

# Milwaukee Brighter Futures

*A Better Community Through Prevention*

Summary of Meeting: April 20, 2010

## Child abuse prevention programs, activities outlined at April meeting

**REPORT OF MILWAUKEE BRIGHTER FUTURES MEETING, APRIL 20 AT AURORA FAMILY SERVICES.** The meeting started with the Brag Show, a slide show of pictures of youngsters as supplied by proud parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc. Aren't they cute!

Introductions were made.

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**A Panel discussion – “Child Abuse Prevention Month:” Featuring Mary Thomas, UWM; Carmen Pitre, Sojourner Family Peace Center; Lance Jones, Kids Matter; Jan Buchler, The Parenting Network**

**The Milwaukee CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program** was outlined by **Lance Jones**, of Kids Matter, Inc. Its role is to be a voice for abused, neglected and exploited children who are under legal protection of the Milwaukee County Circuit Court, Children's Court Division. CASA volunteers advocate for the rights of these children to grow up in safe, nurturing, and permanent homes.

Jones said the program began in 1979 when a judge decided that he needed more information on Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) cases; he put out a call for community volunteers to be trained to be observers and advocates for kids adjudicated as CHIPS. Currently 80 CASA's serve the Milwaukee area.

The training is rigorous: 34 hours of classroom and observation training – nearly as much as is required to be a foster parent. CASA volunteers invest a lot of time. Research shows that CASA reduces reentry into the Child Welfare system. He said that once a child achieves permanency with a parent or guardian or in long term foster care or adoption, CASA involvement prevents that child from being re-traumatized and re-entering the child welfare system.

Other programs at Kids Matter targets kinship care providers who step in to take care of their relatives before kids/families enter the child welfare system. He estimated there are 20,000 kids in Milwaukee County being raised by people other than their parents, the vast majority by relatives. Such voluntary placements provide a relative only \$220 per month.

**The Family Connections Program**, funded through Brighter Futures, combines initial assessment with other services to enhance positive parenting; legal services are also provided along with support in the process to help relatives get legal control of their child. Family Connections, after the placement is assessed, provides legal assistance in benefits along with assistance in education issues, victimization challenges, and other areas needing support. The program, he said, is aimed at including both court-ordered and voluntary kinship care providers to keep family with family. That is the best form of prevention, Jones added.

In answer to a question, Jones said CASA volunteers stay involved with kids only until the court order expires. If kids are aging out of foster care, CASA's maintain contact with kids to help them make the transition.

He also said the referrals must come exclusively through the court, since a court order is required because of extraordinary access to information.

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**Mary Thomas, of University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee**, discussed the changes at the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. She said BMCW got a new director, Arlene Happach, as a result of deaths in foster care. The new director brings clinical/management experience from work in Illinois, where she was co-chair of an Illinois task force to redesign child welfare system, which focused on performance-based contracting.

A lawsuit dating back 15 years still defines a lot of what the Bureau does, she said, with several issues remaining: placement stability; 40% of kids in foster care have two or more placements; more timely reunification within 12 months; adolescents losing their placement and remaining too long in stabilization centers.

There is concern regarding the fragmentation of the system due to privatization; concern about the Safety Services program, on the question: is it really voluntary? There is thinking that it should be used as a 'deferred prosecution' type thing where if a family accepts Safety Services the case won't go to court but if they don't comply, case would go to court. The new BMCW director is interested in outcomes, Thomas continued. The Bureau has a lot of data but little information and the information not used to make decisions and set priorities.

Thomas said there have been a lot of changes over the past several years, making it hard to get focused. New change: nurses will accompany initial assessment workers on kids 0 to 3. Major change to kinship relatives: they will be licensed and this will enable state to garner additional federal money. Placement will be based on kids' needs and this may have a negative impact on relatives taking care of kids where the Bureau may not think they're qualified. The BMCW is also looking at improving initial assessment and revising their assessment processes. It wants to have a more comprehensive assessment process, with more emphasis on strengths. "We need to make sure we stay on top of this," she added.

**The MCAPS Public Policy Committee**, of which Thomas is co-chair, has expressed its concern about independent living services provided to all kids until age 21. She said the committee has made this issue a top priority.

Other issues being addressed: Need for reduction in turnover at the bureau; more coordination between W2 and child welfare; use of coordinated service teams is also an improvement, but a problem is that not all the actors are always there – short notice keeps teachers and others from attending.

Among some exciting happenings, she said, was creation of Families Come First Initiative to address racial disparities (Meta House), and the effort of the BMCW to better engage fathers. She invited all present to attend the Public Policy Committee meetings at 2:30 p.m. at the United Way, 235 W. Vine St.

**Jan Buchler, executive director of The Parenting Network**, said the Brighter Futures funds the Community Response program, also known as Family Links, providing for 1.6 FTE serving 72 active families. She said there is a wonderful network of community services with a lot of improvement in the past four years. She suggested having each Bureau site linked to a CBO that would work with the site so that Bureau could refer families to get very individualized resources in the home.

She cited the case of a family in a single hotel room at \$35 a night. There are four children and the mother, who is on SSI, but the family needs financial help every month. The case doesn't rise to child abuse or neglect levels, but there are definite challenges for the family that could move it to that level. She questioned: Are there better ways to organize/coordinate our services in the community? She said the "challenge to you is that we come together more intentionally to coordinate services for people more effectively." She added there is a fine line between prevention and intervention, but that Bureau workers don't necessarily agree on this, which affects how they spend safety services dollars.

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**Carmen Pitre, executive director of Sojourner Family Peace Center**, said the agency serves 30,000-35,000 clients a year; all affected by a lifetime of violence. There are generational histories of violence. The best way to keep a kid safe is to make sure there's no violence in the home. She said the effort needs to get more upstream. Domestic violence work started in the crisis arena in which victims needed shelter. She urged changes in criminal justice policy and more community based solutions to DV.

Overarching themes: How to get fathers to change their behavior? Criminal justice impact of frequent appearances before a judge; more movement toward change. Children – big motivator for fathers. Women do the same – will try to change for their kids. "We created a doorway for people to come through on behalf of their kids," she said. There are 1,000-1,200 parents who are seeking safety for their children through environmental and legal protections, etc. How to keep parents in a protective place? No matter what your intentions are, your own history of abuse can prevent efforts to protect children. Witness of violence – will predict problems later. Focus on kids 0-5 to help them with that trauma. Parents want better lives for their children but get tripped up by their own histories.

Pitre said: Children are starving for positive relationships with their parents – regardless of what

happened. “We need to take that seriously – and working to keep that connection,” she added.

Multi-disciplinary approaches are warranted, since 90% of cases are co-occurring sexual abuse, DV, and CAN. The indicators are bad with more homicides related to DV (12 DV in 1<sup>st</sup> 2 months), despondency, people staying in more complicated situations, and finding it harder to get out.

The Sojourner Family Peace Center helps people be survivors. BF funds a 12-week family program – a child witness to DV program that sits atop a case management program. It involves safety planning with kids, help for parents re-parenting, graduation with moms talking about their children in a positive way. The agency wants to run this program for fathers. There was a study with the Homicide Review Team publishing a paper regarding children’s exposure to violence. The agency also runs weekly family fun nights for graduates.

A Medical College project on preventing violence focused on two areas of the city where there are existing collaborations. It included written and oral interviews and was based on preventing youth violence from an asset-based/resiliency perspective. Pitre suggested that BF have someone from MCW make a presentation on this new project.

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**UNCOM:** Terrence Maggitt reported. He gave a update on 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, and said that all the numbers are good. A few sites have missing data regarding ethnicity and birth dates.

Racquel Bell reiterated that agencies have to comply with UNCOM or payments will be held up. She said

Terrence will provide individual technical assistance so agencies need to take advantage of that.

Terrence assured participants that all data is secure and is masked from any other agency in the UNCOM system. There was a comment regarding the use of the system to track outcomes. He asked agencies not to wait until the last minute to enter data. Terrence will now be tracking monthly to avoid the last minute rush.

Coming dates: July 15<sup>th</sup> - next reporting deadline. Training May 11<sup>th</sup> at the UNCOM office and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month. Terrence urged agencies to enter data regularly so that there will be less of a rush.

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**Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network (TPPN):**

Racquel Bell reported that the TPPN Teen Summit was occurring today (April 20) and that 300 students at Milwaukee New School for Community Service were attending. There were 10 workshops with 6-7 led by youth ambassadors. She urged people to drop in to the summit.

Family Unity Night planning is moving along, with County Supervisor Peggy West on board and willing to be a sponsor, speak at the event, and help out with media. All BF agencies have received a FUN packet to recruit families to participate. The June event at the Washington Park bandshell is a kick off for the October event. Youth ambassadors are developing a video promoting FUN; additional information will be sent to BF agencies asking agencies to contribute \$25 if 3 or fewer families are participating and \$50 if more than 3. There was a comment regarding Stouffer’s sponsorship of family dinner programs; Channel 4 or 6 also recently did a story on this topic.

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Thanks to Jan Wilberg for recording these minutes.

**April 20, 2010**  
**Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance**

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Agency</b>
Terri	Strodthoff	Alma Center Inc
Cyndie	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Christina	Treiber	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Anna Elizabeth	Lee	COA YFC
Kari	Nervig	COA YFC - Riverwest Ctr
Heather	Monroe	COA-Milwaukee Public Allies
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Wendy	Mc Carty	Dept. of Children and Families
Mark	O'Neil	Diverse & Resilient
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Marina	Acosta-Fowlkes	La Causa
Juanita	Valcarcel	Latino Community Center
Brittany	Gresl	Marquette Univ. Behavior Clinic
Carole	Poth	Marquette Univ. Center for Peacemaking
Kenyatta	Martin	MATC
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Kathi	Boyce	Milwaukee Christian Center
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Diamond	Archibald	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Anita	Spencer	New Concept Self Development
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Sherri	Daniels	Pathfinders
Joseph	Stanley	Pathfinders Youth Shelter
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Susan	Tragesser	Planning Council
Thelma	Newby	SET Ministries
Sandra	Garcia	Sojourner Family Peace Center
Pat	Holland	Sojourner Family Peace Center
Michelle	Scott-Grant	St. Amelian Lakeside
Carmen	Pitre	Task Force on Family Violence
Jan	Buchler	The Parenting Network
Viki	Olsen	The Parenting Network
Daphne	Jackson	United Healthcare
Terrence	Maggit	United Neighborhood Centers of Milw
Mary	Thomas	UWM-School of Social Welfare
Nina	Cunningham	Vincent Family Center
Marissa	Lopez	Walker's Point Youth and Family Ctr.
JohnRae	Stowers	Wis. Foundation of Independent Colleges