

reClaiming Children

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

January 2013

Winter Edition

Volume 5

Issue 2

HEY! Did you know that this newsletter is interactive? Yep. Just click on any of the links below and throughout this newsletter to easily navigate around.

INSIDE

Front Page (1)

Executive Address (2)

President's Address (4)

Happenings (5)

Policy Room (6)

Conference Recap (9)

Feature Stories (12)

Join Us (15)

Moving Forward (16)

Questions? Comments?

Let the Editor, Corey Brown, know at cbrown@ffcmh.org or 240-403-1907.

Connect w/ Us



This past year was undoubtedly a long one for everyone. It was a tough year with talks of sequestration and budget cuts, the loss of many prominent members in the field, and an uncertain political landscape. What has stayed true is our dedication to provide you with the best resources and information on the work that we do. If you attended our conference in November, you may have taken some of that back to your community. We hope that it has helped you to continue expanding your programs and community outreach. We would like to take a moment and thank all of our chapters, sponsors, and partners who have made our last year a successful one and we hope to provide you with the same amount of support in the new year. Here are a few things that we will be unveiling in the 2013 that we want your input and participation on:

- ◆ We will be releasing our long awaited new community portal for all current, paying chapters and partners. This portal will allow chapters and partners to communicate with each other on important topics, as well collaborate with each other on projects and events.
- ◆ We will be unveiling our long overdue Policy Agenda for 2013 and beyond on our website and elsewhere. In the meantime, you get a first sneak peak in this newsletter.

www.ffcmh.org / 240-403-1901 / Rockville, MD



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FAMILIES

For Children's Mental Health



Executive Address

From the Desk of Sandra Spencer

A Charge to the Membership for 2013

Each year, I give a “charge” to our national membership at the annual conference. The charge to the membership is my chance to get us united with a call to action. In years pass, we have taken these charges very serious and have made great strides in our quest to put children’s mental health on the national agenda. This year, with such a full conference agenda, I decided not to give the charge during the conference. You all did not agree with me. I was asked by several members why I had not given the charge this year to get us kick started for the new year. Some participants admitted to staying to the very end of the conference waiting on this charge. I must admit, I was pleased to know that so many of you actually listened and adhered to the charge. I was told that the annual National Federation Conference is the time and place for advocates to get refueled and ready to go back home and continue this work, no matter how difficult it seemed. I thought back to charges I had given in the past and realized that change had happened and maybe, in part, because of these annual charges to the membership.

Five years ago I gave the charge to launch a green ribbon campaign during Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week. Everyone was to wear green ribbon with the words “children’s mental health matters” during the first full week of May. This event has grown nationally and has even spread to our neighbors to the north, Canada. You all met the leader Keli Anderson at this year’s conference. Three years ago, I charged all of our family organizations to reach out to their local police chiefs because of our working relationship with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to improve interaction between police officers and our children when they are in mental health crisis. Many states did and there are good things happening still with those efforts. This year in your conference bags, we released a document from this effort entitled “How to Work Effectively with Police When Youth are in Mental Health Crisis: A Guide for Families and Youth with Mental, Emotional or Behavioral Health Problems”. All of this work came about because you all responded to the charge.

So in the spirit of listening to our membership, here is your charge...

I challenge all of us to stay **informed**, remain **united**, and to be **vigilant**. Like most of you, I am glad the election is over. I grew tired of the constant ads and campaigning. But the election being over just means now we need to put our efforts into making sure we are **informed** about what’s happening with the Affordable Care Act and other issues that impact our children and families. We need to make sure we are **united** in our advocacy message around what we need for our children and families. And we must be **vigilant** with our voice until we see the change we are looking for in children’s mental health and support for families. The term vigilant is defined as being keenly aware and watchful, ever awake and alert. General Colon Powell once said “Never neglect details, when everyone’s mind is dulled and distracted, the leader must be doubly vigilant”. As a leader, I want to be doubly vigilant to ensure that we, the family movement, are here to stay.



**Sandra Spencer,
Executive Director**

“The National Federation knows all too well that now, more than ever before, we have to be strategic, innovative and determined to secure the resources to keep our doors open and to support our membership in doing the same.”



So how do we do this?

Stay **Informed**

- ◆ Become a member of the National Federation so that you are on our email list to get information
- ◆ Review the National Federation's 2012 National Policy Agenda
- ◆ Read the emails from the National Federation on current policy issues. We endeavored to keep you informed on the sequestration and fiscal cliff crisis
- ◆ Forward the emails to your contact list to help spread the word
- ◆ Read information from other mental health advocacy groups so you know what others are advocating for or against
- ◆ Act on the National Federation's Policy Alerts and follow-up on any action request like calling or emailing your Legislators

Remain **United**

- ◆ Be consistent with your message of supporting the needs of children with mental, emotional and behavioral health challenges and their families
- ◆ Use the National Federation's National Policy Agenda as a tool when you advocate at the local and state level
- ◆ Take advantage of opportunities to give input and influence the National Federation's policy efforts or to give input on any SAMHSA planning initiatives when invited to do so
- ◆ Support your local or state chapter of the Federation of Families
- ◆ Support the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

Be **Vigilant**

- ◆ Never give up, change takes time
- ◆ Stay alert and ready, use your voice for change
- ◆ Recharge your battery by staying close to the children, youth and families we serve
- ◆ Stay connected to the larger movement
- ◆ And again, don't quit, our voice is needed and critical

Lastly, I must talk about what's next for us. Many of you are concerned about the future of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. I want you to know that we hear you.

With our nation being in such an economic crisis for the last several years, I am well aware of the anxiety faced by our membership organizations and individual members around sustaining family and youth run organizations, sustaining the National Federation and keeping our voice strong and viable. The National Federation knows all too well that now, more than ever before, we have to be strategic, innovative and determined to secure the resources to keep our doors open and to support our membership in doing the same. The National Federation has been impacted by federal budget cuts and we have seen the impact of many of our local and statewide chapters. We are committed to working on diversifying our funds and engaging our membership in our resource development and sustainability efforts. The implementation of the Affordable Care Act will allow us an opportunity to engage new partners to support our Parent Support Provider Certification program as well as other National Federation initiatives. The development of a family support workforce will need to be trained and certified to support families and will also provide opportunities for our chapters to benefit training and supporting this new workforce. The National Federation is implementing a strategic plan that provides additional strategies to bring in additional revenues, increase partnerships, and identify fundraising opportunities. Along with these development strategies, we plan to face the economic challenges ahead by being **informed**, **united** and **vigilant**.

As always, we need and appreciate your support and generous donations.



Board Room

From the President

Statement to Families, Youth, Communities and Leaders

What an honor and privilege it is to be elected the new President of the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health. This is a call I do not accept lightly and understand the journey to move forward will not be an easy one, however it is one I embrace personally. Currently I am the Lead Family Partner Coordinator for SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) BECOMING (Building Every Chance Of Making It Now-Grownup). We focus on what has been considered our forgotten young people, age 16-21 years old.

As the mother of two sons and a wonderful grandson who has captured my heart, I am reminded daily of the impact of one’s mental health. I have been an advocate of and for children, youth and families for well over 28 years. Through the guidance of my grandmother, Kittie Dempson, who had a major presence in my life growing up in North Carolina, I learned through faith and her daily teaching that everyone is NOT the same; however, that does not make them any less important as the person who appears to have everything going right.

My faith will guide and support me during the great moments in this office, as well as support and encourage me through those times when difficult decisions will be made in the best interest of our children, families and chapters across this country. It is my hope to increase the awareness of our mental health systems, which truly is a deciding factor of how our children, families and communities move successfully to another level in life. It is important that we, The National Federation, increase our advocacy to our legislators in every community in order to share with them our voice, our concerns and our successes.

We hope to enhance the awareness of Mental Health within our medical field with primary physicians. Early detection of mental health can often times come from the parents of a child, yet parents are not being heard and are seeking guidance and support. In North Carolina and other parts of the country, we are making great progress with sharing, training and collaborating with physicians, therapists and psychiatrists.

It is exciting to be a part of an organization focused on making and being a part of change in our mental health system.

Sincerely appreciative,

Teka Dempson



**Teka
Dempson**
**FFCMH
President**

“It is important that we, The National Federation, increase our advocacy to our legislators in every community in order to share with them our voice, our concerns and our successes.”



Meet the Board



Teka Dempson,
President
Durham, North Carolina



Sue Smith,
Immediate Past-President
Atlanta, Georgia



Sherri Luthe,
Vice President
Wichita, Kansas



Josh Ross,
Secretary
Loveland, Colorado



Terre Garner,
Member-at-Large
Cincinnati, Ohio



Luz Garay
Ruskin, Florida



Bernadine Meeks
Staten Island, New York



Shandra Summerville
Champaign, Illinois



Antonio Wilson
Miami, Florida



Kristin Melton
Harrisburg, Illinois



Reclaiming Children Is a Green Newsletter

In our continuing effort to sustain a healthy environment for our children, the Reclaiming Children newsletter is entirely digital. In other words, our primary distribution is strictly done electronically. If you know of organizations or members who are unable to access Reclaiming Children electronically, please let us know, and we will gladly send them a printed copy of our newsletter instead.

Happenings

Find Out What's Happening in the Field

Do you have something going on in the field? Would you like to have it listed here? Email Corey Brown at cbrown@ffcmh.org and we'll showcase it in our next newsletter.

Upcoming Major Events

26th Annual Children's Mental Health Research and Policy Conference

March 3 - 6, 2013

Children's Mental Health Awareness Week 2013

First Week in May

Pre-order your Green Ribbons & Lapel Pins today!

Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Week is May 5-11, 2013. This week is dedicated to increasing public awareness about the triumphs and challenges in children's mental health and emphasizing the importance of family and youth involvement in the children's mental health movement!

Join us in wearing a green ribbon during Children's Mental Health Week to spread awareness to the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, and social disabilities and their families across America.

Use this form to pre-order your green ribbons and lapel pins!

Organization Name	Address	City	State	Zip	Telephone
Product					
Green Ribbons (sold by increments of 50)		\$2.00 each			
Lapel Pins		\$1.00 each			
Shipping Ribbons/Lapel Pins .20/500 qty = \$1.00 .2500+ qty = \$1.25 SHIPPING & HANDLING TOTAL					
Method of Payment					
<input type="checkbox"/> Check/Money Order Enclosed (made payable to FFCMH) <input type="checkbox"/> Credit Card (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover)					
Credit Card Number	Expiration Date				
Signature					

Submit completed form and payment to:
FFCMH
 For Children's Mental Health
 Mail: 3605 Medical Center Drive, Suite 280, Rockville, MD 20850
 Email: ffcmh@ffcmh.org • Fax: 240-485-2109

Promote Awareness - Wear your green ribbon!

We are officially taking pre-orders for Green Ribbons and Lapel Pins!

Join us in wearing a green ribbon during Children's Mental Health Awareness Week to spread awareness across America.

Place your order for Green Ribbons and Lapel Pins for this year's Children's Mental Health Awareness Week.

Download the order form or order online at www.ffcmh.org/cmhaw/order.

Policy Room

Advocating on the Hill

Calling All Members, Partners, and Supporters: child-serving agencies must contribute to the support of family-run organizations in their state. Congress must substantially invest in the statewide family network program, ensure its survival, and safeguard this crucial network from varying administrative priorities, and personal or political agenda.

We are asking that everyone give us feedback on our draft Policy Agenda for 2013. Please let us know if we are missing any of the important issues that impact your family or your community. We will be increasing our policy and advocacy efforts this year, and it is important that we represent each of you. Please send all commentary and feedback to Joy Spencer at jspencer@ffcmh.org. We'd love to hear from you!

Families report significant challenges to children and youth with mental health needs achieving success in school, and remaining at home in their communities. These obstacles are often the result of a lack of access to appropriate services and supports, insufficient attention to the complex needs of children and youth involved with multiple service systems (mental health, special education, juvenile justice, child welfare, etc), or inadequate public policy. The following issues require the attention of our nation's policymakers.

SUPPORTING FAMILY ORGANIZATIONS

Families raising children with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs require emotional support, accurate information about mental health services, and help protecting the rights of their children. Research on *systems of care* has indicated that strengthening families enhances resilience in children. Educational outcomes are better when families support and are involved with their child's school.

Consumer, family-driven and youth-guided mental health care requires a fully developed peer-to-peer network that families and youth can rely on for information, support, technical help, referrals, and advocacy at all levels. Each state and territory needs at least one such family-run organization. A national technical assistance and training center for these organizations is vital to coordinate their activities and collect data about their impact. State

A complementary need is the promotion, training, certification and financing of family support providers offering parent-to-parent, youth-to-youth, and peer-to-peer support services and program for families addressing the mental health and well-being of children and youth.

FUNDING FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

As a nation we must invest heavily in our children's mental health so that no child is deprived of effective and appropriate mental health services when and where they need them.

Adequately funding children's mental health care will ensure every child gets culturally and developmentally appropriate and effective services and supports that allow them to function successfully in their family, school, and community.

We know that community-based services are a less costly alternative to residential and out-of-home institutional placements. Lawmakers must ensure federal grant programs supporting community-based prevention, early intervention and treatment services and supports are sufficiently funded so states and communities have the resources to meet the mental health needs of children and families without diverting funds from other programs.

Community mental health services for children and youth with serious mental health conditions are funded primarily through the Medicaid program. Federal policymakers must avoid short sighted budget cuts to federal entitlements (e.g. Medicaid) that harm beneficiaries and merely shift costs to states.

HEALTH CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Children's mental health is essential to their overall health. Nationally, one in five children has a diagnosable mental disorder. Most mental disorders begin among youth between the ages of 14-24. Early identification of mental health conditions and the provision of effective mental health services and supports are critical to building emotional health and resiliency. While many effective interventions exist, less than one-half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive mental health services in a given year.

Among the notable benefits of the health care reform law and mental health parity law to children with mental health needs and their families are ending discriminatory pre-existing condition and inequitable mental health coverage in health insurance and providing improved access to affordable and quality health and mental health services. Policymakers must uphold and fully implement these important laws.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood is particularly challenging for youth with mental health conditions. Many youth with mental health conditions do not receive the services and supports necessary to transition successfully to adulthood from the various service systems. Needed services include housing assistance, job skills training, financial assistance and health care. Paying attention to the unique needs of young adults with mental health conditions is paramount to helping address their transition.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Students with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs must be provided with a developmentally appropriate public education that is academically challenging and builds on their strengths to promote social skills, emotional and ethical development. Schools must be held accountable for the academic and social progress of all students, regardless of their ability or disability. Students eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must have access to all rights afforded by the law, including due process procedures.

Zero tolerance policies disproportionately affect students with emotional, behavioral or mental health needs, with this population having lower graduation rates and greater rates of suspension and expulsion than other students. Students who have been suspended or expelled are at much greater risk of dropping out of school, contact with the justice system and unemployment later in life. Education systems should implement school-wide positive behavioral supports and provide individualized support and services for students who need more help.

Students with emotional, behavioral or mental health needs should be engaged in early and effective transition planning to have the best chance of success in post-high school and adult life.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

All juvenile justice systems must support the youth they serve and effectively identify and address their mental health needs in a timely manner.

These programs must protect the rights of children and youth, ensure their health and safety, and provide educational opportunities while they are under the jurisdiction of juvenile justice authorities. Jails and prisons must end the harmful practice of locking youth in solitary confinement.

Juvenile justice programs must reduce the disproportionate confinement of minority youth and must take steps to reduce the number of youth placed in the adult criminal justice system. Federal policymakers must provide adequate funding for state and local juvenile justice programs. Federal, state and local juvenile justice and mental health agencies should designate appropriate funds for prevention, early intervention, diversion, re-entry and rehabilitation services.

CHILD WELFARE

There is a high prevalence of children in foster care with mental health needs. Every child entering the system should be screened and assessed for a mental illness and receive safe and effective mental health care. Recent studies have reported that an alarming number of psychotropic medications are administered to infants and children in the foster care system. These studies establish the need to

ensure effective, evidence-based psychosocial interventions are part of a comprehensive treatment plan for youth.

Permanency options (reunification, guardianship, adoption) achieving safe and stable placements for children in foster care must be prioritized.

Requiring parents to relinquish custody of their children to the child welfare system in order to obtain essential mental health services and supports for their children must cease. This practice wastes funds and destroys families. Children who need intensive mental health services must not be deprived of their right to be connected to their family, who are the only consistent and unconditional lifelong source of emotional support for them.

In addition to choosing a temporary out-of-home service when needed to stabilize or resolve a crisis, children, youth, and families must have ongoing access to a wide range of home- and community-based services and supports, culturally relevant spiritual healing, as well as traditional clinical mental health treatments.

ENDING RESTRAINT, SECLUSION, AND AVERSIVE PRACTICES

Subjecting children and youth to inhuman, degrading, and dangerous use of restraint, seclusion, and aversive practices in the name of treatment must cease. All children and youth should grow up safe from the use of such practices to respond to or control their behavior, and be free from the fear that these practices will be used on themselves, their siblings or their friends.

There is no evidence that these practices afford any educational or therapeutic benefit. Their use impedes the development of respectful and supportive relationships between children and adults. There is evidence that they can cause severe physical harm, emotional trauma and even death.

Use of these practices is an indicator of the failure to provide appropriate services and supports for which there is an evidence base and has no place in school, residential or treatment settings for children and youth. Positive alternatives exist to respond to

disruptive and challenging behaviors, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, de-escalation and conflict management practices. Programs that serve children and youth must be subject to regulatory oversight and accountable to implement policies and practices that exclude all forms of restraint, seclusion and aversive tactics.

SUICIDE AND BULLYING PREVENTION

The failure to adequately care for our youth can have deadly consequences. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents. Ninety percent (90%) of youth, who complete suicide, have depression or another diagnosable mental health problem at the time of their death. Most tragically, some of these deaths occur while youth are on "suicide watch" in hospitals, residential treatment facilities, or secure detention. Federal and state policymakers need to increase public awareness of suicide; craft prevention plans for individuals, programs, agencies, and systems; establish school-based prevention programs, dedicate resources for training, and collaborate with other agencies for the safety of youth.

Bullying among school-age youth is a serious problem. Research suggests that approximately 70% to 80% of school-age youth have been involved in bullying during their school years, as a bully, victim or bystander. Creating a safe, supportive and conducive to learning educational environment is vital to prevention and is associated with less involvement in bullying as a bully or victim. Federal and state policymakers need to increase public outreach and awareness of anti-bullying efforts and take steps to address student bullying through comprehensive laws and policies, including protection against harassment of youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Conference Recap

Relive the Conference's Biggest Moments

Elizabeth Smart

By Rebecca Ornelas



On November 17th, 2012, key note speaker Elizabeth Smart captivated an audience of over 700 attendees at the 23rd Annual National Federation of Families Conference held at the Hyatt Regency in Washington D. C. Her personal story of hope, faith and resilience was in stark contrast to her traumatic experience upon being abducted in 2002 from her bed as she slept next to her sister in their home in Salt Lake City, Utah.

She opened her presentation by quoting President Snow, a character in the 2012 movie "The Hunger Games", who said "Hope. It is the only thing stronger than fear" because she said this mirrored her guiding force from the day her life took an unimaginable turn when she was only fourteen years old. Despite being held captive for nine months under horrific conditions, Elizabeth refused to let her captors dominate her mind or diminish her faith, hope and will to reunite with her parents and family. It was that inner strength and resilience that shone through as Elizabeth, now an articulate, lovely and wise young woman, recounted the nightmare she lived as a captive teenager. Yet, she also recollected her innermost thoughts during her ordeal bringing the audience to tears and laughter as she took us back in time sharing her emotions and youthful wisdom. She yearned to hear her mother's voice even if it was doling out chores and reminders to tend to her studies. She talked of how the unconditional love of her parents and the teachings of her faith kept her steadfast in her will to survive. She shared how she outsmarted her captors by influencing their return to Utah from California. And she told of experiencing the "happiest day of her life" when she was finally rescued by an astute police officer and reunited with her family.

The day after her rescue, Elizabeth said that she received the best advice from her mother who told

her that "what this man did to you is terrible; he has taken 9 months of your life that you will never get back and you may never feel that justice is served. But the best punishment is for you to be happy and to not give him another second of your life. Do exactly what you want to do." Elizabeth discussed that she has come to view her experience as having opened doors to many opportunities she never would have had otherwise. With her father's help, they established the Elizabeth Smart Foundation (<http://elizabethsmartfoundation.org/>) that focuses on bullying, abuse and preventing crime that targets children. Indeed, she has worked very hard for the past ten years and achieved success in following her dreams and taking back her life and having touched the lives of many, many people.

Policy Day

By Joy Spencer



This year's policy day was heavily geared towards promoting advocacy and the use of one's personal story to invoke change in policy on a local, state and national level. John O'Brien, Senior Policy Advisor for the Disabled and Elderly Health Programs within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services (CMS) delivered a very informative plenary session about CMS's goal areas in behavioral healthcare and the various vehicles they plan to use as they implement their goals and strategies. There are current efforts underway to implement new opportunities created by the expanded Medicaid programs, 1115 demonstration waivers, and other provisions of the Affordable Care Act. CMS is dedicated to helping children, youth, and families obtain needed mental health services and supports.

Ane Romero, Senior Legislative Assistant and Mental Health Advisor for the Honorable Grace Napolitano, co-chair of the Mental Health Caucus shared some helpful "Hill Meeting How-To" tips with us, as we prepared for our afternoon Hill visits. She was able to share with us the importance of sharing one's personal story as an advocate on the Hill. Like many of us, Ane has a personal connection with her work. As a child, her best friend completed a suicide, and she has dedicated her life to be an advocate for mental health and suicide prevention.

Laurel Stine, Policy Consultant to the National Federation, was able to review the National Federation's policy agenda. This Policy Agenda outlines the key issues and advocacy priorities that the National Federation will focus on throughout 2013. We encourage everyone to give us feedback on our Policy Agenda. We would like to represent the issues that affect us all, such as funding and obtaining children's mental health services and supports, increasing access to education, improving the juvenile justice and other child serving systems and continuing intervention and prevention in areas such as bullying and suicide prevention. A full copy of our draft Policy Agenda for 2013 can be found in this newsletter.

All Policy Day attendees were heavily encouraged to visit their Congressional representatives on Capitol Hill and advocate for what affects their community and state the most. We provided all attendees with fact sheets, tip sheets, and other resources that described the importance of maintaining services and supports, not only for all children and youth, but for their families as well. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of the materials that were given out on Policy Day, please visit our website.

Our plenary presentation was followed by a wonderful set of workshops. Our Policy 101 Workshop gave participants a refresher of the basics of policy, advocacy, government, and how a bill becomes a law. Our workshop on Current Federal Legislative Events focused on advocacy through topics such as budget sequestration, the Children's Mental Health Accessibility Act, and the Keeping All Students Safe Act. It is important that we advocate to avoid sequestration and preserving funding for the services and supports that our families need.

Many of the youth who participated in Policy Day attended the Youth Voice In Policy workshop. They were very enthusiastic about learning how to properly advocate in their communities on a local, state, and national level. In this workshop, youth learned important information about how the legislative process works and they were empowered to implement this new knowledge. Youth learned that their voices matter and they are never too young to advocate for their future.

Children's Mental Health Awareness Week will be another opportunity for us to flood our legislators' offices and the media with education and awareness tools. Let's make sure our voices are heard!

Youth Track

By Joy Spencer



The Youth Empowerment Track at the National Federation's 23rd Annual Conference ROCKED! We had such a wonderful group of youth attend the conference this year! The youth had an opportunity to attend workshops on a variety of topics including but not limited to policy, sharing their voice, youth leadership, mental health and substance use, the sibling experience, and expression through the arts.

Youth MOVE National showed up and showed out during the conference! Chapters from all across the country were in attendance. Youth MOVE National was recognized for reaching its goal of becoming an independent organization, and thanked for their continued dedication to improve the lives of ALL youth, nationwide. Way to go Youth MOVE!!

The youth also had the opportunity to participate in our Viva Vox track. Viva Vox is a program that gives integrated mentoring through artistic guidance to impact new expression. Their mission is to provide arts mentoring services to "at risk" youth in order to promote self discovery, positive personal growth, and impact social change. This year Viva Vox taught our youth how to present African drumming, African dance, spoken word, and improvisational theater. On Sunday morning, all youth who participated in the Viva Vox track honored us by performing what they learned in front of the conference audience. Their performance was AMAZING! During their improvisational theater performance, the youth asked for stories from the audience, and then acted those stories out on stage. This was followed by an African dance and drumming routine. Both performances were captivating. It is always great to see the talents that our youth possess.

Our youth did a wonderful job participating in our dance and drumming opportunities during lunch on Friday and Saturday. It was also wonderful to see

all of our youth moving and grooving on the dance floor! This year's dance was awesome! No one wanted to leave, including the DJ!

Overall, we had great balance of fun and learning opportunities. I can't tell you the number of times I heard comments like "can't we just stay one more day" or "can you all make the conference longer next year?" I was also pleased to hear youth tell me that they now feel empowered to share their stories in order to inspire others!

The youth were very engaged in the Youth Empowerment Track, and they all seemed to have a great time attending the conference. They left Washington, DC as Youth Empowered; prepared to effect change in their communities!



Features

Our Featured Articles of the Month

Domestic and International Adoption: Strategies to Improve Behavioral Health Outcomes for Youth and their Families

By Marie Niarhos



A forum about adoption policies, research and practices was hosted by SAMHSA on August 29-30, 2012 to discuss strategies to improve the mental and behavioral health of children adopted both domestically and internationally. There is currently a lack of evidence based behavioral health prevention and treatment interventions identified specifically for this population of youth and their families. Researchers, practitioners, policy makers, families and youth leaders came together to review current research, policies and practices. The National Federation was represented and participated in discussing ideas and experiences, proposing challenges and concerns and planning for next steps. There were many participants who identified as family members.

Leaders from SAMHSA, HHS, NIMH and ACF who had organized the agendas welcomed the participants. Each laid out their interest in adoption which included personal connections, policy concerns and scientific studies. Trends in adoption were presented by representatives from the US Department of State and the Administration on Children, Youth and Families. Disruption prevention was a focus and concern. Domestic and International adoption experiences were framed by youth and family representatives, followed by medical and clinical practitioners. The need for universal accreditation of adoption agencies and adoption competent providers was voiced by presenters and participants.

Outcomes and trajectories for adopted youth were presented, focusing on early neglect, institutional living, attachment, brain development, trans-racial family experiences, substance abuse and psychosocial deprivation. Background information and examples of interventions for adopted youth were

presented and discussed.

Representatives from the National Resource Center for Adoption, Annie E. Casey Foundation, American University and Boston College presented information about available behavioral health services and evidence based interventions. Finally, policy implications were presented by representatives of the Dave Thomas Foundation, Voice for Adoption, U of MD and First Nations Repatriation Institute.

Following each section, participants were given ample opportunity to comment and to add to the content. Family members spoke up often and gave important perspectives.

The last part of the summit was spent prioritizing the challenges and opportunities to stimulate change in adoption research, policies and practices. Meeting the goal of the two-day forum, knowledge and promising approaches were presented and implications for future research and improvements in policy and practice were compiled. Workgroups will convene to continue the work and a white paper will be published.

Visit to the White House by Executive Director

By Sandra Spencer



In the wake of the Newtown tragedy, Sandra Spencer, Executive Director for the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, met at the White House on January 9th with Vice President Biden's task force on gun control to ensure that the issue goes beyond just gun control. President Obama has asked Vice President Biden and the Cabinet to lead the Administration's effort in identifying concrete proposals for real reform around the issue of gun control as well as improved mental health care. The United States Health and Human Services Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, and Attorney General Eric Holder were present at this

meeting. Ms. Spencer urged those in attendance to make sure that any task force or working commission dealing with mental health included parents with the lived experience of raising a child with mental health challenges, as well as young people who have lived this journey first hand.

Ms. Spencer made these additional comments during the discussion:

"We must deal with the real issue that children do have mental health challenges and parents don't have support or access to services without fear of losing their children to public scrutiny, bullying, discrimination and even institutionalization. There is a serious lack of education in our society surrounding children's mental health needs. These are not "bad" or "violent" kids and young adults. These are youth who need treatment and parents who need support in getting help early. These children, youth, and families need to know where to go, which treatment is best, and how to access community support. The isolation parents feel because of their children's behavior, due to mental illness, keeps them from reaching out or even knowing who to trust for help. There should be national outrage at the number of young people who die each year by suicide and drug abuse, or the number of children with a mental health diagnosis that go untreated, and the lengths parents go to just trying to keep their children safe and out of trouble. This has to change in our nation before we can adequately address the need for an improved children's mental health care system"

Other points of conversation included the following:

- Mental health issues in children are treatable. With meaningful and consistent care all children thrive when given access to services, support for their parents, youth peer support and a community free from stigma and discrimination.
- Children's mental health is a public health issue because of the current rate of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders among children and youth and the broken system that fails to meet their needs. The lack of services and supports have immense negative consequences for families and communities.

- Mental health affects everyone! About one half of all Americans will meet the criteria for a mental illness at some point in their lives.
- Community-based treatment and support options are more cost effective. Philosophies such as wraparound and systems of care have been proven to increase positive outcomes and the quality of life for families, individuals and communities as a whole.
- The nation **must** address the mental health crisis of children and young adults. Schools, health care providers and community organizations need to make a mental health checkup as routine as dental and physical health checkups and provide meaningful and consistent care.
- Our Nation needs to normalize mental health care so that stigma and the fear of parent blame is no longer a deterrent to families asking for and seeking help.
- Parents need support from other parents who have lived this experience so they feel comfortable seeking help. Youth need peer support who will direct them to help when they feel they need support without shame. Parents and youth often feel isolated by society's (stigmatized) reaction to mental illness.
- Children who need intensive mental health services must not be deprived of their right to be connected to their family and live in their community. Parents, siblings, and extended family are the only consistent and unconditional, lifelong source of emotional support for children with significant mental health problems.

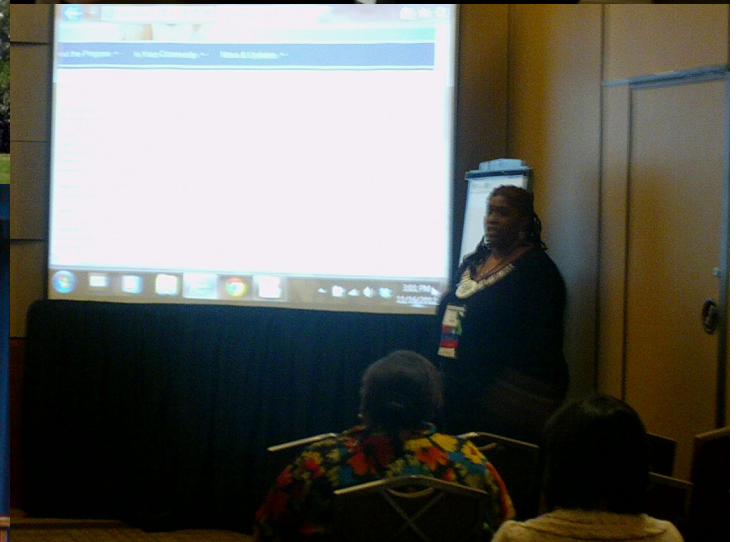
Recommendations:

- Protect and continue to fund family-run organizations and the development of a parent support work force. Parents need support and help with knowing where to go, who to talk to and what to ask for in regards to helping their children. Legislators need to hear the voice of

families.

More Conference Photos

- Focus our funding and research on prevention and early intervention as well as a positive mental health promotion and a wellness model for children, youth and families. Ensure the voice of youth and families are a part of any planning process.
- Look at the positive outcome data from the community-based systems of care programs and make sure they continue to be funded across the country.
- Create a forum for community dialogues across the country on children’s mental health so that we can educate the general population and end the stigma and discrimination that prevent parents and young people from seeking and having access to the services and supports they need.



Support the Movement

Sign Up to Become a Member of the National Federation

Join Now - National Membership Is Free!

Please print this page and either fax, mail, or email it to the National Federation Office. Contact information below.

Here are some of the benefits received when you join the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health:

1. You will become a **part of a large national network** that support children with serious emotional disturbances and their families;
2. You will receive the **Re-Claiming Children electronic newsletter**;
3. You will receive **Newsclips**;
4. You will receive **Policy Updates**; and
5. You will receive a **reduced conference registration fee**.

Please mark here if you wish to be added to the National Federation of Families list serve. yes no

YES, I want to become a member of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, the National Mental Health Advocate for Children, Youth, and Families. yes no

Please circle all that apply:

Concerned Citizen: yes no

Consumer: yes no

Professional: yes no

Family member of a child(ren) with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs: yes no

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip code: _____

Home phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Fax: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Web site: _____

Local FFCMH affiliation (if any): _____

Please contact the National Federation of Families if any of your contact information changes.

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
9605 Medical Center Drive, Suite 280u Rockville, MD 20850
Office: 240-403-1901 - Fax: 240-403-1909
E-Mail: ffcmh@ffcmh.org - Web: www.ffcmh.org

Moving Forward

In Our Next Issue



The Reclaiming Children Newsletter is released either biannually or quarterly, based on content and relevance. The next issue will be released around the spring time.

We hope you're staying warm this winter — spring will be here soon!

Comments? Suggestions? Improvements?

We strive to make this newsletter the best it can be, so let us know how we are doing by providing feedback. Send your remarks to cbrown@ffcmh.org.

Contact us at:

National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

9605 Medical Center Drive, Suite 280

Rockville, Maryland 20850

Office: 240-403-1901

Fax: 240-403-1909

We can't do this without you. Click to make a donation.

[Donate Now](#)

If you would prefer to donate by mail, [please download our brochure](#) to obtain a copy of the donation form. Donations submitted this way can be made by check (made payable to the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health) or by credit card. Completed forms and payment can be sent to the address above. Make a copy of the form for yourself.

If you are unable to download our brochure, you may also give our office a call and make a donation by phone (240-403-1901).

All donations are tax deductible.

Need to contact a staff member? Just click on their name and it'll open Outlook automatically! (if installed)

Executive Director

Sandra Spencer

Staff

Lizzette Albright

Corey Brown

Nadia Cayce

Barbara Huff

Cindy Juárez

Teresa King

Nicole Marshall

Marion Mealing

Mery Amalia-Mendoza

Marie Niarhos

Rebecca Ornelas

Frances Purdy

Lynda Richard

James Sawyer

Sheryl Schrepf

Joy Spencer

Bruce Strahl

Kim Williams

The ReClaming Children Newsletter is maintained by [Corey Brown](#) and [Lizzette Albright](#) with articles submitted via staff and outside entities.