County of Los Angeles
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE
713 KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
(213) 974-1101
http://ceo.lacounty.gov

WILLIAM T FUJIOKA
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Supervisors
GLORIA MOLINA
First District

YVONNE B. BURKE
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District

DON KNABE
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

October 16, 2007

To: Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: William T Fujioka
Chief Executive Officer

REPORT REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS FOR ADOPTION RECRUITMENT AND RESOLVING ANY BARRIERS TO FULL UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEERS

On July 31, 2007, on motion of Supervisor Knabe, as amended by Supervisor Antonovich, the Board instructed: 1) the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to report back on faith-based groups and the outreach programs to various groups; and 2) the Chief Executive Office (CEO), with County Counsel and DCFS, to report back within 60 days on resolving any barriers, legal or otherwise, to the full utilization of volunteers in the faith-based community, but not limited to, using volunteers to transport children in their own vehicles to church and other events, and increasing the volunteer opportunities for faith-based programs and churches to support our children and help with adoption home recruitment efforts.

THE USE OF FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS FOR ADOPTION RECRUITMENT

During the past year, DCFS has worked diligently to develop and maintain ongoing partnerships with the faith-based community in order to recruit more prospective adoptive parents, particularly for older children that have been waiting for a permanent family. DCFS began involving the faith-based community in 2005 when the Department worked with Supervisor Antonovich's office to host a brunch for faith-based leaders. The goal of the brunch was to engage the faith-based community in meeting the needs of children in foster care. Since then, faith-based collaboratives have been formed throughout the County. By mid-2006, specific plans were identified to recruit resource families and adoptive parents through the faith-based community.

In December 2006, DCFS held its first intensive recruitment event when it partnered with West Angeles Church of God in Christ and its congregation to host a Holiday Matching Party. The event was the culmination of an extensive campaign after which 16 families signed up to begin the adoption process.

In April 2007, DCFS partnered with Child Share, an agency that recruits prospective adoptive families for private agencies in the faith-based community, to hold an Adoption Sunday at Crenshaw Christian Church. Interested families attended an information meeting followed by a party with children waiting to be adopted. This effort resulted in 41 prospective families signing up and attending a DCFS orientation. DCFS is currently in the process of partnering again with Child Share on two different programs.

DCFS is also working on various contracts to strengthen its partnerships with the faith-based community to increase recruitment of prospective adoptive families. For example, an agreement with One Church One Child is being developed to help the organization update their website to feature children waiting for adoption and to develop a campaign with a faith-based radio station.

Furthermore, DCFS' Resource Family Recruitment section, which recruits families to help with reunification and pre-approves them to adopt should reunification efforts be unsuccessful, has partnered with the Family-to-Family section and regional office staff to provide Service Planning Area (SPA) specific faith-based events. At these events, recruitment tables with photos of children waiting to be adopted are set up and a DCFS recruiter speaks to the group about how their faith-based organization can recruit families for waiting children. In addition, DCFS has created Covenant Books, which are small booklets featuring children waiting to be adopted. The booklets are distributed throughout the faith-based community and ask that if members of a congregation cannot adopt one of the children, that they advocate for and encourage others to consider adoption.

Another significant outreach effort is the development of the Heart Gallery Los Angeles (HGLA). HGLA, created by DCFS and community partners, is a roving portrait gallery of children waiting to be adopted and is designed to increase adoption awareness and recruit potential adoptive families for older youth, sibling sets and traditionally harder to place youth. HGLA's photo gallery has already been displayed at St. Monica's Church in Santa Monica where 15 families signed up for an adoption orientation. St. Monica's has also agreed to host additional orientations at its facilities and will continue to feature DCFS children waiting to be adopted in their on-line newsletters.

Recently, DCFS co-sponsored the following faith-based events: 1) September 15, 2007 HGLA display at the Faith-Based Family Fun Day in Torrance; 2) September 29, 2007 HGLA display at a festival sponsored by La Mirada Area Christian Church; 3) September 30, 2007 Open Your Heart Weekend at St. Thomas Church in Hollywood; and 4) October 13 and October 14, 2007 Open Your Heart Weekend at Whittier Area Community Church. In addition, DCFS is working with Pastor Andre at the Eagle Rock Christian Church and Pastor Lacy of Christ Church of the Valley to develop future faith-based events.

One of the newer DCFS programs, Kidsave Weekend Miracles, has done outreach in many of the faith-based communities to encourage them to host events and help recruit weekend hosts, advocates, and prospective adoptive families. On October 27, 2007, All Saints Church in Pasadena will be hosting a Kidsave event and in May 2008 they will be hosting the Heart Gallery as part of one of their larger community events.

Further, All Saints Church has been working with DCFS in attempts to start a Church Mentor Program. The program will identify specific congregants to "mentor" children who expressed a desire to be involved in activities at that religious organization by taking the child to various church activities based on the their interests. The mentor will also advocate for the child at church and inform families at All Saints that he or she needs a family. This workgroup is also looking into featuring a waiting child monthly in the on-line newsletters.

The Department has made significant progress with the faith-based community and will continue its outreach efforts so that more children will be able to have a permanent family.

RESOLVING BARRIERS TO FULL UTILIZATION OF VOLUNTEERS

Based on our review, there are no significant barriers prohibiting the County from utilizing volunteers in the faith-based community to work with or to assist with the transportation of children to and from County sponsored/co-sponsored programs. Provisions are currently in-place which allow County volunteers to drive their own vehicles in the course of performing County related activities. Specifically, existing County policy and past practice is such that we allow County volunteers who use their own vehicles as long as they: 1) are enrolled as a County volunteer; 2) possess a valid California driver's license; 3) maintain appropriate auto liability insurance; and 4) the use of their vehicle is not outside the scope of their volunteer assignment. In addition, County departments are either already or may register with the California Department of Motor Vehicles, which would enable them to review and evaluate a volunteer's driving record.

As mentioned above, DCFS has been proactive in increasing volunteer opportunities for the faith-based community and churches to support children in the care of Los Angeles County. All individuals interested in assisting DCFS as a County enrolled volunteer or mentor must pass a thorough criminal and child abuse background check and complete Departmental orientation and training on appropriate interactions with youth prior to having any contact with DCFS children.

In addition, some DCFS programs with faith-based organizations and churches utilize group volunteers. In these situations, volunteers are in a public group setting where they are supervised by County social workers and are not left alone with DCFS children. While formal enrollment of the individuals is impractical, the Department may enroll the entire group as County volunteers. The group as a whole would receive DCFS orientation and training and are required to provide group leader and individual names, addresses, telephone numbers, and other personal information that may be requested. For those volunteers who may be interested and available to assist with the transportation of DCFS children in their own vehicles, the same County Volunteer registration, requisite background clearances, orientation and training, and insurance requirements would apply.

Finally, DCFS is in the process of developing specific protocols to expedite the clearance process for its volunteers and mentors. While there is some potential liability with volunteers transporting DCFS children in their own vehicles, we believe the County's risk management controls are appropriate and do not present a barrier to the full utilization of volunteers. Having volunteers participate in transporting children to and from faith-based activities, as well as community and recruitment events will help DCFS children develop positive adult relationships which can lead to permanent connections in their lives.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me, or your staff may contact Brian Mahan at (213) 974-1318.

WTF:SRH:BY:
GP:BM:SG:lm

c: County Counsel
Department of Children and Family Services