

Brighter Futures

A Better Community Through Prevention

Website: <http://milwaukeebrighterfutures.org>



Meeting Summary • Dec. 16, 2008

Ombudsman office role outlined: Reviews, assists in child welfare cases

The Milwaukee Ombudsman for Child Welfare exists not only to review complaints about individual cases but to also point out potential improvements in the child welfare system.

In a presentation before the December Brighter Futures meeting, Pam Matthews, executive director of the Office of the Milwaukee Ombudsman for Child Welfare, outlined the role of the office, which was developed as part of the Governor's Kids First initiative and began operations in June, 2005.



Pam Matthews

She noted that the Milwaukee office, which is operated through a contract with the Planning Council for Health and Social Services, is a classic "ombudsman" model in that it is completely independent and acts as an impartial observer, strictly looking at the facts of the cases.

She described the ombudsman as a neutral and independent agency with the authority to review "case specific complaints," she said. "However, we don't put blinders on. If something else jumps out at us, we don't ignore it." The office does have the ability through its reviews to help the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare do its job better, she said. "Our office can have a big impact," Matthews added.

The office's contract with the state requires OMOCW to encourage people to first use the complaint resolution process within the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. None-

theless, she said, the ombudsman office does not turn away a complaint, if the caller is reluctant to use the BMCW procedure.

Almost anyone can file a complaint, she said, encouraging persons to call, even if they are unsure that it's appropriate. "When in doubt, give us a call." The kind of questions the agency asks are pretty basic, she said. The office also spends a lot of time working with complainants to determine what the actual issue is, since many times people have trouble articulating their problems.

The office does not handle complaints involving foster home licensing, foster care payments or court decisions. As far as court decisions goes, she said, the office can look at issues raised if the complainant says the Bureau provided wrong information to the court. "However, we have no jurisdiction over the courts," she said.

There are some time constraints, and the office likely won't consider cases more than a year old because people's memories often are difficult and sometimes the case workers involved are gone, Matthews said.

She said that in most cases the callers have never heard of the BMCW's complaint resolution process even though they were provided information at the beginning of the case. The callers will be referred to the process, and the ombudsman office will follow up on the case. She said the office will keep the complainants' names and particulars confidential if they wish.

Matthews said that of the 76 people referred in the first nine

(Continued on Next Page)

Milwaukee Brighter Futures is a coalition of 80 organizations whose mission is to develop strategies geared toward preventing child abuse and neglect, inspiring greater hope for youth, building stronger families and creating better neighborhoods. The Milwaukee Brighter Futures Initiative is funded by the State of Wisconsin. Contact information: Racquel Bell, Coordinator, 4906 W. Fond du Lac Ave., Milwaukee 53216. 414-449-4777. email to:

Ombudsman role told

(Continued from Page One)

months of 2008 to the complaint resolution process, approximately one third got their complaint resolved in 30 days, one third were not satisfied and asked for a review and the ombudsman followed through, and one third where the office was unable to track. The BMCW has 30 days to respond to a complaint from the ombudsman.

She said the ombudsman's role is to look at whether the bureau followed its prescribed policies and procedures and the law; it also looks at areas in which there is no violation of the law but in which there is a concern which may require some changes in law and procedures. Matthews said the office also looks as to whether the Bureau follows its mission.

She said that the office is starting to look at whether the training of workers has been adequate as well as to suggest ways to help the bureau improve its practices.

The office has a category called "other findings" that covers concerns or violations found that are not specifically covered in the original complaint. It will identify any concerns or violations it finds.

The most frequent complaints involve placement issues, she said. The complaint form used by the office is available from its website.

By September 30 this year, the agency completed 20 reviews, while five continue in the process. Those reviews covered 52 separate issues, and the office affirmed the Bureau's actions in 47 of the cases. Among those, there were four concerns and one actual violation of the law. In the reviews, however, the office found another ten issues, and two of those were violations of the law.

"We're not out there to find fault with the bureau," she said. "Our goal is to assist the BMCW in making changes to its policies and procedures that will improve the safety, permanence and well-being of children in their care."

Of the 25 recommendations made in the cases, five of them were case specific and 20 were more systemic in nature, she said.

"We can't enforce our recommendations," Matthews said. The agency hopes to get its recommendations out to the public so that the public may take action.

Matthews said she would be happy to make similar presentations to other groups and organizations. Contact her at 224-1347 or <http://ombudsmanmilw.org>.

Tips on having a safe holiday with your family

Jan Buchler of the Parenting Network presented several ideas on how to have safe and interesting projects for the family during the holidays.

"I want to give you ideas for family fun that are a little unusual," she said, noting that her agency which operates the Family Helpline gets many calls during the holidays from many families who may be "overdosed with fun." When the weather is bad, and families are isolated inside, it's

nice to have things to do to occupy the family.

She passed out several handouts: 1) "Ideas for Family Holiday Fun," listing nine suggestions for creating family traditions; 2) "Tips on Coping With Greed," in providing ways to get children to focus less on material goods; and 3) Various worksheets that encourage children to draw.

"There's an opportunity during holiday times to do things for people," she said. She suggested doing things such as recycling toys by donating them to institutions or other families in need of toys.

Buchler suggested one project that involved making ornaments that have sentiments written on them, and putting them on the tree. She told of a family in which a grandmother was raising six children and that involved the children writing wishes for each other and placing them on the tree to be read on Christmas Day.

(Photo at Left) Buchler concluded with a group signing of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" involving participants stand when the month of their birth was sung out; for instance, the "first day of Christmas" is January, the second day is February, and so on.



What made agencies proud during 2008!

Agency representatives listed their proudest accomplishments on sheets at December BF meeting!

Agape Community Center. Six participants went to college from their program, stayed in school and successfully transitioned to adulthood.

Walkers Point Empowerment Program. The “amazing” teams of volunteers and staff who handle the programs and work with the “amazing” teens and parents. A community of Networks that shares goals and resources.

Alma Center. Completed pilot test of Wisdom Walk trauma recovery program and presentation by the graduates to discuss the changes.

Task Force on Family Violence. Proud to work with the “amazing” families within the CWTDV groups.

Bethany Christian. The agency provided infant adoption awareness training to 400 persons from more than 150 agencies, including most major hospitals, Planned Parenthood clinics, schools, colleges, etc.

Office of Milwaukee Ombudsman. Increased outreach and making the office more visible as well as increased level of commitment to helping complainants through the complaint review process and a new focus on best practices.

COA. Developed new program structure at Goldin Center, focusing on more educational activities and highlighting recreation. Partnering with the Riverwest Center to create uniformity throughout COA.

Marquette University CREC Peer Mediation. Developed collaboration between law school, school of education, center for Peacemaking and MPS violence prevention program. The Passion of commitment is inspiring.

Milwaukee Christian Center. Program’s increased focus on parent involvement and with families that culminated with Family Unity Day on Oct. 9. Si se puede!

The Parenting Network. Strong collaboration with the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. A productive and open process.

Parents Plus. Invited to speak at National

Conference of the PTA on parental involvement.

Parents Plus (Vista School Sites, Business and Economics Academy of Milwaukee). Building staff and community buy-in for parental involvement program, leading to more parents attending BEAM meetings and events.

Big Brothers Big Sisters. Our focus on quality and safety and longer lasting matches between mentors and children.

DWD/DCF. W-2 complaints for 2008 are about 1/3 less than in 2007. IDPA monitoring implemented in tandem with goal of “self-sufficiency.”

Pathfinders. Reaching more than 800 youth and teaching them how to prevent themselves from being sexually assaulted.

Boys and Girls Clubs. Working with young women and teaching them how to reach goals for college and beyond through Sista Pride. Teen becoming youth of the year due to involvement with Sista Pride and Boys and Girls Club programs.

St. Gabriel’s Church. Made a significant impact in high school graduation rate and with fathers having a meaningful relationship with children. Completed the cycle by directing those aged out to military services, vocational training, employment of high education.

MAHP. Staff’s ability to adjust and deal with adversity and still put youth first by attempting to meet their needs, whatever they are.

Latino Community Center. Organization stayed focuses on its principal mission in spite of major changes in leadership. Accomplished all program goals and served more youth than projected.

Milwaukee Health Department. Creation of Men’s Health Office, scheduled for 2009.

Modjeska Youth Theatre Co. Production of three full length musicals which featured a large spectrum of youth from different social, economic and racial backgrounds on



stage in a teen building effort to help promote diversity in the arts.

2 – 1 – 1 @ IMPACT. Staff handled record number of callers for the year (Over 129,000!)

Neu-Life Community Center. Added on a second site and agency now serving double the number of children and touching their lives in a positive way.

MKE LGBTCC. Increasing the ladder of opportunity for the youth by changing to a membership model and being able to hire two of the youth leaders as staff.

West Allis Police Dept. Community Alliance Against Drugs activities.

Perez-Pena Ltd. (FISS program). Sharing information from Brighter Futures programs with families to help empower them with resources and information.

IMPACT. Wrapped up Drug-Free Communities Program. Five years of training and other activities that built awareness of teen substance abuse prevention.

Pathfinders Youth Shelter. Media campaign to address youth homelessness and create community awareness for action. In 2007, served 238 youth in shelter and served 4,715 youth in the Street Beat (outreach) program.

Vincent Family Center. New staff (Ms. Kelly Young) and new youth programs.

The Parenting Network. Adolescent parents very interested in early brain development and providing rich experiences for their new babies.

Safe and Sound. Collaborating with the District Attorney’s Office, we helped young criminal offenders (drug and graffiti primarily) avoid lifelong felony convictions while helping to repair the harm to the community through interaction with other youth and residents in a positive manner.

December 2008 Brighter Futures Meeting Attendance (Listed by Agency)

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Eva	Spencer	Agape
Janeen	Boone	Agape Community Center
Terri	Strodthoff	Alma Center Inc
Stephanie	Jung	BEAM
Cyndie	Ody-Weis	Bethany
Karina	Simons	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Amy	Chionchio	Big Brothers Big Sisters
Sandy	Malone	Boys and Girls Club
Danielle	Luer	COA YFC - Goldin Center
Andrea	Kurth	COA Youth and Family Centers
Racquel	Bell	Community Advocates
Aricka	Evans	Community Advocates
Kenneth	Germanson	Community Advocates
Joe	Volk	Community Advocates
Stella	Montoya	Greenfield School
Peggy	Neal	Heartlove Place
Bob	Waite	IMPACT
Duncan	Shrout	IMPACT Inc.
Maria	Kolda	IMPACT, Inc.
Clarence	Rice	Innerworks
Joel	Nelson	Journey House
Jorge	Perez	Latino Community Center
Jennifer	Carrasco	Marquette University
Natalie	Fleury	Marquette University
Robert	Fox	Marquette University

First Name	Last Name	Agency
Lenora	Shaw	Milwaukee Adolescent Health Program
Emilio	Lopez	Milwaukee Christian Center
Shirley	Senaya	Milwaukee Health Dept.
Julie	Bock	Milwaukee LGBT
Sgt. Risa	Cain	Milwaukee Police Dept. Comm. Serv. Div.
David	O'Day	Modjeska Youth Theatre Co.
Jody	Rhodes	Neu-Life Community Resource Ctr
Trudy	Ranallo	Parents Plus, Inc.
Lisa	Gumm	Pathfinders
Marge	Kreuser	Perez-Pena, LTD
Tiffany	Stark	Rep. Tamara Grigsby
Joseph	Kubisiak	Safe & Sound
Pastor	Shaw	St. Gabriel COGIC
Lee A.		
Greg	Lewis	St. Gabriel's COGIC
Theresa	Post	Task Force on Family Violence
Cathy	Arney	The Counseling Center
Jan	Buchler	The Parenting Network
Megan	Thompson	Vincent Family Resource Center
Mary Pat	O'Hara	Walkers Point Youth and Family Ctr.
Lt. Edward	Benish	West Allis Police Department
Charles	Unger	West Allis Police Department
Monica	Lawrence	Wis Dept of Health and Human Serv.

Please send any corrections to
keng@communityadvocates.net
NOTE: All Brighter Futures funded agencies are expected to attend
monthly MYFDA meetings, according to their contract.

Visit our website:
<http://milwaukeebrighterfutures.org>