



CIRCLE OF SUPPORT MISSION:

To promote a positive environment for foster, kinship, and adoptive parents by increasing the level of community support through networking, building partnerships, and information sharing.

FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES SUMMER ISSUE 2007

A Quarterly Newsletter Published for Foster/Adoptive/Kinship Parents

(Mire adentro para español)

GREGORY A. MILLER

Foster and Adoptive Parent

In 1998, he became a certified licensed special needs Foster and Adoptive resource parent with Forestdale, Inc., following his retirement from the Criminal Justice System. For over sixteen years, Mr. Miller has been an adoptive, kinship parent and has become a recruited resource parent to three additional children, who were voluntarily surrendered into foster care. Mr. Miller identifies himself as an ambassador to children in need and in crisis. Mr. Miller has cared for more than thirteen children since becoming a certified provider. He and his partner of twelve years, Hernando R. Ang, have willingly shared their home. Mr. Miller presently has six children, including one adopted and four that he intends to adopt.

Mr. Miller has devoted his time and efforts ascending the horizons of child advocacy by becoming proactive with his agency and his community. He holds an executive board title with Forestdale, Inc. This position has paved the pathway to a new journey in advocacy. His contributions have allowed him to spearhead a vast array of community functions such as scholarship banquets, agency award ceremonies, holiday feasts and community events. His accomplishments have not come without the challenges of community leadership participation and fundraising. Many youths have benefited from Mr. Miller's heartfelt contributions to the Association through the presentation of scholarships, incentive awards and other tangible gifts.

As Mr. Miller's involvement in children's services blossomed, he climbed the mentoring ladder as a community speaker and child advocate representing the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender population. This endeavor opened the door for the parent agencies, including the A.C.S., to form foster parent advocacy groups on a City, State and Federal Level. As leaders researched the formulation of these groups, advocates such as



Mr. Miller were selected for their insight and knowledge to create and shape the LGBT Circle of Support and the *New York State LGBTQ Children's Coalition*.

In 2003 Gregory A. Miller was appointed as Anchor Parent for the *Circle of*

Support's LGBT City-Wide Support Group, in New York City. He presently shares that responsibility with another qualified resource parent, Shawnese Parker. Mr. Miller now focuses his efforts on children with special needs and advocating for the appropriate services for this population. Mr. Miller, who has helped draft legislation, is also a journalist and author of several books. His love, dedication and commitment has inspired him to write *Dreams Really Do Come True*, a Foster, Adoption and Kinship handbook, which is scheduled for release in the Fall of 2007.

Mr. Miller is a true champion for the rights of the children we serve and advocate for seamless service delivery.

Circle Talk

Another year has come and gone and we have accomplished a milestone in our mission in supporting children in need and crisis. Since last summer, we have traveled across the country endorsing the Circle of Support. Members from the Circle of Support participate in many family focused events, including the Cinema Rosa Children's Day and the LGBT Family-to-Family event which were hosted at the Queens Children's Museum and the Brooklyn Children's Museum, respectively.

We have welcomed new anchor parents to the circle who are leading some of our community-based meetings. Congratulations to Sherry Brinson, Nicole Brown, Brenda Burney, Antoinette Cotman, Wade Hanley, Shirley McQueen, Beatrice Williams and Patricia Woods.

Anchor Parents have been featured in print and media interviews. We have seen our colleagues profiles disseminated for national review in publications including celebratory issues for National Foster Care Month. Anchor Parents have also been involved in several focus groups, that will help shape the direction of the child welfare system in terms of planning and service delivery design, in New York City.

Circle Talk (cont'd from page 1)

We are proud to announce the birth of The Full Circle. The Full Circle is a collaboration of Foster Parents and Birth Parents who participate jointly as a workgroup. A founding and current member of The Full Circle is Diane Dunk. The Full Circle is operated under the auspices of the ACS' Office of Advocacy.

The Circle of Support currently has four Circle of Youth groups citywide, including a LGBTQQ specialty group. Circle of Youth is a forum designed to support the constructive expression and information sharing to youths in foster care. For more information on the Circle of Youth, see the article included in this edition.

The Circle of Support welcomes new members. We are here to support, encourage, advocate and inform. *Help is close to home™*.

For any information regarding events and services within the Circle Times contact Diane at 718-712-3874 or Greg at 718-210-3191.

Warmest Regards,
Diane & Greg,
Editors



**Circle
of Youth**
212-341-0728

Circle of Youth is a support group for foster and adopted youth. Participation is open to youth 12 and up including those who have aged out of care.

Mission: To provide a comfortable environment where young adults and adolescents in foster, adopted, kinship, and congregate care settings can come together to learn about their rights, express their feelings, set a positive example, and help each other achieve goals.

Purpose: Meet other foster and adopted youth. Learn about information and programs. Discuss topics that are important to youth in care.

Admission is free

Empowerment and Advocacy

Empowerment is developed through the exploration of options. We are capable of determining the choices that are available to us and then making informed decisions. Empowerment is enhanced through information and knowledge search. Advocacy is a skill of empowerment. With each child that enters our home we strive to make their life improved. We petition for appropriate schooling, fair treatment, financial benefits and so much more. There is strength in knowing your rights and not accepting the wrongs that can be introduced. Resilience is an outgrowth of empowerment that is stimulated by being proactive while minimizing the tendency to be reactive. For all of our experiences we must find the lessons that continue to shape us as individuals. We need to choose to grow through life rather than just go through it. As we travel on our courses it is necessary to be involved in the decision making for ourselves and the children for whom we provide care. We need to be active participants. Question those issues of which you lack knowledge and demand clarification when in doubt.

Knowledge is a key to power; knowledge is a means to strength. The approach that we utilize in the care of our children and ourselves needs to be strength-based.

Many will state that they begin caring for the child placed in the home at the point of arrival. However, the work should actually commence when the referral is made and the inquiry of the availability of your home is asked. You are to begin ensuring that child's safety from the onset. You are provided the name of the child, age and other child specific data. This is the opportunity to inquire of the child's medical condition, if the child is on medication and their diagnosis, and to advocate that the medications

arrive with the child. Each child prior to placement is to be evaluated by a medical provider. The child must also be determined to not be a danger to him/herself or others. Medication and/or prescriptions should be solicited at this point, if necessary. For children previously prescribed medications, refills should be requested or new prescriptions written, if warranted. Children, who must manage the trauma of placement and are on medications, do not need to be compromised by having a disrupted medication administration plan. Missed dosages can compromise their stability and create unsolicited disruptions to the individual and possibly within the household. You want to ensure that the medical regimen is not compromised due to the urgency of placement. Expect and firmly state that medication is to accompany the child; no one wants to risk the decomposition of a child's condition.

At the time of referral is also when you need to begin maintaining a history of the child. Capture all pertinent information that is provided from that first phone call and onward. Maintain individual journals for each child that will provide a chronicle of service efforts, service delivery and outcomes. Keep all documents pertaining to the child, including intake sheets, medical notes, educational reports and mental health evaluations. Ensure that you maintain the documents in a manner to encourage the confidentiality of the child. In the journal, keep a record of visitors who came to the home on behalf of the child. There are resource parents who have caseworkers sign-in when they come for a visit. Agencies must keep records therefore it behooves all resource parents to be as conscientious. This may sound labor intensive, yet it is good practice. All too often you will be asked for historical information

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Summer Fun Safety Tips

With the summer fast approaching, let's remember and practice safety! This is an ideal opportunity to instill positive safety factors in the children we care for. One of the ways we all learn is by replicating someone else's behavior. We learned how to ride a bike by observing how to mount, how to move the feet in a pedaling motion, and that we must balance ourselves in order to not meet the ground very often. Once we understood these basics, we spent a lot of time practicing until we learned (or didn't).

These are the same fundamentals that we have to role model for our children, not just the ones in your home, but the vast community of children. We have to expect our older youths to also demonstrate this to the younger ones who are impressionable and vying to be like the bigger kids. Verbal praise goes a long distance. Positive reinforcement is essential. Safety tools and encouraging words can make the warm weather months more enjoyable. Let's make a commitment to ensure our kids observe some of the basic safety tips.

Pedestrian Safety

- Stop at the curb before entering the street
- Cross the street at designated intersections where you are most visible to vehicular traffic. Never cross the street between parked cars.
- Look in all directions to be aware of what is happening around you
- Wear light colored or reflective clothing in the evenings, to be visible to drivers.

Bicycle safety

- All children under the age of fourteen (14) are required, by law, to wear a helmet when riding a bike or as a passenger on a bike.
- Bicyclists are to ride in the same direction as the flow of traffic.
- Bicyclists must obey all traffic control devices, including stop signs and traffic lights.

Many of you will have the pleasure of teaching children how to cross the street. This is a behavior that they will spend a lifetime practicing. Let's educate them the correct way the first time, so there are fewer hard lessons that they will have to experience down the road, and try to make sure that you and your family are aware of other seasonal and general safety tips. Remember when we practice safety, we are teaching safety. Let's have a healthy summer season!

GIVE THE GIFT OF FAMILY

Please Help Us Recruit Foster and Adoptive Parents

Please help us explore ways to encourage more of your neighbors and friends to become resource parents. Share with us what made you decide to become a provider parent, be it foster, kinship or adoptive. Did someone influence you to accept this life shaping responsibility? Is your commitment steeped in a need to give back to your community? Was your choice to become a resource parent a matter of necessity? And what motivated you to accept the 24 hour, 7 day a week duty?

Please share your story both through this newsletter and in your community. Celebrate your successes while encouraging others to join the ranks of professional parenting. It is proven that the best recruitment tool is word of mouth from current resource parents. Let's work together to increase our strength and commitment to New York City's children by sharing a part of ourselves. The most heartfelt submission will be featured in the next edition of the *Circle Times*.

Recruitment is everybody's business!

Please call 212-676-7381 or email circleofsupport@dfa.state.ny.us

Consejos para la Seguridad y Diversión en el Verano

¡Con el acercamiento del verano, recuerden de practicar la seguridad! Ésta es una oportunidad ideal para inculcarles factores de seguridad positivos en los niños que cuidamos. Una de las maneras que todos aprendemos es imitando el comportamiento de otro. Aprendimos como montar la bicicleta observando como montarla, como mover los pies para pedalear y debemos balancearnos para no caernos muy a menudo. Una vez que entendemos estos fundamentos, pasamos mucho tiempo practicando hasta que lo aprendemos (o nó). Estos son los mismos fundamentos que tenemos que sirven de ejemplos para nuestros niños, no solamente los que están en su hogar, pero la comunidad extensa de niños. Nosotros esperamos que nuestros jóvenes mayores demuestren a los menores, que son mas impresionables y compiten para ser como los jóvenes mayores. El elogio verbal va lejos. El refuerzo positivo es esencial. Las herramientas de seguridad y las palabras que animan pueden hacer que el verano sea mas agradable. Vamos a comprometernos para asegurar que nuestros jóvenes observen algunos de los consejos básicos de seguridad.

Seguridad de peatones:

- Pare en la acera antes de cruzar la calle
- Cruce la calle en las intersecciones señaladas donde usted será mas visible al tráfico de vehículos. Nunca cruce la calle entre coches parqueados.
- Mire en todas las direcciones para estar al tanto de lo que está sucediendo alrededor de usted.
- Use ropa de color claro o reflexiva por las tardes, para ser visible a los conductores.

Seguridad de la bicicleta

- La ley requiere que todos los niños menores de catorce años (14) usen un casco al montar una bicicleta o como pasajero en una bicicleta.
- Los ciclistas deben andar en la misma dirección que el flujo de tráfico.
- Los ciclistas deben de obedecer todos los aparatos del control de tráfico, incluyendo letreros de pare y semáforos.

Muchos de ustedes tendrán el placer de enseñar los niños como cruzar la calle. Esto es un comportamiento que pasarán practicando toda la vida. Vamos a educarlos de la manera correcta la primera vez, así tendrán menos lecciones duras que aprender en el futuro y trate de asegurarse que usted y su familia estén concientes de otros consejos de seguridad general en otras estaciones. Recuerde cuando nosotros practicamos seguridad, estamos enseñando seguridad. ¡Tengamos un verano saludable!

DA EL REGALO DE UNA FAMILIA

Ayúdenos a reclutar padres de crianza y adoptivos

Por favor, ayúdenos a explorar diferentes formas de animar más a sus vecinos y amigos para que se conviertan en padres adoptivos y/o de crianza. Comparta con nosotros cuales fueron las razones por la cual usted decidió ser padre proveedor, sea de crianza, de parentesco o adoptivo. ¿Fue la influencia de otra persona que lo convenció aceptar esta responsabilidad que le ha cambiado la vida? ¿Es su compromiso basado en la necesidad de devolver algo a su comunidad? ¿Fue su decisión convertirse en un padre de crianza o adoptivo por necesidad? ¿Y que lo motivo para aceptar esta función que requiere su esfuerzo las 24 horas del día, 7 días a la semana?

Por favor, comparta su historia por este boletín de noticias y en su comunidad. Celebre sus éxitos mientras anima a otros ser considerados padres profesionales. Ha sido comprobado que el mejor método para reclutar a padres de crianza adoptivos actualmente es de boca en boca. Trabajemos juntos para aumentar nuestra fuerza y compromiso hacia los niños de la Ciudad de Nueva York compartiendo un poco de si mismo. La sumisión mas sincera aparecerá en la próxima edición de *Circle Times*.

¡Reclutamiento es la responsabilidad de todos!

Por favor llame al 212-676-7381 o mande un correo electrónico a circleofsupport@dfa.state.ny.us

Empowerment and Advocacy (cont'd from page 2)

pertaining to the child, a proactive plan for compiling data can be less stressful than a barrage of questions and a mountain of unorganized documents.

We all work with agencies, including the telephone company, cable company, managed health care providers therefore we have experienced the necessity of paperwork. Service requests can be made by phone or in person, yet there are times that requests need to be in writing. Documents become a matter of record and a guide to follow-up on requested items, for timely implementation if approved. You should also request a response in writing. Of course, all service requests are incorporated into the child's journal that you are maintaining.

Entries do not need to be lengthy. Summarize the pertinent information and list the participants. Other items that you need to capture are specific times of events, the location, the child's feelings and/or behavior. This compilation can also be helpful in understanding a child's response to varying situations. You may discover patterns in the child's behaviors that may present as reactions or outbursts, based on specific factors. You may see that each time the child visits with a particular relative they return very withdrawn and will isolate him/herself. The behavior is indicative of a feeling. The child may not express the feeling immediately but through encouragement and patience may become able to express it within the safe environment. This all does take time; it is an investment into the future of a child. The dividends however can be rich. Diane Dunk, an adoptive parent, stated recently that "being a good foster parent means making a commitment to doing whatever is in the best interests of the child." She elaborated further and shared how "The work may be challenging, but I am blessed with many rewards, too."

It is very easy to get frustrated with a child who has frequent outbursts and other defined negative behaviors, including going missing. However, we need to maintain lines of effective communication. Keep in mind the old adage - things happen for a reason. Record when the child went missing and when they returned. Capture where the child stated s/he went. And make sure you have handy the names and phone numbers of the adults and young people who are important to your child. One foster parent told ACS that when a child with a history of running away is placed in her home, she makes a practice of calling all of the people to whose homes her foster child might runaway, introducing herself, and asking them to please alert her if her foster child "runs away" to their home.

We all have made a commitment to serving children. These efforts may help the delivery of services to the child to be at its optimum. You may assist the child in understanding him/herself and manage the feelings and behaviors that are demonstrated. *Be the Hero of a Child's story.*

ACS' Improved Outcomes For Children Strategy

On May 7, 2007, ACS' Commissioner John Mattingly, Deputy Commissioner Jeanette Ruiz, Associate Commissioner Eric Nicklas and Assistant Commissioners Lorraine Stephens, Jess Dannhauser, Dawn Saffayeh and James Edell held a special briefing for foster parent leaders on ACS' new Improved Outcomes for Children Strategy. Nearly 75 Circle of Support Anchor Parents, foster parent advocates newly hired by foster care agencies, and heads of agencies' foster parent associations gathered to learn how, over the coming year, ACS and its partner foster care agencies will be gearing up to implement important changes in the way that foster care services are delivered and monitored in New York City.

On the one hand, agencies will be given greater decision-making authority and autonomy and will be responsible for convening family team meetings every 90 days to expedite the achievement of permanency for children in care. ACS will take part in these conferences every six months.

In addition, experienced ACS social workers will facilitate family team meetings at certain critical points in the life of a child in care - for example, before a child is moved from one foster home placement to another or before a child's permanency goal is changed.

ACS is also in the process of bolstering its capacity to monitor the outcomes achieved by foster care agencies and the supports they provide to their foster parents.

Foster parent input will be an important aspect of this new work. Additional details about Improving Outcomes for Children will be available in upcoming issues of Circle Times and on the ACS website, www.nyc.gov/acs

La estrategia 'Resultados Mejorados para Niños' de ACS

El 7 de Mayo, 2007, el Comisionado de A.C.S. John Mattingly, Comisionada Diputada Jeannette Ruiz, Comisionado Asociado Eric Nicklas y Comisionada Asistentes Lorraine Stephens, Jess Danhauser, Dawn Saffayeh y James Edell tuvieron una sesión informativa especial para los líderes de padres de crianza sobre la nueva estrategia de A.C.S. llamada 'Resultados Mejorados para Niños'. Cerca de 75 padres del Circulo de Apoyo (Circle of Support), defensores de los padres de crianza recién contratados por sus agencias, y directores de las agencias con asociaciones de padres de crianza se reunieron para enterarse como, en el próximo año, A.C.S. y sus agencias sociales se van a preparar para llevar a cabo cambios importantes en la manera como los servicios de padres de crianza son despachados y monitoreados en la Ciudad de Nueva York.

Por un lado, las agencias serán otorgadas más autorización y autonomía sobre toma de decisiones y serán responsables por convocar 'reuniones de equipos familiares' (Family Team Meetings) cada 90 días para acelerar el logro de una familia permanente para los niños bajo nuestro cuidado. A.C.S. tomará parte en estas reuniones cada 6 meses.

Además, trabajadores sociales experimentados de A.C.S. facilitarán las 'reuniones de equipos familiares' durante puntos críticos en la vida de un niño bajo nuestro cuidado - por ejemplo, antes de que un niño sea trasladado de un hogar a otro o antes de que su meta de permanencia oficial (permanency planning goal) sea cambiada.

A.C.S. también esta reforzando sus capacidades de controlar los resultados logrados por las agencias sociales y los apoyos que éstas agencias proveen a su red de padres de crianza.

Las opiniones y aportación de los padres de crianza será un aspecto muy importante de esta nueva estrategia. Detalles adicionales sobre 'Resultados Mejorados para Niños' serán disponibles en ediciones siguientes de *Circle Times* y en el sitio web de A.C.S., www.nyc.gov/acs

Visit NYC ACS's website at
www.nyc.gov/acs



NYC Administration for
Children's Services

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New York, New York 10038

COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS: If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this issue, please contact Diane at 718-712-3874.

TO SEND MATERIALS FOR THE NEWSLETTER MAIL TO:

Attn: Circle of Support/Newsletter, 150 William Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10038
or email to: circleofsupport@dfa.state.ny.us

You are invited to join a **Circle of Support** group for Foster, Kinship, and Adoptive Parents.

These groups meet monthly in all five boroughs. Please join us to learn new information, and have the opportunity to discuss topics that are important to our families.

Brooklyn:

Bed-Stuy.: Audrey 718-382-3797
Bushwick: Janet 718-573-6654/Queenie 718-452-5038
Canarsie: Betty 718-241-6168/Sherry 718-642-6202
Crown Heights: Shatema 347-385-0608/Pearl 718-774-9834
Downtown Bklyn: Lourdes 718-596-2035/Brenda 347-578-7192
Flatbush: Nivia 718-675-4504

Bronx:

Concourse Village: Grace 718-295-2391/Nicole 646-281-2726
Mott Haven: Leatrice 718-379-4739/Carol 718-993-4225
Kingsbridge: Nancy 347-275-8769/Patricia 718-877-5790

Manhattan:

Central Harlem: Angela 212-426-0983/Wade 212-281-8614

Queens:

Jamaica: Dymita 718-949-0438/Beatrice 347-869-7322
Long Island City: Minerva 718-728-2083
Queens Village: Antoinette 718-322-1173

Staten Island:

Shirley 917-805-3546

LGBT:

Greg 718-210-3191/Shawnese 718-529-2532

Circle of Support Borough Coordinators:

Queens: Barbara 718-776-1250/Diane 718-712-3874
Brooklyn/Staten Island: Jill 347-715-6926
Bronx/Manhattan: Henrietta 718-992-9362

www.circleofsupport.org

Circle of Support is organized and run by Foster and Adoptive Parents living in our community, in partnership with the NYC Administration for Children Services. Participation is open to Foster and Adoptive Parents from all agencies.