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THE NEWS YOU NEED | THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH

MAY/JUNE 2015 | DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Resource Family Support & Retention MSW Odessa Becker, Kaari Vasquez, and Family Services Specialist Areli Zelaya

It Really Does Take a Village

The impact a community makes when needs are known

FOR 16-MONTH-OLD Tomas* and his grandmother Isabella,* life was hard.

Isabella's teenage daughter, who had emigrated from El Salvador, had abandoned Tomas, leaving him with Isabella, who was pregnant herself. Isabella lived in a small one-bedroom apartment with her 17-year-old son and four-year old-daughter. She worked at a local restaurant while her partner, Samuel,* worked in Maryland.

Isabella needed help. When she reached out to DCHS, Family Services Specialist Areli Zelaya got her case. Zelaya helped Isabella file with the court for custody of Tomas, but then they hit a roadblock.

"There were no safety concerns, and Tomas was well cared for," Zelaya recalls, "but the court-appointed guardian *ad litem* wrote a report to dismiss the petition." The guardian *ad litem*, a person appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child in legal actions, was especially concerned about the cramped housing situation, Isabella's pregnancy and literacy issues.

As Zelaya worked to find ways to help Isabella improve her chances of gaining custody, social worker Odessa Becker began looking for a resource (foster) family in case Isabella didn't

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**Names have been changed to protect the family's privacy.*

DCHS Director Kate Garvey

Strengthening the Way We Use Data: A Partnership with the Office of Performance & Accountability

WHAT IS data, exactly?

Merriam Webster defines it as factual information (measurements or statistics) used as a basis for reasoning, discussion or calculation.

For DCHS, data is information about the people we serve, about what we do, and how well we do it. It tells multiple stories: family's triumphs and trials, changing trends, and staff commitment. It also tells us about the number of people who need our resources, how few or many resources we have, what works well and what appears to not be effective.

Over the next year, we will have the opportunity to work with the Office of Performance and Accountability (OPA) to strengthen our approaches in using data. DCHS and OPA have developed an MOU which "represents the expressed desire of OPA and DCHS to work collaboratively to facilitate efficient and effective service delivery at DCHS through the use of best practice performance management tools and techniques."

Utilizing a set of tools, support services, and staff time, the partnership between OPA and DCHS will work to achieve the following goals:

- Evolve DCHS into a performance management leader.
- Build capacity for strategic planning, performance management and program evaluation.
- Integrate DCHS data sources into one central location for business intelligence and data-driven action.
- Promote data driven communication between DCHS leadership and program managers.
- Proactively use data to evaluate programs and address emergent community needs.

One of the methods that will assist DCHS is reaching some of these goals will be the creation of internal DCHS AlexStat Meetings. The purpose of this activity is to provide DCHS programs with the support and opportunity to discuss challenges and success in a data driven format. OPA will be DCHS' analytical and presentation support, working with DCHS staff to evaluate issues and prepare graphs and presentation materials.

We will be working with OPA, Information Technology Services (ITS) and a company called Socrata to focus on our data, including how we communicate about it and how our data may be integrated. Socrata works to make data more available and understandable to the public. They create dashboards that enable organizations to demonstrate their performance and for the public to gain a greater understanding of the work we do and the challenges we face. We will have the opportunity to tell our story in ways that are clear and accessible to our residents and partners. We will also be exploring ways to integrate our data, so that we may be more comprehensive and coordinated in our service approaches, as well as to strengthen our ability to analyze our data.

Please keep an eye out for updates on this partnership, as well as opportunities to get involved in this work. It will be fun and interesting—I promise!

"For DCHS, data is information about the people we serve, about what we do, and how well we do it."

Director's Corner

Getting Creative with Mentorship

Redesigning rooms part of SOHO program

Stephanie Puszka with her mentee, Sierra.

WHEN SOCIAL WORKER Stephanie Puszka got an email last year about the mentor program through Space of Her Own (SOHO), she immediately knew it would be a great fit for her.

Through mentorship and afterschool learning programs, the award-wining Northern Virginia organization helps at-risk youth avoid delinquency and succeed in school by teaching them to value creativity and engaging them in visual arts, community service projects, and space design—including designing and renovating each child's room using crafts and furnishing created in SOHO activities.

Puszka, who is a support coordinator for adults with intellectual disabilities at DCHS, enjoys her job. She helps link clients to and monitors services in the community like day and residential programs as well as transportation and crisis services.

"It's quite rewarding, but I miss working directly with children," Puszka explains. "And the fact that we'd work on a lot of art activities was attractive to me. I like to be hands on, and it makes the girls think outside the box."

The girls, who come from low-income backgrounds, are fifth graders transitioning to sixth grade. "This is a very important time in their lives," Puszka says. "It's important for them to have the stability of a mentor."

A fan of TLC's *Trading Spaces*, Stephanie also liked the idea of working with her mentee to decorate her room at the end of the year. "The girls and mentors often go to each other's houses and help decorate rooms," she adds.

Puszka met her mentee last fall, and they got together every Thursday evening with other mentors and girls for workshops led by guest artists where they worked on creative projects that they could incorporate into the girls' rooms, including pillows, mosaics and shadow boxes.

In January, the mentors started taking the girls out on the weekends as well, visiting museums, parks, an architecture firm and Home Depot, and trying new activities like ice skating.

"My mentee had never been ice skating—it was something outside her comfort zone," recalls Puszka. "She was so nervous, but she went out there with a big smile on her face."

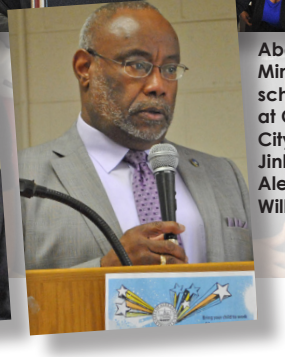
The mentors and their girls also spent a weekend at Camp Kekoka on the Chesapeake Bay. "The cabins were very rustic, and the girls definitely got out of their element," says Puszka, who then laughs. "We did, too."

As the school year drew to a close, Puszka began to gather materials for her girl's room. While SOHO provides each mentor and mentee $300 and a mattress, Stephanie also reached out to City employees for more materials by posting on the AlexNet forum—with great results: a lamp, rug and curtain rod.

While the program is officially one year long, SOHO encourages mentors to continue their relationships with their mentees—and each other. "It's a sisterhood," Puszka says of her relationship with other mentors. "We look out for each other and each other's girls."

If you are interested in supporting SOHO—which also has a preteen boys program—as a mentor, contributor, instructor or volunteer, visit at www.spaceofherown.org or www.spaceofhisown.org.

DCHS takes High School Students to Work



Above: TC Williams and Minnie Howard high school students gather at City Hall. Bottom left: City Manager Mark Jinks. Bottom right: Alexandria City Mayor William D. Euille.

THE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN arranged for Minnie Howard and TC Williams high school students to participate in the national Take Our Daughters & Sons to Work Day on Thursday, April 26. City employees signed up to mentor the students for the day. The event was a great opportunity to expand the horizons of a child and demonstrate first hand how education leads to career opportunities.

Take Our Daughters to Work Day was initiated in 1992 by the Ms. Foundation for Women to focus on girls' ideas, needs and dreams, and to help ensure that girls remain confident, strong and in school throughout their teen years. In 2003, the Ms. Foundation added "sons."

It Really Does Take a Village *(Continued from Page 1)*

get custody of Tomas.

That's when Lee and Kaari Vasquez heard about the family.

"Odessa called us about Isabella and Tomas at the end of April, and explained the situation to me," recalls Kaari Vasquez. "He was well loved and cared for, but if the grandmother didn't gain custody, he would need to come into foster care and would likely not be able to return to his family because of their legal status. Therefore, it would most likely lead to adoption."

Kaari and Lee have been foster parents with the City for about eight years. Two of their sons were adopted through foster care, so they are familiar with the process.

"We became foster parents two years into being married, and while we were open to adoption, we felt that God led us to fostering to not only help children heal but their families as well," Vasquez says. They maintain close relationships with their sons' birth mothers, spending time together every month. They also stay in touch with the other kids who have been able to return to their families.

Vasquez told her husband about Tomas' situation. "We prayed about it and decided that while we weren't able to be a placement for this little guy, we wanted to do anything we could to help preserve this family," she says. "We know firsthand the impact that separation from family can have on children, and to have a child taken from a loving, safe home just because of financial difficulty didn't seem right to us. So we wanted to offer to become a source of long-term support for the family."

DCHS had secured a two-bedroom apartment for the family, but Isabella needed to move that week as the custody court date was at the end of the week—five days away.

The Vasquezes were eager to help, but Isabella was hesitant to connect with them because she was afraid they were the family who would take her grandson. That changed after Lee, who speaks fluent Spanish, called her.

"He told her we wanted to help them move," Vasquez recalls. "She agreed, and then Lee inquired about what else they might need. After speaking with Lee, Isabella began to trust us and even asked if we could come to court to support them."

The following day, the Vasquezes and their two boys met Isabella and Samuel at their apartment and helped the family pack the moving truck and unload at their new apartment.

Vasquez learned from Isabella that the family was in need of furniture and household goods. Kaari reached out to other resource families, friends and a support network at their church. "We knew we couldn't do this on our own and they would all want to help," Vasquez explains. "The response was incredible!"

"Lee and I are very proud to be resource parents with the City of Alexandria. Every single social worker we have been privileged to work with has gone above and beyond because they truly care about the children and their families." ~Kaari Vasquez

A neighbor provided sheets and a brand new comforter. Other resource parents provided a pack n'play, dining room table and chairs, new clothing for the children, shoes and toys. Church friends provided a crib, toys and $400 to buy furniture at Ikea while another used his truck to pick up and deliver the furniture items.

For the next two days, the Vasquezes helped Isabella's family put together their new furniture and settle into the apartment before the court date.

At the end of the week, the Vasquezes joined Isabella in court, where the judge granted full custody of Tomas to Isabella.

Everyone involved was relieved and thrilled.

"I honestly cannot say how happy I was to receive that email that the grandmother was granted full custody," Becker recalls. "I am so happy I want to shout it from the rooftop!"

"This was one less child who would have to enter foster care unnecessarily," reflects Vasquez. "There are already so few families. This little one could stay with his relatives who love and care for him."

Kaari and Lee have stayed in touch with Isabella and her family. Since the court date, they have continued to visit, bringing books and toys, helping the older son fix his laptop for school, and spending time with the family.

"From this experience, we have learned something extremely important," Vasquez says. "We learned that when given *specific* ways to meet needs and *specific* families to help, individuals go above and beyond to do whatever they can."

The experience has spurred Kaari and Lee to find a way to help coordinate future efforts between the City and local churches to help meet the needs of families like Isabella's.

"Lee and I are very proud to be resource parents with the City of Alexandria," Vasquez says. "Every single social worker we have been privileged to work with has gone above and beyond because they truly *care* about the children and their families."

Using TV to Help Children Find a Home

Two children featured on NBC 4's *Wednesday's Child* segments

SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD Genvota and 12-year-old Destinie, two Alexandria children in need of adoptive homes, were recently featured on NBC 4's *Wednesday's Child*.

"Our agency has representation on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Foster Care and Adoption Advisory Committee as well as the *Wednesday's Child* Committee," says Social Worker Becky Tavenner. "Any agency partnering with COG can feature a child on the program. Both Gevonta and Destinie have been difficult to recruit for due to their special needs. Their workers have identified *Wednesday's Child* as another effort to locate a permanent home for them."

Gevonta, who was featured in May, loves volunteering at the local animal shelter, looks forward to a career in law enforcement or any profession where he can help others. He has a strong sense of justice and never hesitates to stand up for those in need. He is looking for a family who would be willing to help him keep building his independent living skills, teach him how to cook, fill out applications and learn money management skills. He will also need continued academic support as he works to finish 10th grade and move through his junior and senior years.

Destinie, a young lady with a big heart, was featured in June. She loves animals, watching movies, listening to music, and singing in the church choir. Destinie loves to read and write and she is in the 6th grade, where she receives special education services. When she grows up, she would like to be a social worker because she likes kids. She is looking for parents who are patient, calm and committed to her.

"When I first started working here 25 years ago, we used *Wednesday's Child* a lot for recruitment," Tavenner says.

Tavenner recalls a time when the program's use of the TV segments decreased due to concerns that it would be difficult emotionally for youth to be identified as a foster child by their peers as well as issues surrounding relatives seeking information when their rights had been terminated.

"Our philosophy has shifted again," says Tavenner. "With proper preparation, children know how to answer questions from their peers if they want, and we do 'bridging the gap' work with birth and foster families; often, birth families are still involved and know that the child will be featured."

In addition to *Wednesday's Child*, Child Welfare also utilizes adoption match retreats, features children on the AdoptUSKids website, and advertises in conference brochures for organizations like the National Foster Parent Association and National American Council on Adoptable Children.

Photos by Jan Schrader

Fund for Alexandria's Child Gala Highlights

THIS YEAR'S fundraising gala—"An Island Affair" held at the Hotel Monaco on June 5—was a great success, says Krystal Fenwick, Coordinator of Community Resources and The Fund for Alexandria's Child.

"The Fund was able to net a little over $24,000 to continue to provide enrichment that supports the development of the mind, body, and spirit of children in foster care and families receiving treatment services," Fenwick says. Guests enjoyed an evening of mingling, dancing, hors d'oeuvres, drinks, silent auction, raffle for a St. Croix Island vacation and more. All proceeds benefited children in foster care or at-risk of abuse and neglect.

The Fund for Alexandria's Child works to enhance the quality of life of foster children and children at risk of abuse and neglect by promoting community awareness, involvement and resource development through providing such activities as dance, art or karate lessons, summer camping, school field trips, scouting and team sports. DCHS helps to identify children in need and enrich the lives of children in our community who are most at risk. To see more photos from the event, go to Department Wide Photos in the DCHS Information folder.

Top: Guest and Deborah Warren
Middle: Greta Rosenzweig and Christine Levine
Bottom: Jackie Washington, Krystal Fenwick, and guest

Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

15 Years of Reducing Teen Pregnancy

How does ACAP do it?

THE ALEXANDRIA Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy (ACAP) is celebrating 15 years of success, including helping to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by 54 percent over the 15 year period.

ACAP aims to help youth achieve lifetime success and sustain a reduction in adolescent pregnancy through culturally and age appropriate education, advocacy, technical assistance, direct service prevention programs and public awareness.

ACAP's formation came out of a long-time commitment to teen pregnancy prevention by the City. A number of community task forces were working on the issue under Mayor Kerry J. Donley's Blue Ribbon Task Force in the late 1990s. Two groups merged to become ACAP, and the City Council appropriated $100,000 to create an ACAP coordinator position and campaign.

"It was exciting and innovative at the time," says Lisette Torres, ACAP's current coordinator who stepped into the role in 2012. "Even today, it is quite rare for local jurisdictions to appropriate city funds for this kind of work. It shows just how highly the wellness of youth is prioritized in Alexandria by its elected officials. A lot of communities still reach out to us for guidance on how to make that happen."

ACAP launched a media and public awareness campaign utilizing a website and an award-winning youth-written magazine as well as mediums like videos and bus ads—and the City began to see teen pregnancy rates decline.

As the Campaign progressed, ACAP developed strong partnerships with local agencies and organizations. "ACAP is the convener of everybody and everything dealing with teen pregnancy in Alexandria," Torres says, "and the strength of who we are is all the people around that table."

Today, the fruits of those partnerships are evident. ACAP partners with the Health Department and Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) who make free and confidential services available at the Teen Wellness Center, located on the TC Williams campus. The services include health education and counseling and illness treatment as well as reproductive health services like pregnancy prevention and testing, contraception and HIV testing and counseling.

Keep It 360 booth at the Del Rey Farmer's Market

ACAP partners with ACPS in incorporating evidence-based curriculum into the school system's Family Life Education program. In addition, ACAP works with Capital Youth Empowerment Program, which works with males and incarcerated youth, and the Northern Virginia Urban League Resource Mothers Program, which provides parent training and makes home visits to pregnant or parenting teens.

One of their most important partnerships, however, is with the teens themselves. "Teens are key partners because they are the messengers that other teens are going to listen to," Torres explains. "They have an important role in everything we do."

In addition to including two youth on the board in voting positions, youth were central to the formation and launch of the youth-led Keep It 360 Campaign in 2011. The youth run a social media campaign and engage their peers in a variety of ways, including performing and visual arts, contests, promotional videos, school events and activities, contraceptive workshops and teen parent panels.

ACAP also co-sponsors programs to build teens' leadership skills, such as the Summer Leadership Youth Conference that helps youth develop public speaking and writing skills—which, adds Torres, is beneficial to both the youth and to ACAP.

All that work has made a difference. In 2000, the City's teen pregnancy rate was 56.4 per 1,000 10-19 year-old females. By 2011, that rate had dropped to 33.4—a 20 percent decline from the 2010 rate of 41.6 and the lowest overall teen pregnancy rate Alexandria had seen in the previous 15 years. In 2013, the pregnancy rate dropped again to 24.8 pregnancies in the same range—a 20 percent decline from 2012.

While those numbers are encouraging, ACAP still has a lot of work to do, says Lisette. Alexandria's teen pregnancy rate is still higher than the state rate and one of the highest in Northern Virginia. Data also reveals that there are segments of the community which are disproportionately affected by teen pregnancy including young Latinas, teens born in other countries, and 18-19 year olds.

So, what's next for ACAP? The Campaign has broadened scope and is beginning to focus on youth in a more holistic way.

"That's the direction teen pregnancy prevention is going nationally," Torres says. "We are looking at all the things that affect health outcomes that we can influence, like poverty, education, employment, housing, substance abuse, mental health and crime. We're not only focusing on reproductive aspects but everything that affects a young person and will ultimately affect their reproductive choices and outcomes."

For more information about ACAP, visit www.keepit360.org. And stay tuned: ACAP will have a community event to mark its anniversary this fall.

TRAILS Offers New Hope to Alexandria Youth

Early intervention in treatment of serious mental illness

A 22-YEAR-OLD woman hears voices telling her to set fires. A 16-year-old boy thinks he has special powers and is on a mission. A 17-year-old girl believes other people can hear her thoughts.

Now these and other Alexandria youth and young adults struggling with mental illness have an avenue towards recovery thanks to a new program, TRansitioning Adults Into Living Successfully (TRAILS).

TRAILS has a broad outreach to identify and support Alexandria youth ages 16-25 who have experienced a first episode of psychosis within the previous two years.

TRAILS is funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services under the Virginia Coordinated Specialty Care Initiative. Alexandria is one of eight regions in Virginia to receive the grant.

This kind of program is significant to the community because, while the majority of individuals with serious mental illness such as schizophrenia experience the first signs of illness during adolescence or early adulthood, an average of five years pass between onset and access to treatment—and the lack of early intervention is associated with significant mental health disability later in life.

Youth experiencing first-episodes are often frightened and confused. They also present unique challenges to family members and clinical providers, including irrational behavior, aggression against self or others, difficulties communicating and relating, conflicts with authority figures and substance abuse.

According to international research, however, early intervention leads to better outcomes, including improving symptoms, functions and recovery skills.

TRAILS is designed to eliminate the gaps in behavioral health programs between child/adolescent and adult and uses an evidence-based early interventional treatment model with a team-based, multi-disciplinary approach. It is recovery-focused and person-centered with culturally competent care that weighs the duty to care with respecting each individual's autonomy or dignity to make choices for himself or herself.

Services include outreach and referral, evaluation and assessment, psychiatric treatment, recovery coaching, case management, psychotherapy, vocational and educational support, family education and peer support. In addition, the grant funding provides ongoing rental subsidies and contracted residential support services for up to 10 clients.

The team expects to serve 30-35 individuals and their families. Operating out of 4480 King Street, the team includes Team Supervisor, Nichole Rohrer, Psy.D., Senior Therapist Andres Acosta, LCSW, Employment and Educational Specialist Doug Archie, M.A., and Anjuli Jindal, M.D., with support from West End Wellness Center Director Wendy Vaughan, LCSW, and Community Support Services Director Connie Juntunen, LCSW.

Photo by Justin Wise

Conference Room Transformed for Trainings

IN ORDER TO inform DCHS staff of the diagnostic changes in behavioral health with DSM 5 and ICD-10, Quality Assurance staff in conjunction with Tech Services held a series of trainings the week of June 1. For the trainings, TS staff converted the 4th floor conference room at 720 N Saint Asaph St. into a temporary computer lab.

QA and TS staff highlighted content changes such as new diagnostic categories and reorganization and demonstrated how those changes would be reflected in the electronic health record. Staff were encouraged to experiment with the changes and ask questions. Eight sessions were attended by 115 clinical staff within DCHS.

Food Program in Danger of Cuts

What you can do to help SNAP continue

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the House of Representatives passed budget blueprints that would cut funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by as much as $125 billion (34 percent). While the cuts aren't likely to happen in the near future, Alexandria leaders and service providers are concerned.

SNAP, a federal program, is critical for supplementing the food needs of low income households in Alexandria, says DCHS Customer Service Manager Esperita Bullard. Over 8,000 children, elderly and low income working family members in Alexandria would be impacted by the cuts.

"Cuts to the SNAP program would have a major impact on emergency food distribution organizations throughout Alexandria," Bullard says, adding that if people can't buy food using SNAP they will turn to local food banks and non-profit emergency food providers.

Cuts would also translate into economic stimulus losses. According to the Department of Agriculture, every $1 of SNAP benefits generates $1.89 in economic activity.

That could impact local businesses and Alexandria Farmer's Markets, where the Double Your SNAP program gives SNAP customers access to fresh produce for half the price (see photo).

But the greatest concern is for children. Forty percent of SNAP benefits go directly to children.

Sara Rhodes, Department of General Services, and volunteer Maria Handler cut fresh vegetables donated by Farmer's Market vendors for a cooking demonstration for DCHS clients at 2525 Mount Vernon. Sara staffs a table in the lobby every other week, providing information about the local markets, including benefits available for SNAP customers. Under Double Your SNAP, SNAP customers can receive up to $10 matching double dollars tokens to use at Old Town Farmer's Market and Four Mile Run Farmers Artisans Market.

"Adults can find other ways to get food, but children can't fend for themselves," says Bullard. "A part of alleviating childhood hunger is making clear to legislators who make those decisions that the impact on children is huge."

If you would like to help raise awareness about the impact of cuts, write your local congressman through Fair Share Online at www.fairshareonline.webaction.org.

Free swimsuits for kids!

Sign up kids from your caseload for swimsuits

IT IS OFFICIALLY summer, which means kids will be spending time at the pool. We have an incredible donor who is committed to ensuring children participating in child welfare services are summer swimwear ready. Are there any kids ages 2-13 on your caseload that would benefit from receiving a swimsuit this summer?

If interested, please email Krystal.Fenwick@alexandriava.gov by July 2 with the following information:

- Name of child
- Name of parent
- Age
- Gender
- Clothing size (please provide number sizes as opposed to small, medium or large)

Call Krystal at 703.746.5663 if you have any questions.

Images by Freepik

Experiencing Our Feelings

A new approach benefits clients and staff

HOW DO YOU help people deal with depression and other mental health issues in a way that brings long-lasting and sustainable changes?

That is one of the challenges faced by the eight-member team of Mental Health Outpatient Services.

Team Leader Asta Lynch says that the team noticed a discouraging trend when primarily using cognitive behavior therapy, a form of psychotherapy that focuses on illogical thoughts as the main driver of emotional difficulties.

"Our clients who had successful treatment episodes would come back in approximately two and a half years with similar problems," Lynch recalls. "It was puzzling for them and for us."

Aware of the good results the Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy (ISTDP) Program was getting in the field, Lynch and her team decided to participate in The Washington School of Psychiatry's three year ISTDP program. Two staff graduated in June, another just completed the second year, and three more have finished the first year.

While they are in the early stages of measuring the effects of this new approach, it is getting great feedback from both clients and therapists on the team.

Cognitive based approaches primarily focus on conscious mental processing. ISTDP understands that unconscious or procedural memory significantly influences our behaviors and emotional responses. As one focuses on bringing awareness onto current emotions, one can begin to see the link to automatic memory, and then choose whether to continue as before or make different choices. Therapists facilitate clients to fully experience emotions and see their options for responding, which results in empowering clients to see the choices they have in front of them at any given time. ISTDP adds the component of experiencing emotions and learning to tolerate them without resorting to behaviors that thwart the goal," Lynch explains. "For example, sometimes when people are angry at someone else, instead of tolerating anger, they turn and attack themselves. If they can learn to experience and tolerate anger as a normal response to not getting a need met, they won't have to resort to turning back on themselves—which results in depression."

ISTDP allows the client to go through the full physiological experience of the emotion when it comes up. "Instead of staying primarily in the realm of the frontal lobe, they process the emotion now," Lynch says. "Because it is experiential, it stays with people much longer than nonexperientially focused therapies. It is a transformative experience that helps people make a change in their lives."

One of Lynch's clients, who had been in treatment for 20 years, finished a two-year treatments with Lynch last year. When Lynch followed up with her a year later, the client reported that the specific behaviors she had worked on had continued to improve.

Others on the team are seeing similar results. A client of Senior Therapist William Lyne told him, "This therapy has helped me have real hope for myself for the first time." Senior Therapist Regina McGloin's clients tell her that the approach makes them pay attention to how they feel and look at themselves differently. "The lesson of feeling my emotions is larger than anything in my life," says one of Senior Therapist Omayra Hunt's clients.

"ISTDP is like the benefit of having a flashlight in a dark, intimidating cave," explains Senior Therapist Linh Harbes-Thai. "It enables the client and the clinician (as the companion and guide) to see what used to be unseen, the barriers, sink holes, passages potentially to the treasure one is seeking, and at times, even freedom from years of being stuck in destructive patterns."

Back row: William Lyne, Anne Kamau, Regina McGloin. Middle row: Omyra Hunt, Linh Harbes-Thai, Miriam Elwell. Sitting: Elizabeth SanPedro.

The three-year program is a huge commitment for the team members, who contribute a portion of their own funding and time to participate. But Lynch says it is worth it. "What we learn is immediately applicable to the job we are doing," she says.

Part of the process of learning the new approach involves videotaping therapy sessions and consulting with clinical supervisors as part of the training. "It is a big personal risk for a therapist to put their work out there in that way," says Lynch, who adds that it takes about a year to get over the hurdle of being anxious about the presentations. "After that, the learning curve accelerates. We are much more open and willing to learn than before."

The process has also increased compassion and connection between teammates. "The progress is visible and the connection and support resulting from these risks helps the team to tolerate the discomfort necessary to provide the intervention effectively so the clients can change and improve their lives," says Lynch, who received a Star Award last quarter for her work in this area.

"The thing I most appreciate about ISTDP," concludes Harbes-Thai, "is that although the clients may appreciate me and how I have helped, the most important factor is their discovery of their own power in their internal experiences—and that affects so many aspects of their lives."

Seniors Exhibit Art at Black History Museum

LAST MAY, the Adult Day Services Center (ADSC) held its first art exhibit at the Black History Museum. The exhibit displayed the art work of the Center's seniors, who created their paintings and other works as part of an Arts for the Aging (AFTA) program led by Expressive Arts Therapist Carol Siegel at ADSC.

"The participants in this program all have challenges—either physical or mental, sometimes both," says Siegel, who has been a teaching artist with AFTA for 16 years. "I use different art modalities, sometimes in combination, to stimulate the creativity that enables the participants to enjoy the process of making art. The main idea is to engage the participants and connect them with each other through the arts of poetry, music and the visual arts."

An intergenerational collaboration with Episcopal High School piano students was a major part of the creation of the art exhibited at the museum. The piano students were studying Mozart's Variations—better known as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*—and the seniors worked on a series of abstract paintings that reflected an aspect of the music while listening to it. The seniors also went to the high school to hear the students play the variations, giving both generations a chance to connect with each other through the arts.

ADSC Therapeutic Recreation Leader Jackie McCord arranged to have the art displayed at the museum. "It was so exciting and fabulous," says McCord, who expressed her gratitude for the hospitality displayed by Black History Museum Director Audrey Davis.

"The exhibit of these paintings and other works was a huge success," says Siegel. "It adds a sense of pride to the accomplishments of the seniors."

That's important to ADSC staff. "We concentrate on what our seniors do rather than what they can't do," McCord explains. "We try to reach as many seniors as possible to get them engaged."

Siegel feels fortunate to work with McCord and finds her enthusiasm for seniors' accomplishments contagious. "The exhibit was one of the highlights of my career," she concludes.

Thank you to Carol Siegel, who contributed to this article

Seniors MaeBell Sanders, Judith Torres Martinez, Soriy Kim Teng, Ivah Copeland, Karla Kombrink.

Audrey Davis, Director of Black History Museum; Kimberly Taylor, AFTA Program Director Brandi Rose, Therapeutic Recreation Leader Jackie McCord, AFTA Expressive Arts Therapist Carol Siegel.

Reducing Stigma Through Art

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR in a row, Art Uniting People: Celebrating, Recovery, Creativity and Mental Health continues its mission of eliminating stigma and promoting the recovery and good health of those affected by mental illness, addiction or developmental disabilities. The nearly year-long-exhibition opened at Alexandria City Hall on June 9 and will travel to three other locations throughout the year.

Visitors can see 108 pieces of art submitted this year by Alexandrians who use the art to tell their stories of hope, despair, frustration, joy and anger as they live with mental illnesses, disabilities and addiction. Often, however, the biggest challenge is dealing with the ignorance, fear and prejudices of many in the community, which often blocks access to help and the chance at recovery. The World Health Organization notes that stigma is the biggest barrier to getting help.

The Mental Health Anti-Stigma HOPE Campaign, a workgroup of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, was founded to develop ways to lessen that stigma. The AUP exhibits are organized by the Campaign and co-sponsored by the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, the Alexandria Office on the Arts, and the Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center. *~by Mary Anne Weber, Chair, Mental Health Anti-Stigma HOPE Campaign*

First Exhibit
June 9 to July 9
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Reception: Friday, June 12
2nd Floor, Room 2000
6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Second Exhibit
July 28 to September 8
St. Elmo's Coffee Pub
2300 Mt. Vernon Avenue
Reception: Tuesday, July 28
6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Third Exhibit
October 2 to October 30
Beatley Library, 5005 Duke Street
Reception to be announced

Fourth Exhibit
November 28, 2015
to March 11, 2016
Durant Memorial Center
1605 Cameron Street
Reception to be announced

Learning Cultural Humility Over Lunch

What is cultural humility--and how does it help us overcome unconscious bias?

THE CULTURAL and Linguistic Competence Committee continued their focus on raising awareness of unconscious bias during its second Lunch and Learn series last month.

The Committee hopes the lunches will facilitate an increased awareness of equity, race, inclusion, cultural diversity and bias so as to better work alongside one another and serve DCHS clients.

"We all have unconscious biases—that is the way our brains work," CLCC Chair Allyson Coleman told the over 20 staff who attended the May 19 lunch. "We won't be able to eradicate it, but we can raise our awareness of it."

Staff watched a short video featuring San Francisco State professor Vivian Chavez focusing on cultural humility, a practice that not only uncovers unconscious bias but helps overcome it. The video introduced staff to the concept, which is based on a set of principles to guide thinking, behavior and actions, including lifelong learning and critical self-reflection, recognizing and changing power imbalances, and institutional accountability.

More than a concept, Chavez and her colleagues say cultural humility is a communal reflection to analyze the root causes of suffering and create a broader, more inclusive view of the world. It is a daily practice for people to deal with hierarchical relationships, changing organizational policy and building relationships based on trust, and it encourages us to realize our own power, privilege and prejudices, and be willing to accept that acquired education and credentials alone are insufficient to address social inequality. (You can view the entire video here.)

Staff then participated in a discussion led by Senior Therapist Aminah Mellion and Dr. Robert Weigl, a psychologist who specializes in intercultural development and partners with the committee.

"Cultural humility applies not only to those of us that work with clients but also in our interactions with each other," said Mellion, who shared how practicing cultural humility has helped her better serve her clients and work with her colleagues.

"Each person walking in the door is different," observed Kim Burson, Team Leader in the Outpatient Substance Abuse Program. She noted that DCHS clients come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. "We need to be curious about who they are and what makes them who they are. What's the best approach for that person? As clinicians, that's important."

Coleman noted that in light of recent events in Ferguson and Baltimore, cultural humility is more important than ever. "We need to create an environment where voices can be heard," she said.

The lunch was the second of three that focus on unconscious bias. The series grew out of comments and results from staff surveys and the Civility Brown Bags. The next lunch and learns will be the week of July 27. Look for upcoming emails for more information.

DCHS Ice Cream Social Highlights

Enjoy highlights from the Fourth Annual Administrative Support Day Ice Cream Social at the end of April. To show their appreciation for staff, the DCHS Senior Mangers and Leadership Team hosted the social, serving ice cream to staff and giving away prizes to all. (To see more photos from the event, see the Department Wide Photos folder in the DCHS Information folder on your desktop.)

Left, top: Danny DeJesus. Left, bottom: Bonnie Mitchell Right top (from left to right): Avis Hunter, Danny DeJesus, Melissa Villacorta, Annie Diaz, Elke Hayes. Right, bottom: Carol Layer serves ice cream to Jackie Bostick. Also serving staff were Dennis Mickney, Jeff Bollen, and Kate Garvey.

April & May Star Awards

April Star Award Winners

Group Star Award

OCS Case Managers:
Genevieve Fields, Kelly Robinson, Priscilla Willet, Betsy Hiers, Renee Viar, Patty Martinez, Elizabeth Dorton and Zenobia Russ

Individual Star Awards

Iris Melendez
Gusatvo Cubas

**These awards were given under the previous Star Award Program. In May, the award program was streamlined to make nominations and awards simpler.*

The DCHS Stars Award Program gives staff the opportunity to acknowledge and recognize significant employee contributions in two ways. The Star Awards are given out once a month and designed to recognize an individual whose action was significant to another employee. Five nominees receive a $25 gift card (if there are more than five nominees in a month, names are drawn to decide the recipients). The Super Star Awards are designed to recognize an individual or group whose action was outside normal work expectations and had a significant impact on internal or external DCHS customers or departmental operations. These awards are given out twice a year to two individuals for $500 each and one group award of $500. Nominees and winners will be recognized during a late March breakfast celebration and the DCHS picnic in September.

May Star Nominees

Arathi Krishnendra*
Becky Tavenner*
Cheryl Padilla
Diana Tracey
Areli Zelaya (two nominations)
Michele Mintling
Elke Hayes
Howard Pivec
Mara Jacobs
Debbie Latimer
Diana Reynoso*
Nelva Hernandez*
Iris Melendez*

**Winners of $25 gift certificates*

May Super Star Nominees

Ashunta May
Arathi Krishnendra
Vanessa Ward
Chrissy Campbell

To nominate an individual online for the a Star Award, go here.
To nominate an individual or group online for a Super Star Award, go here.

Tending to Our Curb Appeal

SEVERAL DCHS facilities received attention to their curb appeal in May. During *Spring for Alexandria*—a City-wide event where volunteers help nonprofit organizations and City agencies prepare for spring with fresh paint, planting, mulching, and more—three teams worked on DCHS residential group homes. Earlier in the month, the building owners gave 720 North Asaph Street some new landscaping.

Left, top: A team representing Hotel Monaco and Morrison House at Linden Street, a group home serving clients with intellectual disabilities: Dwain Carter, Raeshawna Scott, Rachelle Felizardo, Ashley Ramos, (front left) Tara Justice, Abigail Ropp, Kate Ellis. Left bottom: A team from Old Town IT at the Windsor house, a group home serving substance abuse clients: David Bender, Meg Ward, Geoff Williams, Nu Harman, Lindsey Swanson, Stephanie Connolly, Michele Russell. Right top: A team at Bellefonte, a group home serving clients with intellectual disabilities: Alexandria Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Dana Lawhorne, Tiffany Searcy, Latoscha Pierce, Deputy Andrea Diaz, Lt. Melissa Josiah, Deputy Shawn Buker, Cpt. Robyn Nichols, Deputy Phillip Leger; Department of Project Implementation: Suellen Savukas, Christopher Balallo, Jennifer Bell, David Le, and Lisa Robrahn. Right bottom: New landscaping at 720 North Asaph Street.

Hello & Goodbye

NEW STAFF

SHELLY BROWN

Shelly Brown is a residential counselor at Dogwood Group Home.

MARIS CRUZ

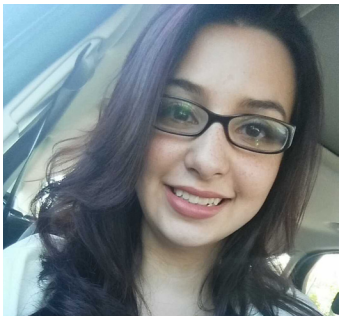
Maris Cruz, began employment as a Bilingual Human Service Specialist. She came from Henrico County Department of Social Services in Richmond, VA. She has 11 years' experience in eligibility, beginning her employment in Pennsylvania. Maris is currently relocating to Alexandria with her daughter. She enjoys exercise, running, and outreach within her local church. She is excited and grateful to be a part of the Eligibility Team.

JACQUELINE FONSECA

Jacqueline (Jackie) Fonseca, MSW recently joined the Sexual Assault Center as a full time therapist. She is a Maryland native. She comes with experience ranging from working with domestic violence offenders to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault as well as international work in Central America. She enjoys spending time with her friends and family (including her dog), being outdoors, and watching comedies. Jackie is excited to be part of an established and well-respected program in the DC metro area.

ANA HENSE

Ana Hense recently joined DCHS as a Caseworker at the Customer Call Center. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from George Mason University. She currently resides in Crystal City with her husband and two kittens. She enjoys traveling and spending time with friends and family.



LILLIAN HERNANDEZ

Lillian A. Hernandez interned with the DCHS Division of Aging and Adult Services from August 2014 until May 2015 and has recently joined as a temporary employee where she conducts assessment for various programs. Prior to that she was an intern at SERVE Family Shelter in Manassas. She recently graduated from George Mason with undergraduate degree in Social Work. She was born in Mexico, speaks Spanish fluently, and was raised in and currently resides in Woodbridge. She is grateful for the opportunity to assist and provide services to older adults in the community.

TAI LAI

Tai Lai recently joined the DCHS finance team as an Account Clerk III. He has been an accountant for almost eight years, working the majority of that time as a Staff Accountant in an investment broker firm in Rockville, MD. He has lived in Maryland for eight years and currently resides in Howard County with his wife and one child that is coming this month. In his free time, he enjoys gaming, watching sports and spending time with his family. Tai is grateful for the opportunity to work with such a great team that serves the people of Alexandria.

JENNY MENDONZA

Jenny Mendoza recently joined the DCHS as a full time Benefits Program Specialist. She has been a BPS for the past 9 years and has worked for Culpeper Human Services and Prince William County DSS. She resides in Culpeper, with her husband of 20 years, and 11 year old son. She is also a proud Marine mom of a 20 year old son stationed in Japan. She enjoys spending time with her family, playing tennis, camping, wine tasting, mountains and reading. Jenny feels blessed and grateful to work with such an excellent team of people dedicated to the needs of the Alexandria community.

JOYCE REESE-BEY

Joyce Reese-Bey joined DCHS in April 2015 as a Family Services Specialist on the Children's Protective Services Team. She is a native Virginian who recently returned to the area after spending three years in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Joyce obtained her MSW from the University of Michigan (Go Blue!) with a focus in Child Welfare and looks forward to a long career working with children and families. She enjoys reading, traveling and spending time with family.

Joyce Reese-Bey

MIRNA RODRIQUEZ

Mirna Rodriquez is a Benefits Program Specialist at 2525 Mount Vernon.

JOB CHANGE

Debra Evans is the Division Chief for Domestic Violence and Assault. **Fatmata Fadika** is a full-time residential counselor at Taylor Run Group Home for individuals with intellectual disabilities. **Alaina Grimm** is a Supervisory Program Analyst/Director of Program Evaluation in Behavioral Health. And **Greta Rosenzweig** is Chief of Child Welfare.

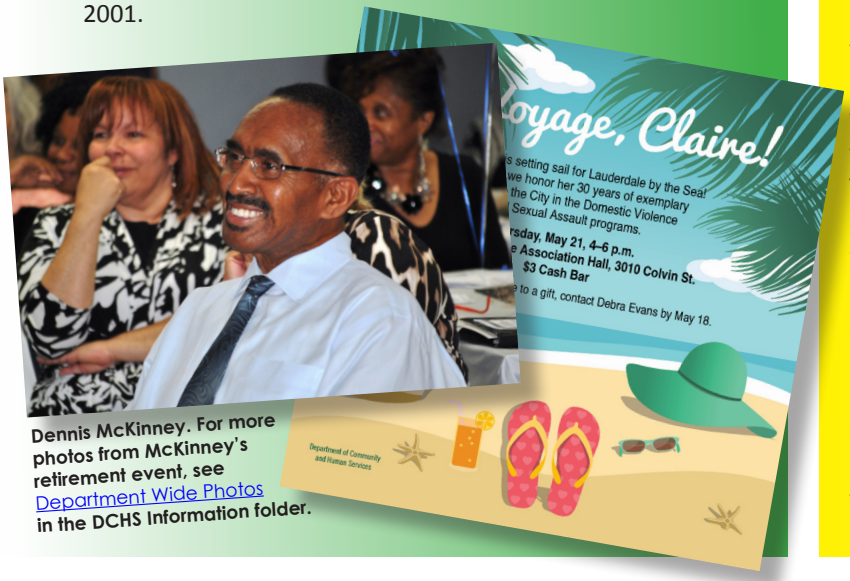
RETIREMENTS

Claire Dunn retired as the Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Division Chief. She served the City for 30 years helping survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault receive the services and support they need.

Jane Hassell retired as the Chief Officer of Administrative Services, Quality Assurance, Information Technology Services, Finance and Program Evaluation. She had been with the City of Alexandria since 2001.

Judy Howe retired as Director of Program Evaluation in Administration on March 1. She is working part time as a temp employee performing the same key functions until her replacement is trained.

Dennis McKinney retired as the Deputy Director of the Center for Economic Support. His responsibilities included oversight and coordination of public benefits, community services and employment services.



Dennis McKinney. For more photos from McKinney's retirement event, see Department Wide Photos in the DCHS Information folder.

EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHT

Business Services Specialist **Ralph Critten** was selected for and participated in the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Development Services Level One Certified Cultural & Linguistic Competence Facilitators Training on June 2-3.

Critten, who began working with the City in 2012, is co-facilator of DCHS's CLC training with Kimberly Davis. "As a co-facilitator for the Department's already established training program, I was looking for an opportunity to add value," says Critten. "Also, because I work with a very diverse client population as an Employment and Training Specialist (and now Business Services Specialist) with Alexandria Workforce Development Center, possessing CLC skills will go a long way toward supporting my goal of delivering quality customer service."

Critten has already found value in the training. "I have a better understanding of the topic and how to package and present the information back in a training format," he says. "One byproduct of the training is that I now have a better understanding of how our individual bias impacts our ability to effectively interact with other groups. The training provided the opportunity for me to assess my own biases ... [and] will now allow me to utilize additional methods in which to deliver CLC content to DCHS employees."

CLC training is a part of the Department's new employee training (NET) and the CLC Committee plans to offer a series of trainings in the fall to provide opportunities for DCHS employees to enhance intercultural skills, a goal of CLCC.

If you have an educational achievement you'd like to share with us, please email carmen.andres@alexandriava.gov

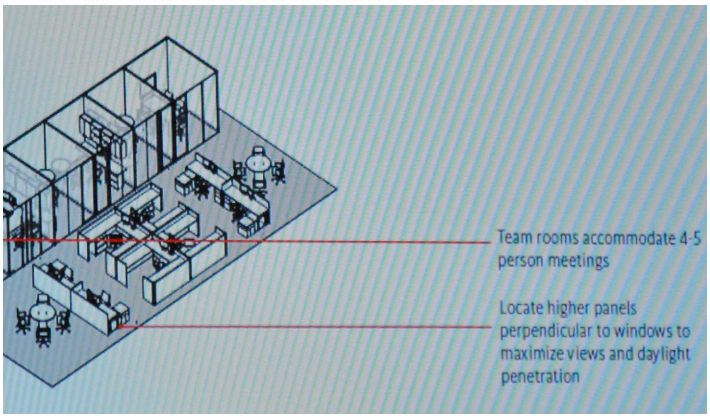
News You Can Use

NEW WORKPLACE STANDARDS BEING DEVELOPED

Earlier this month, DCHS employees got an update on the creation of new workplace guidelines that, if adopted, will be used in designing the spaces in renovations or new leases of City property.

The guidelines, which developed out of plans to renovate City Hall, and the findings of a City employee focus group, were presented during a presentation on June 16 at 2525 Mount Vernon by City Deputy Director of Planning Construction and Facilities Titanna Cross, Capital Projects Manager Adrian King, and Gensler Director of Consulting Robert A. Peck.

The focus group visited several facilities—including the U.S. General Services Administration building in D.C., which set new standards for workplace design. The building's recent renovations were designed to foster an open and collaborative environment



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Employee Assistance Program Offers Something for Everyone

When we think about the Employee Assistant Program (EAP), most of us consider it a resource for employees seeking counseling for mental health related-matters such as stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, and relationship and family issues. While this is true, EAP offers a whole lot more:

Counseling: Eight free sessions and referrals to your health provider if additional counseling is desired. Use of the service is confidential. If an employee receives a referral from a supervisor, sessions may be scheduled during the work day.

Legal Services: Free 30-minute consultation with an in-network attorney and a 25% discount off the attorney's hourly rate if you choose to retain that attorney.

Financial Services: Speak for up to 60 minutes with a financial professional at no charge regarding such issues as retirement planning, debt consolidation, funding a college education, mortgage loan options and a variety of other financial concerns. Financial information, tools and calculators are available at www.inova.org/eap

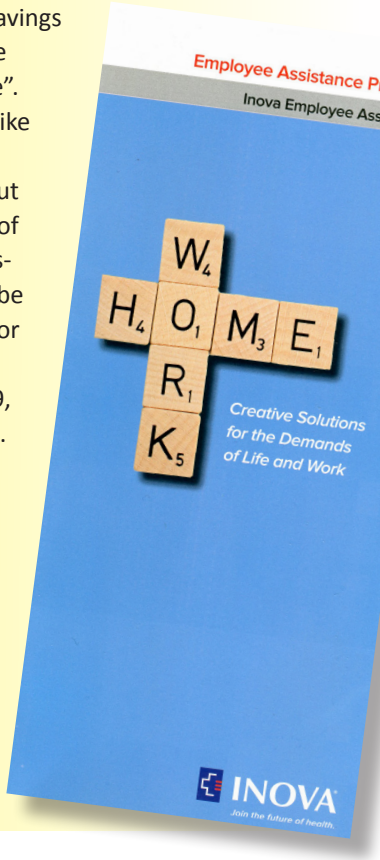
Identity Theft Services: Free telephone screening and consultation. If the counselor determines your identity has been stolen, a "recovery" packet containing everything that you need to resolve your identity-theft issue will be sent to you at a no charge.

Work Life Resources: Consultants help you assess your needs and pinpoint resources in such areas as child care, elder care, pet care, wedding planning, health and nutrition, and sports and entertainment. Includes discounts at popular stores—particularly good discounts around the holidays—and other online resources.

Online Resources: EAP offers an interactive Web service that provides access to a wide range of information and materials, including: access to wills, advance directives and other legal documents; financial information, tools and calculators; and an extensive library of nationwide Work life resources (child and elder care locators, savings discount center, relocation center, monthly interactive online seminars, and 24-hour instant messaging access to a Work Life Consultant.

To access the EAP resources on the website, enter the user name "Alexandria" and use "City" as the password. To sign up for the savings discount, use the code "Advantage".

If you would like to find out more information about EAP, attend one of the following sessions which will be hosted by a senior DCHS manager: Monday, June 29, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. (1900 N Beauregard St., 3rd Floor MultiPurpose Room) or Thursday, July 9, 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. (720 N St. Asaph St., Conference Room 401).



where employees can excel, be productive and demonstrate operational excellence. The space maximizes natural daylight by removing offices that blocked windows and high cubicle walls and replace them with open or transparent offices, low cubicles, shared spaces and an open floor plan.

The focus group was impressed by the GSA design, says Cross. During his presentation, Peck noted that the design focuses on assigning space based on function verses title, increasing mobility and collaboration and improving the work environment.

After the visits, a set of goals and guiding principles as well as sample worksites and designs were developed, including an emphasis on natural daylight, space designed by function versus title, collaborative and shared spaces, and making sure everyone had a personal work space.

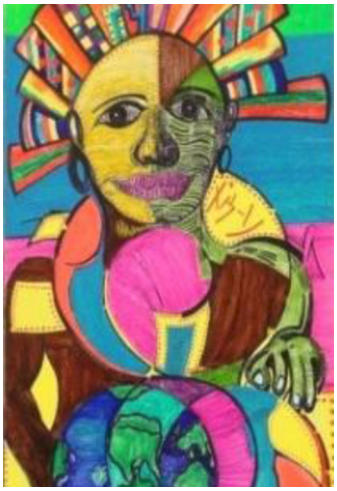
Cross emphasized that any guidelines adopted are not written in stone.

"My takeaway from all this is that these are simply guidelines," said Cross, adding that they are meant to be adopted and revised according to a department and leadership's needs and the space.

Employees can see pictures from the presentation—including photos of slides with timeline information, focus group conclusions and sample workspaces—in the Department Wide Photos folder in the DCHS Information folder on your desktop; you can find the photos in the 2015 folder under "Workspace Standards Presentation."

FMLA FORMS AND INFORMATION

Employees in need of guidance related to the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) can contact Cindy Gaisor in DCHS Human Resources at x3494 or DCHS_HR@alexandriava.gov. FMLA forms have recently been updated, and can be found by following this link.



CONTEST FOCUSES AWARENESS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Since 2008, DBHDS has participated in the Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month celebrations. Campbell was a leading African American journalist and novelist, and a national spokesperson for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

Her goal was to eliminate mental health stigma in minority and multicultural communities. We have celebrated her life's work by hosting a statewide media contest focused on anti-stigma messages.

This year's contest theme asks "What does mental wellness mean to you?" Entries to the contest will share their responses through video, art, music, and more!

Submit entries by email, mail or Google Docs to Office of Cultural & Linguistic Competence, DBHDS, PO Box 1797, Richmond, VA 23218, oclc@dbhds.virginia.gov. Entry Deadline is July 31.

CITY WEBSITE IS GETTING A NEW DESIGN—AND YOUR INPUT IS WELCOME!

Earlier this year, City ITS, City Communications and DCHS Communications along with communication managers from other City departments, began the process of establishing first phase changes to the City's website. Implementation of these changes will begin in September 2015 and will include a modernized look and easier navigation for locating information.

This effort will lay the groundwork for a complete overhaul of the City site beginning July 2016. As the departmental websites reflect the organization and design of the overall site, this will mean a redesign of the DCHS website.

The Steering Committee has drafted several principals for the new site, which reflect consideration of DCHS staff and leadership concerns and those of other stakeholders: focus on the customer rather than the organizational structure; foster better cross departmental presentations of information and services; increase use of services; allow the public do more online; use metrics, surveys and emerging tends to take a constantly evolving incremental (versus ad-hoc) approach to site changes.

Some recommendations may be implemented immediately, some incrementally after September, and some will be held until the proposed FY17 full-site overhaul.

Throughout this project, staff input is welcomed. Please contact Jennifer Cohen-Cordero at jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov or 703.746.3484 or complete the web survey on Survey Gizmo.

Connect seeks to inform DCHS employees about programs, services and changes within the Department. It also introduces you to one another on a more personal level, recognizes employee and team accomplishments, and helps foster relationships between programs and employees across DCHS. It features program activities and special events and helps keep you informed on departmental initiatives.

We are always looking for news and ideas for stories. If you have an idea for a story or content, contact Carmen Andres at carmen.andres@alexandriava.gov or call 5753.

To report significant errors in this newsletter, please email carmen.andres@alexandriava.gov