



# DCF Spotlight



OCTOBER 2009

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

JON S. CORZINE, GOVERNOR

## From the Commissioner

At the Department of Children and Families we say all of the time that we cannot protect and strengthen children and families without the support of our many partners. We know that these partnerships are key to ensuring families are healthy, safe and strong. It takes the support of our partners in the community as well as in federal, state, county and local government to reach and truly help people in need the most.

Through statewide initiatives like NJ FamilyCare, together we are improving the lives of vulnerable children and families. Governor Jon S. Corzine is committed to ensuring every child in New Jersey has health insurance, and the process of achieving this goal has been based on partnerships across the board.

Under Governor Corzine's leadership, NJ FamilyCare has become a multi-departmental initiative with all departments working to accomplish one goal - ensuring our children receive the health insurance they deserve. Due to this administrative-wide effort, there has been a net increase of over 100,000 children enrolled in NJ FamilyCare since 2006.



DCF is doing our part by offering application kits at all of our Family Success Centers and Differential Response sites, and training staff to assist families with completing the application. People who work with families every day are taking part in this very important work. And together, we are helping mothers and fathers rest their heads at night with the comfort and peace of mind knowing that their children will have access to quality health care when they need it.

In this issue of "DCF Spotlight" you will read about how ambitious partnerships are helping DCF help kids and families. You will learn about the Raise Me Up campaign, grants awarded to partners to expand DCF's Home Visitation initiative, the expansion of DCF's efforts to use data to

manage child welfare, the reduction of children receiving specialized behavioral health services out of state, and Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to join several mothers and their children in a workshop to support safe sleeping habits for infants and young children. The workshop was held at the South Ward Family Success and Parent Child Center, which is managed by the Children's Home Society of New Jersey. The bilingual workshop was facilitated by a representative from the Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies coalition and focused on educating parents on best practices for putting their infants and toddlers to sleep safely. This informative workshop is just one more example of how community based partnerships are leading to stronger families.

Together we are improving the lives of New Jersey's children and families. And only together can we continue on this path of ensuring our families are healthy, safe and strong.

*Kimberly S. Ricketts*  
Kimberly S. Ricketts, Commissioner





## Raise Me Up Campaign Launched in New Jersey to Support Youth in Foster Care and Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect

*Everyone in the state can now find a way they can help with Raise Me Up*

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Casey Family Programs launched a new statewide campaign in September called Raise Me Up – which is aimed at inspiring people to support children in foster care to help prevent child abuse and neglect in communities throughout the state. The Raise Me Up campaign message is simple: “You don’t have to raise a foster child to raise them up. You just have to raise your hand and say you’ll help.”

The campaign was officially launched at a press conference held at Rutgers-Camden, where attendees heard remarks from DCF Commissioner Kimberly Ricketts, the Governor’s Chief of Staff Ed McBride, representatives from Casey Family Programs and Rutgers University, and from two former foster children.

The crowd also heard from Miracle Pygum, a sophomore at Rowan University, and a participant in the Transitions for Youth and NJ Foster Scholars programs. Her words about her experiences being in the foster care system since she was 14 years old, and her unwavering drive to succeed at school and become an attorney truly personified the goal of the Raise Me Up campaign in New Jersey.

“We really need people to help raise us up when we’re down, to lift our spirits when they have fallen,” Miracle said. “People like you can be that extra push that is needed every day.”

**On any given day, there are 8,300 children in foster care in New Jersey. The Raise Me Up campaign aims to support children while they spend time in foster care and eliminate the need for foster care all together.**

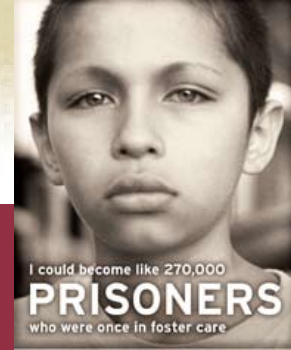
DCF, with financial support from Casey Family Programs, launched the Raise Me Up media campaign using powerful television, radio and transit advertisements that highlight the problems that can often affect children in foster care – such as mental illness, homelessness and prison – if they are unable to successfully reunify with their families, find another safe, loving and permanent family, or obtain the support they need to strive as independent young adults.

Raise Me Up invites the public to get involved by simply visiting the Raise Me Up Web site – [RaiseMeUp.org](http://RaiseMeUp.org) – and by clicking on New Jersey, interested people will be linked with a variety of options on how to help foster children and prevent child abuse and neglect in their own communities.



Cari DeSantis, executive vice president of public affairs and communications for Casey Family Programs, spoke at the launch.

Kenneth Parker, a New Jersey native and vice president of public policy for Pepco Holdings, Inc., spoke to the large crowd about his experience in foster care as a child with his nine siblings, and how he was helped and supported along the way by some very important individuals.



## New Jersey's Raise Me Up campaign benefits programs and services including:

- ▶ Recruitment of foster and adoptive families, especially families for teens, sibling groups and medically-fragile youth.
- ▶ Support for adolescents transitioning from care by donating to the NJ Foster Scholars Program to fund their college education and career development and volunteering with the Transitions for Youth Program.
- ▶ Community involvement in the state's 37 local Family Success Centers, which support families in need of services and support.
- ▶ Finding new mentors and volunteers for local community Boys and Girls Clubs.
- ▶ Donations to benefit and support recently reunified families around the holidays.
- ▶ Support for the state's Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).
- ▶ Raising community awareness of supports for youth in need, including the 24-hour 2NDFLOOR youth helpline.
- ▶ Spreading the word about New Jersey's child safety campaigns to prevent injury or harm to children and infants.



Ed McBride, Chief of Staff for Governor Jon S. Corzine, NJ Foster Scholars recipient Miracle Pygum and Commissioner Ricketts gathered together at the launch.

New Jersey's primary partners who are offering volunteer opportunities through their organizations are: Boys and Girls Clubs in New Jersey, CASA of New Jersey, 180 Turning Lives Around, Foster and Adoptive Family Service (FAFS), all 37 local Family Success Center in New Jersey, and Transitions for Youth – Institute for Families in the Rutgers' School of Social Work.

New Jersey also identified several sponsoring and supporting organizations that have committed to support Raise Me Up by helping spread the message or financially contributing to a participating program. These supporters include Atlantic City Electric, Medco, Verizon Communications, PSEG, the New Jersey Coalition of Automotive Retailers, South Jersey Industries, Inc., Wachovia, and the Girl Scouts of New Jersey.



Casey Family Programs selected New Jersey for a national launch, making New Jersey the second launch of Raise Me Up – which had only previously been piloted in Austin, Texas – because of the tremendous work already underway at DCF to improve the state’s child welfare system. Since 2006 DCF has:

- ▶ Achieved significant progress with record numbers of adoptions – over 5,100 former foster children adopted between 2006 and September, 2009
- ▶ Recruited and licensed over 5,200 new foster and adoptive families – yielding total net gain of more than 1,800 stable, safe and loving homes
- ▶ Reduced the number of children in out-of-home placement by more than 25 percent, from 11,380 children in June, 2006 to 8,603 children in June, 2009.
- ▶ Reduced the number of children sent out-of-state for specialized behavioral health services from over 300 in March 2006 to only 52 children in September 2009.
- ▶ Served 50,000 families through New Jersey’s statewide network of 37 neighborhood-based Family Success Centers since mid-2007.

**W**e encourage our partners to help us spread the Raise Me Up campaign message throughout the state by sharing the campaign with your colleagues, clients and peers, as well as placing the Raise Me Up logo and link on your Web site. To learn more ways on how to become a Raise Me Up sponsor or supporter, please call the DCF Communications Office at 609-292-0422.



Kenneth Parker, vice president of public policy for Pepco Holdings, Inc., spoke at the launch about his experience in foster care and the people who supported him while he was growing up.

# DCF Achieves Unprecedented Reduction of Children Placed Out-of-State for Behavioral and Mental Health Services

*New Jersey serving more children closer to home*

The Department of Children and Families has continued to achieve incredible success in reducing the number of children receiving specialized behavioral health services out of state. As of September 2009 only 52 youth were receiving services outside of New Jersey, marking an 85 percent decline since the creation of DCF in 2006.

"DCF has prioritized finding the most appropriate services for children based on their individual needs and with the primary goal of keeping children served by all DCF programs at home and as close to their community as possible. This is evident in the successful efforts to reduce the state's reliance on out-of-state programs for some of our most vulnerable youth with mental health needs," Commissioner Ricketts said. "We remain committed to this effort, because New Jersey's children deserve to receive here at home the best care and services available here at home."

Historically, New Jersey had relied too heavily on programs and treatment services available in other states because those services were not available in our state. In 2006, well over 300 children were sent out-of-state – far from their homes and families – to get the help they needed. Children weren't receiving the best care possible because the closer children can be served to their homes, their communities and their families, the better they progress in their treatment.

Since that time, DCF's Division of Child Behavioral Health Services (DCBHS) has worked incredibly hard to build the needed capacity here in New Jersey. This consistent decline is due to Governor Corzine's and DCF's sharp focus on better managing new authorizations for out-of-state care, a year-long case planning initiative focused on returning youth from

out-of-state care, and continuing efforts to develop appropriate in-state resources based on the needs of New Jersey youth. The decline has been achieved with a multi-part strategy: not just by reducing the number of youth in out-of-state care, but also by placing a sharp focus on case practice; and by providing high quality, appropriate care for children and youth as close to their home communities as possible.

Since 2006, DCF issued two Requests for Proposal (RFPs) to develop new specialty beds for children with intense, behavioral health needs across the state – issued in May 2007 and March 2008. Through those two RFPs, a total of 133 new specialty beds now serve children all across the state.

The new specialty services help New Jersey youth stay in state – close to home, community, and kin – to receive high-end and expert care. And for the youth returning home, the majority return to parents or kin, or to another licensed family home setting.

New Jersey has also reduced the total number of children receiving behavioral and mental health services in out-of-home treatment over the last few years. In March 2007 there were 2,175 children in out-of-home treatment through DCBHS, and 14 percent of those children were in programs outside of New Jersey. Now, more than two years later, there are 1,898 children in DCBHS out-of-home treatment services.

As New Jersey improves its ability to serve children in their homes and in their communities, we are reducing the need for residential care overall. This is a trend that can be observed throughout the department, as evidenced by the reduction of children in DCBHS out-of-home care, and also the dramatic reduction of children in placement through the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) as well.

**New Jersey has had a more than 85% reduction in the number of children sent out-of-state to receive specialized behavioral and mental health services in just three years.**

# DCF to Implement Comprehensive Manage-By-Data Initiative

*Receives extended technical assistance and support from NCIC*

DCF is rolling out a comprehensive manage-by-data initiative to significantly expand New Jersey's efforts to use data to manage child welfare, as well as increase training for child welfare managers so they may utilize data to guide their decisions in order to best serve children and families.

The initiative was made possible through extended technical assistance and support from the Northeast and Caribbean Child Welfare Implementation Center (NCIC), a member of the Federal Training and Technical Assistance Network, within the U.S. Administration for Children and Families.

**The initiative began in July 2009 and will run through June 2013. The model will be sustained long after the implementation is complete.**

The ultimate goal of the project is to implement a comprehensive statewide management and supervisory practice that will lead to improved outcomes for children and families and that is transportable to other jurisdictions with similar needs. Managers throughout DCF's entire supervisory chain will be trained to use data to identify problems, monitor progress and document successes.

This initiative, coupled with DCF's effort to empower and engage families, is a strong complement to DCF's ongoing reform and will lead to sustainable improvements in outcomes for children and families.

Commissioner Ricketts met with the remarkable young men residing in the William Waldman Independent House in Paterson - which is supported by DCF and run by the New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC). She talked to the young men - who are aging out of foster care or who were previously homeless - about their future ambitions and the services they are now receiving to prepare them for adulthood.



# DCF Expands Home Visitation Programs to Support New Families and Prevent Child Abuse

*New Jersey awards five agencies with federal grant funding*



## Be Counted: Participate in the 2010 Census

- The census is a count of everyone living in the United States every 10 years.
- The census is mandated by the U.S. Constitution.
- The next census is in 2010.
- Your participation in the census is required by law.
- It takes less than 10 minutes to complete.
- Federal law protects the personal information you share during the census.
- Census data are used to distribute Congressional seats to states, to make decisions about what community services to provide, and to distribute \$400 billion in federal funds to local, state and tribal governments each year.

Continuing New Jersey's statewide child abuse prevention effort, grants have been awarded to five community agencies totaling \$2.5 million over the next four years for DCF's Home Visitation Initiative, a program that promotes positive parenting and the healthy growth and development of infants and children.

It is evidence-based programs like home visitation that will help reduce the number of children who are abused or neglected in New Jersey, and help build strong, independent families.

The grants will either establish new programs or support existing services in New Jersey providing primary child abuse prevention and early intervention services to young families challenged by complex health-related or social problems. The new programs will add an additional 230 slots to the statewide capacity, expanding the state's total capacity to serve over 2,500 families at any given time.

**At any given time, more than 2,500 families are being supported by evidence-based home visitation services in all 21 counties.**

The majority of the funding for the awards was made possible through a \$2.5 million federal grant awarded to DCF by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The department, after submitting an application for the grant, was one of 17 national grantees awarded last October for home visitation expansion services.

Each of the awards will be supplemented by matching funds secured by the local agencies and two awardees will also be supported by \$25,000 grants through the New Jersey Governor's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee (JJJPC), which operates in relationship with the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), the designated state agency.

Over the last three years, DCF has more than doubled the number of available home visitation programs in New Jersey, making services available in all 21 counties.



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# Domestic Violence Awareness Month

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## DCF Combats Domestic Violence during Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Throughout the Year

October marks Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This month is an opportunity for DCF and our many community partners to raise awareness around domestic violence.

Throughout the month, DCF's community partners are holding events to commemorate victims, celebrating survivors, and gain support for people affected by domestic violence.

At DCF, domestic violence is a serious issue that our caseworkers must combat every day. That is why DCF has taken steps to re-established our Domestic Violence Liaison initiative within the Division of Youth and Family Services.

The goal of the program is to increase safety, stability and well being and improve outcomes for children and their non-offending parents in domestic violence situations. The program also has the goal of strengthening the division's capacity to provide effective assessment and intervention for families in domestic violence situations.

The initiative means that Domestic Violence Liaisons throughout the state ensure DYFS workers are considering what parents in domestic violence situations are doing to protect their children and themselves. The liaisons make sure DYFS workers are looking at a domestic violence victim's strengths.

The role of Domestic Violence Liaisons is to partner with DYFS caseworkers on site and home visits when appropriate, and assist with domestic violence assessments, DYFS child safety protection plans and case plans. They also assist with domestic violence safety planning for non-offending parents and children and provide direct advocacy, community networking and referral information. They help identify and address

gaps and barriers that non-offending parents face in obtaining needed support and safety for their children and themselves.

Through case consultation and staff presentations, the liaisons educate and mentor DYFS staff in their efforts to identify individual needs and offer appropriate interventions to address those needs. In addition, they model best practices in working with families in domestic violence situations, model collaboration and cross systems advocacy to strengthen community partnerships and enable a coordinated community teamed response when domestic violence and child abuse co-occur, and help facilitate family team meetings that follow best practice guidelines and safeguards when domestic violence is present.

In addition to the Domestic Violence Liaison initiative, DCF is combating domestic violence in other ways. DCF developed a Domestic Violence Protocol to give an overview of the dynamics of domestic violence, and its impacts on partners and children, and the ways domestic violence intersects with child abuse and neglect.

The protocol directs workers and supervisors on how to properly respond to families where domestic violence is suspected - through both the investigation of a referral and when a case needs to be opened to help keep kids safe and help the family become stable.

The protocol speaks to how workers' response to domestic violence must consider a child's safety and stability, and how to do that while working with each parent. DCF's work must also be integrated with domestic violence programs in the community, as well as coordinated with the direction of the court.

DCF is also working with a national expert on developing a training for DYFS that will focus on critical knowledge about domestic violence and child welfare, and how DCF staff can apply the protocol to daily work.

**According to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Approximately 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence every year.**