



Our Mission

The mission of Community Connections is to facilitate the organization of comprehensive family support systems in neighborhoods throughout the Commonwealth to prevent child abuse and neglect. Community Connections promotes a planning framework that is prevention-focused, is collaborative and builds upon the strengths and diversity within our neighborhoods.

Massachusetts
Department of
Social Services

LEWIS H. SPENCE
Commissioner

Fall 2002

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS QUARTERLY

A newsletter for, by and about Community Connections in Massachusetts

Advocate Jacklyn Harris, fondly remembered



Some individuals come to community work through circumstance, some know from a very young age that their place on earth is to advocate for families and children. Jacklyn Harris Stone was the second kind of individual. She had a vision of healthy families living in healthy communities. Her mission was to educate communities to make families and children a priority.

A History of Caring

In the early 80s, Jacklyn began working as a child advocate at the former Office For Children. She later did substance abuse prevention work when working for Bay State Health Systems of Springfield. Her supervisor, Frank Robinson, remembers: "Jacklyn was an uncompromising advocate for children. At times, and often, she would come into my office to warn me about a phone call that I was about to receive or a note that was in the mail to me.

Invariably, she had recently confronted some sort of injustice or inaction by an adult who was not holding up their end of the partnership with the young people we were working with."

In the 90's, Springfield saw the number of child abuse and neglect cases sky rocket. Jacklyn went to work for the Springfield Family Support Coalition, seeing it as an opportunity to work with families who truly needed assistance in raising healthy children. One thing that really excited and energized Jackie was the commitment and vision of her staff.

The energy, commitment and knowledge that Jackie brought to the families of Springfield were priceless. She devoted her life to helping others – mostly assisting mothers to realize their potential as women and as role models for their children.

We lost Jacklyn to cancer this past August but it wasn't without a fight. She leaves her husband Warren Stone and two daughters, Danielle and Alexandra. We will always miss Jacklyn for all that she was, for all that she gave and for the way she believed in people and in communities. Rest in peace dear friend.

– Betty Medina-Lichtenstein

Reflections from Friends

"Her work was characterized by her devotion. She always had room for one more child in her life"

– Frank Robinson

"How can you thank someone who has brought you from being a partaker of community services to being an active member and provider of those same community services. Someone who encouraged you to go back to school and earn your degree, while supporting you in every aspect of this endeavor. Jacklyn was a woman that always encouraged her staff to achieve higher, knowing that reflection might inspire the families and children we serve daily. The true mission and love, was always to serve those in need."

– Cindy Stovall

"Jacklyn always gave me the confidence to believe in myself and reach for higher goals."

– Elsie Dones

"Jacklyn used her strong will and determination to create and bring great services to the Springfield community through Springfield Family Support Coalition."

– Emily Rodriguez

"I became involved with the Springfield Family Support Coalition two years ago as an Administrative Assistant. During this time Jacklyn became my friend, confidante and a great supervisor to work for. She was someone that I admired and learned from. I will miss her deeply."

– Joyce Davis

Building Partnerships to Prevent Child Abuse – Community by Community!
Community Connections is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services



Commissioner Spence creates Department of Planning and Program Development at DSS

The new Department of Planning and Program Development will build momentum and support for a system of care that is increasingly community-based, and will organize internal strength-based pilots into a coherent practice approach. Pam Whitney, formerly the Director of Domestic Violence and Family Support, will be Director of Planning and Program Development. Pam will continue to be integrally involved with Community Connections and other family support initiatives.



Keep us informed!

Send us your:
Story ideas

Comments or questions
Announcements, events,
or special projects

Community Connections

24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210
Attention: Jan Elia
or fax it to
(617) 748-2441

BOSTON

- Chelsea Community Connections (617) 889-7100
- Dorchester CARES: (617) 474-1256
- Jamaica Plain Coalition: Tree of Life/Arbol de Vida: (617) 522-4832
- Lower Roxbury Coalition (617) 989-3111
- South Boston FANS: (617) 269-9331

CENTRAL/METRO

- Fitchburg Joint Coalition for Health: (978) 342-2069
- Framingham Coalition Community Connections Action Team: (508) 879-6874
- Southbridge Community Connections (508) 765-6670
- Worcester Community Connections Coalition (508) 754-1176 x126

Nurturing Programs bring parents and children together

In five sites across Massachusetts, Nurturing Programs bring together parents and children in a sixteen-week program focused on improving the relationship between the generations. Nurturing Programs offer interactive activities that involve parents and young people in hands-on learning. Families experience music, games, role-plays, art, movement, and fun while learning love and respect for themselves and others. Former graduates of Nurturing Programs often are facilitators, so they know where families are coming from. Evaluations of family support programs have shown that when parents look to each other for support, and build their confidence in their own parenting, their children are more likely to grow up socially and emotionally healthy. Here's what some fathers who went through the program had to say about Nurturing Programs:

“The group was a good thing. We had a chance to let out some of the stuff we hold inside. It relieves a lot of pressure.”

“I now have rules in place. I can manage my stress. My kids are happier. I'm very pleased with myself and all the members of the group.”

“One of the reasons I'm here is my son just turned 13. When I started the program I was having difficulty with him. Basically, we weren't friends. Now after 13 weeks we are friends. That means a lot to me.”

A Teen Living Program for victims of domestic violence in Holyoke has also piloted a Nurturing Fathers Outreach Program. Young fathers are assisted in having access to and involvement with their children in a safe setting.

“We cannot treat kids outside of the context of the family”

– Commissioner Spence

Nurturing Programs

are located at the Dimock Street, Hyde Park, and Park Street DSS Area Offices, Enlace de Familias de Holyoke, the Fitchburg Joint Coalition for Health, and the Jamaica Plain Coalition: Tree of Life/Arbol de Vida.

Advocates work for systems change and family empowerment

Family Advocates are funded to work with families through the DSS Area Office Multi-disciplinary Assessment Teams (MDATs), a team of experts that provides assessments for DSS involved families. Family Advocates work to empower individual families to participate in the MDAT Team process in order to keep their kids safe.

More recently Family Support Advocates were funded to provide a link between Community Connections Coalitions and Family-Based Services (FBS), a network that brings together formal and informal resources in order to provide the widest possible range of supports for DSS-involved families. Family Support Advocates also work for family empowerment, but they work with a broader community systems focus. Family Advocates have connected families to non-contracted resources in their communities and surrounded families with supports that will exist long after DSS involvement.

The main focus of Family Advocates and Family Support Advocates is to ensure that families involved in the DSS system are empowered and heard. However, their work is highly valued not only by families. Below is a sample of the kind of praise that Family Advocates draw from Area Directors, Social Workers, and FBS and MDAT teams.

“...We can't do without her, she is an excellent bridge between DSS and families, good understanding of DSS, good advocacy skills and is very knowledgeable of the resources in the community.”

“She is an outlet to a multitude of services and provides the Department with resources, procedures to obtain resources and unique ideas to approach families we are working with. She also has information about strength-based assessments which I feel is above and beyond her role.”

“If we can intervene with families in distress early enough, we often can prevent the breakup of the family.”

– Commissioner Spence

MDAT Family Advocates

are located in the Arlington, Fitchburg, Framingham, Park Street, Pittsfield, and Worcester DSS Area Offices.

FBS Family Advocates

are located in Dorchester, Fall River, Fitchburg, Lowell, New Bedford, North Quabbin and Springfield.

NORTHEAST

- Lawrence/Methuen Community Coalition
(978) 975-8793
- Lowell Alliance for Families & Neighborhoods
(978) 454-5405, x122
- Lynn Community Connections Coalition
(781) 477-2902



SOUTHEAST

- Brockton Neighbors United
(508) 588-5099
- Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition
(508) 539-2711
- New Bedford Community Connections
Coalition: (508) 994-9625 x21
- United Neighbors of Fall River (508) 675-0098



Coalitions and DSS collaborate

*In our Summer 2002 issue of **Community Connections Quarterly**, DSS Commissioner Harry Spence shared with us the basic principles that would make DSS practice more strength-based, family-focused, and community-centered. This issue, in the articles below, demonstrates ways in which Community Connections Coalitions and local DSS offices work on initiatives that reflect the Commissioner's vision.*

Community Connections Coalitions build bridges and hope in their neighborhoods

Community Connections is a neighborhood-based, resident-driven network of coalitions in neighborhoods across Massachusetts. The goal is to build a comprehensive continuum of family support that strengthens families, builds communities, and prevents child abuse and neglect. Community Connections coalitions accomplish this by better coordinating resources already in the community, involving residents in planning for local resources, and ensuring that services meet the needs of the people. Community Connections coalitions operate according to the following premises:

Premises of Family Support*

1. Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.
2. Assuring the well-being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.
3. Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.

4. Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents' understandings of child development and of their children's unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions and mores.
5. Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children.
6. The developmental processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.
7. Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well-being of children, families, and communities.

In a recent statewide evaluation of Community Connections Coalitions, an average of 78% of respondents agreed "that residents are listened to and respected by all coalition members, that coalitions are driven by the concerns of residents and that residents are part of making major decisions."

* Developed by Family Support America

"Collaboration is the key to our doing our job."

— Commissioner Spence

■ Community Connections

Coalitions are located in Brockton, Cape Cod, Chelsea, Dorchester, Fall River, Fitchburg, Framingham, Holyoke, Jamaica Plain, Lawrence/Methuen, Lowell, Lynn, Montague/Turners Falls, New Bedford, North Adams, North Quabbin, Roxbury, South Boston, Southbridge, Southwick, Springfield, and Worcester.

WESTERN

- Brick House Community Resource Center
(413) 863-9576
- Enlace de Familias de Holyoke: (413) 532-9300
- North Quabbin Community Coalition
(978) 249-3703
- Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
(413) 663-7588
- Southwick Family Support Coalition
(413) 569-3456
- Springfield Family Support Coalition
(413) 733-7699
- Valuing Our Children Program, Athol
(978) 249-8467

Family Group Conferencing brings families to the table

In six sites across Massachusetts, Family Group Conferencing brings together immediate and extended family members to develop a plan to support a child's safety in the home. By focusing on a family's strengths, Family Group Conferencing works to decrease the number of children entering foster care, without risking their safety. More than 115 social workers and community members around the state were trained to lead these meetings. The key ingredient to Family Group Conferencing's success is the time that the family is allowed to meet without social workers or service providers in the room. This enables the family to develop their own plan to keep the children safe, and the family intact. A mother, aunt and child who participated in Family Group Conferencing had this to say:



"I feel as if the program is helpful by letting my family have a say in how things are handled with the help and guidance of DSS."

"I feel it was an opportunity for my niece to see her strengths in black and white on paper. I also feel it gave the family a chance to talk without it being a shouting match. My hope is this will be the start of something good."

"It went well and I'm happy."

Patch Teams partner DSS with the Community

Patch has developed community-based sites that partner the neighborhood prevention work of Community Connections with the child-protective case practice of DSS social workers. This family-centered approach also brings together the DSS Family Based Services Networks and other state agency services, as well as a diverse array of resources offered by community organizations and grassroots groups. Patch promotes shared ownership of the problem of child protection within the community, works with families who are not involved with the Department, providing supports and resources that will prevent them from becoming involved in the future and connects families to community resources more quickly, minimizing the need for lengthy DSS intervention. Here are some comments from DSS-involved families who worked with Patch Teams.



"Every worker has told me I could call or come by if I needed help and someone would help me. They were very receptive and didn't harp on things we didn't do, but praised us for what we did. They knew we were really trying."

"My worker is a very important part of my life. She really believes I can do it, can get better. She has helped me move to another level."

"I was not the person I am today. My self-esteem was at ground level but every time I saw my social worker, she had something good to say."

"The extended family is not dead; we in government just haven't asked them to help."

– Commissioner Spence

■ Family Group Conferencing

is located in the Attleboro, Hyde Park, Framingham, Holyoke, North Central and Lynn DSS Area Offices. Expanding soon!

"We must make social workers feel less isolated, more supported, and safer in making their inherently risky decisions."

– Commissioner Spence

■ Patch Teams are located in Dorchester and North Quabbin.

Family Support Specialists can provide help and info about Community Connections

To find out more about Community Connections, check-out the Community Connections web site www.state.ma.us/dss, or call your local Family Support Specialist:

- Brockton, Cape Cod, Fall River, New Bedford
• **Manuela DaCosta** (508) 894-3959
- Holyoke, Montague, North Adams, North Quabbin, Southwick, Springfield
• **Mary Kenney** (413) 452-3435
- Dorchester Patch, Lawrence/Methuen, Lowell, Lynn, Roxbury
• **Danny Lewis** (978) 557-2717
- Fitchburg, Framingham, Southbridge, Worcester
• **Carl McCarthy** (508) 929-2153
- Chelsea, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, South Boston
• **Sarah Potter** (617) 574-8412
- Family Support Team Leader
• **Brian Cummings** (617) 748-2336
- Family Policy Analyst
• **Joan Stiles** (617) 748-2355
- Director of Domestic Violence and Family Support
• **Pamela Whitney** (617) 748-2338



Ask DSS

Adoptive family wants another child in home

My husband and I are adoptive parents, who have had to place our daughter in foster care. She is 17, soon to turn 18. The reasons for our daughter being placed out of the house have more to do with her issues around abuse and neglect prior to her placement with us. We will always continue to be “parents” for our daughter, but we feel we just can’t fight the system. We would like to open our home to another child. However, we have been told that we are “consumers” and therefore can’t be considered as candidates for providers (even though we were approved in the past). If DSS is looking for good homes, why can’t they take a second look at us?

– Anonymous Adoptive Mother

Dear Anonymous Adoptive Mother:

Thanks for writing in, and for being so willing to provide a loving home for a child. You are to be commended for taking a child into your home, and for continuing to be supportive of your daughter even now that she is no longer living with you. Placing your child in foster care must have been a difficult decision. Staying committed to her is one of the most important things you can do.

Parenting, especially adoptive and foster parenting, can sometimes be extremely challenging. The Department recognizes that children who experience abuse and neglect can have behavioral problems and have a tougher time in school; and that this does not necessarily reflect on their adoptive or foster home. They are working through issues of loss, anger, and sadness.

You hint that your daughter needed a lot of support while she was living with you. Now she needs a lot of support to be able to return to your home or to transition into an independent living program. DSS can provide counseling and other programs and services to help your daughter move successfully into a permanent setting, but she will also need a lot of help from you. You and your husband will probably need to spend a great deal of time with her, helping her work through her issues.

You and your husband also need a lot of support during this time. A therapist or support group could help you work through your questions. Your family seems to be in a transitional period because of your daughter’s entry into foster care. Have you worked through your feelings about this separation with your husband, or with your daughter? It is important for you to work through your own feelings about this experience before you open your heart to another child.

DSS does not have an explicit policy that people who use DSS services cannot be foster or adoptive parents. In fact, policy specifically makes some exemptions for adoptive parents. When finding families for children in DSS custody, DSS has to take a lot of factors into account. Without having more details we cannot give you a specific answer. If your daughter was removed from your home as the result of a 51A being supported, you are not eligible to be reconsidered as an adoptive or foster home until the case is closed. If you placed your daughter in foster care voluntarily, you could ask that a clinical review team approve you for eligibility. The way to go about doing this is to contact the Area Director of your local DSS office.



This fall, approximately 2,700 DSS children have a goal of adoption. While adoptive homes have been identified for most of these children, over 450 children are still in need of permanent homes.



Thumbs Up to a neighborhood organizer

Shirley Davis has been a solid Community Connections supporter in the North Adams community from the start. Her tireless energy has provided hundreds of youth with opportunities for summer camp, field trips to summer theatre, Halloween parties and more. Mayor John Barrett of North Adams recently presented Shirley with the Carol Hess Memorial Award. This award is presented annually to a woman who has made a significant contribution to the city.

Mayor Barrett said, “Shirley went out eighteen years ago and recaptured her neighborhood. She reached out to youth. What I really admire about Shirley is that she did this without any fanfare. She did it solely for the good of the neighborhood and the good of the community.” The Northern Berkshire Community Coalition congratulates you for your love, your caring and your perseverance.





Do you want to lend a hand and give back to your community? Here are some things you can do locally.

Help us help New and used items needed

☆ **Chelsea Community Connections** needs children's clothing up to size 6X-7, maternity clothes, baby equipment (such as strollers, cribs, high chairs), formula, diapers. We are willing to pick up within eastern Massachusetts and would be pleased to give donors a tax letter.
– Call 617-889-7100 or e-mail chelccc@shore.net

☆ **The Cape Cod Neighborhood Support Coalition** is looking for a new trumpet (or used in good condition) for a motivated 11 year old.
– Call Dianne, 508-539-2711 or e-mail nsc@cape.com

☆ **The JPC: Tree of Life/Arbol de Vida** is looking for a copying machine for small to medium size jobs. They are also looking for supplies for after school drop in centers for youth 6 – 14 years old. They could use anything from paper and pencils, art supplies, board games and computer programs both learning programs and games, and balls and jump ropes.
– Call 617-522-4832 or e-mail nocemnoce@aol.com.

☆ **The Department of Social Service, Lynn Area Office** is looking for infant and child car seats, all sorts of sturdy toys, diapers and PJs in any size and gift certificates to grocery stores.
– Call Suzanne, 781-477-1600 or e-mail suzanne.cooper-dolan@state.ma.us

☆ **The Department of Social Services, Plymouth Area Office** is looking for: furniture (especially children's furniture for lobby and visitation rooms), car seats, modest gift certificates for parents to meet children's needs, cash donations to the Children's Fund, book and magazine subscription for teens and young adults, computer accessories (color printer, scanner and software, ergonomic mouse pads and wrist rests), gift certificates to fast food stores, refrigerator, fans, conference table and chairs for office.
– Call Michelle, 781-732-6200 or e-mail michelle.mason@state.ma.us



WORDS OF THANKS

The family, staff and volunteers of JP Tree of Life/Arbol de Vida Coalition wish to express their gratitude to the **Framingham Police Department** for a generous donation of toys. Members of the Nurturing Program received a special gift on Graduation Night. We appreciate your commitment and support!

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS QUARTERLY



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24 Farnsworth Street
Boston, MA 02210
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