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IN APPRECIATION

Dr. Jennifer Wyatt, the founding editor of the *RAP Sheet*, has moved on. After completing her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology at UN-L, and a fellowship at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), she is now a Research Scientist at the CDC in Atlanta, Georgia. We appreciate her vision and commitment to the goal of providing current research findings to child welfare and juvenile justice practitioners. Thanks, Jen!

CASA VOLUNTEERS GET MORE HELPFUL AND COMPLETE INFORMATION TO THE COURT

The role of a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is to have a close relationship with an abused or neglected child, and then provide relevant and detailed information to the court in the hopes that this information will result in better outcomes for the child, such as safety and timely permanence. According to this study of Nebraska child abuse and neglect cases, CASAs do appear to bring more helpful and complete information to the court than do Protection and Safety Workers (PSWs) and attorney guardians ad litem (GALs). Judges reported that they always received reports from PSWs and CASAs prior to a hearing, and from GALs about half of the time. Judges found the reports from CASAs to be the most helpful, followed closely by PSW reports, and then GAL reports. Overall, judges thought that more complete information was provided to the court in cases that had CASA volunteers than in those that did not. In addition, CASAs were more likely than GALs to perform several activities prior to the hearing, such as visiting the child at home and investigating alternative services for the child. Both groups reported that they talked to caseworkers before almost every hearing. Interestingly, GALs reported doing more activities when a CASA volunteer was *not* assigned to the case. The authors concluded that CASAs clearly are assisting courts by providing more complete and helpful information. However, caution was expressed regarding the finding that GALs may be less active in cases with a CASA volunteer, as many GAL functions should not be delegated to others, such as providing legal and agency information to the GAL's clients and assessing the child's best interests.

Weisz, V., & Thai, N. (2003). The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Bringing information to child abuse & neglect cases. *Child Maltreatment*, 8, 204-210.

MANY CHILDREN ENTERING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM DO NOT RECEIVE MENTAL HEALTH OR DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENTS

Recently, researchers conducted a national survey of child welfare workers to investigate the kinds of health assessments that children who enter foster care are receiving. The researchers interviewed mostly caseworker supervisors in 72 welfare agencies. While the majority (86.4%) of welfare agencies in the sample required a physical health assessment of all children entering the system, considerably lower proportions required mental health (47.8%) and developmental assessments (57.8%). Over 40% of agencies had no policies

concerning either a mental health or a developmental assessment. Not surprisingly, children from agencies with no assessment policy were much less likely to receive screening. In agencies that had no mental health screening policy, only 30% of children were screened, compared to 86.2% of children living in districts where screening was required of all children. Areas with policies that required screening of only a sub-group of children had rates of screening that were slightly higher than the rate in regions with no screening policy, but they did not come near the level of assessments seen in regions with inclusive policies. Given the high rates of mental health problems and developmental delays among this population of children, it is important that their needs are attended to appropriately as they enter the system. This finding suggests that if identifying children with special needs early is a priority, a comprehensive policy may better meet that goal. Also, providers of these health assessments need to be aware of the specific problems and needs faced by these children compared to children from the general population. One way to accomplish this goal might be to provide training to primary care providers who regularly come into contact with this population. Another approach is to create centralized child welfare locations to serve as a single point-of-entry into the foster care system, or to create specialized foster care clinics to assure that all children entering the system receive the proper health assessments.

Leslie, L. K., Hurlburt, M. S., Landsverk, J., Rolls, J. A., Wood, P. A., & Kelleher, K. J. (2003). Comprehensive assessments for children entering foster care: A national perspective. *Pediatrics*, 112, 134-142.

DESPITE STRUGGLES, ADOLESCENTS IN FOSTER CARE HAVE HIGH EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Many researchers have observed that adolescents in the child welfare system complete high school and go on to college at much lower rates than adolescents who are not in the system. While several factors likely affect this group's academic achievement, few studies have systematically studied these factors. In an effort to understand why the lower achievement, researchers in Missouri interviewed 262 teenagers who had been referred for independent living classes about their educational experiences and aspirations. Over half of the sample reported having failed a class, and almost a third reported at least one physical fight in the past year, suggesting that these youths experience serious difficulties in school. However, despite these struggles, the majority of the sample (70%) planned to attend college, and 19% planned to go even further in their education. The authors suggest that these high aspirations are a strength on which teachers, mentors, and program-developers can build. While supporting their goals, adults can also help them assess the kinds of skills and knowledge they will need to achieve them. The authors also suggest that the adolescents in foster care could benefit from education advocates, who could help adolescents achieve their goals by providing them with the opportunities, knowledge, and skills that they require to successfully transition into adulthood.

McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T., & Thompson, R. (2003). Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care. *Child Welfare*, 82, 475-495.

EDUCATION DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE INAPPROPRIATE ASSIGNMENT OF TRACTOR WORK TO CHILDREN

Children who grow up on farms are significantly more likely to experience injury, disability, and even death, compared to children who do not. Many of these injuries often occur as a result of children's accidental contact with farm equipment and other environmental hazards; however, some of these injuries are a direct result of parents assigning children jobs that they are too young to safely complete. A common strategy to combat this problem is education. For example, organizations like the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety have published guidelines that link specific developmental skills with 62 common agricultural jobs, so that parents are better equipped to assess whether their child is capable of each task. Researchers in the U.S. and Canada surveyed farm parents who had previously received the guidelines for tractor work to see if they were in fact adhering to them. The authors also gave half of these parents additional educational materials via a video. The results of this study suggested that education is not sufficient to eliminate the assignment of young children to hazardous tractor work. While the parents demonstrated a high degree of knowledge about child development (70% got at least 11 of the 13 questions correct), roughly 20% still clearly violated the guidelines. The authors suggest that it may be time to move away from a heavy emphasis on education intervention, and consider legislative alternatives that would declare and enforce safety standards.

Picket, W., Marlena, B., & Berg, R. L. (2003). Parental knowledge of child development and the assignment of tractor work to children. *Pediatrics*, 112, e11-e16.

The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT) published by the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety can be found on the web at <http://www.nagcat.org/>, or call (888) 924-7233 for information.

BRIEF STAYS IN FOSTER CARE RELATED TO RE-ABUSE REPORTS AFTER EXIT

When children exit the foster care system, the goal is that they will have a safe and permanent home. Researchers in Missouri studied whether that goal is being met by investigating the risk of re-abuse for 1915 children who had been in the state foster care system. After exiting the system, the majority of these children (79%) were reunified, and about 709 children (37%) had a subsequent maltreatment report. Children who exited foster care before three months were at a greater risk of future reports, substantiated reports, and re-entry into foster care. Thus, while a brief stay in care was appropriate for some children (50% of them had no re-report of maltreatment), the authors cautioned that a brief stay may not be enough for some families. The authors explored the possibility that in-home after care services lessen the risk of subsequent maltreatment, and found that these services were not significantly related to future reports of maltreatment. However, placement with kin

appeared to be a protective factor, as placement with relatives during foster care, and an exit to relatives after care, was related to a lower risk of subsequent report and re-entry.

Jonson-Reid, M. (2003). Foster care and future risk of maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 25, 271-294.

EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS RELATED TO BULLYING AND VICTIMIZATION AT SCHOOL, ESPECIALLY FOR GIRLS

Children's exposure to interparental violence at home and their bullying and victimization behaviors in school appear to be related. Almost half of this sample of 1059 Italian elementary and middle school students reported that they had bullied others at least "sometimes" in the previous three months. Boys reported engaging in bullying more often than girls, especially when physical bullying and name-calling were considered. In addition, more than half of students stated that they had been victims of bullying at least "sometimes" during the previous three months. Boys reported being victims more often than girls, with the exception of social exclusion, which was more frequent for girls. Additionally, roughly 17% of students reported they had been exposed to domestic violence. A greater percentage of children who had been exposed to domestic violence reported bullying behavior than those who had not been exposed, suggesting a relationship between interparental violence and bullying. In addition, this relationship was stronger for girls than boys, as girls exposed to more severe forms of domestic violence were three times more likely to be bullies than girls who were not exposed. Interparental violence and victimization were also found to be related, although not as strongly, in that a greater percentage of children who had been exposed to domestic violence reported they had been victimized as compared to those who had not witnessed domestic violence. The authors cautioned that exposure to interparental violence is just one risk factor among others, such as parenting styles or peer pressure, to be considered in understanding bullying and victimization in children. Even so, they suggest that early intervention at school can help children learn ways other than bullying to interact with their peers, hopefully preventing the continuation of aggressive behavior into adulthood.

Baldry, A. C. (2003). Bullying in schools and exposure to domestic violence. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 27, 713-732.

Editor	Twila A. Wingrove	twingrov@unlserve.unl.edu
Assistant Editor	Angela L. Williams	awilliam@unlserve.unl.edu
Faculty Advisor	Vicky Weisz	vweisz1@unl.edu
Layout Design	Chris Wiklund	cwiklund1@unl.edu
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Center on Children, Families, and the Law
121 South 13th Street Suite 302
Lincoln, NE 68588-0227