



Save Our Children Coalition

NEWSLETTER



“We dream of a day when all children grow up in families and communities that nurture and support them, so they can make their unique contribution to the world.”

Katie Page Sander, Editor

Perspectives: Focusing on Hope For Children

By Jack Kresnak

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The two people most responsible for my passion and commitment to improving opportunities

for all children are no longer with us in the physical sense. Father Bill Cunningham, my high school English and Drama teacher before co-founding Focus: HOPE in Detroit, died in 1997. A tornado ripped through the Focus: HOPE campus a few weeks later. His partner and co-founder Eleanor Josaitis died the morning of August 9 just as a heavy storm rolled through the Detroit area. Both have left us with remarkable legacies of passion and caring for children and families faced with daunting challenges, including dire poverty.

Together with another Catholic priest, Jerry Fraser, Cunningham and Josaitis founded a unique civil rights organization—Focus: HOPE—in 1968 that served as the conscience of the metropolitan Detroit community and worked tirelessly on practical ways to give

hope and to give opportunity for the forgotten and marginalized.

I was a volunteer with Focus: HOPE from its inception until August 1969 when the priest and the “suburban housewife” as Eleanor became known conspired to get me hired at the Detroit Free Press as a copy boy. While I struggled to become a professional journalist, Eleanor and Bill were finding ways to feed malnourished children in the city with surplus food that the federal government had paid farmers to produce but then went to waste. Their efforts convinced the federal government to address the issue of chronic hunger and to expand the surplus food commodities program in Detroit and other cities.

Recognizing that children needed parents who had jobs and economic security, Eleanor and Bill also began a skilled-trades school that helped lift thousands of people out of poverty and into the middle class. The impact on the children of those folks is profound. In the 1970s, Focus: HOPE created a program to address racial tensions in Detroit high schools—then

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Perspectives: Focusing on Hope For Children	1-2
SOCC website launch	2
Outstanding Child Advocate Award	3
Foster/Adopt-Your Call	3
Support MYOI Youth	4
Director’s Corner	5
Upcoming Meetings of the Faith Communities Coalition	5
SOCC Advisory Board	6

Save Our Children Coalition (SOCC)

is a broad-based coalition that mobilizes and fosters change in communities to meet the needs of children and families who are in, or in danger of entering, foster care in Southeast Michigan.

predominantly white—by training ethnically diverse groups of teenagers about ways to counteract the evil of racism.

Eleanor’s advocacy in behalf of children was relentless and optimistic, despite the obstacles that she and Cunningham faced overcoming a lack of government investment and public support that mitigated the challenges of poverty for children and families. This is how Eleanor put it when she testified before Detroit City Council on December 10, 1974, just one talk in a career of loving speeches to help children: “hunger in Detroit hurts babies’ brains, chipping off I.Q.,” she told the Council. “Hunger softens bones and puts toddlers on bowed legs. Hunger twists emotions and leaves children hostile, hating, hurt for life. Hunger fills classrooms with tired, listless pupils of the poor. Hunger is anemia, rickets, mental retardation, hostility. Hunger is death by premature birth and infant disease.”

That was 37 years ago, and Eleanor’s efforts to improve the lives of children did not stop until her death from cancer. Over the decades, she and Cunningham made countless trips to Washington, educated thousands of people who visited the Focus: HOPE campus in Detroit and fought hard on behalf of others, especially for children, with little concern about their own well-being. They challenged government officials, corporate titans and insurance companies to do better for the poor.

Together they built a movement of people who marched, wrote letters and demanded action of government and the public to counter the long-term effects of racism and build opportunity for all.

Of all the lessons about child advocacy that I learned from Father Cunningham and Eleanor Josaitis, the most important is this: Advocacy is not a one-time activity in which someone makes one phone call or sends a single email to a policy maker. True child advocacy requires persistence, passion, patience and hope beyond measure. Influencing public policy to better all of our lives—while taking practical action to alleviate suffering and eliminating obstacles—was what Eleanor Josaitis and Bill Cunningham were all about.

And while we face daunting challenges today in ensuring that all children throughout the state grow up healthy, safe, well-educated and prepared to join a creative and skilled workforce, I will count it as a success if a little bit of Eleanor and Bill lives on in the work we do at Michigan’s Children.

Thank you, Eleanor Josaitis.



New and Improved *Save Our Children Coalition* Website is (A)Live!

www.SaveOurChildrenCoalition.org

After over a year of hard work and dedication on the part of many University of Michigan-Dearborn staff, Michigan Marketing and Design and SOCC staff and volunteers, our newly designed website is now live! With an almost 400% increase in site traffic from 2009 to 2010 (over 40,000 hits last year) the site’s improved usability and cleaner design will allow visitors to easily navigate news, resources and events benefitting families and children in foster care. Check out the site’s newly enhanced areas showing ways to “Get Involved”, “Support SOCC”, “Faith Communities Congregations in Action”, and updated news and resources. To add or update your event or resource, please contact us at socproject@umd.umich.edu.



Reverend Dr. Kate Thoresen Receives Outstanding Child Advocate Award from Vista Maria

At Vista Maria’s Annual Meeting and Special Recognition Breakfast on June 28, 2011 at the Dearborn Inn, Reverend Dr. Kate Thoresen was presented with the organization’s “Outstanding Child Advocate” award for her tireless volunteer efforts as the Coordinator of SOCC’s Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care.

Kate is passionate about building awareness about the issues facing children in foster care and is dedicated to the mobilization of congregations of all faiths to get involved in assisting foster children and families. Kate leads by example with her commitment to put “feet” on her faith, inspiring hundreds of others in Michigan to do the same.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANGELA HALOPULOS

Meet Dominico
AGE 12
Dominico hopes to be a scientist or a historian.

Meet Marquez
AGE 11
Marquez says, "The best thing about me is that I am very helpful!"

Please consider Foster Care or Adoption

There are thousands of children in Michigan's foster care system. Each of them needs a safe and loving family. Please join the Michigan Department of Human Services as we host a free, Faith Based Community Awareness Event. Come hear personal stories and find answers to your questions about becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent. Then take the next step and start this exciting journey.

Foster/Adopt - Your Call
Finding Families for Michigan's Children

Register online at www.fbce-detroit.eventbrite.com
For more information, please call 231-398-8497.

Hosted by "Greater Grace Uplift Foster Care Ministry"
Sunday, September 18, 2011 3:30 PM-8:30 PM
at Greater Grace Church
23500 W. Seven Mile Rd.
Detroit, Michigan 48219

Dominico and Marquez are not fictional characters. There are thousands of youth just like them waiting to be embraced by the love of your home. For more information regarding Dominico and Marquez and other waiting children in Michigan, go to www.marq.org. The Children's Foster Care Program provides placement and supervision of children who are temporary or permanent court or state wards. This includes children who cannot remain at home because their families are unable to provide minimal care and supervision. State wards are youths whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and who are legally free for adoption.



Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative Action Focused - Youth Driven

In Michigan between 400 and 500 youth “age out” of foster care every year. Many youth who leave foster care at 18 years of age or older entered foster care as teenagers. They need support and services to help them begin the transition to adulthood and prepare for work and personal responsibilities. Studies of youth who leave foster care without a safe, permanent family reveal consistently negative life outcomes.

One found that 25 percent of foster care alumni who aged out did not have a high school diploma or GED. Another study found that less than 2 percent finished college compared with 23 percent of youth in the general population. Over half of youth who aged out of foster care experienced one or more episodes of homelessness, and nearly 30 percent were incarcerated at some point—many times the rate for other young adults. Youth who aged out of foster care were less likely to be employed or to have health insurance than were their peers who had not been in foster care. These negative experiences compromise these young adults’ abilities to lead independent, fulfilling and productive lives and create substantial costs for government. (McCoy-Roth, Devooght & Fletcher, 2011)

What is MYOI?

MYOI’s goal is to ensure that young people in foster care have successful outcomes in housing, education, employment, community engagement and health. Each site provides:

Youth Boards

Youth boards serve as the leadership and advocacy arm of MYOI. Youth are trained in leadership, media and communication skills, including how to strategically share their story and present on panels.

Community Partner Boards

A community partner board is a group of businesses,

public and private agencies, and community representatives that have an interest in assisting youth who are transitioning out of foster care. Community Partner Board members provide support, discounts to services and advocacy for older youth in care.

Training

Training opportunities provided to youth encompass asset purchases, life skills, and preparation for adulthood including housing, employment, education, health and community engagement.

Matches

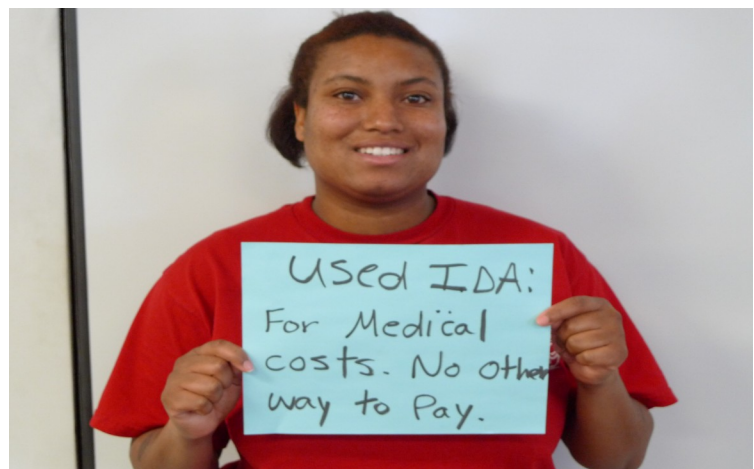
Each youth has an Individual Development Account (IDA). Youth are required to save money in their IDA each month. MYOI matches the IDA funds dollar to dollar up to \$1000 per year for a youth to purchase an asset.

Stipends

Youth earn stipend payments for participation in events and meetings. The stipends assist youth to save money in their IDAs. Earning stipends is a tangible way to recognize the time and effort the youth contributes to the program.

For more information, please go to:

<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit> or <http://www.myoifund.org/>





Isn't That a Good Sign?

“He called me ‘mommy’ and ran into my arms the first time we met! He never cried or even looked back at his foster family. We ‘bonded immediately’”, she said, “he told me he loved me already! Isn't that a good sign?” This adoptive mother was in love at first sight. She had heard stories of children with attachment problems and was pleased to see her new son “attaching” immediately. My internal alarms sounding, I suggested gently that she consider her son's reaction to their first meeting more closely.

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

I asked her to imagine how she might react if a man showed up on her doorstep and said, “I'm your husband now!” then took her by the hand to his home in the next town over. Would she jump into his arms and give him a big kiss? Would she look back at her family on the way out the door, or grieve for them? If she said in the car on the way to the new husband's house, “I love you!” would she have meant that?

While it isn't convenient or romantic for an adult who is longing to add a child to their family to be faced with a fearful and grieving child, fear would be the expected reaction of a typically developing child. This “mommy” is a total stranger. Love usually takes time. Many children in foster care have lost so much, that they develop adaptive strategies to cope with these losses. Seeking love and getting needs met from adult strangers and learning what pleases them is a great adaptive strategy when one is surrounded by chaos and uncertainty, but it doesn't necessarily signal “bonding.”

Over time, this adoptive family will need to allow this child to grieve, to be angry or sad, to possibly reject them. They will need to show him that they are different than the other adults in his life who didn't, or couldn't, stick around. The long-term, tough, work of bonding and building trust has just begun. The good news is that this woman's son was imitating something positive, something all humans crave: the love of a family. And that's a good sign.

UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES COALITION ON FOSTER CARE

Thursday, September 15, 2011 6:30PM [Mid-Michigan](#) Mott Regional Tech Center 1401 E. Court Street, Rm. 1403 Flint, MI 48503.

Thursday, October 6, 2011 6:30 PM [Washtenaw](#) St. Luke Lutheran Church 4205 Washtenaw Ave. Ann Arbor, MI 48108 (right next to the County Services complex) MYOI Youth Panel to speak

Monday, October 10, 2011 6:30 PM [Western Wayne](#) Faith Community Presbyterian Church 44400 West Ten Mile Road Novi, MI 48375 Exploring resources that focus on November as Adoption Awareness Month.

Thursday, November 3 6:30 PM [Eastern Wayne](#) Grosse Pointe Memorial Church 16 Lakeshore Drive Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236

Tuesday, November 8, 2011 6:30 PM [Mid Oakland](#) Kirk in the Hills 1340 West Long Lake Road Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302 Michigan Department of Human Service Director Maura Corrigan and others to speak about the urgent need for foster and adoptive parents and mentors for Michigan's children. Area agencies will have information booths for families to learn more about how to get involved. Reservations requested. To reserve a spot or to register your agency for a booth, please contact socproject@umd.umich.edu

For more information call/email Rev. Kate Thoresen, coordinator, at 248-643-8373 at kthoresen7@gmail.com

or contact Katie Page Sander, Director of the Save Our Children Coalition socproject@umd.umich.edu

SOCC Advisory Committee



The SOCC Advisory Committee, representing the many perspectives and “voices” of those who care about the welfare of Michigan’s children in foster care, utilizes the special expertise of many of our supporters in moving the Coalition forward.

The Advisory Committee is composed of the following members:

Ismael Ahmed, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Gail Bagale, SOCC Founder/Consultant

Brenda Baker-Mbacké, Michigan Foster Care Review Board

David Benjamins, Detroit Institute for Children

Paul Duford Southeast Michigan Community Alliance

Danita Echols, Department of Human Services

Tracy Green, Detroit Center for Family Advocacy

Nicole Hoshock, Michigan Department of Human Services

Cameron D. Hosner, Children’s Hospital of Michigan Foundation

Annette Howard, Life Directions

Gilda Jacobs, Michigan League for Human Services

Viola King, Legal Aid and Defender Association

Jack Kresnak, Michigan’s Children

Shirley Mann-Gray, Children’s Hospital of Michigan

Kelly Ramsey, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court of Michigan

Amy Skehan, University of Michigan—Dearborn

Reco Spencer, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan

Trisha Stein, Child’s Hope

Mary Lynn Stevens, University of Michigan—Dearborn

Deborah Strong, Great Start Collaborative Wayne/Student Advocacy Center

Cynthia Swift, Plymouth-Canton Community Schools

Veda D. Thompkins, Families on the Move

Kate Thoresen, Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care

Mary Trepanier-Street, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Nicole H. Wood, Promise Neighborhoods Initiative/The Guidance Center

Lacea Zavala, KIDSTalk/The Guidance Center



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