

The website, www.wca4kids.org, also features links where visitors can identify their elected officials and find out how to communicate directly with them in White Plains, Albany or Washington D.C. Log on to www.wca4kids.org today to start influencing laws, programs, and policies that affect the lives of children and youth. ■

Support WCA Today!

For the past 90 years, WCA has worked to ensure that all of Westchester’s children are healthy, safe and prepared for life’s challenges. We need your support so WCA can continue to speak out and mobilize support for children’s needs. All contributions to WCA are tax-deductible.

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