Director's Message

By Shelly Willis, Executive Director

It's the Spring of 2014 and I am very excited about a paradigm shift in our community related to how we serve families. The recognition of ACES or Adverse Childhood Experiences and the provision of programs and services that promote resilience will ensure a community where children thrive, for multiple generations.

Imagine if scientists discovered a toxic substance that increased the risks of cancer, diabetes and heart, lung, and liver disease for millions of people. Something that also increased one’s risks for smoking, drug abuse, suicide, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, domestic violence and depression — and simultaneously reduced the chances of succeeding in school, performing well on a job and maintaining stable relationships? It would be comparable to hazards like lead paint, tobacco smoke and mercury. We would do everything in our power to contain it and keep it far away from children.

Well, there is such a thing, but it’s not a substance. It’s been called “toxic stress.” For more than a decade, researchers have understood that frequent or continual stress on young children who lack adequate protection and support from adults, is strongly associated with increases in the risks of lifelong health and social problems, including all those listed above.

Thanks to people like Dr. John Medina, who will be speaking at our March 26th, Parenting Tools offering at SPSCC, we now understand how a child who is exposed to toxic stress (violence, neglect, or early trauma) may develop behavioral and physical health problems later in life. Furthermore we recognize that when a child launches into "flight or fight" mode, they cannot learn. It is physiologically impossible. The stakes? Children arrive to school unprepared, and at times unable to engage in, learning. We can now use this rapidly evolving knowledge to create real-world solutions.

By developing the ability to read a child’s cues, and by being emotionally available on a daily basis, parents can provide buffers that reduce the harmful physiological effects of high stress. As an agency we are dedicated to helping adults explore strategies to ensure children thrive. (Continued on page 5)
11th Annual Voices of Children Contest Begins

What is the contest?

*Voices of Children Raised by Grandparents and Other Relatives* is a contest for children in Washington State who are being raised now or in the past by a relative other than their parents. The contest honors both the children, and the more than 37,000 relatives in Washington State who are raising them.

How do you enter the contest?

Write a poem, short essay, or draw a picture that describes how living with a relative (such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle) has made a positive difference in your life. Entries will be judged in three age categories 5-7 year olds, 8-12 year olds, and 13-19 year olds.

What are the rules?

- All participating children must live in Washington State and be 5-19 years old.
- Poems should be 21 lines or less.
- Essays should be 200 words or less.
- Use colored pencils, markers, pencil, or crayons on any drawings. Make your art as big and bold as possible and add a statement that explains your drawing.
- Poems and essays may be submitted by email to Lynn@Familyess.org, or by filling out the form at the link provided below. Artwork must be submitted on the entry form found on the link.
- Do not include any names within artwork.
- Artwork must be flat and within the box on the entry form.
- Entry must be original, in English, and unpublished.
- Winners will be notified in early May and all decisions of the judges are final.
- Award ceremony for winners will be held in June or July.

What are the prizes?

The top two entries in each age division will receive:

- $100 from Twin Star Credit Union
- A free night at Great Wolf Lodge, Grand Mound, WA for a family of four!

Questions?

If you have questions, please call Family Education and Support Services at 360-754-7629 or Toll Free 1-877-813-2828 or e-mail Lynn@Familyess.org.

Download a form by going to this link:


Submitted by Jasmine for the 2013 Voices of Children contest
On the evening of February 24, 2014, my family was privileged to spend time at our State Capitol with an amazing group of families. Gathered from across Washington state, these families had each been honored by The Department of Early Learning’s Strengthening Families Washington Program. Each family’s story was featured on Seattle’s Child website during the month of February, as part of our state’s Parent Recognition Month. The Washington Unsung Hero Awards honor the important role caregivers play in children’s lives. I was surprised and honored to be recognized with this award. I appreciate the love and support of my husband, who has been by my side all along the way. Together we have tried to improve the lives of many children, in our family and in our community. - Lynn

Shelly Willis, Executive Director of Family Education and Support Services wrote the following when she nominated Lynn for the Unsung Hero Award:

After raising their own four children, Lynn and her husband Lars have joined together to raise their granddaughter Tara. I first met both Lars and Lynn as they began participating in the Kinship Support group offered through our non-profit organization. Then, six years ago, Lynn applied and was hired to work as a Kinship Navigator serving Kinship Caregivers in a tri-county area.

Lynn is an upbeat, optimistic person who has only the best interest of children in her heart. I have seen Lynn go to extraordinary lengths to ensure the needs of Kinship families are met. She finds beds and delivers them on the weekend. She negotiates donated hot water heaters for frazzled grandmothers who live in rural locations. Recently she coordinated holiday and emergency gifts for over 200 low-income Kinship Caregivers. Because of Lynn many children in our community are living in safer permanent housing and thriving.

Lynn helps Kinship Caregivers in a variety of ways. She leads support groups, presents to community groups about Kinship Care, and often serves as a link to further resources for families in need. In addition Lynn volunteers for a variety of community groups in an effort to advocate for Kin Care. She is the President of her Kiwanis Club, she serves as a liaison and on the Board of FPAWS in order to promote collaboration between Foster and Kinship Caregivers and also serves on other community coalitions and committees.

Recently both Lynn and Lars accepted a second granddaughter into their home. While I know this has taxed her in time, she wouldn’t have it any other way. Any child would be fortunate to be raised by such extraordinary people who go to such great lengths to ensure the safety and well-being of ALL children. Lynn goes the extra mile to ensure Kinship Caregivers have the resources necessary to ensure children thrive.
Kinship Navigator? What's that?

by Lynn Urvina, Kinship Navigator

I am often asked about my job as Kinship Navigator - as many people have never heard of this occupation. Recently I received a card from a kinship family with the following note, which explains a little about our program:

“In the beginning, six years ago, we suddenly became the full-time caregivers of three grandchildren. One was a baby and we suddenly needed a crib. We were given the name of Kinship Care to use as a resource. Within 24 hours, our granddaughter had a crib.

"Since then we have attended workshops featuring speakers from DSHS, health, behavior and legal agencies, providing us with invaluable information to use in our journey as custodial grandparents.

"We have also had the opportunity to attend events like Kinship Day at Great Wolf Lodge, A Halloween Haunted House, Christmas Parties and weekly support groups. We have been thrilled to attend as it gives us a chance to have fun as we learn and grow in this sometimes thankless role of kinship caregivers.

"The Kinship Program seems to always be there when we need help the most. Thank you for thinking of us again this Christmas. “
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Kids need adults they can count on, who they know will not hurt them, and who are there to help them learn these new skills. If it's not happening at home, it had better happen at school or in our community. Otherwise children will not have much of a chance. The stakes are high. If you would like a list of ways you can promote resilience in our community give us a call, volunteer, join us for a discussion and we will look forward to the conversation.

The stakes are high and in my mind this is the most important opportunity for the prevention of health and social problems that our community has ever seen.

Please save the date May 3, 2014 for our second annual Seeds of Hope auction to benefit the programs and services offered at FESS. With your help, we are able to provide education and support to every parent, regardless of their ability to pay: programs such as Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, Kinship support, Clean and Sober Parenting, Consider the Children, and Nurturing Fathers.

Thank you to our donors

Many, many thanks to all of our donors and volunteers. In December 2013 and January and February 2014, the following individuals and groups contributed money or supplies to FESS:

Norma Schuiteman  Josh and Krista O’Byrne
Peg and Rick Young Foundation  Mary Jo Rice
David Rothschild  Carrell Simmons
Deanna Kraft  South Puget Sound Area Service Committee
Robin Higa  Cheryl Haskins
Hands on Children’s Museum  Olympia Family Theater
Marie and Chad Pearson  Nancy Koptur
Michael Nelson  Tim and Jan Suess
Ann Jackson  NOVA School
Jerry Barney  Marilyn Nelson
Diane Bergt  Total Systems Integrators
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We're on the Web!
Visit us at:
www.Familyess.org