M E M O R A N D U M

TO: COMMUNITY BASED CARE CENTERS
FROM: FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
SUBJECT: FAMILY REUNIFICATION DAY EVENT COMMUNICATION PLAN

Note, this Communication Plan and Communication Timeline is based on Florida’s Reunification Day events, which are scheduled for May 2–May 8.

This document provides a communications plan and timeline for the successful planning and execution of Family Reunification Day events in communities across Florida in the week before Mother’s Day (May 2 – May 8, 2010). Taken together with the materials developed and that will be disseminated by DCF with technical assistance support from Casey Family Programs, this communications plan is intended to make the process of organizing this event as easy as possible. We encourage you to use and adapt this information, and/or to develop new or additional materials if you like.

The materials that will be disseminated by DCF include:

- Guidance on identifying and preparing event speakers
- Guidance on creating brief speaker bios and working with speakers on remarks
- Press release template
- Media advisory template
- Op-ed template

The Goals of – and Key Messages for – the Family Reunification Day Event are:

- To celebrate the accomplishments of families who have overcome an array of challenges to reunify safely and successfully.
- To recognize the vital role that community partners – including mental health and substance abuse providers, courts and judges, foster parents, and others – play in helping to reunify, strengthen, and support families.
- To inspire other parents – particularly those going through the recovery process – that it is possible to confront and resolve the issues that led to their separation, and to reunify with their children.

In addition, the Family Reunification Day Events are an opportunity to reinforce the importance of:

- Safe, permanent families for all of Florida’s children and youth.
- Working to provide families with the support and services they need to stay together or reunify safely and successfully.
- Safely reducing the number of children in Florida’s foster care system by achieving permanence through reunification, guardianship, and adoption.
**Target Audiences**

The target audiences for the Family Reunification Day events consist both of groups and individuals within the child welfare system, and a broader audience of non-child welfare professionals. These events provide an opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of parents who have successfully reunified with their children, and the critical role community partners play in the reunification process. These messages will not only resonate with those who know, and work within, child welfare, but with a larger audience including policymakers, the media, and others. The stories of parental success – told in the parent’s own words – and the illustration of the types of programs and partnerships that contribute to this success provide a powerful opportunity to communicate the core goals of the child welfare system, and bring attention to the programs and services that are producing positive results.

The composition of your target audiences – both within and outside of the child welfare arena - may differ based on your individual communities. Feel free to use the lists below as a starting point for identifying and prioritizing your target audiences.

**Child Welfare System Target Audiences for Family Reunification Day Event:**

- Service Providers & staff
- Parents currently in recovery
- Judges, lawyers, and other court personnel
- Birth and foster parents and their affiliate groups
- Foster youth and former foster youth and affiliate groups
- Child welfare advocates

**Broader Audiences for Event:**

- Media
- Local and state legislators and their staff
- Other child and family serving professionals (doctors, teachers)
- Others

**Family Reunification Day: Event Planning**

A detailed timeline can be found at the end of this document. In addition, there are a number of logistical and content decisions that will need to be made when planning for the event. These include:

- **Selecting the event date.** Optimally, the event should occur late the week before Mother’s Day (May 9) – Wednesday the 5th, Thursday the 6th or Friday the 7th.

- **Determining the event start time & length.** You should plan for an event that is about an hour in length. Generally, it is easiest to get people to attend, and obtain media coverage for, an event that occurs in the morning (between 9a.m. and 11a.m.) or early afternoon (between 1p.m. and 3p.m.).
Deciding on the event location. There are a number of different places that this event could take place that are more interesting – and more suited to – its key messages than a conference center or a public meeting hall. Partnering with a service provider and using their facility might help illustrate the role they play in helping families reunify. Using a park may help visually emphasize and reinforce the importance of children and families. A courthouse may also be a potential location. When selecting your location, keep in mind that you want to find a place that is centrally located and easy for people to find; that has sufficient parking; that can accommodate more than 50 people and cameras and/or other equipment if press attend; and that does not present any physical difficulties (for instance, only accessible by steep steps).

Choosing event speakers. You will want to begin the process of identifying speakers for the event quickly, as this can be a time consuming process. You will receive two documents that will provide additional, detailed guidance on how to identify and prepare event speakers – particularly parents and others who will be sharing personal experiences – and how to work with speakers to craft brief bios and event remarks.

Partnering with other organizations to plan and host the event. You should consider reaching out to organizations and individuals in your community to partner with you on this event. This can help lessen the burden of planning, and ensure that a diverse group of organizations are involved in speaker selection, vetting materials, etc.

Determine who and how you will invite attendees. Ensure that the list of organizations and individuals that you would like to invite to attend this event includes the target audiences you have identified. Even if you decide not to partner with other organizations in planning and executing the event, reach out to other child welfare and child serving organizations to invite them to the event and encourage them to share the invitation with their members, allies and others. If there are individuals or organizations you would particularly like to attend (particularly member of the media, policymakers and others), make sure to follow up with them by phone in addition to sending an email invitation.

Press Outreach

Templates of press materials, including a media advisory, press release, and op-ed, will be disseminated by DCF for your use and customization. You should feel free to use these as these draft documents as the basis for creating more detailed documents, which you can add quotes, statistics and other county specific information to. Or, if you prefer to craft your own press materials, you can simply use these templates as reference materials that will provide a sense of how the key messages around Family Reunification Day will be communicated.

The timeline at the end of this communications plan provides additionally guidance on when you may want to start drafting, finalizing and disseminating the media advisory, press release and op-ed in the lead up to the event. While the op-ed template will be
provided, it is up to you whether or not you wish to create and submit an op-ed. This event and the success stories that parent speakers will be sharing lend themselves very nicely to an op-ed, and the process of working with speakers to create brief bios and their event remarks can also serve to provide much of the content for an op-ed authored either by one of the parent speakers, or co-authored by a parent and another speaker (a service provider, judge, young person or other speaker).

When determining what media you would like to attend the event, be certain to reach out to both print and electronic media. Also, given the fact that the event will celebrate the successes of parents and the importance of family, it may be an opportunity to not only create interest among reporters who cover child welfare, but among reporters or columnists who cover child and family issues more broadly.
### Planning Timeline for Family Reunification Day Event

Note: this timeline assumes that the Family Reunification Event will occur in the week before Mother’s Day, with optimal timing for press coverage on Wednesday the 5th, Thursday the 6th or Friday the 7th

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| Early February 2010 | ▪ Determine whether or not you will hold a Family Reunification Day event  
                      ▪ Select a tentative event date and time                              |
| Late February – Early March | ▪ Reach out to organizations and individuals in your community to partner with you this on event. You can even form a Family Reunification Day Event Committee including representatives from key organizations/constituencies--a birth parent, a young person who has been reunified with their family, a judge, service providers, a foster parent, and others. These individuals can help with the process of putting together the event, help brainstorm ideas for speakers, review and offer feedback on materials, etc.  
▪ Identify potential event locations (service provider, courthouse, etc)  
▪ Begin to identify potential speakers  
▪ Determine who “event point people” will be – who will help identify event location and work on event logistics? Who is the media contact? Who will help identify and work with speakers?  
▪ NOTE: If you create an Event Committee, as mentioned above, put procedures in place for sharing information and materials as they are developed, getting feedback and finalizing documents and decisions with the Committee members |
| Mid-March           | ▪ Finalize the event date and time  
                      ▪ Finalize event speakers  
                      ▪ Visit your prospective event location(s) to ensure that they will meet your needs |
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| Late March          | • Finalize the event location  
                      | ▪ Work with your speakers to craft their event remarks, create bios for each one (these will go into the event press packet) (guidance on how to work with speakers and craft bios will be provided) |
| Early April         | • Draft event media advisory (template will be provided)  
                      | ▪ Draft event email invite  |
| Week of April 5     | • Finalize the event media advisory  
                      | ▪ Send event e-mail invite out; share this with your partner organizations and Event Committee (if you have one) and ask them to disseminate. Post information about the event on your website and ask partner organizations to post on their website  
                      | ▪ Send out media advisory  
                      | ▪ Begin drafting event op-ed (template will be provided) |
| Week of April 12    | • Begin drafting event press release (template will be provided)  
                      | ▪ Determine if there are any other materials you would like to add to the press packet (county specific reports, newsletters, press clips, etc.)  
                      | ▪ Finalize event op-ed  |
| Week of April 19    | • Finalize press release  
                      | ▪ Determine where to submit event op-ed and submit op-ed to run week of Mother’s Day (around time of event)  |
| April 22            | • Resend media advisory to press  |
| Week of April 26    | • Determine event “run of show” (speaking order)  
                      | ▪ Draft and finalize key message talking points for speakers  
<pre><code>                  | ▪ Individually prep each event speaker |
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| Early Week of May 3     | ▪ Phone follow up with media (can do this late the last week of April depending on when your event is, how far in advance your reporters like to be contacted)  
                          ▪ If you like, you can share embargoed press release and other materials (such as event speaker bios) with interested reporters  
                          ▪ Do conference call/meeting to run through event lineup with all event speakers; answer any last minute questions |
| May 5 or 6              | ▪ Family Reunification Day Event                                     |
| Days after event        | ▪ Do any event follow up. This includes following up with reporters who attended; sending thank you notes or emails to event speakers, sponsors, partner organizations, Event Committee members or others who helped make the event possible.  
                          ▪ If there are action items that emerged from the event, start on these (for example, creation of a committee of birth parents who have successfully reunified, ideas about how to improve relations between birth and foster parents and develop policies and procedures that can help create this relationship, etc.) |