
For Parents by Parents

Issue 8

CHILD WELFARE ORGANIZING PROJECT

Fall / Winter 2002

THANK YOU ASSEMBLY MEMBER GREEN

Hon. Roger L. Green, New York State Assembly Member from the 57th District in Brooklyn, has long been recognized and valued as an unparalleled leader and advocate in the field of child welfare. As Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee for Children and Families, and—more recently— the Black, Puerto Rican, and Hispanic Legislative Caucus, Roger Green drafted the Maintenance of Effort agreement that shielded New York City Preventive Services from proposed cuts of 50—75% in 1995; secured \$33 Million in TANF funds for Preventive and Aftercare services; established an MSW scholarship program to promote professionalization of the child welfare workforce; and has drawn public and media attention to the impact of race and class on decision-making in child welfare.

These are just a few select highlights. The scope of Assembly Member Green's accomplishments cannot be fully described in this limited space. He has been an eloquent and persistent voice for the voiceless, struggling to secure rights and resources for constituents with virtually no political power of their own, including mothers in recovery, senior citizens serving as the primary caretakers of their grandchildren, and children orphaned as a result of AIDS / HIV.

One key to Assembly Member Green's ability to remain informed, focused, and effective while working in such often-overlooked areas of public policy has been the services of his Counsel **Sania Metzger**. In October 2002, after ten years with Assembly Member Green, Sania began an important new chapter in her career as Director of Policy for Casey Family Services in Connecticut.

In June 2002, the Child Welfare Organizing Project was awarded a generous Member Item Grant from Assembly Member Green for Child Welfare Parent Self-Help and Advisory Services. We want to use this issue of *For Parents by Parents* to pay tribute to Roger Green and Sania Metzger, because this appropriation represents such an important addition to their legacy to New York State's most disadvantaged children, as well as a milestone in the history of our organization.

THANK YOU SANIA METZGER

The genesis of Parent Self-Help and Advisory Services began, more or less, in December 1998. Roger Green and Sania Metzger addressed an overflow crowd of CWOP parents at a Family Rehabilitation Program in Harlem. The subject was ASFA - the Adoption and Safe Families Act—signed into federal law the preceding year, overdue for New York State implementation. Many professionals did not yet grasp the full implications of this landmark law, let alone how to explain it to their clients, so everyone left that meeting with a heightened sense of both urgency and purpose. The stakes in child welfare were rising, driven by compressed timeframes for Termination of Parental Rights. Parents in Harlem, the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and beyond needed to understand this law.

Given the longstanding state of crisis in the public child welfare and family law workforces, parents cannot always depend on their Case Planners or 18-B attorneys to effectively explain or protect their rights. Those communities most impacted by the public child welfare system need to develop mechanisms through which parents can educate themselves and assert their own rights. It is also a democratic principle that these same communities have a right to participate meaningfully in the development of public policies that determine the course of their children's lives. Other categorically-based public service systems such as Headstart, child mental health, and services for children with developmental disabilities have long benefited from a mandated, organized, empowered parent / consumer voice. Child welfare falls far short of these other service systems in this respect as well. Based on these realizations, the idea for Parent Self Help and Advisory Services was formed.

This allocation supports and extends the reach of CWOP's core activities: peer-led parent support and self-help groups; legal and resource education seminars for parents; using the media and public forums to challenge the stereotypes that depreciate service quality; bringing parents into meaningful dialogue with policy-makers and educators; and helping parents to—individually and collectively— develop the knowledge, skills, and base of support needed to function both as peer advocates and advisors, and as uniquely qualified policy analysts.

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WELCOME CWOP'S NEW PARENT ORGANIZERS

As a direct result of Assembly Member Green's grant, **Teresa Bachiller, Bernadette Blount, and Philneia Timmons** officially began work as CWOP Parent Organizers On July 15, 2002. Already well known to some of our readers, all three are mothers who have successfully reunited with children who had been involuntarily removed to foster care.

Teresa is a June 2002 graduate of CWOP's East Harlem Parent Leadership curriculum (*see Page 3*). She also has computer and managerial training and experience. She has assumed primary responsibility for our newsletter. Teresa has led parent support and education groups, represented CWOP in meetings with ACS Commissioner William Bell, with the newly-reconstituted Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel, and in a series of discussions on "dual track" alternative response systems to State Central Register reports. She has also improved and updated CWOP's website (www.cwop.org), among many other accomplishments.

Bernadette graduated CWOP's Bushwick Parent Leadership initiative in January 2001, and had since worked with CWOP on a consultant basis. Bernadette was a keynote panelist at the Fordham Interdisciplinary Center Spring 2001 conference, and has guest lectured at the Columbia University Schools of Law and Social Work. She has written for a variety of publications, including co-authorship of a comprehensive parents' rights manual in collaboration with several leading public interest legal services organizations. She has co-led parents' rights workshops at a wide variety of drug treatment programs, transitional residences, and NYCHA tenants' associations, among many other accomplishments.

Philneia graduated CWOP's East Harlem Parent Leadership curriculum, and regained full custody of her two beautiful children, in June 2002. Philneia has led parent self-help and support groups, written about her experiences with the child welfare system for publication, and represented CWOP in meetings with ACS Commissioner Bell, HRA Commissioner Verna Eggleston, and US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, among many other accomplishments.

CWOP Parent Organizers serve on the ACS Parent Advisory Workgroup, the NY State Office of Children and Family Services Performance Improvement Plan Family Engagement Work Group, lead weekly Support Groups (*see Page 3*), co-lead CWOP's East Harlem Parent Leadership Curriculum, and serve as a training resource for students of law and social work, among many other duties.

**Child Welfare Organizing Project
East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street #1E
New York, NY 10029
212-348-3000 phone
212-348-1605 fax
www.cwop.org
e-mail: mike@cwop.org**

We welcome any articles, stories, poems or comments in English or Spanish from parents who have been involved with the child welfare system. Please send, mail or e-mail to the above address along with your contact information. If we use your submission we will contact you regarding any edits before printing.

"Thank You" to All Our Supporters

CWOP receives support from:

- The Child Welfare Fund
- The Community Resource Exchange Reality Checks Fund
- The Daphne Foundation
- The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
- The Fund for the City of New York
- The Hite Foundation
- The New York Foundation
- The North Star Fund
- The Open Society Institute
- The Valentine Perry Snyder Fund
- A variety of individual donors, and
- A Member Item Grant from NY State Assembly Member Roger L. Green administered by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Congratulations to Our Graduates

In June 2002, CWOP graduated our first class of East Harlem Parent Leaders. Modeled on a similar CWOP initiative which took place in Bushwick, Brooklyn in 2000 / 01, the purpose of the Parent Leadership Curriculum is to educate local parents about the child welfare system and prepare them for ongoing roles as community advocates and activists. Over a six-month period, classroom training is offered in communication skills, navigating the Family Court and Foster Care systems, resources for preserving and reuniting families, and community organizing. Equally important are hands-on learning and leadership activities such as meeting with elected officials, writing for publication, and participating in Washington and Albany actions with all organizations such as Community Voices Heard and JusticeWorks Community. Many of our Parent Leaders move on to positions as Parent Aides and Mentors with foster care and preventive service programs at agencies including Family Consultation Services, the Harriet Tubman Residence, the Salvation Army, and the Southern Queens Park Association; or join CWOP's own staff or Board of Directors.

Our June 2002 graduates are: **Teresa Bachiller, Carmen Caban, Caroline Diaz Marrero, Vanessa Grace, Bertha Marquez, Terry Reed, Leslie Smith, and Philneia Timmons**

*The following poem was written and read
By Titania D. Grace,
in honor of her mother Vanessa's graduation from
CWOP's Parent Leadership Curriculum.*

To An Inspirational Mother

As your hands reach out
They stretch through struggles
Struggles so often wished forgotten, but all endured
Battles of our past, no longer our present
Your arms extend to today's joys with an indelible
warmth
A warmth that demands gratitude
Your devotion has blossomed beyond flowers
Flowers grown amongst the most beautiful days
Of both spring and summer
Your love has surmounted any other in my life
Allowing me to instill it in others
Through journeys and obstacles
Presented in our path,
You have although struggled, still fought and won
Not only are you a survivor, but also and most im-
portantly a true Inspiration
We have and we will continue to survive.

CWOP IS RECRUITING FOR A 2002 / 3 CYCLE OF OUR PARENT LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM

Are you an East Harlem parent who is, or has been, involved with ACS Foster Care, Protective, or Preventive Services?

Would you like to:

- **Gain a better understanding of your legal rights and responsibilities?**
- **Help other parents and families in your community?**
- **Work to change and improve the NYC child welfare system?**
- **Earn a training stipend?**
- **Develop skills and knowledge that may qualify you for ongoing employment?**

If you answered yes to all of the above, and you have about ten hours per week to spare, we would like to meet you! Please call Teresa or Mike to schedule an interview: (212) 348-3000.

(RECRUITMENT FOR THE 2002 / 3 CYCLE WILL END AT THE END OF OCTOBER 2002)

CWOP's PARENT SUPPORT / SELF-HELP GROUP

Meets every Wednesday from 11 AM—1 PM at
NY Foundling's East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street, 1E
(between Park and Madison Avenues,
#2,3, or 6 Train to 110th Street)

*"We are sharing our knowledge, our experience, supporting one another,
and organizing for change"*

**We suggest calling ahead to confirm your attendance:
(212) 348-3000**



QUOTE OF NOTE

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs, in collaboration with the Child Welfare League of America, launched the Indian Adoption Project in 1958 to stimulate the adoption of Indian children nationwide. Huge numbers of Indian children were relocated from reservations to adoptive homes in distant white communities...The government’s reason for this wide-scale transfer of Indian children was the familiar child-saving rationale... Columbia social work professor David Fanshel explained the relocation program as a response to the ‘tragic plight’ of Indians, marked by unsanitary housing, illiteracy, unemployment, and alcoholism...”

“One hundred years from now, today’s child welfare system will surely be condemned as a racist institution—one that compounded the effects of discrimination on Black families by taking children from their parents, allowing them to languish in a damaging foster care system or to be adopted by more privileged people. School children will marvel that so many scholars and politicians defended this devastation of Black families in the name of protecting Black children.”

Dorothy Roberts, Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare, Basic Civitas Books, 2002

CWOP Mission Statement

Through organized client involvement and collective advocacy both inside and independent of the system, the Child Welfare Organizing Project will change/transform the quality of services provided to New York City families through the New York City child welfare system.

Nuestra declaración de misión

A través de la participación organizada de los clientes y la acción colectiva ambos dentro de y afuera del sistema, el Proyecto cambiarán/transformarán la clase de servicio provisto por parte del sistema de protección de niños para las familias en la Ciudad de Nueva York.

CHILD WELFARE ORGANIZING PROJECT

East Harlem Neighborhood Center
80 East 110th Street, #1E
New York, NY 10029

PLEASE SAVE THE DATE !!!

CWOP Fundraiser honoring NY State Assembly Member Roger L. Green and Sania Metzger

TUESDAY DECEMBER 3, 2002, 6—8 PM
at the Hunter College School of Social Work, 129 E. 79th Street, NYC

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR! INVITATION TO FOLLOW SHORTLY!