



# NEWS FROM THE FIELD

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### THE FIELD CENTER

FOR CHILDREN'S POLICY, PRACTICE & RESEARCH  
*Founding benefactors Joseph and Marie Field*

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### TRENDS IN FOSTER CARE SINCE THE ENACTMENT OF THE ADOPTION AND SAFE FAMILIES ACT

**Problem**  
 The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was designed to increase safety and permanency for the children who suffer from maltreatment at the hands of their caretakers and who must consequentially be placed in out of home care. The proponents of ASFA envisioned reaching the goals of safety and permanency by creating a federal policy that would:

- increase the number of children exiting foster care
- reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care
- promote safe reunifications and adoptions for children exiting foster care, and
- reduce the barriers that impede children in foster care from becoming adopted

The purpose of this paper is to examine and analyze the state of the foster care system six years post the enactment of ASFA. Are children in foster care gaining safety and permanency at a greater rate under ASFA than under its predecessor, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act? Is ASFA achieving the results that its proponents intended?

**Method**  
 In order to examine the state of the foster care system we analyzed public use data sets from 1999 to 2003 from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems (NCANDS). AFCARS collects case level information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care or supervision, and on children who are adopted under the auspices of the State's public child welfare agency ([www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/statsresearch/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/statsresearch/index.htm)). *continued on page two*



From left to right: Richard J. Gelles, Ph.D., Debra Schilling Wolfe, MEd, Cindy W. Christian, MD, Alan M. Lerner, Esq., Caroline Wong, MSW and Carol Wilson Spigner, DSW

*Guided by the Schools of Social Policy & Practice, Law, and Medicine and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research brings together the resources of the University of Pennsylvania to enhance and assure the well-being of abused and neglected children and those at risk of maltreatment. By moving beyond traditional approaches, the Field Center utilizes an interdisciplinary model to integrate clinical care, research and education, inform local and national policy, and prepare the nation's future leaders, for the benefit of children and their families.*



## TRENDS IN FOSTER CARE (continued from page one)

NCANDS is a voluntary national data collection and analysis system created in response to the requirements of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law 93-247) as amended ([http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm)).

### Findings

The most significant finding is the steady reduction in the number of children in foster care between the years 1999 and 2003. The day count (number of children in foster care on September 30 of each year) decreased by 58,000 over the four year period, peaking in 1999 at 581,000 and reaching a low in 2003 at 523,000. The result is a decrease in the snapshot number of children residing in foster care on a single day, from a rate of 8.01 per 1,000 children in 1999 to a rate of 7.05 per 1,000 children in 2003.

This reduction is not due to a reduction in the number of children entering into foster care, but rather to a dramatic increase in number of children exiting the system. The years 1999 and 2003 each reported the same amount of entries – 297,000 – indicating a lack of change in the number of children entering the system. The number of exits, however, changed considerably over this four year span, with 251,000 children exiting foster care in 1999 and 281,000 children exiting in 2003, for a total increase of 30,000 children.

There has also been a shift between 1999 and 2003 in how children exit foster care. One-sixth of the reduction in the number of children in foster care is likely attributable to more children exiting the system to be adopted. The number children adopted from foster care increased by 10,000 between 1999 and 2003. Other types of exits also increased slightly from 1999 to 2003: guardianship increased by 4,400, reunification increased by 4,000, emancipation increased by 3,000, and exits to live with relatives increased by 6,000.

Another significant finding regarding permanency is that the number of months that children remain in foster care waiting to be adopted drastically increased from 20 months in 1999 to 33 months in 2000. This number then leveled off over the next three years and even slightly decreased to 31 months in 2003.

The safety of children in foster care has actually decreased between 1999 and 2003. There is a slight increase in the rate child fatalities from 1.6 per 1,000 children in 1999 to 2.0 per 1,000 children in 2003. Additionally, there is a near 30 percent jump in the number of children who experience one or more recurrence of child maltreatment within six months of a prior episode.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The changes and trends in foster care since the enactment of ASFA indicate that the policy has indeed made an impact on the number and distribution of children in the system. The reduction of children in foster care, the increase of children exiting the system, and the increase in adoptions all signify the improvements that ASFA has made in securing permanency for children. The children who are not fortunate enough to exit the system, however, are subject to remain in foster care for longer periods of time. Additionally, statistics indicate that children are not safer under ASFA than they were prior to its enactment. Overall, ASFA has been successful in creating positive change in the foster care system for two of its four objectives.

#### *Increase the number of children exiting foster care*

The fact that 30,000 more children exited from foster care in 2003 than in 1999 indicates that ASFA has been successful in its quest to get more children out of the system and into permanent homes.

#### *Reduce the amount of time children spend in foster care*

Although there are more children exiting and overall fewer children in foster care since the enactment of ASFA, the children who do remain in care linger there for longer periods of time. The stipulations in ASFA accelerated the rate at which "placeable" children exited the system. As a result, the foster care system is evolving into a long-term system, filled with hard-to-place children: children whose families are too dysfunctional to be reunified, children who are too old to be adopted, and children who do not have a strong enough family support system to be placed with relatives. Thus, while ASFA was unsuccessful in directly reducing the amount of time children spend in foster care, it was very successful in uncovering the necessity of addressing the needs of this population of hard-to-place children.

#### *Promote safe reunifications and adoptions for children exiting foster care*

The statistics show that the enactment of ASFA has not produced any improvements in securing safety for children. Child fatalities continue to occur and children continue to suffer from recurring maltreatment at a similar if not greater rate as the years progress.

#### *Reduce the barriers that impede children in foster care from becoming adopted*

The steady increase in the number of children being adopted from foster care implies that ASFA has been successful in its objective to reduce barriers that stand in the way of adoptions. While this rings true for a number of children in foster care, there nevertheless remains a significant population of hard-to-place children for which barriers to adoption continue to stand in the way. The barriers that are unique to this population of children and the strategies that are needed to overcome them must be further investigated and addressed.

## JUDGE FIELD RETIRES AS PHILADELPHIA FAMILY COURT ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE



Judge Myrna Field retired from the Philadelphia Family Court bench in December of 2005. She has spent the past four years serving as an Administrative Judge of the Family Court Division in the First Judicial District of Pennsylvania. Focusing the majority of her career on family and child welfare issues, Judge Field began her career as a lawyer working in the family court system. Judge Myrna Field is honored to be affiliated with the Field Center due to the center's focus on children's issues. She states that she is very impressed with the Center's publicly oriented focus. Judge Field believes that the Field Center does an excellent job of making others aware of the

very important issues of child welfare. She initially became involved with the Center through her acquaintance with Dr. Annie Steinberg, and her colleague, Dean Richard Gelles, who assisted her in creating various educational programs for judges on child development issues and women's issues. Judge Field specifically oversaw court cases for dependency, delinquency, adoption,

custody, child support, and domestic violence. Presently, approximately six thousand six hundred children have been designated as dependent in Philadelphia Family Court.

Judge Field worked with the Field Center on two projects to improve the court house and provide better information to the litigants. Judge Field and the Field Center worked together to improve the court house waiting rooms by providing increased privacy, less noise, and providing a place where children can play while they await their court hearing. Additionally, educational visual posters have been created to clearly explain the court processes to the litigants. The Field Center and Judge Field plan to have these boards erected in the court house.

In addition to Judge Myrna Field's involvement with the Field Center, she created many successful programs in the court houses she oversaw. She has specifically focused on parent outreach, creating parenting classes for teenage fathers, teenage mothers, and young parents, teaching them how to aid their children. These ten week courses are taught in English and Spanish and have maintained high success rates. They also have programs to help parents assist their children successfully navigate through probation. Additionally, she has created a revision of truancy, focusing on eighth grade children,

## JUDGE FIELD RETIRES AS PHILADELPHIA FAMILY COURT ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

*(continued from page two)*

and has created a probation unit specifically geared for young female issues. In addition, Judge Field has attempted to decrease the time both adolescents and probation officers spend in court and increase the time they spend attempting to decrease negative behavior. These additional moments of human contact, she believes, can ultimately help a child succeed. Judge Field has also created a night court which meets weekly to aid parent's who can not attend court during the day due to work obligations. Lastly, Judge Field has collaborated with Educational Data Systems, Inc (EDSI), to enroll fathers in this state subsidized job training program. This program also has enjoyed great success aiding young men in job acquirement and job security.

Judge Field's most successful program thus far, she believes, has been her work with child support collection. This year the court will collect over one million dollars in child support from fathers. Her success in this area afforded her a national award from the National Child Support Association. In 2004, Judge

Field was named Judge of the Year for her work and success in Child Support collection.

Judge Field hopes that in the future the number of dependent children will decrease. She additionally believes that if DHS can provide a child with more services before they are removed from the home, this should prevent long term support to dependent children. She will continue to sit as a judge for six months out of each year. In addition to her work with the Field Center, Judge Field enjoys traveling, attending the theatre, and assisting charities such as Race for the Cure. Currently, she reviews their annual grants. In addition, Judge Field has a daughter and two grandsons, who are fifteen and ten, who reside in Mississippi. Although they were affected by Hurricane Katrina, she reports that they are doing just fine while rebuilding their home. Judge Myrna Field plans to continue her involvement with the Field Center, collaborating on projects to assist the Center and the court house.

## COLLABORATING TOWARDS REFORM

Alan M. Lerner, Esq.

Rules of procedure are important in every aspect of life, from professional sports to book clubs. Lawyers, especially those who have been involved in litigation, know the importance of procedural rules. They help to assure the regularity of the process. They assure that everyone can be properly informed of what is going to be decided and when, and that anyone has an opportunity to be heard before important decisions are made.

The Federal Courts, the State Courts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the courts of every state of the union, have rules of procedure for civil and criminal cases. In Pennsylvania, there have also been rules for Family Court; however, they focus on custody, support and domestic abuse cases, what in Philadelphia comprises the Domestic Relations Branch of the Family Court. Unfortunately, statewide rules of procedure for the Dependency part of the Juvenile Court Branch of Family Court have not existed. The result is that such rules differ from county to county, and that in any county, for example Philadelphia, there may be no local rules covering very important issues, leaving attorneys and courts to guess about how to proceed with respect to any number of issues in any given case. One example would be the absence of rules governing "discovery," the process by which a litigant can use the court's power to obtain information important to the case from an opposing party or a third party. Also, there are no rules regarding the ability of a litigant without funds to obtain an expert witness, including a medical or mental health evaluation. Among the other questions left undecided by the absence of comprehensive state-wide rules of procedure in dependency cases are: Where and how to serve notice on another party that I want to have the Court make a ruling on a particular issue at an upcoming hearing? When, for what reasons, and by what procedure may a court terminate a court appointed lawyer's representation of a party? What process shall govern a local court that wishes to promulgate, or change its local rules of procedure? How does a party or the Court compel a witness or another party to attend a particular hearing in a matter? When must the proceedings in a matter be transcribed and made available to the parties? When, if at all, may a child waive the right to have counsel represent them? And there are many others.

During the summer of 2005, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's Juvenile Procedural Rules Committee, which had been working to create a statewide system of procedural rules for Dependency Court published proposed rules and distributed copies to lawyers and judges who work in the Dependency system throughout the Commonwealth, inviting comments by October 1. Upon an initial reading, I realized that, despite the monumental accomplishment that the draft represented, there were a number of questions, some relating to the clarity of the draft, some to potential conflicts between two provisions, and some as to policy, that needed to be addressed. My work in the Child Advocacy Clinic, in the Field Center, and my experience as a lawyer and teacher told me that (1) the review and input of many minds, especially those of constituents from different perspectives, would be the most effective means of teasing out all of the inherent issues and of crafting the most workable solutions, and (2) a set of comments submitted by such a multi-faceted group would be much more effective with the Rules Committee than the comments from a lone lawyer or agency. Consequently, I proposed to that we invite all of the

constituent agencies and groups in Philadelphia to come together to discuss the proposed rules, and to try to agree upon a common set of questions and comments.

Over the next two months, at a series of meetings, representatives of the City of Philadelphia Law Department (representing the Department of Human Services), the Department of Human Services, the Defender Association, Child Advocacy Unit (representing children), Community Legal Services (representing parents), the private Bar (individual lawyers representing both children and parents), Juvenile Law Center (representing children), the Support Center for Child Advocates (representing children), and the Penn Interdisciplinary Child Advocacy Clinic (representing children) met and discussed the proposed rules. At the outset, we agreed that each participant reserved the right to join, or not, in any proposal or comment, and even to submit contradictory proposals and comments. With that caveat, each party felt free to express their needs and concerns, and to submit proposals to satisfy them. At the same time, each was able to listen to the concerns of the others with an open mind. Each participant agreed to take the lead in analyzing specific proposals of the Rules Committee, do any required research, and produce a proposed response, with explanations for all to review at subsequent meetings. Disagreements were aired and explained, and solutions proposed, examined, and revised. To the surprise of all, by the time October rolled around, we had come up with a single set of "comments" including proposed changes to the Rules Committee's draft and to its explanatory "comments," and our own explanation of the reasons for our proposed changes, to which everyone signed on with out reservation or dissent.

In October, the entire "package" of our comments was submitted to the Rules Committee. We are awaiting the results of their deliberations and submission to The Supreme Court.

## The Field Center is pleased to welcome three new members to our Advisory Board.

**Pennsylvania State Representative Michael Gerber** has joined the Field Center Advisory Board. Rep. Gerber, a Penn alum and practicing attorney, has a long history of advocating for women and children. In the State Legislature, he currently sits on the Children & Youth and Judiciary Committees.

**Renee Dillon Johnson, MHSA**, is a welcome addition to the Field Center's Advisory Board. Ms. Johnson and her family recently relocated to the Philadelphia area from Ohio. Ms. Johnson was formerly the Executive Director of Prevent Child Abuse Ohio.

**Pennsylvania State Representative Dennis O'Brien** is another new member of the Field Center's Advisory Board. Rep. O'Brien has represented Philadelphia in the state legislature for the past 23 years. He shares a strong interest in advocating for the needs of children and is Chair of the Judiciary Committee in Harrisburg.

# FOCUS ON THE FIELD CENTER

## ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER PROFILE JOSEPH FIELD



Joseph Field, Founding Benefactor and Advisory Board member of the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research, attributes his interest and passion in children's issues and his dedication to the Field Center to his wife, Marie Field. Mr. Field explains that Marie, in her previous career as a teacher, encountered and aided numerous disadvantaged children, stating that "she really did great things for so many children in difficult situations while teaching." Marie and Joe believe that a healthy society begins with healthy children and support the Field Center in hopes of making a positive impact on the lives of children.

Through Mrs. Field's position on the Board of Overseers of the School of Social Policy & Practice (previously known as the School of Social Work), she met Dr. Richard Gelles and became acquainted with his writings on the subject of children, violence and neglect which she shared with her husband. After reading such materials and meeting with Dean Gelles, the Fields were deeply impressed with Dr. Gelles' immense knowledge, dedication, and passion for children's issues. With plans for the Center to feature a unique multidisciplinary approach across professional lines utilizing the leadership of top professionals in the fields of medicine, law, and social policy from the appropriate University schools and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia to address the issues on both a policy and practice level, the Fields realized that with the assistance of Dean Gelles they too could foster an immense impact on children. After providing significant annual support for the program during its early years and observing its progress, the Fields decided on July of 2003 to assure the long term visibility and growth of the Center by providing a ten-year challenge grant through their Foundation to match, dollar for dollar, other charitable gifts to the Center. The Center was then named the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research in recognition of the Fields' generosity.

Mr. Field believes that the foremost attribute of The Field Center is its interdisciplinary professional focus on children's issues. The Field Center provides both a forum and a vehicle, built on the collaborative leadership of eminent

professionals from the University's Schools of Social Policy & Practice, Medicine, and Law and from the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, for working on children's issues and providing education, assistance, and best practices to doctors, social workers, lawyers, judges, legislators, police, and others involved with children's issues. The Center's functions are enhanced by substantial pro bono services provided by the faculty and students of its various participating schools and hospital, and its mission is aided by the location of those entities on a unified campus that facilitates easy walking access to most of its meetings and functions. Mr. Field states that the next task for the Center is to disseminate its mission and goals to a much broader audience and to attract greater interest in and funding for the Center's goals.

Mr. Field is Chairman, Founder and ex-CEO of Entercom Communications Corp. When Mr. Field is not working for Entercom or helping to facilitate growth at the Field Center, he can often be found performing as an amateur violinist. He has performed in various chamber music groups and as a soloist with the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. Marie and Joe enjoy spending time with their children and six grandchildren and are involved in other philanthropic work for children through their support of the Free Library of Philadelphia, where Marie serves on the Foundation Board. The Field Family Teen Authors program, which is endowed by Mr. and Mrs. Field, distributes copies of various books to teenage children in Philadelphia through the Free Library and its many branches. The program then arranges for the authors of such books to come to the Philadelphia area to speak and meet with those teenagers for discussion. Mr. and Mrs. Field believe that investing time, effort, and concern for children and teenagers will lead to a more beneficial society of the future. The Fields plan to continue their work to better the lives of children through their involvement with The Field Center, the Free Library and other philanthropic projects.

## COMMUNITY ASSOCIATE PROFILE CHRISTINE DOWNS, MSW



Christine Downs, Social Work Coordinator at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Safe Place: The Center for Child Protection and Health, has been involved with abused children and their families for many years. Ms. Downs initially worked with adjudicated delinquents in the Philadelphia area before going on to receive her MSW degree from Widener University in Clinical Social Work. While working with adjudicated delinquents, Ms. Downs first became involved with sexually abused children and adolescents. Ms. Downs continued to work with sexually abused children when she accepted a position at the Joseph J. Peters Institute as a clinician. She then moved into an administrative position as the Compliance Officer supervising admissions, intake and medical records as well as providing clinical supervision for staff and students. Ms. Downs also worked on research collaboration between JJPI and the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety comparing traditional treatment to prolonged exposure in therapy with adult woman who had been sexually abused.

Ms. Downs states that she developed her passion for working with sexually abused children and their families through her work with adjudicated minors. In her current position at Safe Place, Ms. Downs provides follow-up services for two programs within Safe Place, SCAN and the CARE (Child Abuse Referral and Evaluation) Clinic. SCAN, Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect, is the division of Safe Place which works with inpatient clients at CHOP where there is concern of child maltreatment. Ms. Downs provides psycho-education, crisis intervention, support, referrals and resources to children and families who have been affected by sexual abuse and follows up with phone consultation to families after discharge to determine if the child has any additional needs. When indicated, she provides referral information for appropriate support programs. In addition, Ms. Downs and her colleagues provide training to teachers, social workers, and caregivers on understanding and responding to sexual abuse. Ms. Downs also co-leads a group for eight to twelve year old sexual abused girls in Delaware County.

Ms. Downs expressed that she is deeply committed to the Field Center because of the important work the center is achieving. Ms. Downs believes that the Field Center has the potential to make a large impact on various difficult cases of child maltreatment. She remarked that the Field Center's interdisciplinary focus allows professionals to aid abused and neglected children from a variety of disciplines and perspectives. Ms. Downs became involved in the Field Center through encouragement from the Medical Director at Safe Place, Dr. Cindy Christian. Currently, Ms. Downs serves as a Community Affiliate of the Field Center. Because sexual abuse cases often encompass numerous issues, Ms. Downs believes they necessitate attention from an interdisciplinary team of medical staff, social workers, psychologists, and legal counsel. Ms. Downs' hope for the future of the Field Center is a continued focus on interdisciplinary work, which will specifically be utilized to assess difficult cases.

Christine Downs wants to work to improve services for all maltreated children. She recently co-led a workshop on childhood trauma at the Field Center's national conference. Ms. Downs' plans to continue to combine her passion for clinical work with her management skills to create a social work environment that will serve its clients more effectively.



## FIELD CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PROFILE DEBRA SCHILLING WOLFE, MEd

Debra Schilling Wolfe, MEd joined the Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice, and Research as its first Executive Director in 2003. Ms. Wolfe became involved with the Field Center after having an extensive thirty-year career in child welfare. Prior to working at the Field Center, Ms. Wolfe was the Chief Operating Officer for a Montgomery County non-profit agency and served as the Clinical Director of Our Town Family Center in Tucson, Arizona.

Ms. Wolfe began her career in child welfare after receiving her MEd in Counseling with a concentration in Community Mental Health. After receiving her graduate degree, she worked for the Massachusetts Department of Social Services first as a child abuse assessment worker and then as a child welfare supervisor. This initial job spurred her passion for child welfare. Since then, Ms. Wolfe developed and managed numerous innovative programs in child welfare including Boston City Hospital's Sexual Abuse Team, New York Foundling Hospital's Crisis Nursery, and Arizona's public-private partnership, Family Builders. Ms. Wolfe has done extensive clinical work with abused and neglected children and their families and has provided training and workshops to enhance the skills of child welfare professionals. She has served on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Family-based Services and was President of the Arizona Association of Family-Centered Practice. The Field Center marks the first time Ms. Wolfe has worked in an academic setting.

Ms. Wolfe explained that her passion for child welfare specifically stems from her dedication to high risk children. Ms. Wolfe believes that children who have been abused and neglected need and deserve to have services of the highest quality. Her hope is that her work with the Field Center will impact the child welfare system by improving services to this population.

Ms. Wolfe describe the Field Center as having two important assets:

1. The Field Center enables leaders and thinkers the opportunity to collaborate with various disciplines to create improvements and advancement in the child welfare system.
2. As a solution-focused organization, the Field Center is able to be proactive and act as advocates for various issues affecting child welfare.

Ms. Wolfe believes that the Field Center has limitless possibilities and that its unique interdisciplinary nature can provide a vehicle for positive change in the child welfare system.

Ms. Wolfe's commitment to the Field Center is one of the reasons for the Center's initial success. She believes that it is of paramount importance to continue to represent a group of individuals and a cause which will impact numerous children and families.



## THE FIELD CENTER BREAKFAST MEETING SERIES

The Field Center was pleased to host its second Breakfast Meeting of the academic year on November 17, 2005.

Law School Practice Professor and Child Advocacy Clinic Director **Alan Lerner, Esq.**, moderated a lively discussion on *Kids in Care: Where We Are, Where We Need to Go* among panelists **Anne Marie Ambrose**, Director of the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, **Gillian Blair, Ph.D., LL.M.**, child and adolescent therapist and former Clinical Director of the Youth Study Center, **Angel Flores, Esq.**, Chief of the Juvenile Unit of the Office of the District Attorney of Philadelphia, **Marsha Levick, Esq.**, Legal Director of the Juvenile Law Center, and **Sandra Simkins, Esq.**, Assistant Chief of the Juvenile Unit of the Defender Association of Philadelphia. Attendees found the presentation to be both informative and captivating. Many participants commented that the interdisciplinary approach was useful and enjoyed hearing different perspectives on the subject matter.

The next Field Center Breakfast Meeting is scheduled for February 21, 2006 at the University of Pennsylvania Law School's Levy Conference Center, located at 3400 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. **Howard C. Stevenson, Ph.D.**, Director of the School, Community, and Clinical Child Psychology Program, Psychology in Education Division of the Penn's Graduate School of Education, will speak on *Playing with Anger: Making Meaning of Aggression and Bonding with African American Boys*. Over 200 attendees have registered for this seminar.

The Field Center offers its free-of-charge Breakfast Meetings throughout the academic year to enhance knowledge and enrich communication among those varied disciplines involved in the child welfare arena.



## EDITORIAL

The death of 7-year-old Nixzmary Brown, tortured, molested, and starved by her stepfather, is an all too familiar narrative with all the usual suspects. Nixzmary's ACS caseworker went weeks before seeing the child and failed to update the file in a timely or appropriate manner. The caseworker's supervisor failed to follow through and obtain a warrant to help find the Nixzmary after the girl failed to attend school for weeks and after the school reported that the Nixzmary showed up at school with a gash over her eye. Although ACS caseworkers and supervisors had multiple opportunities to protect Nixzmary, they failed. It is tempting to conclude that Nixzmary is yet another in a long line of abused and neglected children who fell between the cracks of New York City's child protective service system.

But so-called cracks are hardly random or unique to ACS. A report issued this week by the U.S. Inspector General found that most child welfare systems fail to see maltreated children who are in foster care at least the once-per-month prescribed by state law. In only 5 of the 17 states that require monthly visits are children in foster care actually seen once-a-month. Not only do child welfare systems not see endangered children as often as required by law, most states have no information or data management system to determine how often children in foster care are seen. According to the Inspector General, only 19 states and the District of Columbia can even report how often visits occur.

On any given day, there are 500,000 children in foster care and at least as many children who have been abused and neglected but are still in their own homes and whose cases are open to Child Protective Services. It may well tax the manpower of state agencies to physically visit at-risk children. As long as caseworkers and supervisors are over-worked and under-trained, cases such as Nixzmary Brown will still occur. But, to be unable to actually know whether visits are occurring and to blame the lack of information on "manpower shortages" is malfeasant and unforgivable.

The on-line auction site EBay keeps track of 1,000,000 transactions each day. Buyers and sellers can keep track of tens, hundreds, or thousands of transactions, know about the buyer or seller, know whether they have paid or been paid, and have access to volumes of information on each item. Bidders can bid from mobile phones, Trios, and Blackberrys.

If EBay software and electronic communications can keep people in touch with millions of tchotskies, then child protective systems should be able to, at the very least, keep track of one million at-risk children. Rather than fall back on blaming the usual suspects and the "cracks" in the system, it is time child welfare systems evolve from believing that technology is a cell phone and a laptop and implement software programs that can at the very least inform the system and its employees where vulnerable children are and what is being done to keep them safe.

Richard J. Gelles, Ph.D.  
Dean, Penn School of Social Policy & Practice



## THE MAKING OF A (SOCIAL) ACTION HERO: THE STORY OF FRANK CERVONE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SUPPORT CENTER FOR CHILD ADVOCATES

### Step 1: Ignite a passion for human service

Frank Cervone traces his passion for helping people back to his years in middle and high school. His first experience in community service occurred in the sixth grade as his class took trips to a local nursing home to sing to the elderly. His love for service was truly awakened, however, in his tenth grade "Community Service" class, where he again visited nursing homes and provided assistance to the elderly. As he grew older, his passion continued to develop and mature. His outlook and scope on helping people broadened drastically in a University of Pennsylvania undergraduate course, "Freedom and Authority". This course outlined the historical struggle between freedom and authority and its threat to civil liberty for all people. This course opened Frank's eyes to the dire need for civil liberty in the United States and inspired him to become an agent to bring it about.

### Step 2: Acquire the tools and skills necessary to bring about change

Frank's first step in becoming a change agent was to pursue a law degree at the Villanova University School of Law. Here, Frank's service oriented passion was further refined by law professor Peter Goldberger's teachings in public interest law. Goldberger's classes convinced Frank that his future career would have to be in public service.

### Step 3: Adapt a central mission and personal philosophy to guide life's work

Around the time that he was pursuing his law degree, Frank's life went through somewhat of a transformation on another front. His Roman Catholic upbringing led him to join the Catholic order of the Christian Brothers. In the eight years he spent in this "religious life" he worked with children and juveniles in the order and came to adopt their mission of service through education. He became drawn to children and was fascinated by working with them. When he left the Christian Brothers in 1989 he was equipped with the tools, drive, and experience that would lead him to become the child advocate and social change agent that he is today.

### Step 4: Position yourself in the field

The following year, in 1990, Frank joined the Support Center for Child Advocates as legal counsel. This career move allowed him to unite his passions for children, law, civil liberty, and service through education. Two years later Frank became the executive director of the Support Center and has since worked simultaneously to grow the organization, educate the public and professionals about child abuse and advocacy, advocate for children, and reform child welfare law.

### Step 5: Create change

Many of Frank's social change efforts have resulted in positive change for abused and neglected children. Frank counts the organizational growth of the Support Center for Child Advocates and its resulting ability to serve more of Philadelphia's children as one of his biggest accomplishments. When he became the executive director in 1992, the organization was about a quarter of its current size in financial resources, and was about one-third of its current size in work production. Frank is furthermore very proud of the amount of public awareness that he has been able to garner for the Support Center. He has also gained national recognition himself for his work done in children's law and children's rights. This recognition has allowed him to make an even bigger impact in the lives of children by providing him with opportunities to advise professionals and to create change for children on both local and national levels.

### Step 6: Deal with challenges that stand in the way of change

No social change can be achieved without facing a number of challenges along the way. One of the earliest challenges that Frank had to face in his quest for social justice was the racism he was witness to in his own family. As

a child he became aware of the injustice of the racism and prejudice acted out by his family members and was able to separate himself from those actions. This racism, however, is an issue that he must continually deal with in society today. Another significant challenge that Frank has encountered is raising money for the Support Center. Fundraising is an ever-present issue for non-profit organizations. While he has made considerable progress in this area, it will continually be a challenge that he must contend with as the executive director of a non-profit organization. A final noteworthy challenge that Frank persistently faces in his work, is finding the ability to remain patient and to deal with the difficulty that clients and families have in healing and changing for the better. In order to overcome this challenge, Frank relies on the motivation that he finds in the promise of children and young people.

### Step 7: Offer advice and "lessons learned" to future social change agents

Throughout his journey to bring social justice to children Frank has learned many lessons about social change. The first lesson he has learned is that social change takes a very long time. The value of persistence is key in any social change effort. The second lesson is that social change and social justice are nowhere close to being done. There is a lot of work to be done in our society in order to bring about true justice. The third lesson Frank has learned is that that Americans are ethnocentric. He has learned to put the problems that Americans face into a worldly perspective. Only when we understand the grave misfortune of other countries will we be able to appreciate that many of the problems in our society are mere minutiae when placed in a global context. Finally, Frank has learned the importance of collaboration and that there is strength in numbers when working toward social change. Many of his successes have transpired as a result of his ability to connect with people and to form collaborative relationships.

Based on his experiences and lessons learned Frank offers future practitioners some key pieces of advice. The first is to "know your stuff in a thorough, professional way." He advises practitioners not to be "intellectually lazy", but rather to stay on top of the issues and to know the finer points and detail of those issues they are fighting for. The second piece of advice Frank offers is to "keep your humor." The business of seeking social change and advocating for social justice can be tough at times, so it is important to stay positive and to keep your humor intact. A final piece of advice is to "be opportunistic with the message" of social change. Frank has found the use of public events and media exposure as effective avenues by which to get the word out about children and their needs. He urges practitioners to "strike while the iron is hot" and to get their messages and ideas out there when there is such an opportunity to reach the public.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATE & LOCATION	EVENT & SPONSOR	CONTACT INFORMATION
February 27-March 1, 2006 Washington, D.C.	2006 National Conference <i>Children 2006: Securing Brighter Futures</i> Child Welfare League of America	Phone: (202) 942-0308 or (202) 942-0305 www.cwla.org
March 5-7, 2006 Washington, D.C.	2006 BACW Annual Conference <i>Building Partnerships to Serve African American Children and Families</i> Child Welfare League of America	Phone: (202) 942-0308 or (202) 942-0305 www.cwla.org
March 14-17, 2006 Huntsville, Alabama	The 22nd National Symposium on Child Abuse <i>Honoring Everyday Heroes</i> The National Children's Advocacy Center	Phone: (256) 327-3863 or (256) 533-KIDS (5437) Contact: Marilyn Grundy www.nationalcac.org
March 26 – 29, 2006 Denver, Colorado	33rd National Conference on Juvenile Justice	Phone: (703) 549-9222 www.ndaa.org
April 19 – 21, 2006 Portland, Oregon	7th Annual Child Abuse Summit & Family Violence Conference	Phone: (503) 655-8329 www.co.clackamas.or.us/sheriff/summit
April 24-28, 2006 Seattle, Washington	American Professional Society on Abuse of Children Child Forensic Interview Clinic WA State Criminal Justice Training Commission	Phone: (206) 835-7293 Contact: Patti Toth apsac.fmhi.usf.edu
May 15-17, 2006 Phoenix/Mesa, Arizona	Rocky Mountain Quality Improvement Center (RMQIC) <i>What It Takes: Promising Practice and Collaboration for Families with Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Issues</i> American Humane	Phone: (303) 792-9900 www.americanhumane.org
May 21st – 24th, 2006 San Diego, California	2006 Prevent Child Abuse America National Conference <i>America's Families: We All Play a Supporting Role</i>	Phone: (312) 334-6809 www.preventchildabuse.org/ ConferenceEvents/conference.html
June 21st - 24th, 2006 Nashville, Tennessee	2006 APSAC 14th Annual Colloquium <i>American Professional Society on Abuse of Children</i>	Phone: (877) 402-7722 apsac.fmhi.usf.edu
July 17 – 19, 2006 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	FFTA's 20th Annual Conference on Treatment Foster Care Foster Family-based Treatment Association	Phone: (800) 414-3382 ext. 121/113/118 Email: shorowitz@ffta.org
July 19 - 21, 2006 Washington, DC	9th National Child Welfare Data and Technology <i>Making IT Work: Improving Data and Practice in a Time of Change</i> National Resource Center for Child Welfare Data and Technology	www.nrcwdt.org/nrc_conf/ pres_2006_outline.html
August 6-8, 2006 New York, New York	Council on Accreditation's 2006 National Conference <i>Achieving Excellence Through Accreditation</i>	Phone: (212) 797-3000 www.coanet.org/2006Conference
October 25 – 27, 2006 Omaha, Nebraska	2006 Annual National Respite and Caregiver Conference <i>Blazing Trails for Caregiving</i> Respite Resource Center	Phone: (402) 996-8444 Email: respitecenter@yahoo.com

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