



LINKING HANDS

Issue 13

Fall 2005

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As of October 2005:

1,207 total youth enrolled in MSFA System of Care



WV's System of Care "graduation" — a time to recognize...

Champions...



...Heroes

... & the road ahead

RAINY DAY HEROES

***Presenting...some of our
2006 Rainy Day Heroes
(and nominating
families)***



Top Row, left to right: Sgt. Robert Sparks, Ruth Dowdy, Major Paul Clark, Marcia Rice, Sharon Short, Logan, Cindy Bryant.



Middle Row, left to right: Laurel, Jim and Joel Haight, Kevin Walker & family, Steve Horner, Logan, Bill Locke, Danis Soylu.



Bottom Row, left to right: Dr. James Phifer, Robin Hughes, Linda, Leasure, Jason & Sandra Pettaway, Jennifer Santmyer, and Ashley Haynes.



2006 RAINY DAY HEROES...IN THE WORDS OF OUR YOUTH AND FAMILIES:

When **Cindy Bryant** of Mountain State Family Alliance in Huntington said we would have in-home services, respite care and out of home therapy for my son, it was too good to be true. I gave her the benefit of the doubt, since I was at the end of my rope. Cindy was "the big cheese" that put everything into place and helped me keep the faith. She discovered that my son was a very unique boy who had Aspergers Syndrome. Also, she had a hunch he was diabetic. Blood work was done and we discovered one of his meds was causing his sugar to go up. Cindy is very thorough, reasonable and knowledgeable about mental health. She would work with any child, no matter what the circumstances or situation.

I nominated **Suzanne Celdran** and **Tammy King**, both nurse practitioners for the Saxe medical office in Barboursville, for listening to my daughter and me, and putting our needs and beliefs first, and do whatever they can to work my daughter into the day's schedule and see her quickly whenever there's a problem.

Lisa Clark of Cross Lanes has spent the past two years not only pursuing her nursing career, but also filling in all the gaps at home so that her stepdad and I could manage to keep working our hectic schedules. I also want to acknowledge her care and compassion as a mentor for some of our "grant" kids, for outreach on System of Care to staff and students at the University of Charleston, and for all her volunteer work for the system of care.

Major Paul Clark and **Sgt. Robert Sparks** of Huntington High School JROTC have helped Justin so much. Major Clark has been such a positive figure in Justin's 11th grade year. He has helped to give him such positive attitudes that he can achieve goals for himself. Sgt. Sparks has worked along with Major Clark and helped build Justin's self-confidence and pride.

Sharon Deusenbury of Cross Lanes, the mother of my son's friend Eric, who my son has adopted as his second "Mom" this summer. Sharon and her entire family truly accept Ian for who he is and unconditionally welcome him into their home. We have been fortunate through this grant project in past years to have gotten weekend respite care for Ian, and the families were wonderful. But having someone ask ME if they can have my son for a few days...it may seem trivial to them, but to me this has been a milestone for Ian and an answered prayer for me.

The kids nominated their "**Papa Jim**" **Haught** from Cross Lanes, who regularly takes time rotating outings with them on the weekends, is overly generous at times with the money he spends on them, and always makes sure they learn something new about the world when they are with him. The years of experience he and Nancy have had in taking in and raising 40+ foster kids has no doubt contributed to his patience and tolerance, and he has been a key figure in keeping our family together.

Ashley Nicole Haynes, Family Services Associate for KVC in Charleston, has been such a blessing to our family! She was a mentor in our home through MSFA for one year. Ashley went way above and beyond in her dedication to two of my foster children. She was creative and innovative in her approach to the services that she provided to these very seriously abused and neglected children. She also assisted the family as a whole in relating to the challenging behaviors that the children displayed. Ashley's efforts kept two children who were headed out of state for intensive residential treatment in the home and able to be maintained in the community.

Steve Horner from Treasures at Kanawha Mall runs Yu-gi-Oh! tournaments, and volunteers to give these kids something to do to keep them out of trouble. He furnishes tables, judges, makes sure they're playing fairly. He is a unique individual who sees the beauty in everybody.

Region 2 Family Network Parent Liaison **Robin Hughes** of Barboursville received two nominations:

"Robin has taken my daughter on outings with her and her daughter to help her with social skills. Now my daughter has a good friend, which is something great to have!"



We've all heard about "fair-weather friends," those people who are around when times are good and easy. But the Mountain State Family Alliance knows that parents and caregivers of children with emotional and behavioral challenges really value a "rainy day hero"....the one person who recognizes a child's strengths and individuality...who takes a real interest in a child's progress and is there to help in the rough times...the person who goes that extra mile, respects and follows up with a family...



2006 RAINY DAY HEROES...IN THE WORDS OF OUR YOUTH AND FAMILIES (continued from page 3)

"I chose my mom (**Robin Hughes**) because she's a very hard worker. She never gives up on a battle when it comes to her kids. She's great at work because it's what she's been doing practically all her life. When my 19 year old brother was in a coma and wasn't supposed to live, my mom had faith in Chuck. She's the only one who's been there when one of us has been in the hospital or sick. She always led in the right way. She has always made sure the school has done right by me in I.E.P. meetings. She has been there whenever I needed her all my life and she's never done wrong by me. And she always thought of her kids (us) before herself. And I love her for everything she has done for us."

Tony Lahon, Hurricane police officer, sat down and talked with my son like a human being, when he got in some trouble in the neighborhood. He put him on "Tony Parole." He worked so well with my son and has been very understanding with me.

Linda Leasure of West Virginia Advocates in Charleston has been a rock. When I was at my lowest point she would pick me up. She was there 24-7 it seems to me. When I cried she cried with me. When I couldn't get anyone to listen, she got them to hear. In 2002 I thought there was no hope and she gave me hope to continue. She is my inspiration.

My father **Bill Locke** of Hurricane gave me his strength and patience. After things had been going downhill for me for several years, there was nobody to help me but my father. He has gone through living hell, doing whatever he could do, even as DHHR had to take custody, as my son went out of state, and then dealing with the explosive behavior when he returned home. He has always only wanted the best for my son, and to help get him on track.

My son **Jason Pettaway** of Huntington has been a great role model for his brother. He has a business that he worked hard to build on his own, but even with his busy schedule he is there for me whenever I need help or guidance with Justin. Jason has served as a mentor with other young people in MSFA, but the time he volunteers to provide work opportunities and social interaction with his younger brother has meant so much to Justin and me.

Dr. James Phifer of Radical Rehab in Huntington saw in my son what nobody else could. He has been my son's lifeline. Dr. Phifer met Charlie in 2002 and was able to talk to me like he had been there from the start of Charlie's life.

David & Marsha Rice of Barboursville have been there to help me with my daughter ever since her birth. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't be able to work at all. From taking my daughter to her doctor appointments so I could work, to countless other things, my parents have gone above and beyond the role of "grandparents."

Jennifer Santmyer of Nitro, my crazy friend and cohort who, years ago, jumped in and started volunteering as my emergency back up with any of my kids...before she even knew how dysfunctional we are! I can call her any time day or night (and I have) and she'll always be there, no questions asked. Jennifer has also had to make some hard decisions this past year with her own son in and his issues, and I am so proud of her for continuing to see him through it all so bravely.

Have you ever met someone who leaves a lasting impression? **Danis Soylu** of Braley & Thompson in Dunbar is the mentor who would spend 40 hours a week respite with my son. Someone mentioned that this mentor was a retired 'shrink,' and I just didn't know what to expect. To my surprise, Danis just overwhelms children with building them up. He was like a breath of fresh air. He showed him how to interact with others and did so many wonderful things for Logan - outings, social skills, manage money, and most of all, being his friend.

Kevin Walker, Kanawha Respite Worker, taught Logan how to sing and rap out his feelings, which was a great technique. Kevin was the most dynamite, energetic young man that connected with Logan and got on his level.

...If there is a "secret weapon" in community based systems of care, above all else it would be the people we are honoring. More than traditional therapy, medication, or formal services, families often feel most supported by the strength a Rainy Day Hero provides. Families of children enrolled in Mountain State Family Alliance were asked to nominate individuals who have been models of strength. The recipients of the Mountain State Family Alliance's Third Annual "Rainy Day Heroes" awards have gone above and beyond the call of duty to help our children succeed.

Child-serving agency leaders, judges and others now coming together to listen, learn, and improve West Virginia's service delivery system for children and families

By Linda Watts, Project Director

Representatives from the Mountain State Family Alliance were requested to appear at the State Capitol in late September on behalf of the WV System of Care Collaborative Team, to provide information and recommendations to a recently-formed state commission.

As project director for the six-year-old System of Care initiative in southwestern West Virginia, I was able to share information on the structure, components, goals, achievements and impact of the Mountain State Family Alliance. Through federal grant funding and significant contributions from state agencies, our partnership has been able to develop and support a cost-effective, integrated service delivery mechanism for multi-system/multi-need children.

Because of these collective efforts, services are now being utilized successfully at the community level by parents and caregivers who once felt stigmatized. As a result, families in the region are less likely to resort to legal action, custody relinquishment or placement of children in facilities outside the home. The regional outcome study and family testimonies strongly demonstrate that children are more successful in their own communities.

Laurel Haight, long-time MSFA parent and director of the Region 2 Family Network, offered her perspectives to the Commission on the importance of the system of care to West Virginia families (*see box*).

The commission was charged with studying the current practices for placing children in out-of-state placement, as a result of House Bill 2334 (WV Code 49-7-34). Upon completion of their work, the Commission will make recommendations to improve the service delivery system, support cross-agency collaboration, and reduce duplication of efforts.

Per H.B. 2334, the Commission consists of the following members: Department of Health and Human Resources (with Secretary Martha Walker serving as Chair), Bureau for Children and Families, Office of Behavioral Health, State Superintendent of Schools, Director of the Office of Institutional Educational Programs, Director of the Office of Special Education, Director of the Division of Juvenile Justice, and West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals (circuit and family court judges).

The members have years of experience, knowledge, expertise, and are willing to discuss the problems that hinder the collaboration of efforts among state child-serving agencies, review existing programs that are addressing placement issues, and make recommendations that are solution oriented that will result in statewide change.

This is far from an easy task for the Commission. The results will impact the future of our children and their families. It is our hope that these discussions do not end with the recommendations, but will provide oversight and their continued expertise as new problems arise that prevent our children from

being served in the least restrictive placement option.

Meetings are held once a month and open to interested persons. To review H.B. 2334, go to http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Text_HTML/2005_SESSIONS/RS/BILLS/HB2334%20enr.htm.

Everyone participating on this commission knows very well that approximately 400 West Virginia children are in out of state treatment facilities on any given day. I asked to be here today because my child was one of these 400 kids.

My son is not a bad kid, but he does have some serious mental health issues which have greatly affected our entire family, and at one point almost tore us apart.

I have been involved, as foster, then adoptive parent of three kids, with every child-serving system available for in-home and outpatient services. For the first two years we were running in circles from one system to another...but no one was working together with us to help figure out what was wrong or what we could do...and my son just kept getting worse.

I did end up having to file a mental hygiene petition and was shocked *and sickened* to learn that once that was done; the hospital recommended to the court that he be sent to Georgia for treatment.

By the grace of God, and a chance call, we learned there was a place close called Barboursville school, only 35 miles from home, where we were able to get him in & where he stayed for 14 months. During this time we were able to visit weekly, call daily, and participate in every meeting that took place.

I believe in my heart he needed residential care. I also believe that if the plans to send him to Georgia had gone through; we would have lost him forever.

I could go on for quite a while about what went wrong for the first 2 years...but what I really want to emphasize here today is what goes RIGHT when you have good planning and coordination of services that truly meet the needs of the child and family, and without having to worry about what system you need to be put into to assure that your child gets what he needs to improve. What is right in my home is that my son has been in my home for 4 ½ years without even 1 overnight hospital stay!

What we have learned is that we can find the good in every child & make things better! We can take small successes and build on them. Everyone of us have to commit time and effort as a team...families, teachers, therapists, & providers from all the different systems ...have to plan together, work together, and be accountable together...to be on the same page in order for any positive changes to come about. That is a System of Care!

Laurel A. Haight