crb network news

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BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD

Patrick Kindred, second from left, addresses an audience during the 2013 Oregon Legislature. Kindred was one of several teens from the Oregon Foster Youth Connection to lobby for a "Foster Children's Bill of Rights."

Photo: Oregon First for Children

Giving a voice to foster children

Children in the foster care system will be better able to advocate for themselves thanks to a law passed during the recently-concluded 2013 Oregon Legislature.

As part of Senate Bill 123, the Department of Human Services will adopt rules establishing an "Oregon Foster Children's Bill of Rights." The legislation ensures that kids are made aware of certain rights, such as the ability to file private complaints regarding their care and notification of – and transportation to – court hearings and reviews.

According to SB 123's language, youth will receive a copy of the "Bill of Rights" upon entering substitute care or when there's a change in placement. They'll also receive written information on basic life skills to help empower them, such as how to acquire a driver's license or obtain health services available under state law without parental consent.

Finally, the bill will create a position that will receive and address reports from foster kids regarding violations of their rights.

The law was drafted by the nonprofit Oregon First for Children and drew upon input from more than 100 foster youth involved in Oregon First's Oregon Foster Youth Connection (OFYC) initiative.

Several young people actively lobbied for the bill during the session.

While current laws already protect a foster youth's basic rights in theory, gaps in policies and protocols still keep many foster youth from ever knowing their rights in care, said , said Lydia Bradley,

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Welcome, new volunteer board members!

DESCHUTES: Patricia Craveiro, Katherine Edwards

LANE: Julie Byrd, Chris Helm, Eugene Jackson, Susan Johnson, David Lindner, Steve Peterson

LINN: Cynthia Bene', Janet Blair, Joy Jorgensen, Michaela Judah, Mary Lou Merrill, Janet Nieberlein, Carol Rothauge, Christine Ruck, Christina Storm

MARION: Sally Amirjalaly, Barbara Benda, Katherine Bigeagle, Carla Bird, Nancy Curtis, Yevgeniy Gerasimenko, Susan McNaught

UNION: Martin Birnbaum

YAMHILL: Kathryn Wilson

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Summer a great time to reunite siblings

Summertime is the season that I remember spending the most time with my siblings growing up. We camped often as a family, shared a small tent, hiking, and fought over the last smore. We were separated only by the sounds of the crickets singing, campfires crackling and opposing teams during a game of tag. If there was a bully in camp, we were sure to all stand united. Children who enter foster care often do not have the same opportunity to share similar sibling experiences. Many children who enter the foster care system are separated from one another. Camp to Belong was developed to bring siblings together. It lasts one week, but allows kids to build memories for a lifetime.

Tina Qualls

CRB Field Manager

Camp to Belong was created by Lynn Price in Las Vegas, Nevada in 1995. Price was separated from her sister through the foster care system; she wanted children in foster care to know that foster care does not define you and that children can develop valuable connections with their siblings — despite not living with one another. Campers are provided a safe and neutral environment to connect with their sibling. This week-long program provides opportunity for campers to make crafts, participate in activities, and attend a life seminar. Children do not want to be part of the system and visit with their siblings at the DHS office. Camp to Belong allows kids -- at least for one week -- to be and feel like a “normal” child.

During each week at Camp to Belong, siblings take part in two special activities. The first is a special birthday celebration for each camper. Siblings can shop at a special tent for a gift and make a card for their sibling. They then give their gifts and cards during a special dinner where they are able to honor one another. Most siblings separated through the foster care system are unable to celebrate each other’s birthdays; this has become a special occasion that is celebrated at each camp location.

The second activity designed for developing lasting memories for siblings when they leave camp is creating their own scrapbook. Each camper is given a camera when they come to camp to snap photos of their week-long journey. Scrapbooks and materials are provided so each camper leaves with their own pictures and books.

In Josephine County, two siblings were selected to attend this year’s camp June 24-29 in Silverton and were able to be reunited after more than a year-and-a-half of separation. These twin sisters were separated based on their own need for counseling and separate family services. Camp to Belong was an opportunity to bring the two girls together in an environment that promotes sibling bonding prior to their permanent placement. The sisters talked about the importance of spending time together before being placed in their permanent home with a new family. The camp provided the perfect opportunity for them to reconnect with one another and to lean on each other during the hard times.

Camp to Belong has now served more than 4,500 siblings across the United States, including Oregon. Camps are run by community volunteers who attend a two-day training. Camp to Belong in Oregon -- called Camp to Belong, Northwest -- hosted 78 siblings and had 41 volunteer counselors this year. The theme was “The Amazing Race,” which included a special formal evening event that saw siblings don formal attire, dance, play games and enjoy a chocolate fountain.

At the end of this amazing week-long journey, a volunteer counselor explained: “The last day is filled with tears and fond memories where attitudes are softened and hearts become opened.” Most volunteer counselors believe this is a life-changing event, not only for the siblings but for them, as well.

We can’t thank the CRB volunteers enough for their continued donations to our annual basket raffle, which supports Camp to Belong, Northwest. We were able to sponsor nine campers this year! You can donate items for campers directly to Camp to Belong, Northwest. Needed items include: art supplies, scrapbook supplies, sleeping bags, and camping supplies. For more information about Camp to Belong visit the organization’s homepage at http://camptobelongoregon.org/

CRB, its mission subject of recent *Statesman* column

Oversight of the foster care system and the citizen volunteers who make this complex and difficult process work were highlighted in a story about the Citizen Review Board published June 2 in *The Statesman Journal* newspaper.

Capi Lynn, who pens a local human interest column, "Forward This," gave readers a history of the CRB program and an overview of how it operates. The piece included interviews with Marion County Field Manager Megan Hassen and Marion County volunteer board members Debra Seeck and Sue Bianco.

Lynn touched on the responsibility of volunteers in making recommendations that significantly affect the lives of children and families and how these citizens – whose ranks include foster parents, retired teachers and private investigators – view their jobs.

"When we tell a parent they're not ready to get their child back, it's because we want them to get better and use the services that they are offered, so their children can have a safe home to go to," Seeck said in a quote. "I wish them all well, but my No. 1 focus is those children."

There are currently 83 review panels in Oregon. The eight boards that serve Marion County conducted 531 reviews of children in foster care last year, Lynn wrote.

The trained volunteers "… serve under a cloak of confidentiality. Among the key things they must decide are whether parents are ready to be reunited with their children," she wrote.

"If there is a more important volunteer job in this community, I don't know what it is."

To view story, search for "Citizen Review Board" in the archives of The Statesman Journal website.

Juvenile justice champion concludes 30-year career

After nearly 30 years working on behalf of children and families involved in child abuse and neglect cases, Michael Livingston has called it a career.

Livingston, juvenile law staff counsel for OJD's Juvenile Court Programs office, retired on June 30. He was recognized during a going-away celebration at the Oregon Gardens in Silverton on Aug. 12.

Livingston earned his law degree from Willamette University in 1981, then served as a law clerk for the Oregon Supreme Court and the Oregon Court of Appeals.

From 1984 to 2008, Livingston worked for the Oregon Department of Justice, primarily for the Appellate Division and administered the Appellate Division's termination-of-parental-rights case load.

He was involved in implementing the termination-of-parental-rights appellate court mediation pilot project in 2006 and 2007. He was also Circuit Court Judge Pro Tem for Marion County Juvenile Court for three years and is the author of the chapter on appeals in Juvenile Law (Oregon CLE 2007).

"Michael has been a major champion of juvenile court improvement, judicial excellence, and CRB!" said CRB director Leola McKenzie.

CRB, JCP staff changes in Klamath and Salem

Sandy Berger, who had been working as a temporary CRB review specialist in Washington County, was promoted in July to field manager for Klamath and Lake counties .

Though she currently calls Hillsboro home, Berger and her family have roots in Klamath County. She lived there for 13 years, during which time she worked for Klamath County Circuit Court and served as executive director of CASA for Children of Klamath County. While with the circuit court, Berger also developed a "family court" program for families involved in the child welfare system.

Berger replaces Christina Levesque, who left the Klamath CRB field manager position in late July. CRB thanks Levesque for her passion for children and efforts in building community contacts.

In Salem, Conor Wall started his duties July 29 as the new data analyst for Juvenile Court Programs. Wall recently received his master's degree in public policy from Oregon State University.

A New Jersey native, Wall managed a meal and volunteer services program at a homeless women and children's shelter in Baltimore Maryland from 2008 to 2011.

Bill of Rights: stakeholders will draft rules this fall

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OFYC program manager, in a July interview with the online publication *Read the Dirt.*

"The life of a child or youth in foster care is complicated," Bradley said. "At very young ages, youth are expected to make decisions that have lifelong consequences with little information. They are forced into a complex system, with no firm understanding of their role or rights."

"Not knowing you have rights – or not having anywhere to turn when those rights are violated – is like having no rights at all."

Pamela Butler, Oregon First's child welfare policy manager, said Oregon's effort isn't unique; California, Maine, Pennsylvania and South Carolina are states she's aware of that have their own form of a foster youth bill of rights.

But "… it seems to me that over the last 10 years or so, there has been a growing national movement of foster care alumni and their advocates speaking up and demanding changes within the child welfare system," Butler said. "It is through the voices of current and former foster youth that this issue of rights while in care has become a recognized issue."

"We are part of a national movement in the direction of clear rights and meaningful grievance procedures for youth in care."

Sen. Chip Shields and House Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer sponsored the "Foster Children's Bill of Rights," which received unanimous support in the House and Senate.

Rule-writing for Oregon's new law will begin this fall and will involve DHS, youth and community partners, said Annajean Goins of the Office of Child Welfare Programs.

"As the legislation requires materials to be developmentally appropriate, it is highly likely that there will be more than one publication resulting from this legislation," Goins said.

"The legislation will also require training for children in care, child welfare staff, community partners, and providers. Planning and implementation of the legislation will be happening concurrently on all these areas."

Gov. John Kitzhaber signed the bill into law in July. While there's a need to reduce the necessity for foster care, "we also have a responsibility to do everything possible to make foster care safe and supportive," Kitzhaber said in a June 26 press release.

The bill "ensures Oregon's foster youth have access to the tools and support they deserve while helping them reach their full potential," Kitzhaber added.

CRB Bulletin Board

■ The United States Supreme Court issued on June 25 its decision in *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl,* a case involving the application of the Indian Child Welfare Act to a voluntary adoption.

Although we don't anticipate this will impact child welfare cases, if you're interested in learning more, you can listen to an online training about the decision provided by the National Indian Child Welfare Association. This training qualifies for one hour of Cultural Responsiveness credit required annually for board members. Read a summary of the case by the Association of American Indian Affairs and NICWA **here.** More information can be found on the NICWA resources page **here.**

■ If you know someone interested in serving on a board, please refer them to Amy Church, Volunteer Resource Coordinator. Often the best referrals come from our current volunteer board members. We are actively seeking volunteers in the following counties: Baker, Coos, Curry, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union and Wallowa.

Upcoming orientation trainings are scheduled for Sept. 24-25 in Portland and Oct. 17-18 in Eugene. For more information: Amy at crb.volunteer.resources@ojd.state.or.us.

■ The Citizen Review board is currently working with Portland State University to develop Trauma Informed Care practices, a subject much discussed during the annual CRB Conference in May. If you missed or weren't able to attend that event, you can still view a video of keynote speaker, Mandy Davis that can apply toward your annual training hours.

Go to the Citizen Review board homepage, click on the "Education and Training" link, then scroll down to the "Everyday Counts Conference 2013" materials and click on "Trauma Informed Care." Or, simply click **here.**

CITIZEN REVIEW BOARD

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