



MONDAY MORNING MEMO

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Appreciating the Culture of Childhood

Professionals who work best with children tend to be those who remember what it felt like to be a child, said Dr. Jodi Ann Mullen during a recent presentation on The Culture of Childhood. Dr. Mullen was one of the presenters at CASA of the Southern Tier's conference earlier this month titled "Healthy Beginnings: Creating Positive Attachments in Children," held in Painted Post, NY. The NYS Child Welfare Court Improvement Project was a sponsor of that training.

Dr. Mullen is a play therapist, teacher, writer and professor at SUNY Oswego. She also is co-author of *Counseling Children And Adolescents Through Grief And Loss* with Jody J. Fiorini.

The culture of childhood, according to Dr. Mullen, "refers to the shared experiences children have in particular societies and sub-cultures, and to the social construction of childhood itself." Much of the literature on cultural competence and perspectives excludes children and childhood, yet they have a unique experience as a group that is historically undervalued. You need only look at the pay scale of those who work with children, often among the worst-paid professionals regardless of academic training.

Many of the interventions created to assist children in need fail because they are designed as if children were just miniature adults, Dr. Mullen said. Children have rules, values, customs, and language all their own, as well as a unique view of the dominant culture of adulthood. Our beliefs about childhood color our interactions with them, leading often to a minimization or denial of their feelings and experiences. "Little person equals little problem," is often the attitude, she said.

As with any effort at cultural competence, you need to be aware of how much you are interacting with another group based on your own values and perspective, and how much you have stereotyped individual members of that group based on isolated interactions or cultural assumptions. Dr. Mullen suggested the following strategies for cross-cultural communication between adults and children:

- Use child-based, developmentally appropriate language
- Keep your responses succinct
- Make sure your non-verbal and verbal messages are congruent
- Be animated: Use a variety of words and a variety of tones
- Get down to eye level so the child doesn't have to stare up at you (Dr. Mullen suggested placing a mirror on a chair and looking down into it to see how you look from a child's eye level. It's not a flattering view.)

To learn more, go to Dr. Mullen's websites:

- www.integrativecounseling.us
- www.oswego.edu/~jmullen





CASA Hosts 'Celebration of Children' in Johnstown

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and Linda Burns, CASA Director for CASA of Fulton and Montgomery Counties, was not going to let that pass without notice. She conceived of an event that would honor children while noting the work that still needs to be done to help protect them. "I wanted it showcase children's talents," she said. "That seemed to be a good fit for CASA."

So the "Premier Celebration of Children Showcase 2008" was born. Held Friday, April 25th at the HFM BOCES in Johnstown, the event featured a 4H presentation by Kian Paddon on The Digestive System of the Horse, and performances by the Bombazo Latino Dancers of Centro Civico and the Amster-Dancers. Student Ryan Senecal served as Ambassador of Ceremonies, and Reyers Brusco provided musical accompaniment.

Honorable Philip V. Cortese, Family Court Judge for Montgomery County, provided opening remarks. He noted the critical importance of a safe,



Amster-Dancers!

secure environment in which children can grow up to become good parents themselves. "Family Court is a therapeutic court," he said. "We can't do that alone. What we do, what CASA helps us to do, is get parents back on track."

Tracy Fluty served as Chairperson of the event. The CASA Program of Fulton and Montgomery County is a program of Centro Civico; Ladan Alomar, Centro Civico's Executive Director, welcomed guests at the program's beginning. A number of community agencies had displays and provided sponsorship.



Lining the grounds of BOCES were dozens of blue pinwheels, a symbol of childhood. "Pinwheels for Prevention" is a new nationwide public awareness campaign for April, created by



Prevent Child Abuse America. The organization stresses the pinwheels are a positive campaign focused on the joy of childhood and the good being done

in the community. The pinwheels convey the message that every child deserves the chance be raised in a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment.



Bombazo Latino Dancers of Centro Civico



New Court Rules Cap Lawyers for Children Caseload at 150

Section 127.5 of the Rules of The Chief Administrator, effective April 1, 2008, sets a case cap of 150 for lawyers for children appointed pursuant to section 249 of the Family Court Act, subject to adjustment under certain conditions outlined in the rule.

For representation provided by a panel of attorneys for children, the Appellate Division may adjust the workload standards to ensure the effective representation of children. Compliance with the rule will be assessed annually as part of the preparation and submission of the judiciary budget.

For the full text of the rule, go to: www.nycourts.gov/rules/chiefadmin/127.shtml

Substance Abuse Training Draws 150 to Learn About Impact on Children

More than 150 individuals representing CASA programs, substance abuse providers, social services departments, and community agencies gathered April 2nd for a training coordinated by the NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program. Titled “Adapting to Addictions: A Child’s Perspective,” the event was co-sponsored by the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project and NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

Presentations included an overview of addictions and psychopharmacology, relapse, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, co-occurring substance abuse and mental illness, Family Treatment Court, interagency collaborations, substance abuse and teens and a child’s perspective on substance abuse. PowerPoint presentations from the seminar are available on the NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program website: www.nycourts.gov/ip/casa/casa_training_a.shtml

Presentation scheduled in Albany on “Kinship Care in New York”

The New York State Kincare Coalition and AARP New York will conduct a special presentation of the Coalition's 2008 report: “Kinship Care In New York: A Five Year Framework For Action” on **Wednesday, April 30th**, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Albany Institute of History and Art, 125 Washington Avenue, Albany, NY. To attend, contact Merissa Gremminger at 212-407-3784 or email her at mgremminger@aarp.org

The report presents the New York State Kincare Coalition's recommendations for action over the next five years to support grandparents and other kincaregivers raising children. The report makes 19 recommendations addressing five core areas where improvements are needed: Special Challenges - Special Services; Statewide Kincare Service Network; Data Collection, Measurable Outcomes & Research; Statutory and Regulatory Changes; and Legal Assistance.



State Bar Association Promotes Importance of Legal Services for the Poor

The importance of the judiciary and of funding legal services for the poor is the topic of a new radio ad campaign from the New York State Bar Association, which will run in conjunction with the New York State Broadcasters Association through May 11. Narrator is State Bar President Kathryn Grant Madigan of Levene Gouldin & Thompson in Binghamton. One ad states, "Did you know that more people can name the three judges on 'American Idol' than the chief justice of the United States Supreme Court? Did you know that even fewer can identify our three independent branches of government?"

🌸🌸 NYS UCS Court Rules and Contract Primer 🌸🌸

NYS UCS Court Rules re CASA Require Written Job Descriptions

According to Part 117 of the Rules of the Chief Administrator of the Courts, CASA programs must each have "written staff and volunteer job descriptions, qualification and evaluation forms." Samples of forms are available at www.casanet.org, and of course you can always ask fellow directors for samples on "CASAtalk." The rule is available online at: www.nycourts.gov/rules/chiefadmin/117.shtml

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Website Provides A Guide to "Common Errors in English Usage"

If you've wondered when you should use "critique" or "criticize," what the difference is between veracious and voracious, or whether it was "brussel sprouts" or "brussels sprouts" (although I can't imagine how sprouts would enter into a CASA report...), this is a good website to answer all your questions: www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html#errors%20%20%20grammar%20website

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"The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem."

- Theodore Rubin

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