

"Keeping Children Safe
& Families Together"



Family
Building
Blocks

A Relief Nursery Serving
Marion & Polk Counties

2012-13

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Testimony for Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services March 21, 2013

My name is Sue Miller. I was the Executive Director of Family Building Blocks, the Relief Nursery serving Marion and Polk Counties, for 12 years and resigned a few months ago.

For the past 5 years, we have participated in the Marion County Casey Partnership project with our regional DHS staff, Marion County staff and numerous private nonprofits and faith-based organizations. There have been significant accomplishments from this collaborative effort.

1. We have worked with DHS as they transformed their focus from placing children in foster care to seeking solutions for preserving families and avoiding foster care. We actually changed the name of our Casey project from Foster Care Action team to Family Preservation Action Team. Our group has been chaired by the Marion County District Attorney who clearly sees the connection between his work and child abuse prevention efforts.
2. We have focused on staff training concerning trauma and toxic stress. Last month, 300 caseworkers and managers from DHS and other providers attended a training on the impact of trauma on young children. Private providers appreciated DHS making this training available to their staff as well as DHS's own caseworkers.
3. DHS has also been a change agent in working with Foster Parents to mentor Biological Parents to assist with successful reunification with children. DHS has contracted with nonprofits to help in this arena – two examples are the Relationship-Based Visitation program contract with our Relief Nursery and the Fostering Hope Initiative lead by Mid-Valley Catholic Community Services providing intensive family strengthening services in targeted neighborhoods.
4. Several partners on the Casey Team support DHS by placing members of their own staff on site at the District 3 office on a daily or weekly basis. This collaborative approach ensures that local resources for families are more easily accessed by DHS caseworkers.

Successfully meeting the needs of high-risk families with young children depends upon the collaboration of public and private organizations. Working together, we are able to leverage the resources that each of us brings for staff training, wraparound services for families and additional financial resources from private community supporters and other public agencies. We appreciate the leadership that DHS provides in sustaining this partnership to the benefits so many families and young children.