

THE FLASH

A Publication of the NJ State Child Placement Advisory Council (CPAC)
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Volume 12
March 2011

CPAC Annual Conference & Training Co-Sponsored with CASA of New Jersey

By Barbara Kutscher, Co-Chair Program Committee

Save the Date flyers have been mailed, so be sure to mark April 5, on your calendars as a reminder to attend the CPAC Annual Conference/Training, sponsored this year in conjunction with CASA of New Jersey. This year's theme, "Path to Permanency: The First 12 Months," reflects CPAC's strong commitment to developing programs that are both relevant and informative for child placement review volunteers and other child welfare stakeholders. The conference will be held at the Middlesex County Fire Training Academy in Sayreville until 3:30.

The CPAC Program Committee has developed an exciting program, divided into morning and afternoon training sessions. The morning session training will cover the path to a child's removal from the home and the trauma of placement. Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) will present an explanation of the law regarding reasons for placement; statistics on the number of families being served both in-home and out-of-home; and an overview of pre-placement family engagement. Susan Esquilin, a well-respected academic and clinician in the field of child abuse, will then deliver a presentation focused on the trauma of removal; the difficulty a child has in coming to terms with his or her parent's actions; and the importance of communication between parent and child in order to reach an understanding.

The afternoon session will feature a case milestone panel discussion and a presentation on visitation. Moderated by Rita Gulden, Executive Director, CASA of New Jersey, the panel discussion among representatives of social service agencies and the courts will focus on milestones and responsibilities during the first 12 months in placement. The conference will end with a presentation on visitation by Joseph Suozzo, former first assistant child advocate in the New Jersey Office of the Child Advocate and current deputy public defender in charge of the Asbury Park Law Guardian Office. This presentation will include an overview of visitation in New Jersey; a discussion of national trends; a summary of the Office of the Child Advocate report and recommendations; the federal monitor's report and findings; and the results of the NFCRC survey.

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Volunteer View

CPAC Annual Conference: Tuesday April 5
Look for registration materials in your mail!

Volunteers Needed For CPAC Executive Board

By Nancy Leibold, Chair, Nominating Committee

Volunteers are urgently needed to serve as officers on the executive board of the New Jersey State Child Placement Advisory Council and to serve as members of the board. You do not need to be a past or present member of the executive board to be elected to an officer position.

The election for the executive board officers and members will be held in June. This year CPAC membership will be voting to fill four officer positions of chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer and eight member positions. There are three members who are returning to the board to complete their two-year terms.

The executive board conducts the business of the council. The number of meetings, the dates and locations of meetings is decided by the incoming board after the election. This year, there have been six executive board meetings and a Retreat. All were held at the Justice Complex in Trenton.

The Election Process: The CPAC Nominating Committee is recruiting candidates for the 2011-2012 slate. In early April, every CPAC volunteer will receive a letter seeking candidates for the executive board. Any child placement review volunteer who has been on a board for at least one year can apply for nomination. During the April conference, there will be an opportunity for the nominating committee to meet with potential candidates. To be considered for a position on the 2011 slate, you can self-nominate, which is highly encouraged.

The election will be held at the CPAC meeting on June 9. The slate of candidates will be mailed prior to this meeting for consideration by the county boards. Each CPR board has one vote: the chairperson-or their designated representative-will be asked to submit their board's vote using the form that will be provided.

The Need: This is a dynamic period for the child placement review process in general and CPAC members specifically. As CPAC Chair Gail Houlihan discussed in her message in the January 2011 *FLASH*, as of August 2010, some 300 volunteers serve on approximately 46 CPR boards, down from 501 volunteers on 85 CPR boards in June 2009. Many of the courts are reaching out to their local communities for additional volunteers, so it is expected that the number will increase as citizen reviewers are trained in the new system.

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CPAC Annual Conference & Training continued...

CPAC has extended invitations to two keynote speakers this year, consistent with the dual judicial and social service perspectives of the conference. Judge Grant, acting administrative director of the courts, will present a keynote speech focusing on the role of the Judiciary in children in placement in terms of case monitoring and achievement of permanency. We await a response from the Children and Families, which has been asked to share its vision of the role DCF plays in providing permanency for children placed out of home in New Jersey.

The CPAC Program Committee is excited to present "Path to Permanency: The First 12 Months," and we hope that child placement review volunteers will make every effort to participate on April 5.

Volunteers Needed For CPAC Executive Board continued

The executive board will be working closely with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to support the volunteers in their work reviewing the cases of children in placement. It is imperative that the board communicates with the CPR volunteers and the AOC to help the courts implement the new procedures as effectively and efficiently as possible. The board will work to obtain feedback from the volunteers to assist in the process of working to have a consistent, quality review process throughout New Jersey. The single goal for this effort is achieving permanency as quickly as possible for those children who have been removed from their homes by the DYFS.

Volunteers are invited to attend the next board meeting, which is scheduled for March 29 at the Justice Complex in Trenton. The meeting is held from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. You are welcomed and encouraged to attend to learn more about the board, even if you can't arrive by 4 p.m. or if you can't stay for the entire meeting.

If you are interested in attending the March 29 board meeting, or if you have questions about the election process, contact Nancy Leibold at nancyleibold@comcast.net or 856-235-4392.

Consider joining the board and taking a proactive role in improving the child placement review system throughout New Jersey.

Meeting with Assemblyman Angel Fuentes By Andrea Freedman, Former CPR Volunteer Camden County

After two snowstorms forced the cancellation of our appointment, I was able to meet with Fuentes on Feb. 7. My visit was part of the ongoing efforts of the executive board to bring awareness of the CPR climate to the Legislature. Fuentes served as a volunteer on a CPR board in Camden County and sits on the Assembly Human Services Committee.

I asked him about his personal experiences with CPR and found that we had much in common. He served on a CPR board in the early 1990's under Judge Joseph M. Nardi, Jr. and Judge Robert Page, two family court judges who were supportive of citizen review. He also was trained by my mentor, Ralph Suarez, who was the CPR coordinator at that time. It was also a time when Camden County was known for its progressive and innovative stands for children in placement, likely because the judges were so supportive and reliant on CPR volunteer findings. Fuentes remembers his contacts with foster parents, natural parents and interviews with children. He felt that CPR volunteers made an impact on the permanency process and their involvement was a more personal intervention than the formal court system. He also remembered many conversations with DYFS workers and the positive working relationships they had with CPR boards, in spite of the fact that many times CPR volunteers were demanding regarding the casework planning. My purpose was to advise him that the landscape of CPR has changed drastically.

As a result of the recent Directive 04-10, CPR boards no longer play a part in permanency planning or ongoing interviewing of clients. Because of this diminished role, many CPR volunteers have resigned from service. There are more than 8,000 children in placement, 10 percent of which are in Camden County. My experience has been that family court judges have large caseloads and are often short staffed. The new directive places much more responsibility on our judges to navigate these children through the system as well as conform to the federal guidelines. Some of the reasoning behind a diminished volunteer participation was to save the courts money. Since the cost of CPR was raised as one of the reasons for the change in practice we discussed that perhaps there was some way to work out a cost effective system that would enhance oversight of children. We agreed that more thought should go into withdrawing child advocates from a system that has been badly in need of advocates. Fuentes said he would be speaking with his colleagues about our issues and in fact, was aware of these issues before my visit. My goal was to make him aware, in a more personal way that our children no longer benefit from citizen review throughout the life of their case. I found him to be very responsive and concerned.

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