



# Children & Family News

February 2010

*N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update*



## **Dickinson region receives grant to establish a new Early Head Start Program**

It will be the first of its kind in southwestern North Dakota. The Community Action Partnership Agency (CAP) that runs the Head Start Program has been awarded a \$1.17 million federal grant to start an Early Head Start program, which will benefit infants, toddlers, and pregnant women.

Once fully developed, the comprehensive child development program will serve Adams, Billings, Bowman, Dunn, Golden Valley, Hettinger, Slope, and Stark counties. The agency will provide periodic home-based services including home visits and socialization opportunities, as well as center-based services five days per week in Dickinson.

"We are very excited to see Sharon Hansen and her staff receive this important funding, which will benefit children and families in the southwestern part of the state. Their proposal competed against applicants from across the country," said Linda Rorman, State Head Start Collaboration Office administrator for the N.D. Department of Human Services.

Rorman said it has been almost 10 years since North Dakota received funding to expand Early Head Start Program services. There are currently seven other Early Head Start Programs in North Dakota.

CAP Head Start Director Sharon Hansen described the community support as incredible.

"Local partners pledged \$275,000 in match, and over 40 community partners submitted letters of support or memorandums of agreement," Hansen said.

The new program will provide early childhood enrichment and learning activities, daily care, parenting education, comprehensive health and mental health services, including services for participating women before, during, and after pregnancy; nutrition, and other support for parents.

Hansen said the Community Action Partnership Agency has one year to complete planning and some new services may become available as early as the summer of 2010.

CAP has been the Head Start grantee in the region since 1991 and currently serves about 152 preschool children (ages 3-4) and their families.

For information about Head Start and Early Head Start services, visit [www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/headstart/](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/headstart/). For information about the Community Action Head Start and Early Head Start grantee in the Southwest region, see [www.dickinsoncap.org/Head-Start.html](http://www.dickinsoncap.org/Head-Start.html).



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## Recent legislation fosters family connections

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections) is a federal law that includes important improvements for children and youth who are in foster care or at risk of entering foster care. Fostering Connections is considered by many to be the most influential piece of legislation passed affecting child welfare since the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. The act became law on October 7, 2008, when it was signed by President Bush after unanimously passing both the U.S. House and Senate.

Fostering Connections is already making a difference in North Dakota for children and youth in foster care by promoting permanent family unity through adoption or relative guardianship. Some foster care highlights of the law include:

- If a child will not be returning home within 30 days, a relative search will take place.
- Relatives must be notified when a child is removed from the parents custody.
- Reasonable efforts will be made to place siblings in the same foster care, relative, guardianship or adoptive placement, unless the well-being of a child is in jeopardy.
- Efforts must be made for a foster child attending an elementary or secondary school to remain in their original school. If a move is necessary, a transfer will be completed promptly, and educational records will be provided to the new school.
- A personalized transition plan will be developed 90-days before a foster child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to address housing, health insurance, education, employment service issues, and local opportunities for mentors.
- When licensing a relative's home, a waiver of non-safety related licensing standards may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Fostering Connections has the potential to make a tremendous impact on adoptions of children in foster care too. Under the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) law of 1996, states could only claim reimbursement for special needs children adopted from foster care if their birth parents met certain eligibility requirements. For instance, if their income exceeded the requirements, the child would not qualify for Title IV-E funding. If this happened, the state and county would carry the full financial burden of any adoption subsidy negotiated with the adoptive family.

Fostering Connections changed this. It allows all children who meet special needs criteria to eventually be eligible for Title IV-E funding for adoption assistance without the consideration of their birth parents' income. This provision will be phased in over a nine-year span and completed by September 2018.

For an in-depth look at the Fostering Connections legislation, log on to <http://www.fosteringconnections.org>.

## New legislation and technology improve background checks

Over the past three years in North Dakota, there has been a substantial increase in the number of criminal finger-based background checks completed due in part to the federal Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006. This federal law requires finger-based background checks for all prospective adoptive parents, legal guardians of children, foster care providers and facility employees.

North Dakota legislators took child safety a step farther during the 61<sup>st</sup> Legislative Session passing Senate Bill 2162, which amended North Dakota Century Code chapter 50-11.1, Early Childhood Services. It became law July 1, 2009.

The legislation ended the CareCheck Registry, a voluntary child care provider background registry created in 1991, and

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put into effect mandatory fingerprint-based criminal background checks for childcare providers.

Currently, these fingerprint-based criminal background checks are required for **new** early childhood services providers and personnel including: directors, supervisors, providers, as well as employees who are eighteen years of age or older, and who have lived outside North Dakota and Minnesota in the last 10 years. This requirement does not include volunteers such as foster grandparents and practicum students.

To meet federal requirements in maintaining the integrity of applicant fingerprints, the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Division invested in 16 *LiveScan* fingerprint scanners. These machines are inkless fingerprinting devices that electronically transmit data to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) in Bismarck to complete a criminal background check. This new technology has streamlined the background check process and eliminated the mailing of fingerprint files to BCI.

Each of the department's eight regional human service centers received two *LiveScan* fingerprint scanners: a desktop model and a portable model. The portable *LiveScan* is available for county child care licensors, foster care/guardianship or licensed child placing agency workers to check out as needed once they have completed training on the machine.

## Meet the Children and Family Services (CFS) Division

### CFS Director



**Tara Muhlhauser** was named director of Children and Family Services (CFS) in December 2008. Prior to her promotion, she was the deputy director. She was hired as the court improvement specialist

in 2005. Muhlhauser is a licensed social worker, attorney, and carries a designation

as an assistant attorney general for North Dakota. She returned to North Dakota in 2005 from Washington state where she was a special assistant to the assistant secretary working on "Family2Family" practice improvements in the children's administration.

### Liaison Accountant



**Donna Aukland** works with fiscal administration in the department. Aukland prepares, monitors, and assists with the creation of the division's budget. She

oversees expenditures, cash flow reports, project revenues, and annual reports. She also works hand-in-hand with counties on budget issues. Aukland holds a degree in accounting from the University of Mary and has been with the department for five years.

### Child Protection Services Administrator



**Marlys Baker** has been with the Department of Human Services for 11 years. As the new State Child Protection (SCP) administrator, she chairs the SCP team and the North Dakota Child Fatality

Review Panel. Her first assignment was with Child Maltreatment Prevention services. Before joining the department, Baker worked at the Burleigh County Social Service office as a child protection social worker for six years. She holds an associate degree in psychology from Bismarck State College and a bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Mary.

### Early Childhood Services Administrator



**Jennifer Barry** joined CFS in November 2009 and is responsible for administering childcare licensing and quality initiatives in North Dakota. Barry has been involved in

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direct early childhood care as a kindergarten teacher, a center director, and a group child care provider. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary and early childhood education and a master's degree in education.

### ***Administrative Assistant Adoption Services***



**Susan Doerr** joined CFS full-time in April 2009 and provides administrative support to the division and adoption services. Prior to that, she worked for the department's Medical

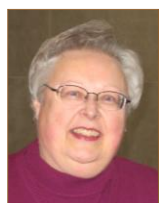
Services Division.

### ***Criminal Background Check Unit***



**Nadine Ehrhardt** joined CFS background check unit in November 2006. She processes criminal background checks of prospective foster and adoptive parents, guardians, and employees at residential child care facilities.

### ***Birth & Adoptive Family Services Coordinator***



**Delores Friedt** has been with CFS for 10 years and brings almost 30 years of child welfare experience to the division. Friedt's program areas include adoption, deputy compact administrator (DCA) for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children – Adoptions, DCA for the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance, Crossroads program, and Child and Family Service Reviews. She began her career as a social worker in Grant County, then advanced to Badlands Human Service Center, Home on the Range, and West Central Human Service Center. Friedt has a bachelor's degree in social work from UND and a master's degree in social work from Kansas University.

### ***Adoption Services Administrator***



**Julie Hoffman** oversees the adoption program for CFS, a position she has held since 1998. She has 27 years of child welfare experience and previously worked at McKenzie County Social

Services and West Central Human Service Center. Hoffman received the national *Angels in Adoption* awarded in 2008. She holds a bachelor's degree in social work from UND.

### ***Children's Mental Health Administrator***



**Wendy LaMontagne** joined CFS and the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division in September 2008. She supervises various children's mental health programs for the

state. Before joining the department, she was a licensed social worker at Wells County Social Services and the Professional Association of Treatment Homes (PATH). LaMontagne has a bachelor's degree in social work from Minot State University and a master's degree in social work from UND.

### ***Child Maltreatment Prevention Services Administrator***



**Tracy Miller** has been with CFS since June 2009. Miller administers many programs including institutional child protection services, the North Dakota Child Fatality Review Panel, and child abuse/

neglect prevention activities in the state. Prior to joining the division, she was the director at the Family Safety Center in Bismarck. Earlier in her career, she was a child advocate at the Abused Adult Resource Center. Miller holds bachelor's degrees in sociology and criminal justice from Moorhead State University. She is also a certified family law mediator in North Dakota.

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### **Administrative Assistant**



**Cindy Nolz** has worked in state government for nearly 33 years. She began her career as a secretary with the Child Support Enforcement Division. In 1982, Nolz transferred to CFS and is responsible for the

Child Abuse and Neglect Registry and works with the Child Protection Services programs.

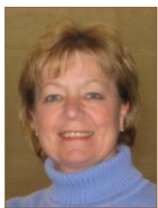
### **Human Service Program Specialist**



**Paula Pearson** joined the department in January 2009 and moved into the criminal background investigation unit in September 2009. She is part of a three-person team processing background

checks for prospective foster care and adoptive parents, family members seeking guardianship, and child care providers. Pearson has worked in public relations, DHS Quality Control Unit and the Executive Office.

### **Human Service Program Administrator**



**Deb Petry** has worked in the foster care unit of CFS for 18 years first as an administrative assistant. She was promoted to Human Service Program Administrator in 1997. In addition to her foster care

duties, Petry administers the state's Subsidized Guardianship program and is the deputy administrator for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children – Foster Care.

### **Administrative Assistant**



**Judy Reile** joined the CFS staff in April 2009 after almost 30 years in the private sector. Her responsibilities include providing support to seven CFS program administrators and staff and serving as the

division's human resources and payroll contact. Reile's background is in litigation as a legal assistant in corporate defense law firms in Los Angeles and Bismarck. She was also a bookkeeper and office manager.

### **North Dakota Head Start State Collaboration Administrator**



**Linda Rorman** has been the administrator of this program for nearly 10 years. She provides technical assistance and support to local Head Start and Early Head Start programs in North Dakota.

She also works with a number of state agencies serving infants, children, and families to help strengthen communication and coordination of services. Rorman was the Head Start director at the Community Action Region VI agency in Jamestown before joining CFS. She has bachelor's degrees in elementary education and early childhood education from UND and a master's degree in management with a human resources certificate from the University of Mary.

### **Independent Living Administrator**



**Rhonda Stevens** has been with the department for three years first as an advanced clinical specialist and now as administrator of the Chafee Independent Living Program for foster youth. Before

joining CFS, Stevens worked for Alaska's Department of Corrections in the women's state correctional facility as a mental health clinician. Stevens has a bachelor's degree in human development and a master's degree in community counseling. She is also a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, LPCC.

*Cleaning your house while your kids are still growing is like shoveling the walk before it stops snowing.*

*- Phyllis Diller, actress & comedian*

### **North Dakota State Foster Care Administrator**



**Dean Sturn** has dedicated his 23-year career to group and family foster care, both in the private and public sector. Sturn has a master's degree in social work from UND. He has been the foster care administrator for nearly one year, and prior to that worked with the Chafee Independent Living Program.

### **ITS, Business Analyst**



**Michelle Watne** joined the division in December 2007. As business analyst, Watne works with process management and improvements for CFS and their customers in relation to the FRAME and the Comprehensive Child Welfare, Information, and Payment System (CCWIPS) computer applications. She began her career in government in 1985 at Ward County Social Services as an administrative secretary, eventually becoming an eligibility worker. Before joining CFS, she was a quality control reviewer in the Economic Assistance Policy Division serving the south central region for nine years.

### **Family Preservation Administrator and Family Preservation Services/Wraparound**



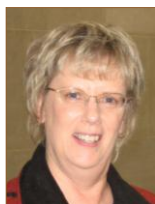
**Diana Weber** has been with CFS since April 2009. She administers several programs designed to help families, including adoptive or extended families, alleviate crises, and prevent the out-of-home placement of children. Before joining the division, Weber was a Partnerships Care Coordinator for nearly 11 years at the Department's human service centers in Jamestown and Bismarck. Weber has a bachelor's degree in both psychology and alcohol and drug abuse studies and a master's degree in counseling.

### **CCWIPS Help Desk and Single Plan of Care**



**Paulette Westrum** joined CFS in January 2000 and works with FRAME and the Comprehensive Child Welfare, Information, and Payment System (CCWIPS) helpdesk. She is also an eligibility specialist for Title IV-E Foster Care. Before joining the department, Westrum was employed by Williams County Social Services in Economic Assistance for 18 years.

### **Criminal Background Checks Unit Supervisor**



**Brandy Wiese** began her career with the department in 1986 in the Personnel Division. Wiese transferred to CFS in March 2001 as a human service program specialist in the Criminal Background Check Unit (CBCU) and was promoted to supervisor in August 2009. Wiese is a long-time member and past executive board member of the North Dakota Conference of Social Welfare.

*When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments; tenderness for what he is, and respect for what he may become.*

*- Louis Pasteur, chemist & biologist*

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