



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

UTOOLS Provides Enrichment Experiences for Foster Youth

March 2011

Volume IV, Edition 2



Regina Storrs, Career Services Director at the University of Michigan-Dearborn participates in Latin percussion workshop at UTOOLS in March 2011

The Save Our Children Coalition received a grant for nearly \$25,000 from the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) to continue the expansion and development of SOCC’s UTOOLS, a program that began as a pilot in 2010 and provides Wayne County foster youth with enrichment experiences that build academic, life skills and productive habits of mind through experiential learning.

The primary goals of UTOOLS are to support at-risk foster youth through completion of high school and to expose youth to new learning opportunities on a college campus.

Sessions are designed to reinforce The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, a book by Sean Covey. Youth have been very receptive to volunteer Michael Lewis, a recruiter from Ryder Logistics, who gives the keynote address on how each habit applies to one’s life.

Faculty and staff from UM-Dearborn’s School of Education, Admissions & Financial Aid, Athletics, Career Services, Student Activities, and the Environmental Interpretive Center lend their enthusiasm and expertise to the program through innovative programs, that include sessions on résumé building and online safety, digital media projects, career and personal goal setting, college admissions and financial aid considerations, team building, critical thinking exercises, and exposure to nature and environmental lessons.



Michael Lewis, with the assistance of L.R. Robinson, Wayne County DHS Educational Planner

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

UTOOLS	1
Perspectives: The Power of	2
A Simple Way to Support	2
May is Foster Care Month	3
Greater Grace Temple/	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.

Perspectives

The Power of Advocacy

Tamyka Miles, Child Advocate Supervisor—Wayne County CASA

Imagine pulling up to your home and you are met by a stranger. The stranger says you are not allowed to go into your home you have to go with them. You are not told where you are going you only have the clothes on your back and none of your family is going with you. Now imagine that you are made to live with strangers in an unknown area and told that all of this is for your safety and when you finally do see your family again it's for one hour with others watching you. You are not told when or if you will be going home again and everything that was once familiar to you is now gone. Fortunately for you this is just something that you can barely imagine. Unfortunately, this is the scenario for thousands of children who are in the foster care system. These children have been removed from a harmful situation, but have now been placed in a situation where they don't know what will happen to them, and often they feel as though they have no voice.

These children need a voice and CASA is that voice. CASAs, Court Appointed Special Advocates, are appointed by jurists to advocate for the best interest of children who have been abused or neglected and are now in foster care. CASA is a volunteer organization that has been in existence since 1977 and has over 70,000 volunteers nationwide.

CASA volunteers play a special role in the children's lives because the volunteers are a consistent face. The children can trust that the CASA will listen and advocate for their best interest. The CASA volunteer is considered an independent and impartial party

whose only objective is the best interests of the children. CASA volunteers report directly to the court from which they were assigned and give a detailed report about how the children are doing and what it is they need.

In Wayne County there are over 3,000 children who are in the foster care system. Each one of those children can benefit from having a CASA volunteer. Wayne County CASA is always in need of people who care about children and want to make a difference. If you are interested in this volunteer opportunity we encourage you to learn more about the program by visiting our national website at www.casaforchildren.org or by contacting the Wayne County CASA office at 313-833-3093. You can make the difference in a child's life.



A Simple Way To Support SOCC—GoodSearch.com and GoodShop.com

Since February 2010, SOCC has raised \$3.43 through participation in the GoodSearch.com and Goodshop.com program! This amount is based on just two dedicated supporters who regularly use this search engine. Since this is such an easy way to support SOCC doing what many of us do several times a day, please take the time to bookmark both sites to use on for your web searches and online shopping.

Supporters can easily access GoodSearch from a link

on the homepage of the SOCC website <http://www.saveourchildrencoalition.org/> or by simply going to GoodSearch.com or GoodShop.com, clicking on "verify" and typing in "Save Our Children Coalition." The site does not require any personal information to be shared or long login process. Thank you!



FAITH COMMUNITIES COALITION ON FOSTER CARE

“What We Can Do To Promote Foster Care Month”

Reverend Kate Thoresen

Mother Teresa claimed, “*Very few people can do great things, but each of us can do something with great love.*” During the month of May we anticipate the great good that will come when many people rally to find that one something to share with great love. Together, with other congregations, this will make a significant impact to alleviate the suffering of our most invisible, voiceless and vulnerable children in foster care.

On each Sunday in May you can find that one small thing to do that can make a positive difference in the life of a foster child. You can invite speakers to share their inspiring stories, encourage ways people can donate items, or ask a representative from one of our service agencies to describe how people can become personally involved. Consider asking members of your congregation to draw the name of a foster child waiting for a forever family and pray for that child during the month of May.

Suggested schedule:

MAY 1: Who are the foster kids in Michigan? How many? What are the current statistics? See special DVD and information from Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange www.mare.org to download pictures, names and profiles of children waiting for forever families) Select the name of a foster child to pray for.

May 8: What act of concrete care

can I do to make the life of a foster youth better? Moment for Mission or Sermon: Invite participation in the Care Kit donation drive for aging out youth—Kits distributed after worship services on behalf of Babies, foster kids going to camp and for youth aging out of the system.

Tuesday: May 10: What is happening now in the state of Michigan concerning foster care? Hear Greg Roberts of the Department of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships of the Department of Human Services describe exciting initiatives to alleviate the suffering of 4000 foster kids. Meet at First Presbyterian Church, 1669 West Maple Road, Birmingham, MI. 48009) at 6:45 PM.

May 15: What’s involved with being a foster parent/grandparent/tutor/mentor? Hear from a social worker from one of our many agencies to come and describe volunteer opportunities.

May 22: How can we become empowered champions on behalf of our most vulnerable, voiceless and invisible youth? Take the message to your own group, workplace, local organization and ask people to contribute to a Care Kit or to donate funds to provide full or partial camperships (\$400-\$500) that enable foster kids to go to summer camp. These camps include ones sponsored by Lutheran Social Services (1-800-625-7650 or www.lcfsmi.org); Royal Families Kids Camp (Amy and Dan Robinson,

directors, robinson64@sbcglobal.net) Skyline Camp (Matt Henry, Director, 248-644-2043; office@skyline.org)

May 26: How Can I Donate Items or Services for Foster Youth and Families? Listen to Lorraine Weber of the *For the Seventh Generation*, a clearinghouse of goods and services for children in Wayne County, at the next Eastside Faith Communities Coalition meeting at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church.

May 29: Dedication care kits for aging out youth and prayers of blessing for all foster children during worship services



These pony pals with colorful saddles knitted by women of St. Anne’s Mead Nursing Care Facility will find homes with foster children in Wayne County Department of Human Services, FPC member, Marcie Carlson-Bodwin, coordinated this connection.

May is National Foster Care Month



Greater Grace Temple FAM (Foster Adoption Ministry) and The Children's Center

When Attorney Lynda White, a member of Greater Grace Temple in Detroit felt a calling do more to help children in foster care, she dreamed big right from the start. She connected with Bobby Wade, recruitment specialist, from the Children's Center at a Faith Communities Coalition meeting in 2010. At that meeting, Mr. Wade invited Ms. White to tour the Children's Center where they discussed ways in which they could help the other improve the lives of kids in foster care.

Ms. White submitted a plan to her pastor, Bishop Charles Ellis III, to begin FAM (Foster Adoption Ministry) and once they were approved, Bobby was invited to address the congregation and explain the great need that existed for homes and support for foster children, particularly in Wayne County. Lynda and Bobby then met with a small group of interested individuals (including two adoptive parents and a DHS supervisor) who eventually became the core members of FAM.

The group initiated a campaign to invite members of the congregation, as well as the surrounding community, to attend an orientation to learn more about becoming licensed foster parents. Their first orientation attracted twenty three potential foster/adoptive families!

The stated goals of the Foster Adoption Ministry at Greater Grace Temple are: (1) To create a safe place for foster children and foster families to develop relationships (2) To provide a support

system to the congregation's foster/adoptive families (3) To provide resources to foster families in need and (4) To recruit at least 50 foster/adoptive families within the next two years. FAM plans to host regular orientations for interested community members to reach their goal, with the next session slated for Sunday, May 22, 2011.

Lynda is "walking the talk" by not only leading the way with her organizational efforts and vision, but by becoming a licensed foster parent herself!

Lynda's advice to others wishing to do something "big" is simple, "Do what works for you...Prayer is a wonderful resource, but further action is mandatory...Grab a partner and get to work. You may find that the life you change is tyour own."

"Prayer is a wonderful resource, but further action is mandatory... Grab a partner and get to work. You may find that the life you change is your own"
Lynda White



Bobby Wade of the Children's Center, addresses a meeting of the Faith Communities Coalition



Greater Grace Temple, home of FAM (Foster Adoption Ministry)



The “Lucky” Ones

DIRECTOR’S CORNER

I have heard the sentiment many times before. A friend or acquaintance or relative says something like, “do your children realize how lucky they are?” I think I know what they mean. And I think it’s a compliment. But the response I give is usually, “no they don’t, because they aren’t really ‘lucky’ in the whole scheme of things.” I’m not trying to be modest. I think we are pretty good parents, doing the best we can. We fail miserably at times and come out looking pretty competent at others. But, I think my twelve year old daughter said it best when she was around seven years old when she said, “I love this family a lot and I’m glad you’re my mom, but I wish I never had to be adopted.” My two oldest children were “lucky” enough to lose their birth families before they started Kindergarten. Their experiences have forced them to face hard truths about things that most children, thankfully, take for granted. They had to learn before Kindergarten that families can’t always stay together, people die, parents sometimes do things that hurt their children and that some kids who need and want to live in a family sometimes don’t get that opportunity. But I don’t think they feel lucky at all, nor do I think they should. Kids shouldn’t have to feel lucky to have what all children deserve and expect. The security of a loving, safe family is not a privilege, it is a right. My husband and I are fortunate that, despite their losses, they gave us a chance. They allowed themselves to trust and love us knowing that adults can really make a mess of things. We are the lucky ones.

UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE FAITH COMMUNITIES COALITION ON FOSTER CARE

Monday, April 11 6:30PM Westside Faith Communities Coalition at Faith Community Presbyterian Church, Novi Presenters: Michael Williams (Orchards Children Services), Bagvati Yedur (DHS, Oakland County) and Megan Callaghan (Oakland Family Services)

Tuesday, April 12 5:45 PM Circle of Light Awards for those in Oakland County involved with protecting children from abuse and neglect held at CAREHouse, Pontiac. Faith Communities on Foster Care to receive a Circle of Light Award.

Tuesday, May 10 6:45 Birmingham Faith Communities Coalition, First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham Gregory Roberts, head of MDHS Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships will speak

Thursday, May 26 6:45PM Eastside Faith Communities Coalition at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church

Monday, June 6 6:30PM Westside Faith Communities Coalition at Faith Community Presbyterian Church, Novi

Please note: the Mid-Michigan Faith Communities Coalition usually meets on the third Thursday of every month in Flint. Contact Ginelle Barry, coordinator at gbarry@ifosterhope.com for details.

Washtenaw Regional Coalition forming!

For more information call/email Rev. Kate Thoresen, coordinator, at 248-643-8373 or kthoresen7@gmail.com or contact Katie Page Sander, Director of the Save Our Children Coalition: soccproject@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, Consultant

Brenda Baker-Mbacké, Michigan Foster Care Review Board

David Benjamins, Detroit Institute for Children

Paul Duford, Southeast Michigan Community Alliance

Danita Echols, Wayne County Department of Human Services

Nicole Hoshock, Michigan Department of Human Services

Cameron D. Hosner, Vista Maria

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

Reco Spencer, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan/Foster Care Alumni

Trisha Stein, Child’s Hope

Mary Lynn Stevens, University of Michigan—Dearborn

Deborah Strong, Great Start Collaborative Wayne

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

Annemarie Valdez, Child’s Hope

Nicole H. Wood, Researcher/Foster Care Alumna

Lacea Zavala, The Guidance Center

Save Our Children Coalition
UM-Dearborn School of Education
19000 Hubbard Drive, FCS C-25
Dearborn, MI 48126

Phone: 313.593.5052

Fax: 313.593.9961

E-mail: SOCCProject@umd.umich.edu

Web: www.SaveOurChildrenCoalition.org



M UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-DEARBORN
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

If you would like to be removed from the Save Our Children Coalition mailing list, please e-mail SOCCProject@umd.umich.edu or call the office at 313.593.5052.