



## Advisory Board Members Honored



Professor Mary Trepanier-Street of the University of Michigan-Dearborn School of Education received the 2011 Child Advocate Award from Child's Hope, the child abuse prevention council of Out-Wayne County. Presented at the Child's Hope annual meeting in April, the award recognized Mary's thirty plus years of child advocacy in her work as an educator, early childhood program director, community consultant, and researcher on mentoring. Her development of the model for early childhood education in UM-Dearborn's Early Childhood Development Center, and a collaboration with the Oakwood Hospital Center for Exceptional Families, created a "state of the art" education program for inclusion education for children of all racial, ethnic, socio-economic, and the continuum of special needs.

SOCC knows and values Mary as one of the original planners for the Save Our Children Summit in 2007, which brought the community together to address the crisis in foster care in Michigan, and resulted in the formation of SOCC in the School of Education at UM-Dearborn. She has served on the Advisory Board of SOCC since its inception, and her guidance and support have helped us to realize our mission and vision of improving the lives of children in foster care. Congratulations, Mary!

CARE House of Oakland County presented Rev. Dr. Kate Thoresen with a Circle of Light Award for 2011 at an April ceremony, highlighting National Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month. Presented by Susan Hull, Director of Children's Services Oakland County Department of Human Services, the award recognized Kate's tireless work over the years in establishing and building the Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care, a major community-based branch of SOCC.

Beginning with serving on the planning committee for the Save Our Children Summit in November, 2007, which was the impetus for launching SOCC, Kate has brought together and mobilized a coalition of over 80 faith communities, 35 service organizations and numerous individuals in the community to build awareness and address the needs of children in foster care. Faith Communities has developed into six regions, with "bases" in Detroit, Wayne County, Oakland County, Washtenaw and Genesee Counties. These groups have contributed to the mobilization of people to become foster and adoptive parents, mentors, and to contribute to the quality of foster children's lives through donations of needed goods, time, and support.

Kate has worked to bring people together to share ideas and programs that members of faith communities have implemented on behalf of children in foster care. She herself (along with her husband, Tom) have become respite foster parents themselves this year.

SOCC is privileged to have Kate as one of its major contributors to our mission. We are delighted that the community has also recognized her efforts to mobilize faith communities on behalf of children in foster care!



## Perspectives

### STILL LIFE GOES ON

by Ebony W., Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative

Still life goes on...even if the worries get strong

Even when we have no one,  
No one to gesture to our own  
STILL LIFE GOES ON!

Us teenagers need to take responsibilities  
for our actions and remarks,  
even when we feel it's the right,  
we must let go and carry on.  
We STILL MUST GO ON!

Sometimes life gets hard  
And no one told me it was easy,  
But when behind closed doors, soaring in my  
spaces,  
I think of consequence,  
Some of good and some of bad:  
When I think of those bad consequences  
I think about 'How could anything get so  
worse'  
But STILL LIFE GOES ON"

I wish I could turn back the hands of time  
when life was better,  
when I was just a baby looking up at my  
mother  
and staring into her brown eyes,  
just hearing her say, "I love you, baby"  
dazzles me every time.  
It makes my stomach drop  
because wishing she was only here to say it  
right back.

If only I didn't have emotions  
Maybe I could face the world alone.  
But now that everything is gone  
I have to start over with my head high  
and feet slowly hitting the floor.  
I turn my back, sometimes,  
then turn around to see who's there,  
many times there is no one but  
as I'm walking through this path  
I learned to keep strong,  
Never give up  
and cross over those  
who don't want to walk my path too.  
And on your path never get attached  
because even the ones you love  
will seem to turn their back.  
But past the pain  
LIFE STILL GOES ON

So while time is steady ticking  
And I'm steady growing  
And thinking of my next mission  
Jesus is right above me guiding me  
while I'm walking,  
and he reminds me every time I seem to fall  
"Ebony, you have to go on"  
And believe me,  
LIFE STILL GOES ON!!!

### MYOI Magazine Submissions Wanted!

The first edition of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative Magazine will feature written pieces and visual works of older youth who are currently in foster care or who have aged out of the system. The proceeds from the sale of the magazine will benefit the MYOI fund to help support youth with Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).

**Deadline for submission of work:** July 8, 2011 to [khadija@fobbs.net](mailto:khadija@fobbs.net)

**Entry Guidelines:** Entry is open to all young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who are currently in foster care or who have aged out of foster care in Michigan. Essays, short stories and poems should be typed and no more than 1,500 words. Make sure submission are proof-read.

# May as National Foster Care Month

## FAITH COMMUNITIES COALITION

### Congregations in Action



Congregations throughout the Detroit metro area have continued to generously respond to the needs of foster children throughout May. Below are a few of the imaginative ways that people have shown God's love in action for foster kids and families. Please send us your own stories and pictures so we can feature all of our "CONGREGATIONS IN ACTION!"

**Faith Community Church of Novi** collected diaper bags and baby items for infants in foster care. They also continue to serve as a wrap around congregation for a young woman who has aged out of the system and now living in a house with her baby and her three sisters.

**The Church of Holy Spirit, Roman Catholic of Highland, MI** began their new foster care ministries by having Saba Gebrai of Park West and Megan Callaghan of Oakland Family Services speak on the needs of foster children today. Individuals there have established positive relationships with several aging out youth.

**First Congregational United Church of Christ in Grand Blanc** put together 20 camp kits (including items such as bathing suits, beach towels, flip flops, etc. enabling children in foster care to attend camp with the proper supplies.

**Northridge Church in Plymouth** donated 20 duffel bags for children going to camp including a pillow, blanket, flash light, etc. This congregation also held a baby shower for girls/babies in Spectrum's Mommy & Me Program. "We set up all the things at our agency and the girls got to go shopping and choose whatever they wanted...it was awesome!!" wrote Pam Jaymes of Spectrum Child & Family Services.



Laura Garvey of Life Church presents suitcases to Judson Center

**Holy Trinity Lutheran of Livonia** collected several baby items and items for aging out youth. The Empty Pockets collections on the first Sunday of the month continue to go to foster care initiatives, culminating in a visit from Pastor Hemke of Lutheran Social Services in September.

**First Presbyterian Church of Troy** collected 42 sets of pajamas and 8 gift cards for youth graduating from high school.

**Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, Bethel Lutheran of St. Clair Shores, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church of Livonia, Holy Trinity Lutheran Livonia and First Presbyterian Church of Northville** all ran successful donation drives to benefit foster kids going to camp.

**First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham** had a special emphasis on foster care of each Sunday in May. Youth from Oakland County MYOI spoke at three worship services. In response, 73 Care Kits for Youth Aging out of the system, plus gift cards for 26 high-school graduates were collected. Throughout the month, the congregation prayed for 11 foster youth featured through the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE). In addition, foster care families and agencies shopped for free at the May rummage sale. 55 prom dresses and accessories were distributed to several agencies. The nursery school moms are now donating outgrown diapers, baby clothes and equipment on a regular basis. Members of the youth group recently toured Oakland Family Services and created birthday cards for foster kids. Their recent Vacation Bible School also highlighted awareness on foster care, with children contributing to a donation drive for foster kids going to camp.

**Northminster Church of Troy** collected items in the Lutheran Children and Family Services foster care programs, to enable youth to attend a summer camp where children will be reunited with siblings living in different homes. A speaker from LCFS spoke at their worship service on May 1st to kick off the month.

**Grosse Pointe Woods Presbyterian Church** Rhonda Barley, director of A Place of Refuge, a transitional home for young men, spoke at a worship service in May.

**Life Church in Canton** donated suitcases to Judson Center

**Oakpointe Church of Novi** sent some of their small group members to Vista Maria to plant flowers and help sort items for the clothes closet.



Oakpointe Church small group members planting at Vista Maria

# Diamond in the Rough: Fostering Successful Outcomes

By Cherish Thomas



On May 21, 2011 the third annual conference for youth in Michigan's foster care system called "Rising Above the Odds Against Me" was held at University of Michigan-Dearborn campus. Birthed by graduate of the University of Michigan and foster care alumna Ms. Cherish L. Thomas, the conference is structured to embrace youth and their value by teaching examples and featuring models of success. The theme this year was "*Diamond in the Rough to Princess Cut*", focusing on the needs of young women aged 12 to 21.

Various private social services agencies such as: Childhelp, Starfish, Children's Center, Vista Maria, Ennis Center, Holy Cross, Spectrum and many county Department of Human Services were represented by the over 50 young women in attendance.

Conference presenters spoke to the youth about self-esteem, living with purpose, goal-setting, establishing vision, financial management, psychological wellness, spiritual empowerment, healing from past experiences and the importance of continuing education.

Led by keynote speaker, Dr. Charisse Gibert, co-pastor of Detroit World Outreach Church in Redford, prominent female community leaders including Min. LaShun Franklin (psychologist/

minister), Dr. Gail Parker (psychologist), Mrs. Tanisha Bolden (Author), Ms. Tiffany Smith (Entrepreneur), Ms. Gail Perry-Mason (Financial Executive), Mrs. Karen Wicker (Speaker/ Executive Account Rep) and Ms. Cherish Thomas (Speaker/CEO of Cherish Our Youth, Inc) inspired youth through interactive sessions. A special guest appearance was made by Mrs. Kim Pratt, known as KIWI (musician/poet) who joined the youth in an "open mike" session which included powerful poetry, music and personal testimony.

Some of this year's supporters and donors were Save Our Children Coalition/University of Michigan—Dearborn School of Education (Dearborn), Helping Individuals Succeed Agency (Detroit), Park West Foundation (Southfield), Lambda Pi Omega Foundation (Detroit), Joe Edwards Salon (Belleville), Jack & Jill of America (Ypsilanti), Fundamentals Relaxation Spa (Ferndale), Exam Experts (Canton), Detroit Pistons (Auburn Hills), Department of Health and Human Services (Oakland), Medical One (Oakland) along with many other individual donors.

Through the efforts of these charitable contributors, community partners and businesses over the past three years, Rising Above the Odds Against Me conferences have benefitted hundreds of youth in foster care.



Cherish Thomas raffles off door prizes to the youth in attendance



### DIRECTOR'S CORNER

## Five Things I Wish I Had Understood Back Then

My first “real” social work job out of graduate school was as a foster care case manager for a private child placing agency in Washtenaw County. A couple of hours into my first day, a mother came in asking for me. She demanded to know why her son was not there for their visit. I hadn’t ever heard her name or her son’s name until that moment. I will never forget how desperate she was, how angry that she had to deal with yet another caseworker. I apologized, assuring her that I would learn quickly. “You are my eighth case worker.” she said.

My coworkers and I were young, mostly single and childless, energetic and passionate. We cared about the kids and families and took pride in our jobs. I understood back then the huge responsibility that lay in my hands and I took that responsibility seriously. But there was a lot that, looking back, I wish I had understood better. Things that age, perspective, parenting and life experience has taught me that would have served me well back then that may be of use to another new, idealistic caseworker:

1. **Talk less, listen more.** Families and kids usually tell us what they need from us if we just listen and watch..
2. **Parenting is really, really hard,** even for those of us lucky to have great support systems and every other financial, physical, emotional and educational advantage. Be kind and offer encouragement instead of judgment.
3. **Kids from all backgrounds and family situations do weird and distressing things** (like eating cat poop or stealing or lying) and it doesn’t always mean that they have an emotional impairment.
4. **Parents want the best for their children.** Even the most distant, angry and non-compliant parents want to be good parents. They want to be happy and they want that for their children. They don’t always know how to get there. It is your job to help them get there.
5. **Don’t make promises you aren’t sure you can keep.** Biological parents, foster parents, attorneys, judges and kids are relying on you to be honest about what your plans are and to follow through with the promises you make. When you don’t, you become yet another barrier to the healing of a fragile family or child.



Wayne County youth celebrated the conclusion of nine months of UTOOLS on Saturday, June 11th, 2011. UTOOLS, funded by the Wayne County Department of Human Services, is an experiential learning program encouraging high school completion for teen youth in foster care. Sessions are taught by a multidisciplinary group of staff and faculty on the campus of the University of Michigan—Dearborn.

The graduation festivities began with a presentation of digital animations showcasing the “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens” on which the UTOOLS sessions were based. Youth were asked to create humorous and creative animations geared toward teaching a younger audience about the habits and how they emerge in our daily lives. UTOOLS students presented these animations as well as an award of appreciation to Michael D. Lewis, of Ryder Logistics, to thank him for his contribution to their learning experience. Other graduation day activities included a low-ropes challenge course with the UM– Dearborn Athletic Department’s Operation Adventure Program, a pizza and ice cream party and graduation/awards ceremony for the youth. Each youth received a UTOOLS backpack filled with resource information, school supplies and a graduation certificate.



Saba Gebrai, of Parkwest Foundation remarked, “The creativity and hands on projects the tireless UM-Dearborn professors and staff put together challenged our youth and exposed them to new ways of learning while having fun.” Save Our Children Coalition would like to thank the Wayne County Department of Human Services, Black Family Development Inc., Vista Maria, Parkwest Foundation, Michael D. Lewis and the staff, faculty and volunteers from the University of Michigan-Dearborn for their support and collaboration towards making UTOOLS 2010-2011 a successful and positive experience for the youth and staff alike.

# 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/volunteer 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

**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**, Juvenile Law Group

**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

**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

**Annemarie Valdez**, Child’s Hope

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

**Lacea Zavala**, KIDS-Talk, The Guidance Center



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