

# Child Welfare News

Fall 2007

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## **IMPLEMENTING SIGNS OF SAFETY IN CARVER COUNTY** DAN KOZIOLEK, CHILD AND FAMILY MANAGER CARVER COUNTY

Almost three years ago Olmsted County offered Carver County Community Social Services the opportunity to follow their lead by consulting with Andrew Turnell to implement an approach to child welfare services that Andrew now prefers to call “relationship-grounded, safety-organized social work practice.” As we have progressed in our ability to understand Andrew’s ideas and test them in our work we found that we first started thinking differently about services and then started thinking differently about safety. Our greatest remaining challenge is in figuring out how to move away from an approach that has long been driven by expert solutions toward an approach where we clearly define safety concerns with the family while firmly but respectfully teaching them to think through and find their own safety solutions.

Andrew frequently reminds us that services don’t equal safety. Deep down I suspect we always knew this. We substituted services for safety because we didn’t know any effective ways to get at safety. Think about a sex abuse case, for example, where the perpetrator fully admits to the accusations and is fully compliant with all expectations in treatment. Andrew tells us this happens in only 9% of such cases.

**(Continued on Page 6)**

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## **A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR...**

Greetings! It is with the greatest pleasure that I introduce myself to you in my new role as Director of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW). I’ve worked in the field of Child Welfare for nearly twenty years; thirteen of which was direct practice in the state of Connecticut. I obtained both my Master of Social Work (1997) and PhD (2005) as a **(Continued on Page 5)**

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# spotlight on IV-E alumni

## CENTER FOR SOMALI FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICE

BY HASSAN UGAS

Minnesota is home to one of the largest concentrations of African immigrants in the continental USA. It already has the largest number of East-African refugees in the country. The arrival of this new refugee influx brings new challenges to the service providers of the state. It challenges agencies with limited budgets to culturally respond and meet the needs of this community.

After long and careful consultation with service providers including Dakota County staff, a group of Somali Social workers together with the immigrant community created "The Center for Somali Family and Children's Service (CFS-FCS)". This is a not for-profit community-based agency administered by Somali professionals with the goal of providing integrated child/ family-centered social services to these families.

Initially, the majority of the refugee population congregated in the Minneapolis and St. Paul areas but as new demographics suggest, Somali and Oromo and other East African refugees are moving to the surrounding metro suburbs. Because of its good housing and friendly environment, Dakota County is one of the most desired destinations for Somali/Oromo and Sudan Communities.

With the approval of the governing board, the Center for Somali Family and Children's Service is seeking to enter a contract with Dakota County to provide culturally competent social services to African American families and youth including the refugee population. Our agency is seeking to provide the following services: Community-based services such as family

group decision making, in-home services such as community reintegration services, and parenting education.

CFSFCS is especially well suited to provide these types of services to the refugee community. Taking parenting education services as an example, our agency will offer parents from different cultures a safe, familiar environment where they can begin to understand their child's behavior. Parents will be provided with the information they need to become knowledgeable and competent at locating, accessing, and making use of the available services within the multiple systems they encounter. Parents will also be provided with the support they need to become a reliable resource for improved children's mental health care within their cultural communities and the community at large.

In addition, we will advocate and help families navigate the educational system, create bridges between parents and schools, and train parents to advocate for their child. To maximize educational opportunities for students with mental health disorders, we will advocate and speak on behalf of children with emotional, behavioral, and mental health challenges.

Center for Somali Families and Children Services will work with parents to improve parental effectiveness by providing a clear parenting philosophy and a set of positive parenting skills and strategies that can be used immediately to address a variety of child-rearing challenges and problems. By working with parents and building relationships with them, we will increase parental **(Continued on Page 11)**

# collaborations

## DR. SUSAN WELLS/RAMSEY COUNTY AWARDED NATIONAL FUNDING TO STUDY COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY ASSESSMENTS

During June and July, Professor Susan J. Wells led a proposal team in collaboration with Ramsey County Community Human Services to write and submit a proposal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on the topic of Using Comprehensive Family Assessments to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes. At the end of September, the grant was awarded to Ramsey County with the School of Social Work as the evaluator for the 5-year project. The total value of the grant is \$2 million with the University receiving half of the total grant amount over the life of the project.

Ramsey County Community Human Services Department (RCCHSD) will examine its current child protection family assessment processes to incorporate, test, and adapt the Children's Bureau Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA) Guidelines. Workers will address the entire family network in a dynamic, ongoing, strengths-based process that considers family dynamics and environmental/social context including specific cultural, ethnic and linguistic concerns. It is hypothesized the resulting thorough, specific, and holistic assessments will

lead to greater client engagement, increased paternal involvement, and more cost-effective service targeting including appropriate services that decrease: placements, re-entries into foster care, and re-referrals to child protection. Professor Wells, Principal Investigator, and CASCW Director Traci LaLiberte, co-Principal Investigator, will partner with RCCHSD to provide a third party independent evaluation of the process, practice, and outcomes associated with program implementation. The evaluation team will participate with RCCHSD to develop a constant feedback loop to ensure implementation fidelity, tracking of project activities, identifying outcomes and enumerating resources expended in the implementation and service delivery. In partnership with community members, cultural consultants, cooperating agencies, and the evaluator, RCCHSD will design an implementation manual for CFA which will be tested in the agency's child services division. A final version of this manual will incorporate feedback from evaluation efforts and will be disseminated to other counties and states to guide further CFA implementation.

## MINN-LINK INVOLVED IN MELF EVALUATION

The Minn-LInK project at the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is working with the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) to build infrastructure to support the evaluation for the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation initiative (MELF). MELF is funding a wide array of early education programs in Minnesota intended to improve the school readiness of young children in families with low incomes. High quality early education

programs have been shown to improve school readiness as well as support parenting and enhance family functioning. Children and families with low incomes become disproportionately involved in child protection systems and this partnership will allow the two centers to actively support children while evaluating the impact of new initiatives on children, families, and communities. Minn-LInK will be able to provide **(Continued on Page 10)**

# events

## CASCW HOSTED EVENTS ON CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN NOVEMBER

On Monday November 5 and Tuesday November 6 the Center, with support from the Otto Bremer Foundation, hosted Dr. Lisa Fontes. Dr. Fontes has worked as a family, individual, and group therapist in a variety of settings, including managed care, emergency services, and protective outreach services, and has conducted research in Santiago, Chile, and with Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and European Americans in the United States. Dr. Fontes is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese. She earned a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Massachusetts and a Master's degree from Columbia School of Journalism. She is a popular conference speaker and workshop facilitator for diverse groups of professionals and parents. She has recently written *Child Abuse and Culture: Working with Diverse Families*. Dr. Fontes is the editor of *Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures: Treatment and Prevention* and has written numerous journal articles and chapters on cultural issues in child maltreatment and violence against women, cross-cultural research, and ethical issues in research. She is a Core Faculty Member in Union Institute & University's Psy.D. Program in Clinical Psychology. For more information go to [www.lisafontes.com](http://www.lisafontes.com).

On Monday, Dr. Fontes conducted a workshop titled *Interviewing Diverse Children and Families about Maltreatment*. The event took place at the U of M, St. Paul Campus and was broadcast via ITV to Kandiyohi County, Polk County, Chisago County, and Winona County. The conference was also available as a live web stream through the Center's website. The turnout for this event was fantastic with approximately 175

people attending across the state. To view the handouts from this presentation go to: <http://ssw.cehd.umn.edu/CASCW/LisaFontes.html>.

Dr. Fontes second presentation, *From Cultural Competence to Social Justice*, was held on Tuesday morning at Cowles Auditorium in the Hubert Humphrey Center. Dr. Fontes presentation was followed by an impressive panel of local responders who addressed the issues raised the larger systemic changes needed to serve culturally diverse families in ways that are helpful, unbiased and fair. The panelists included: Esie Leoso, Manager of the Indian Child Welfare Act – Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health; Senator Patricia Torres Ray, Minnesota State Legislature; Maxie Rockymore, Supervisor – Child Safety and Permanency Division – Minnesota Department of Human Services; Glenna Rooney, Professor – Department of Social Work – Augsburg College; Neal Thao, Associate Professor – Social Work Department – Metropolitan State University; Abdulahi Mohamed, Co-founder and Director of Somali Family and Children's Service; and Esther Wattenberg, Professor – Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare – School of Social Work – and Associate in the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs – University of Minnesota. This event was a great success and was attended by approximately 200 people.

# publications

## RAMSEY TEEN PARENTS REPORT RELEASED

The Minn-LInK Project at the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) has released an evaluation of the outcomes of teen parent families served in Ramsey County. In 2003 Ramsey modified its case management model for Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) to teen parents by having Public Health visiting home nurses monitor MFIP cooperation in addition to their traditional home visit assessments. Nurses became responsible for getting teens connected to schools, monitoring school attendance and graduation, and sanctioning teens who failed to comply. Ramsey wanted to understand how children and teens were faring under this new model and asked Minn-LInK to measure outcomes related to teen school attendance, graduation rates, child protection involvement of teen parent families, and subsequent births. As a way to capture the changing nature of services to teens, outcomes were reviewed for teens served prior to the Public Health change (during 2001 and 2002 when teens could have a mix of voluntary services including a school district operated program called Center for Employment and Training, or CET) as well as just after nurses took on MFIP duties. Find-

ings show that, particularly as the new service model matured, teens who received at least four Public Health nurse home visits had higher high school graduation rates and fewer subsequent births. Child protection results were mixed - very likely in part because teen families had equal chances of being observed by both the MFIP program and the Public Health nurses. School attendance improved for all students immediately after having contact with MFIP, however, the greatest improvements were observed for those who received Public Health services during the most recent year of study, 2003-2004. One general conclusion is that the combination of MFIP and mandatory Public Health nursing services produce positive results for families headed by teen parents. Hennepin County is operating a similar model, which connects teen parents to home visiting via WIC, clinics, and schools. Minneapolis and Hennepin county have observed similarly positive results for teens and they intend to expand their services over the coming year. Download a copy of the full report at: <http://ssw.cehd.umn.edu/img/assets/28759/Minn-LInK%20Report%20No%204.pdf>

**Check out all of the Center's publications at:  
[http://ssw.cehd.umn.edu/CASCW/publications.](http://ssw.cehd.umn.edu/CASCW/publications)**

# feature

## (ANDREW TURNELL CONTINUED)

But think about this person graduating from treatment and coming into court asking to return to the home. On a scale of 0-10 where 10 is you would have no problem with the idea of this person sharing a house with your own child and 0 is, completed treatment or not, you would just as soon this person stay at least 5 blocks away from your own child at all times, where are you?

As we began to practice some of Andrew's ideas for getting at safety, we started to realize that our ideas about safety planning had often been confined to either removing children for their safety, or leaving them in the home with services. Parents who admitted they were having problems and who agreed to accept services were often less likely to have their children removed. Yet, if a parent agrees to start services tomorrow, are their children safer tonight? How exactly did we come to believe that an admission reduces danger? Sometimes it is hard to believe we used to think as we did. Slowly our social workers have come to understand that their task is to clearly define our agency's safety concerns with the family and to insist on an immediate safety plan instead of relying on a service plan we hope will get us to safety several months into the future. Promises don't equal safety either.

One of the more powerful lessons we learned from Andrew came from a case situation where we were telling Andrew we were really concerned for the safety of the children even though we couldn't prove in court that they had been sexually abused. Andrew told us that given what we know about how many offenses most sex offenders commit before they are caught, we need to learn to suspect we are only

uncovering the tip of the iceberg every time such information comes to light. Andrew went on to tell us that we are child protection, people all over the world tremble at the mention of our name, and we need to learn to use this power effectively. In this case he told us we needed to go back to the family to engage them in a process that seeks to make sure that the allegations that came to our attention will never be made again. Andrew correctly predicted that the mother and children would welcome such intervention while the alleged perpetrator would be significantly harder to engage.

This process, which Andrew learned from Suzie Essex in Bristol, UK, is in her words like wrapping the perpetrator up with razor wire and handing one end to the mother and the other end to the child. It involves putting our concerns squarely, directly, and honestly on the table with the family and telling them we aren't going away until the family has built safety to our concerns. When we are able to do this adequately, the family secret is exposed and the power of the secret is diminished. In cases like this, the mother and children are empowered. It is a process that takes considerable skill and courage on the part of our caseworkers and a great deal of courage on the part of the families as well. Yet in some ways these cases are often managed better, and may even seem easier now, than our neglect, child welfare, and children's mental health cases where we aren't yet as good at clearly articulating our concerns and our bottom lines for the children's safety, support, and well-being.

We have been fortunate to have an intake social worker who has eagerly tested some of Andrew's ideas on "starting out right" from Chapter 4 of the Signs of Safety book. Primarily this involves asking a different sort of question than

## feature

**(ANDREW TURNELL CONTINUED)**

the ones we had been asking child protection reporters. Can you tell me about times when things are going well? What can you tell me that is good about these parents? What do you like about them? Who do you see them turning to for assistance? What is your best hope about what will come from your calling us? What are you able to do to help keep these children safer? Not only do these questions invite information about possible safety that we previously didn't get, they begin to define a sense of partnership between our agency and our community.

Besides taking the strengths and signs of safety identified by the intake worker out to start their assessment, our assessment workers have also been learning to slow down their process and to collect additional strengths from other professionals such as staff at school and from the children in those situations where they interview them first. By starting their interviews looking for strengths, the assessment workers create energy for the really difficult work and begin building a partnership with the family and involved professionals. Our social workers continue to get better at asking parents questions to help them think through their concerns for their children's safety and to uncover their ideas for immediate safety. Even when protective services are not needed our assessment workers will still summarize the family's ideas for safety planning in their determination letter to encourage the family to follow through with appropriate steps to improve their children's safety and make it less likely that they will be the subject of a future report.

Andrew has simplified the Signs of Safety framework to what are we concerned about,

what do we have going for us, and what do we need to do? We have come to describe using his Signs of Safety form as mapping the case. It seems dazzling simple, yet using it well is an art that will easily take us many more years to master. It isn't just about organizing the information we already have on the form as we did in the beginning, but actively seeking detail about strengths and safety and worries and sorting the harm and danger from complicating factors and then identifying the best next steps we can to help the family achieve our mutual best hopes. If the next steps aren't clear we go back to get more detail about the worries and strengths. Learning to truly use the family's strengths to build safety around the worries is also a continuing challenge. Andrew continues to encourage us to study Milton Erickson's work for more ideas about how to do this better.

In the beginning our social workers would often come to their supervisor for help mapping the case. A year ago we started mapping each new ongoing case with the assessment worker and supervisor together with the new caseworker and supervisor to improve safety during case transfer and better move the case critical detail with the case. Now our social workers are more frequently mapping the case with the family as a part of their assessment or case planning process and in doing so are collecting rich information, getting the family member's perspectives, and building an effective partnership around the children's safety and well-being.

Many of our caseworkers have also tested, or have teamed with contracted and trained in-home workers to test other tools that Andrew has brought to us. One of these tools which Andrew calls The Three Houses involves asking

# feature

## (ANDREW TURNELL CONTINUED)

children to describe or draw their house of good things, their house of worries, and their house of dreams. Another tool is the Words and Pictures. This tool is used to summarize the concerns and strengths in words the youngest child can understand and to develop an agreed upon language to use to describe the concerns to other professionals as well as the relatives, friends and neighbors the family may choose to invite into their lives to help convince us their children will remain safe long after we have closed the case.

We understand that in Olmsted most cases start with family group decision making conferences or team case planning meetings. Our caseworkers do use these tools more often than in the past but we have long had a lot of resistance about team processes. Fortunately, we are getting better at recognizing resistance as a signal that we are trying to impose our expert solution. Likely the best thing we have learned from Andrew is that anything that appears to be a problem is instead a fantastic opportunity. The opportunity in this instance is about agency leadership learning to better put our concerns directly and honestly on the table with the caseworkers to seek their solutions instead of imposing ours. In the end implementing Signs of Safety seems to require a parallel process where supervisors and other agency leadership model the approach of doing with our social workers not to them in order to teach our social workers to do with their families and not to their families.

More information about Andrew Turnell can be found on his website at: [www.SignsofSafety.net](http://www.SignsofSafety.net). Signs of Safety; a Solution and Safety

Oriented Approach to Child Protection Casework by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards was published by W.W. Norton and Company in 1999. Working with "Denied" Child Abuse; the Resolutions Approach by Andrew Turnell and Suzie Essex was published by Open University Press in 2006.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark your calendars for these spring events sponsored by CASCW:

### **April 16, 2008:**

ITV and Panel discussion about Children with Incarcerated Parents

### **May 1, 2008:**

*Addressing the Best Interests of the Children in Immigrant and Refugee Families: Rising to the Challenge*

featuring:  
Randy Capps  
The Urban Institute

Sonia Velazquez, Vice President-Children's Division of American Humane

# staff news

## CASCW WELCOMES NEW PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Starting in early November, the Center has hired Liz Snyder as a Fulltime Program Coordinator. Her responsibilities include coordinating the BSW Title IVE Program as well as the Center's new publication, CW 360. CW360 is a publication that will take an issue in the field of child welfare and look at it from a variety of perspectives. This will be a companion piece to the Spring ITV Conference and will allow us to delve more deeply into the topic of the conference (the topic for 2008 is incarcerated parents). Liz will also spend part of her time working as a contract researcher with Gamble-Skogmo's new project, implementing and evaluating a comprehensive family assessment model in Ramsey County.

Liz is a 2006 graduate of the University of Minnesota MSW program with a focus in community practice. Her previous work experiences include community organizing around the issue of violence prevention for the Sexual Violence Center of Minneapolis and working for Outfront MN doing community organizing concerning the issues of voting and legislative advocacy. Liz is currently a part-time student in the PhD program at the School of Social Work with research interests in child welfare and the intersection of Social Work and ecology. The Center is excited to have Liz on staff and to be able to expand the services and resources we can provide to the child welfare community. Welcome Liz!

## (NOTE FROM DIRECTOR CONTINUED)

IV-E scholar at the University of Connecticut and the University of Minnesota, respectively. My interests include child welfare systems, foster care, training, child welfare workforce issues and working with adults and children with disabilities within the context of child welfare. I joined the team at the CASCW in August. Everyone at the Center is working as hard as ever as another school year gets underway and as we develop additional outreach activities throughout Minnesota. During the course of the upcoming year we will be hosting state-wide child welfare conferences on cultural competence, immigration, and children of incarcerated parents. We will be piloting an online, multimedia training curriculum on how to support children with disabilities, special needs and challenging behaviors. This training will be FREE for 150 people and is available to

child welfare workers, foster parents, kinship caregivers and adoptive parents. The CASCW is also developing a NEW annual comprehensive child welfare magazine called *CW360*. The magazine will look at a specific practice area and explore what is known in terms of best practices, policy implications and activities, as well as research. *CW360* will include both overview/content article and profile articles designed to expose workers and supervisors to varying perspectives and practices on the given topic. The data share project, Minn-Link continues to work with counties to examine county-based service provision, outcomes etc. The Minn-Link project is also working with the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) to build infrastructure to support the evaluation for the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation initiative (MELF). Other projects that Center staff are pursuing include the development of a post graduate adoption cer-

## **(MELF COLLABORATION CONTINUED)**

additional administrative data resources to assist with longer-term outcomes of children and families served by MELF-funded programs in the areas of child protection system involvement and the educational outcomes of children. The project is collaborative and involves multiple community and evaluation partners such as Wilder, ChildTrends, and SRI International. The MELF project is also intended to create community capacity to serve children and families beyond the five-year life of the MELF initiative. For more information, see <http://education.umn.edu/ceed/projects/MELF/default.html>

**To learn more about MELF, see the article**

**“Getting kids kindergarten-ready: A profile of the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation”**

**on the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis website**

**<http://www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/cd/07-4/melf.cfm>**

## **(NOTE FROM DIRECTOR CONTINUED)**

tificate, a collaboration with the University of Minnesota Dental School to address the dental care needs of foster children, and a collaboration with the Foster Family Treatment Association (FFTA) to conduct research and evaluation. Finally, our student stipend program continues to grow and change. This year we are pleased to provide 40 MSW students and 1 PhD student with IV-E stipends as they pursue their advanced degrees. Ten of our 40 IV-E Scholars are Leadership Scholars working with MN DHS to develop leadership skills. In addition to student stipends, CASCW is also employing 12 graduate students at both the PhD and MSW levels.

As you can see we are planning a very busy and exciting year at the Center. We invite you to join us as we continue to grow and collaborate with Minnesota and other national child welfare professionals! Please visit our website for information of upcoming events and information.

Rest-



Traci LaLiberte, PhD  
Director

**(SOMALI SERVICES CONTINUED)**

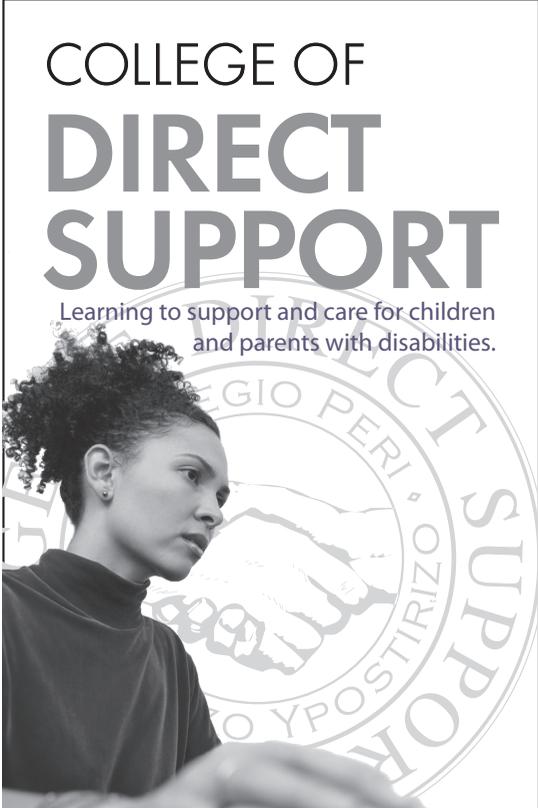
confidence, reduce parental stress and anxiety and improve parenting skills. We will work on reducing or eliminating spanking and hitting, improve parent-child relations. Our ultimate goal is to improve communication skills so that child behavior problems can be reduced. By improving communication will improve the whole family dynamics with regard to child's cooperation, self-esteem, adjustment and academic performance. Our overall goal is to strengthen families.

Center for Somali Families and Children Services has three primary staff members:

Hassan Ugas has an MSW from the University of Minnesota and was a Title IVE Child Welfare Scholar. His work history includes working as financial worker in Hennepin County for more than seven years and as a refugee worker.

Abdulahi Mohamed also received his MSW from the University of Minnesota. He has worked for Dakota County as a financial worker, for the State of Minnesota Department of Human Service as a Minnesota Care Enrollment Representative and for Ramsey County Children's Mental Health Crisis Mobile team as a social work practitioner. Abdul currently works for Hennepin County Children's Mental Health Crisis Response Unit as a senior social worker.

Ahmed Yusuf is currently a candidate in the MSW program at the University of Minnesota and is completing an internship for the Ramsey County Children's Mental Health Crisis Response. He has worked for Life-Track Resources as Employment Counselor and for The Bridge for Runaway Youth as a Family and Youth Counselor. Ahmed currently works for Ramsey County in MFIP Extension Triage Services.



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# announcement

## DIRECTOR PRESENTS AT NATIONAL SUMMIT

Traci LaLiberte, Director of CASCW and Liz Lightfoot, Associate Professor were recently invited to present at Johns Hopkins University at the National Summit on Parenting with Cognitive Disabilities. Drs. LaLiberte and Lightfoot presented their research and recently developed Guide for Legislative Change; both addressing issues facing parents with disabilities in child welfare. Parents with disabilities are being seen in increasing numbers in child welfare caseloads. Child welfare professionals and other key stakeholders struggle with how to manage cases involving a parent with a disability, particularly in light of the time commitment it takes to provide fair and effective services

while collaborating across numerous service systems. As this is an emerging issue within the field of child welfare, Drs. LaLiberte and Lightfoot are committed to continuing their research in this area. They are currently applying for an National Institute of Health (NIH) grant to work with other researchers to create a national research agenda addressing issues of parenting with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Dr. LaLiberte will also be presenting the parenting with disabilities research at a Children's Bureau conference December 12-13, 2007.

## CASCW

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