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○ Winter | ○ March | ○ 2015

# Creating Connections

## Learning Community Updates

### Year 3 Goals

Creating Connections is now in Year 3 of the of the 5 year grant! Year 3 will focus on further implementation and expansion upon activities from last year, such as the Ongoing Mental Health Screening program and the Mental Health: A Critical Aspect to Permanency and Well-being training, as well as embark in new efforts that will continue to move us towards our goal of improving connections to mental health services for children and youth in care.

One major activity that is planned for Year 3 is the creation of an interactive training for mental health providers. This training is being developed in partnership

with alumni of care, veteran parents and foster parents. This training will include information about decision points and child welfare system as well as considerations when working with a child or youth in foster care. See page 4 for more details as this training develops.

We are pleased to announce that Brenda Lopez, Jamerika Haynes and Jackie Yee (introduced on page 2) recently joined the Creating Connections Core Team! With their help, the Creating Connections team will continue to engage and involve foster youth, alumni of care, veteran parents and foster parents to guide the grant activities.



### Year 2 Accomplishments

Several major milestones were achieved during the second year of Creating Connections. The Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) and the Ongoing Mental Health (OMH) screeners and supervisors were trained on administering the new Trauma Tool (Screen for Child Anxiety and Related Emotional Disorders). The Trauma Tool was then implemented into the CHET interview. The Ongoing Mental Health program was implemented and new Ongoing Mental Health screeners were hired and trained. Finally, a mental health curriculum for new and existing child welfare social service specialists was developed and implemented.

# Welcome Unique Voice Representatives!

## Brenda Lopez

My name is Brenda Lopez. I live in Puyallup, Washington. I am a mother of two children and a grandmother of four. I work as a social worker in the child welfare system. My primary responsibility is assisting defense attorneys who work with indigent parent that have had their children removed from their care by the State of Washington. I support the parents in their stated goals as they work toward correcting the deficiencies identified by the state social worker.

I have a unique role on the Creating Connections Team. I bring the voice of the birth parent, also known as the "veteran parent", or "biological parent" of the child welfare system. I lost care of my children to the child welfare system in 1998. My children were in foster care for what seemed a life time, but in actuality 8 months for my son (age 4)

and about 2 years for my daughter (age 11). My experience was life changing in a number of ways; most profoundly, in that I learned to live life without the use of drugs! This was a powerful experience for me as I had lived most of my life on drugs. I gained employment and went back to school to better myself and my life.

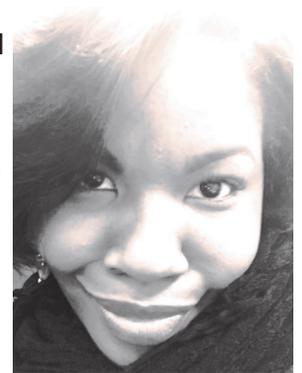
Today, my goals are to continue supporting others in their quest for betterment, and to support positive changes in Washington State's child welfare system. I am looking forward to my position on the Creating Connections committee as it provides an open space for my goals to be carried forward with a team of experts who share in my passion to help others and create positive changes for the child welfare system, which in turn will bring positive changes for children and families involved in the system.

## Jamerika Haynes

Jamerika Haynes holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication from Washington State University in Pullman, Washington.

Jamerika joins us as the Alumni Voice Representative for Creating Connections. She is currently an Administrative Assistant and Communications Specialist for the YMCA of Greater Seattle. She has previously worked as a freelance reporter for the Press Enterprise and Daily Evergreen while studying at WSU.

As the Alumni Voice Representative, she will be the Passion to Action (P2A) Liaison, in which she is currently a Peer Adult Mentor. She will work with her fellow P2A board members to provide a perspective to the Core Team based on first hand knowledge and education of the Child Welfare System.



## Jackie Yee

Hello My name is Jackie and I hold a Bachelors from Evergreen State College. I have worked as a chemical dependency professional for ESD113 for 11 years doing school based treatment services for adolescents.

I have been a licensed foster parent for 6

years and grew up as a biological child in a foster home. My experience with the foster care system and youth goes back 26 years.

I am very excited to have yet another opportunity to advocate for youth in our community by being part of this team!

# Ongoing Mental Health Screening Program Update

*The Ongoing Mental Health Screeners have started their second round of every 6-month screenings! This means that the foster families of children and youth who have been in care for a year are receiving calls*

The OMH screening program has been fully implemented since July 2014. The program is intended to support improved identification of mental health needs and access to appropriate and evidence-based mental health services for children/youth, ages 3-17, in foster care by re-administering three mental health tools:

- Children ages 3 years to 5.5 years, the Ages & Stages Questionnaire, Social-Emotional (ASQ-SE);
- Children/youth 5.5 years through 17 years, the Pediatric Symptoms Checklist (PSC-17)
- Children/youth 7 years through 17 years, the Screen for Childhood Anxiety and Related Emotional Disorders trauma tool (SCARED Trauma Tool)

The Ongoing Mental Health (OMH) Screeners have been busy re-administering nearly 500 assessments. The work continues as they move into the next cohort of children/youth and caregivers. Individuals from this cohort entered care between July and December of 2014.

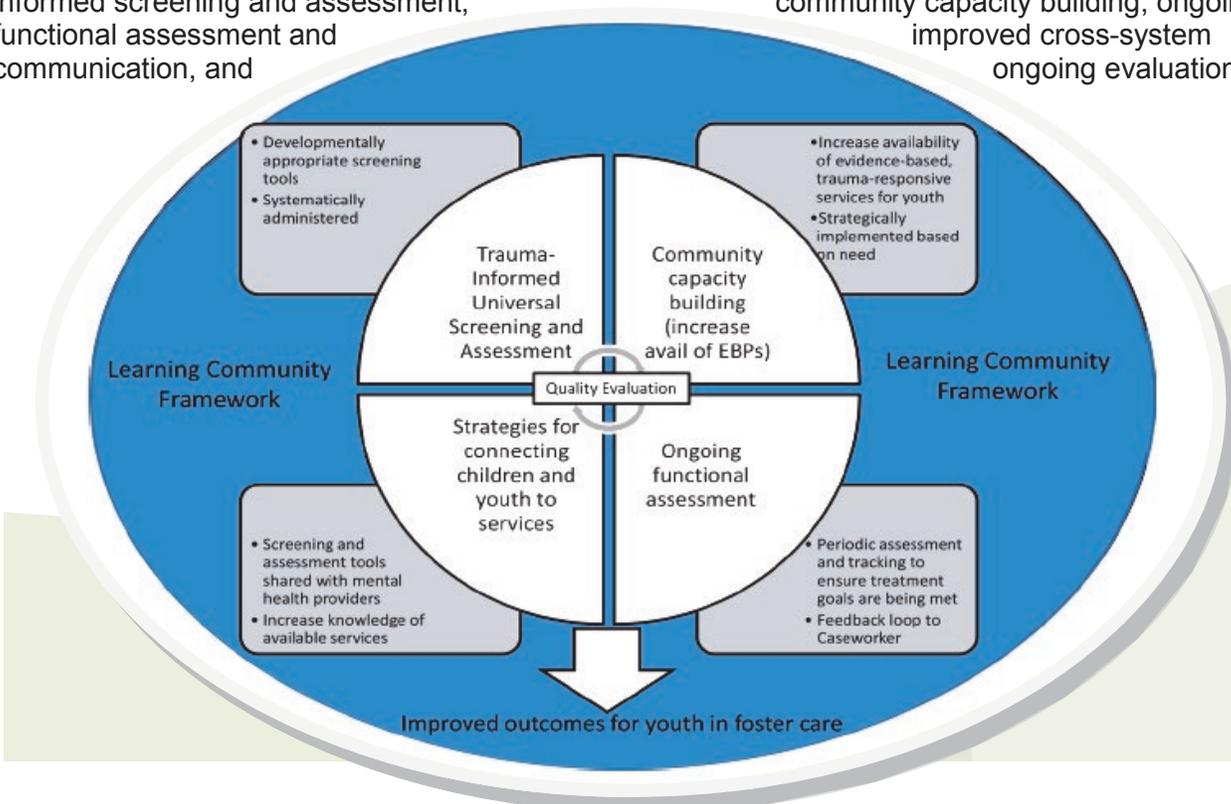
The OMH Program continues to receive positive feedback from the field which is encouraging as we see the beginning effects of the program:

*“THANK YOU VERY MUCH! This is very helpful. I will encourage [the caregiver] to contact the clinic to reschedule weekly appointments for [her grandson]”*

*“Thank you for this information. Sounds like we have a new team of people assessing Mental Health? I like it!”*

## Creating Connections Conceptual Framework

As the grant moves forward into Year 3, we would like to reflect back on the project’s conceptual framework and major goals. The Creating Connections project aims to improve outcomes for youth in foster care with the feedback of a learning community consisting of primary stakeholders in the lives of children and families involved with the foster care system, the implementation of trauma-informed screening and assessment, community capacity building, ongoing functional assessment and improved cross-system communication, and ongoing evaluation.



# AF-CBT Spotlight

*AF-CBT Available in WA State!*

Do you know of a child that has been impacted by some kind of violence in the home – whether they directly experienced the violence, witnessed the violence or were aware of violence toward another child or parent in the family? Alternatives for Families: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT) is an intervention that can help! A-CBT is currently available in at least seven agencies across WA State.

## Who is AF-CBT for?

AF-CBT is for families where there has been some kind of violence and who have children ages 5-17 who will be living with the parent who was violent, or who will have an ongoing relationship with the parent. Children may be affected by the violence with anxiety, posttraumatic stress or depression. In other cases children have behavior problems such as not doing what they are told, being defiant, or acting aggressively. Depending on the individual family circumstances, children

may have emotional and behavioral reactions ranging from minor to severe.

## How do we know that AF-CBT is effective?

Many studies have shown that cognitive behavioral therapy is effective by teaching new and more helpful ways of thinking, how to manage upsetting negative emotions, and teaching new skills to handle situations. Many studies support the effectiveness of positive parenting skills. Some studies have found these interventions work with families where there has been violence toward children.

## What does AF-CBT involve?

AF-CBT has specific components that include: creating a family safety plan, education about mental health and development, emotion regulation, correcting maladaptive beliefs, approaches to positive parenting, skills training and clarification.

## What to expect in AF-CBT:

This is a structured intervention



where children and parents learn new and better ways to handle difficult feelings and more helpful ways to think about what happened. A very important part of AF-CBT is practicing the new skills for handling feelings and thinking in more constructive ways in between sessions. Some sessions are with children alone, some with parents alone and others with the whole family together.

## How long does AF-CBT take?

On average AF-CBT takes 15-17 sessions. Some families need fewer sessions, and others need more. AF-CBT is flexible and individualized to the needs of children and families.

## Want to learn more?

Interested in learning more about AF-CBT, visit <http://www.afcbt.org/>

For a list of agencies that offer AF-CBT in Washington State and areas of practice, please contact Naomi Perry. Email: [nperry@uw.edu](mailto:nperry@uw.edu)

# Child Welfare Training for Mental Health Professionals

The Creating Connections team is in the early stages of developing a child welfare training for mental health providers. The training will provide basic facts about the child welfare system to establish a foundation of knowledge which mental health providers can use to inform their work.

Based on feedback from the learning community in Year 1 of the grant, the training hopes to address many challenges mental health providers experience when working with families involved in the child welfare system.



In addition, the training will present advice from foster youth, foster alumni, veteran parents and caregivers about things they wish their mental health provider knew when they received services.

This training will be highlighted during the Washington Behavioral Health Conference in June 2015.

Stay tuned as this training is further developed!

# Social Service Specialist Training in Mental Health

The Mental Health: A Critical Aspect to Permanency and Wellbeing training continues to be well received in both the three-hour Regional Core Training delivered to newly hired social service specialists and the six-hour In-Service training delivered more broadly to Children's Administration staff.

## Regional Core Training

The Alliance for Child Welfare coaches deliver the Regional Core Training to newly hired social service specialists throughout the state. Alliance coaches continue to receive high praise for their knowledge of the subject matter and their ability to deliver and facilitate the training.

	# of Attendees	Mean 0 (worst) - 10 (best)
Instructor's delivery and facilitation ability	69	8.97
Instructor's knowledge of subject matter	69	8.88
Content, relevance and usefulness to your job	69	8.81
Content was well organized	69	8.39
Training materials helpfulness	69	8.07

## In Service Training

On November 5th, 2014, Suzanne Kerns from the University of Washington and Taku Mineshita from Children's Administration conducted the six-hour in-service training. This training was conducted at Central Washington Comprehensive Mental Health in Yakima, Washington. The training was well received and was attended by 14 participants including Social Service Specialists, CHET screeners, foster parents, FAR workers and program managers.

	# of Attendees	Mean 0 (worst) - 10 (best)
Instructor's knowledge of subject matter	14	9.21
Instructor's delivery and facilitation ability	14	8.86
Content, relevance and usefulness to your job	14	8.71
Training materials helpfulness	14	8.64
Content was well organized	14	8.50

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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