

Children's Services Update

Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor • John B. Mattingly, Commissioner

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ChildStat session at 66 John Street where frank discussions focus on urgent issues.



The smiling faces behind the masks are of children with good reason for their joy. See the Family Fun Day article on page 8.



Commissioner Mattingly with new CPS graduates Rafael Santiago, Anelba Bonilla and Ricardo Gonzales (l-r). For more on the graduation, please go to page 5.

Last spring, a Child Protection Manager (CPM) presented a case to ChildStat where an infant drowned while bathing with his brother in a tub of water. Much of what was done was right – the brother was removed to his father's house, the mother was assessed as mentally challenged, and plans were put in place for visitation. But there was a missing link. "What about the brother?" someone asked. "What has your follow-up been with him? Is he

see the children prior to the incident? Does he need help in caring for the toddler? What about some services for him?"

It's moments such as these that make ChildStat so fraught with tension and emotion. And it's precisely moments such as these that make it so effective.

Things do get hot at ACS on Thursday mornings when ChildStat is held. And it's not because the room is crowded, the microphones too loud, or the PowerPoint statistics overwhelming. ChildStat began in July, 2006 as part of Children's Services' Safety Reform initiatives and at its weekly sessions, the room is packed for the purpose of some straight talk. Frank discussion focuses on common issues, big and small – everything from the need for air conditioners in a field office, to the need for extra slots (continued on page 6)

"...everyone who heard the feedback is trying to put more into the work that they do."

receiving services? He has to have been traumatized." Another questioner piped in: "And who is this father? What do we know about him? How often did he

COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE



Helping the children who come into our care to achieve permanency is one of the most important things we do at Children's Services. Whether it's safe reunification with parents or adoption by a loving family, we want to see children settled with the adults who are committed to being there forever. We believe there is a strong, loving family out there for every one of our young people who need a home – and that families are what children most need to grow up and reach their full potential.

Our challenge is to help bring these matches about. Unfortunately, some crucial factors are not under our control – for example, the extremely busy Family Court is overloaded with work, which has caused delays in Permanency Hearings. I have advocated for an increase in Family Court judges to ease this problem. The judges and I are also concerned that, when a case planner or an ACS worker does not appear at a hearing, months can be lost before the hearing can be rescheduled. That's why it is crucial that everyone come to scheduled hearings.

Fortunately, we have been able to make a real difference in bringing about adoptions through our monthly "matching conferences," which have been in effect for the past year or so. Under this model, we are giving would-be adoptive parents a chance to advocate for themselves – as well as the opportunity for the agency representatives to advocate more directly and personally for the children.

"Usually, parents who apply to be adoptive parents do a home study and then sit home and wait," explains **Antoinette Nelson**, Director of Adoption Support Services. "These conferences give them a chance to meet with agency reps up to three times a month and hear about children who are available for adoption. They can see pictures of children, hear their

poetry, see their artwork. And it's also an opportunity for anyone who's advocating for the child – an attorney, a law guardian – to also speak for the child, to talk about the child's strengths."

At the same time, Antoinette points out, the adults hoping to adopt can actively advocate for themselves. "The home studies are written by agency workers; they don't reflect who the adoptive parent is." But in these conferences, the parents can talk about themselves and their families. They can point out that their yard is big enough for the dog that one child so fervently wants; they can point out that they are lifelong musicians who would adore helping a child get started on an instrument.

One couple intent on adopting a younger child heard about a 13-year old who loved the theater – as it turned out, the couple loved theater as well, and that common interest brought them all together. This model, which Antoinette and **Delphinne (Vanessa) Gamble** will present at the December meeting of the Child Welfare League in New Orleans, was developed at Children's Services, and we are very proud of it. "Usually agencies are hesitant to make matches because maybe 10 people have called and sent in home studies for one child, and they don't know how to pick a family to follow up on," says Assistant Commissioner **Iris Kaplan**, who helped to implement the model with former Deputy Commissioner Jeanette Ruiz, now a Family Court Judge. "At the conferences, the family is real, and more tangible, and it makes it easier for the agencies," Iris explains.

So far, the results look good. For all of 2006, a total of 338 hard-to-place children were presented at an agency matching conference. Of that number, 80 were placed in pre-adoptive homes. More than two-thirds of the children that were placed with a prospective adoptive family were older youth; the oldest child being matched and placed was a 19-year old.

November is National Adoption Month, but at Children's Services, we're committed to making adoptions happen 365 days a year.

John B. Mattingly
Commissioner

HEART GALLERY NYC CELEBRATES CHILDREN AWAITING ADOPTION

Latonya Pew of Queens, foster mother of eleventh-grader Tyrone, is going through the process of adopting him. They met last December and Tyrone filled the gap in her heart after the passing of her daughter. Pew says, "It was a match made in heaven. My 'soon-to-be' son is a good entertainer and a people person. He is energetic, out-going and has a bubbly personality."



Siblings Justin, 9, Adiles, 6, and Joseph, 5 at the July launch of the Heart Gallery NYC.

Heart Gallery NYC is designed to bring about more adoptive matches like that of Pew and Tyrone. Heart Gallery NYC is a not-for-profit organization that works with ACS to help find permanent, loving adoptive families for New York City children in foster care. The exhibit displays the work of renowned photographers who produced 50 portraits that capture the personalities, spirit and individuality of New York City children in foster care who also are seeking a loving family to adopt them. A special reception and a Mayoral proclamation this past July highlighted the grand opening of the exhibit at the Times Square Info Center in Manhattan. Heart Gallery NYC has since made its way to the Queens Center Mall, the Brooklyn Public Library and to Penn Station. These children, mostly teenagers, are united by their hope for a brighter future.

The Division of Family Permanency Services' **Keema Davis**, who was formerly in foster care, offered an insight from her experience. "Talk with your family, neighbors or colleagues and stress how they can make a difference in a child's life and give him or her a happy ending," said Davis. "That is what my foster parents did for me. I am now on my way to earning my second Masters, an MBA."

To inquire about a child photographed for Heart Gallery NYC, call 3-1-1 or 212-676-WISH to speak with a Parent Recruitment Associate.

Office of Safety First—A Critical Link for Mandated Reporters

The phones are ringing off the hook at the Office of Safety First, but that doesn't stop the four highly trained Safety Liaisons from knocking one another over in their enthusiastic efforts to pick up those calls. "We had to divvy up the phone responsibilities, with two members of our office answering calls in the morning and two others in the afternoon because everyone was so anxious to get on those phones and give assistance to our callers," says **Susan Sampogna**, Director of the Office of Safety First.

But that's good news for the 300-400 people who call the office every month—teachers, police officers, doctors, and social workers, to name just a few—mandated reporters who have a concern about a child abuse investigation. It may need immediate attention from a qualified and knowledgeable source at ACS—a real person on the end of the phone who will answer questions, make connections, help to navigate the system, and follow through. "I sometimes think, 'Wow, if we weren't here, where would these people call?'" says **Damaris Rosario**, who worked as a Staff Attorney at Bronx Family Court and, at ACS, as a Child Protective Specialist before joining Safety First. "We're establishing a reputation for getting information quickly and in a concise manner, and that's important. The smallest things can make it easier for people at a stressful time."

The Office of Safety First was created in January 2006 as a special hotline for mandated reporters to ensure clear and direct lines of communication between mandated reporters and ACS staff. The purpose of the Office is to address ongoing safety concerns and to facilitate a partnership between Child Protective Services and the mandated reporter in the best interest of the child. The Office of

Safety First provides immediate assistance to agencies such as schools, hospitals, City agencies, social service providers and child care programs that have concerns related to an open child protective investigation. The Safety Liaisons often find themselves in the role of translator or navigator. "If there's a safety situation or immediate concern, we advise the reporter to call the State Central Register (SCR) and walk them through that process, using our experience to take them to the next stage and correct common misperceptions, most importantly the myth that ACS will snatch a child from his home if a caller makes a report," says **Melissa Lippiello**, who previously worked with ACS as a Staff Attorney in Bronx Family Court.



Safety First Liaisons (l-r) Karen Roach, Tanisha Hopkins, Damaris Rosario, Director Susan Sampogna and Melissa Fiore Lippiello.

Experience is, indeed, the key to the effectiveness of Safety First, and the staggering institutional knowledge of the staff includes: Sampogna's background as the Director of Social Services for the Congregate Care Program at Catholic Guardian Society and Home Bureau; **Tanisha Hopkins'** years at ACS as a CPS and in Home-finding, PES and Family Home Care; **Karen Roach's** work in the Office of Special Investigations as a CPS; and the aforementioned Rosario and Lippiello. With their diversity of experience and background, the staff functions as a team, often putting a caller on hold while they turn around and ask a question which is not directly in their area of expertise, waiting for a colleague to thumb through a Statute book,

a Department of Education directory, or a binder of resources to come up, immediately, with an answer or referral.

A full 52 percent of calls into the office come from teachers, with another 10 percent coming from non-profit agencies. "A case might be closed for investigation but open for services, and then a social worker sees something new," Sampogna continues, "We're the first call for that person."

Safety First is working hard to make its presence – and its mission – known, internally and externally. "We're not here to field complaints about our caseworkers," Roach explains, "We've been there. We know that a CPS who's doing her job is rarely at her desk and that when she's in court she turns off her phones. So we'll take the call from someone who's trying to reach a child's case worker, and we'll collaborate to make sure that they connect."

To make themselves known to the public, the Safety First staff goes out to schools, family courts, hospitals, and even fun fairs, getting out their purpose and, most vitally, their phone number. They do frequent mailings and, in September, sent out more than 3,000 information packages to 1,500-plus schools. The Office also makes efforts to build good working relationships with mandated reporters, especially those who have a special involvement with the children,

like guidance counselors and preventive workers.

Ultimately, when a caller hears the words, "Hello, ACS Office of Safety First," she will know that whatever she is calling about, there will be a discrete, knowledgeable, voice on the other end to provide answers, direct action when appropriate, and follow-up no matter what. In short, that person won't be left hanging.

Mandated reporters only should call 718-KID-SAFE for inquiries about child investigations in which they are involved.

New Appointments at Children's Services

Commissioner John B. Mattingly has made a number of high-level appointments this past year. Please welcome them to our ACS family.



Jan Cummings-Grayson began as the Director for Internal Staff Training for ACS Child Care Client Services this past January. Cummings-Grayson develops curricula and conducts trainings for ACS staff and other populations to assist in providing high quality, in-depth services to child care clients. She reports to Joyce Wallace, in Child Care Client Services for the Division of Child Care and Head Start. She most recently served as CEO of JC Consulting, which she founded and whose mission is to serve youth in "at-risk" environments for the purpose of helping them achieve educational, professional and personal success.



Jairo Guzman is the Executive Director of the Office of Parent Recruitment and Retention. Guzman is responsible for the agency's efforts in finding foster and adoptive parents, and guiding development of the necessary support services for them. He most recently worked at the New York Foundling where he was Regional Director providing management oversight in Queens of NY Foundling's programs, with particular responsibility for its Placement Services Program. Guzman actually is returning to ACS, where he worked in various capacities from 1999-2003, including in the Office of Management Development and Research.



Renee Rosenberg Jaffe is the Executive Director of Child Care Field Operations where she oversees the administration of child care services at Human Resources Administration's (HRA) Job Centers, which serves the public assistance population throughout the five boroughs. Rosenberg, who was a senior social worker, previously worked at HRA as the Director of Business Link's Grant Diversion program, a financial incentives/wage subsidy program.



Valerie Moore joins the Office of Communications staff as Public Affairs Specialist. A 6-year veteran of the Office of Policy and Research, Moore most recently was Senior Program Analyst with the Office of Strategic Resource Management and Reporting under the Division of Policy and Planning. She brings an additional 8 years of expertise from her work in government and press information. As Public Affairs Specialist, Moore will coordinate external relation efforts with the Division of Child Care/Head Start, edit and oversee the "Ask the Commissioner" feature on the Intranet, and coordinate special events planning.



Nicole Navas joins ACS as Deputy Press Secretary in the Office of Communications. Navas most recently worked as Deputy Director of Communications in the office of the Queens District Attorney the

past five years. As Deputy Press Secretary reporting to Director of Communications Sharman Stein, Navas assists in responding to press inquiries, writing press advisories and press releases, working with agency programs to develop and promote outreach initiatives, as well as updating the ACS Web site and Intranet and editing the weekly ACS e-Bulletin.



Aisha M. Taylor joins Children Services as Procedures Director for the Child Care Operations Unit where she coordinates the creation and revision of the Unit's procedural documents and correspondences. Taylor most recently worked with the New York City Department of Investigation as a Background Investigator and Staff Trainer.



Danielle Weisberg is Chief of Staff to Deputy Commissioner of Family Support Services **Liz Roberts**. Weisberg joins Children's Services from the Juvenile Rights Division of The Legal Aid Society, most recently as a Supervising Social Worker in the Brooklyn Office. In her role as Chief of Staff, Weisberg is the project manager for the implementation of Improved Outcomes for Children for preventive services and is responsible for the coordination of cross-divisional efforts to restructure the delivery of preventive services.

Farewell to Zeinab Chahine

Executive Deputy Commissioner **Zeinab Chahine** left Children's Services in August after 22 years of dedicated service. Chahine joined Casey Family Programs in September in its new Manhattan office as Managing Director Strategic Consulting. During her tenure at ACS, Chahine held various leadership roles, beginning as a child protection worker to eventually becoming Executive Deputy Commissioner overseeing major efforts that helped to transform many aspects of this agency's work, especially Child Protective Services. "I've seen the system from every level," says Chahine. "I filter everything I do based on my early experience as a caseworker. Unless you support people on the frontlines doing the work, you can't expect the quality of care you need to help children and families." Chahine will be bringing her knowledge, expertise and compassion for children to a national setting.

"The child welfare field is lucky to have Zeinab working on the national scene, and we hope to continue to benefit from her consultation and guidance," said Commissioner Mattingly.



Zeinab Chahine

New Crop of Graduates Join “Angels on Assignment”

One-by-one the nervous men and women took the stage and shook Commissioner **John Mattingly**'s hand – officially acknowledging their status as the new child protection specialists – 459 of them. They graduated from the James Satterwhite Academy to join the frontlines of child protection at Children's Services. At the graduation ceremony on October 19 at the Hunter College Brookdale Auditorium, Commissioner Mattingly called them “courageous men and women who have dedicated themselves to keeping children safe and strengthening families.” The graduating class also viewed a new, short film, *We Are ACS*, which was produced by the Children's Services Video Unit.

Energizing the new workers and delivering the keynote address was Rev. Alfonso Wyatt, Vice President of the Fund for the City of New York and Assistant Pastor of the Allen AME Church, Queens. “This city needs you,” said Rev. Wyatt, describing the new CPS as “angels on assignment.” He told them that being a CPS “is more than just a job; you didn't pick this job, this job picked some of you because you had issues and someone helped you. Many of you have come forward to help those who are broken.”

The graduating class included recent college graduates as well as individuals who are making career changes, including some who

have previously worked in child welfare. One graduate worked several years as a hospital administrator, while another served in Iraq as an Army National Guardsman. The graduates are ethnically diverse, from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, the West Indies, Russia



Rev. Alfonso Wyatt brings down the house during his keynote address to CPS graduates. Photo Credit: Christopher Auger-Dominiguez

and Africa. Many are native New Yorkers, who will be working in the borough in which they grew up and received their education. The graduating class is predominately female, although about 50 of them are men who are joining this very challenging field.

Also speaking at the graduation was **Mecca Phinizy** who is working in the Office of

Special Investigations and was formerly in foster care. Phinizy encouraged her colleagues to “keep your eyes on the prize that you will help keep the children of New York City safe, no matter how challenging and time consuming the task may seem to be.” The other graduate addressing his peers was **Rafael Santiago**, who related how his own father was abandoned as an infant and adopted. Santiago, who is based in the Bronx, noted that being a CPS “might be difficult and stressful, but I wake up every morning knowing that I have done something.”

The new class of graduates brings the total number of ACS frontline caseworkers and other child welfare investigators to nearly 1,300. The new CPS workers successfully completed a rigorous 6-week program at the Satterwhite Academy, and have been deployed to ACS's 14 field offices throughout the five boroughs.

Rev. Wyatt cautioned the graduates to “put a speed bump” between themselves and the job. “Take care of yourself, do what you can to invigorate yourself, talk to someone if you feel burnt out. Don't feel you can't be rocked by something, or someone. You may be angels, but you are only human,” he added to a standing ovation from many in the audience.

TEENS IN FOSTER CARE PREPARE FOR COLLEGE

Twenty-eight high school students in foster care participated in this summer's second ACS Office of Youth Development and Bard College Access and Preparedness Program (BCAPP). The program provides youth in foster care an opportunity to experience a college-level course taught by college instructors, earn transferable college credits, study classic works of literature, poetry and philosophy, join other students in a supportive, non-judgmental environment and get special writing instruction. Students were selected on the basis of a desire to learn as expressed in personal statements.

“I like to write and be creative” said Traicie, a BCAPP student. “The Bard program has taught me how to pay attention to tone and clarity in my short story writing. I will be attending BMCC (Borough of Manhattan Community College) in the fall and wanted to prove that I have the ability and desire to excel.”

Teens attended a five-week Monday through Friday summer course in the humanities conducted at a Manhattan public school. Classes consisted of art history, philosophy, literature and writing. The

program is made possible through a New Yorkers for Children grant. There was no cost for the course, tuition and books, and students received a stipend. The program was featured on a WABC 7 Eyewitness news show this past summer.

“The ACS/BCAPP Program has been very successful in promoting college readiness, helping students make a more informed choice of a post-secondary school, and contributing to the personal growth and development of course participants,” said **Sally Slater**, Program Manager for College Programs for the ACS Office of Youth Development (OYD).

Expressing pride in the work of the students, Bard professor Simon Van Booy said, “Through their vision, intelligence and imagination, we became the perfect model for a writers' workshop, with each student churning out stories, reading them to the class, and then editing with feedback in mind. During our week together, my students realized that a person's story is the thread which connects them to life, and to write that journey is to make something which can be passed through generations as an emotional and cultural anchor.”

GETTING RESULTS IN PROTECTING CHILDREN

(continued from page 1)

in preventive services. But, the highlight of the sessions – and the source of all the tension – is a detailed analysis of one or two ongoing, randomly selected cases, which are presented in minute-by-minute detail by the case managers who supervised them.

The Commissioner heads up almost every ChildStat session, aided by the Division of Child Protection (DCP) Deputy Commissioners **Jan Flory** and Associate Commissioner **Gilbert Taylor**, along with deputies from each ACS Division. Every field office in DCP sends high-level representatives and the two CPMs, whose zones are presenting that session, give short introductory talks, breaking down monthly statistics from their offices – including average caseloads – and discussing current challenges. Special Advisor for Investigations **Sue Morley** also plays a key role, frequently posing questions.

Modeled after the New York Police Department's CompStat, this forum gets things done, precisely because everyone is present. If there is a frontline problem, the managers responsible are at the table, taking notes. If a practice is in place because "that's the way we've always done it," a ChildStat airing can also make it clear why – and how – the policy can be changed. If one field office has made a change that has improved a vital outcome, the Borough Directors from every single borough can take that idea back to their offices and make it happen there. If caseworkers are having trouble getting access to families, the Investigative Consultants are in the room; if Family Court Legal Services attorneys have an issue regarding the cases brought to them for action, they explain it directly to DCP supervisors.

How does it feel to be in the hot seat? **Shatonya Miggins**, a 10-year veteran of ACS who is currently CPM of the Morris Park Field Office in the Bronx, remembers the first time she went before ChildStat. "I had a sinking feeling when I found out, and we went into a frenzy, pulling case notes, reviewing

documentation, running to the CPS worker and Supervisor. I had heard the horror stories about CPMs leaving there crying from ChildStat when they presented a case that was not so great."

Miggins's case involved a bipolar 17-year-old, a repeat runaway who refused to take her medication or attend her therapy sessions. Miggins and her staff had put all their faith into the mother's story, but, under the close scrutiny of ChildStat, they realized they had been mistaken. For this child to be safe, more supervision needed to be put in place, and that had not been done. "If we had paid closer attention to the prior history, it would have given us better information,"



Brooklyn Child Protection Managers detail one of their cases at the Nov. 1 ChildStat session: (l-r) Thomas Dunbar, Michael Chukwu, Tresilla Boyd-Mulligan, Patrick Thomas.

Miggins says. "ChildStat forced me to take ownership for all of the deficiencies in the case. I couldn't shift the blame. This was about us, what we didn't do, and what we would do to correct it."

Since that first experience, Miggins has presented to ChildStat more times than she can remember, and her most recent experience was the best. "On August 30th, when I presented, the Commissioner actually said to me that it was a case that was well done and that this is the way he wants cases to be handled in the agency. I took that information right back to the Supervisor and the CPS worker so they would know

the Commissioner is acknowledging their hard work. And, as a result of that, everyone who heard the feedback is trying to put more into the work that they do."

The take-away of information and acceptance of responsibility goes in both directions at a ChildStat session. A deputy might reveal to the Commissioner that he has doubts about the assessments a worker is making and get this response from the Commissioner: "Well, what are you doing about it?" Ownership doesn't fall just to the CPMs making the report. At one session, an Emergency Children's Services worker admitted making a phone call instead of a family visit because he was understaffed. The Commissioner viewed this practice as unacceptable; the Division Deputy was challenged to provide more staff, and, today, that problem has been alleviated. Everyone at ChildStat is on the hot seat, but there's not a person in the room who doesn't know that this is what it takes to "do the work."

"Children's Services staff has put forth great effort to ensure that the children and families of New York are protected and served to the best of our ability," said DCP Deputy Commissioner Flory. "The dedication and passion for protecting children is emphatically on display at each ChildStat session – at every level."

What may be most surprising in all this is that, according to Miggins, ChildStat has actually improved the morale in her office. "After ChildStat, what we do is have a floor meeting on Monday or Tuesday, where we tell all the staffers exactly what happened. We want them to see it's not so bad. We go down there and we represent what we do here, and we tell them that we're proud of the work you do. They're so happy when they hear that someone is listening to them and that the Commissioner acknowledges their hard work. That's not something that they hear a lot, and that's the best part of ChildStat."

Q & A WITH ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER GILBERT TAYLOR

Children's Services Update sat down with Associate Commissioner Gilbert Taylor with some questions about ChildStat:

Q: What are the primary goals of ChildStat?

A: Our guiding principal is this: How do we, as a system, protect children? That's why we're all there. So, we get everyone in a room, with the Commissioner present (which is key), in order to have a dialogue with the front-line managers, essentially asking them, "What do you need to do the work?"

Q: How are cases chosen for analysis at ChildStat?

A: The cases we go over in ChildStat are randomly selected. They [staff] get two to three days to prepare them, and we get the same two to three days to review the details and figure out what questions we would like to ask.

Q: What has ChildStat achieved so far?

A: I think that we have cultivated an environment where people are able to effectively communicate, one, their needs, and two, some improved practice areas. It's about being responsive and attentive to each other. We ask our managers directly: How do we get policies disseminated quickly? Do you need any facilities? Do you need more personnel? How are your caseloads?

Q: Can you give us an example of an area where practice has improved as a direct result of ChildStat?

A: Prior to ChildStat, the number of situations where we decided to indicate a case but no

services were delivered was higher than we liked. Our belief is that if a situation rises to the level where the family is known to our agency, and we discover that the allegations are credible, then it's our obligation to offer services. Since ChildStat began, the percentage of cases indicated and closed without services has gone down tremendously, from 35 percent in June 2006 to 13 percent in August 2007. And, as a direct result, the utilization for preventive slots skyrocketed. Now there was a need for more slots, and Liz Roberts, our Deputy Commissioner for Family Support



Associate Commissioner Gilbert Taylor (c), with Deputy Commissioners Jan Flory (l) and Anne Williams-Isom (r) at a November ChildStat session.

Services, was there, at the table, when we realized this. Roberts got a team together, which included [Associate Commissioner] Peggy Ellis, went out to the agencies and helped them identify which cases could be closed, making space for other families. To further follow through, Commissioner Mattingly and Roberts went directly to the city, petitioned for more slots, and got us 1,000 more spaces. This was a huge accomplishment for us, and it all stemmed from ChildStat.

Q: Are there any other positive results you'd like to emphasize?

A: A big plus is that we commissioners have the opportunity to know all the managers and deputy directors. When we speak with them, they feel positive about having the Commissioner's ear. They can talk to him directly instead of being four, five, six steps removed.

Q: Are there areas you'd like to change?

A: I would like to see us improve the comfort level at ChildStat meetings, improve the tone on our own part, in terms of the questions that we ask. I think aggressive questioning can cut off the managers' ability to hear us. They feel attacked. For my own part, I think some self-reflection could help me to frame questions in a way that opened up the conversation without making people feel defensive.

Q: Moving forward, what is your vision for ChildStat?

A: ChildStat has to continue to be malleable and adapt as the system changes. We have to be responsive and reflective. As ChildStat continues, the nature of the dialogue matures. At recent presentations we were able to discuss the dynamics of the families, the nuances of the investigation, and the plans going forward in a way that was instructive and illuminating. It's natural for people to personalize their work and the work of their staff. It can be difficult to talk about what is the best practice, and, yes, things can get hot, but it's important to push through that in order to improve the work we do.

Saluting Vital Work of Child Protection Staff

More than 100 child protection workers have been honored each week at ChildStat for their dedication and efforts in keeping the city's children safe. Each honoree is cited for his/her work in going beyond the call of duty in often dangerous environments. Since the last issue of the Update, here is a list of honorees who received the Commissioner's Child Advocacy Award, through Oct. 31, 2007.

Elizabeth Atkins

Lester Block

Newton Brown

Stacey Byron-Calvin.

Krystal Cardenas

Jacqueline Diaz

Sherril Didder

Daniel Duignan

Vanessa Encarnacion

Sandra Gracie

Sheldene Jackson

Steven Hernandez

Sharon Kagawa

Kevin King

Massiel Knight

Sha-Meeka Lewis

Natalya Litvinova

Rochea London

Nathifa McGill

Tammy Moore

Sharlene Mullings

Ulysses Parker

Wilhemina Poindexter

Faye Ramos

Fatima Robinson

Sandra Rodriguez

Vera Rozenbaum

Fatima Valentin

Pamela Stanton

Bridgette Tajah

Toni Marie Teliszewski.

Ina Thomas

David Trani

Veronica Vasquez

Marie Vilus

Martisha Willis

Reunified Families Celebrate Annual Family Fun Day

When her four children were removed from her home and placed with relatives, Robin Walker was determined to get her children back. She knew that she had to change and that she needed help. She attended an in-residence substance abuse treatment program, underwent over two years of counseling, and achieved sobriety. After a long separation, during which she saw her children only on weekends, she was reunited with them. On September 15, Walker joined hundreds of other safely and happily reunited child welfare system families who overcame similar obstacles at Children's Services' third annual Family Fun Day at Riverbank State Park in Harlem.

"It was a good thing that ACS intervened in my life, because I needed help," said Walker. "I struggled with a drug addiction for six years. I lost my home and family and became homeless. Not until my children were forced to live with other family members did I overcome my personal struggles and find the strength to change. I completed culinary arts training and work as a cook. I trained to become a parent advocate. I have become the mother my children need. We are together."

More than 450 families spent a joyous afternoon together, enjoying the fun of Carnivale Brazilian, a Caribbean and New Orleans Mardi Gras themed entertainment. Families enjoyed live stage performances by Zydeco bands, "The Doc Marshalls," and



NYC ACS Commissioner John Mattingly with Queens mother Robin Walker and her daughters (left to right) Destiny and Desia and grandchildren Juwan and Imani, at Family Fun Day.

"Women in Steel," a basketball show by the Harlem Wizards, samba dancers, capoeira martial arts, Carnivale mask-making, a Mardi Gras bead toss and a limbo competition. They were served a delicious lunch and had the opportunity to learn about resources and support services available in their communities.

"Our first duty here at Children's Services is to protect the children of this city from abuse and neglect," ACS Commissioner John B. Mattingly said. "The best way to accomplish this vitally important task is to ensure that children have strong families to care for them. Not bureaucracies, not organizations – families. We are celebrating

the love, courage, dedication and commitment it takes for families, who have been struggling with personal issues and other serious problems to rehabilitate and reform their lives so they can once again have safe, nurturing relationships with their kids."

According to Children's Services' Office of Policy and Planning, more than half of the 46,624 New York City children who left the foster care system since 2002 have been returned to their birth families. Currently, Children's Services is helping more than 13,000 at-risk families stay together by offering services intended to prevent the need for foster care placements.



Children's Services Update

NYC Administration for Children's Services
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Place
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