

It's Official!

Anne-Marie Twohie has been appointed director of the Office for Children by Fairfax County Department of Family Services Director **Nannette Bowler**. **Twohie** succeeds Office for Children founding director **Judith Rosen**, who retired in 2008.

In making the announcement, **Bowler** noted that **Twohie** has been “a strong advocate for children and families, and is well-respected by her colleagues and the community.”

Twohie has worked in the Office for Children since 1999. Before she was appointed acting director in 2008, **Twohie** headed the office’s Child Care Assistance and Referral Program.

“I’m honored to have the opportunity to serve our community in this new role, and look forward to working with the wonderful staff of OFC to promote quality early care and education in the county,”

Twohie said, adding “The early learning experiences children have during their formative years impacts them — and their communities — for the rest of their lives.”

“I’m also very excited to work with such excellent colleagues,” she added. “OFC



New OFC Director Anne-Marie Twohie.

staff make a difference in the lives of providers, teachers, parents and children every day.”



Dalissa Vargas is the new head of Fairfax Futures, a nonprofit organization that partners with OFC on school readiness initiatives.

Dalissa Vargas is the new Executive Director of Fairfax Futures. She has nearly 15 years experience in the nonprofit arena and an extensive background in fundraising, community partnerships, communications and strategic planning.

“Investing in children to ensure school readiness is vital to ensuring success not only for the individual child but for the community as a whole,” **Vargas** said.

“To lead an organization in the community where I live, and about an issue so important, is truly the realization of a lifelong goal.”

Vargas comes to Fairfax Futures after serving as major gift officer for the National Children’s Museum in Washington, DC. She has also worked for the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Year in Review

Community Education and Provider Services

In 2009, public health officials predicted the worst flu season in more than a decade. Since very young children and their caretakers would be disproportionately impacted by the flu, the Fairfax County Health Department director asked the Office for Children to help spread flu prevention messages throughout the child care community.

CEPS was instrumental in sending letters, e-mails and voicemails about the flu to child care providers. As a result, more than 300 providers attended special flu prevention workshops in the fall.

CEPS' contributions to children's health didn't stop there. CEPS registered dieticians **Maria-Elena Martinez**, **Abeba Tzeggai** and **Kamini Jassal**, along with Head Start registered dietician **Everludis Lopez**, worked with the Health Department on a childhood obesity prevention grant. If the grant is awarded, the funds will be used by family child care providers, Head Start and SACC to help encourage children to exercise and eat healthy amounts of nutritious food.

In addition, in 2009 CEPS increased the number of family child care providers participating in the USDA Food Program, which helps make sure children receive healthy meals and snacks while in care. CEPS also oversees the USDA Food Program participation of Head Start and SACC, which both received excellent ratings by USDA auditors in 2009.

School Readiness

In fiscal year 2009, 50 child care providers received Portage training through a partnership with Fairfax Futures and Partners in Prevention Fund. Portage is a research-based curriculum that helps child care providers observe, assess and plan learning experiences for 0-5 year-olds based on the children's interests, strengths and needs.

"In order to plan when caring for children, child care providers must understand developmental milestones," said **Carol Osborn**, a Portage trainer and mentor who works with VPI-designated providers implementing Portage.

Osborn explained that Portage helps providers identify benchmarks that are



CCAR staff volunteered at Northern Virginia Family Service's toy closet on December 10. Left to right: Megan McNeal; Betty Asmen; Rachel Copeland; Nosheen Khan; Maggie Pantzer; Pilar Otoy; Amy Clark; Susan Jackson; Lizanne Beck-Rife; and Mary Ann Patterson. Not pictured: Erin Isbell; Jason Mort; and Maryanne Martonik.

expected in various age ranges in the areas of communication, thinking skills, how children react to sensory stimulation, relationship skills and motor skills. This helps providers determine, "What does this child need to support this area of development, and how can I help him?" **Osborn** said.

Portage also has a tool providers can use to communicate with families about their children's development.

Child Care Assistance and Referral

Fiscal year 2009 was another busy year for CCAR as more than 8,000 people came to inquire about finding or paying for child care in one of the four DFS regional offices. Last year CCAR subsidized the cost of child care for about 5,000 children each month and worked with more than 1,200 vendors — child care programs that provide subsidized care for children.

"The CCAR staff does complex work to determine eligibility and help families find child care that meets their needs," said CCAR Acting Director **Carol Keil**. "In the midst of all of our work, the activities planned by our Social Functional Team help us keep a positive attitude, work as a team, and appreciate each other's talents, strengths, and hard work."

In 2009 the Social Functional Team hosted team-building activities at an outdoor picnic; made valentines for CCAR staff thanking them for their hard work; and hosted a staff appreciation breakfast and ice cream social.

Although the team usually sponsors a drive to collect food or clothes, the 2009 holiday celebration had a different focus. "With the economic situation affecting everyone this year, we decided to donate our time to help others," explained **Megan McNeal**, team co-chair. The team arranged for 13 CCAR staff to take county volunteer leave to help out at the Northern Virginia Family Services' toy closet in December.

Financial Management Office

In 2009, the Head Start-Early Head Start-School Readiness budget team completed 16 funding applications — the most-ever in one year — for a total of more than \$14.7 million. The team,

made up of **Sushma Kohli, Stephanie Caccamo, Iryna Johnson, Kathy Kennan** and **Sandy Corbin**, also:

- Completed 12 federal funding applications for Head Start/Early Head Start, securing a total of \$10.2 million for the program. Of that, \$1.3 million is American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds.
- Leveraged state and local resources to secure \$2.6 million in state funds, an increase of \$1.5 million over the previous year, to expand the Virginia Preschool Initiative by 108 children.
- Worked with program staff to secure more than \$229,000 from Child Development Resources, Inc. for the Virginia Infant Toddler Specialist Network.
- Helped to secure \$73,500 in ARRA funds from the Virginia Department of Social Services for the Virginia Star Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- Completed the funding application for more than \$380,000 in funds from VDSS for the Infant and Toddler Social, Emotional and Behavioral Development Pilot Communities project. Award of funds is pending.
- Worked with county, state, and delegate agencies to implement new reporting requirements for ARRA funds.
- Participated in the Head Start risk management process to identify strengths and areas for improvement in funding, monitoring and technical assistance; no areas for improvement were found.

Employees' Child Care Center

The ECCC received outstanding responses from parents who took their 2009 survey. At least 95 percent of all respondents agreed with questions about the program, such as: "I feel satisfactorily informed regarding my child's progress," and "My child has developed new areas of interest or

curiosities throughout the year." Their rave reviews of the program included comments such as:

"We are lucky to have such a great and professional staff."

"Knowing that my children are at ECCC has made working much easier."

"I appreciate all the different activities provided to the children; media table, painting, sensory activities, story time, etc."

"Transitions are amazing for the kids — they smoothly move from one class to the next. It is amazingly seamless for the children."

"ECCC is fantastic! The teachers truly care about the children. They provide a home-away-from home for my child."

Head Start

The Greater Mount Vernon Community Head Start Program began implementing the Creative Curriculum for Preschool in 2009.

"Early Head Start has been using the Creative Curriculum for Infants/Toddlers for more than five years, and

the addition of the preschool version creates a continuum of educational services for children from birth to 5," explained Head Start Coordinator **Anne Taggart**.

The curriculum also has a Web-based assessment tool that teachers access via the Internet. On an ongoing basis, teachers enter information on children's progress in all areas of development, and the system then allows them to electronically generate individualized and group lesson plans.

To assist with curriculum implementation, administrative staff are able to electronically provide feedback on lesson planning, as well as generate progress reports for program monitoring and reporting.

The system also identifies learning experiences that assist in the implementation of the plans, and link staff with professional development resources.

A family involvement component of CreativeCurriculum.net creates a communication link between teachers and parents, where parents can track their child's progress and share journal entries with their child's teacher.



Representatives from the Bermuda Ministry of Education visited the Employees' Child Care Center in November. Bermuda is redesigning its public education system, and ECCC's visitors are creating the education framework for Bermuda's 0-8 year-olds. They asked to see U.S. classrooms where the Creative Curriculum for Preschool is being implemented.

Information Technology

“It’s been a year of upgrades and increased security,” said **Gail Duncan**, explaining her department’s 2009 projects. The systems that OFC’s I.T. staff

— which includes **Duncan, Aaron Hopkins, Ed Pritchard** and **Jay**

Romeo — have worked on

this year include the Institute for Early Learning database; SACC’s SEMS system; Minute Menu, which supports the USDA Food Program; and Head Start’s ChildPlus database.

“The new functionality added to IFEL and SEMS helped to support OFC’s efforts in ‘going green’ by facilitating electronic communication,” **Duncan** said. “The mailing of the IFEL training catalog has been decreased by 48 percent, and mailing SACC invoices has been decreased by 50 percent.”

IFEL Director **Karen Quist** added, “We were able to accomplish the first phase of “going green” when the IFEL database went live. Using the IFEL.net electronic communication system has become routine for us now. Changing the method of catalog distribution is the second big effort toward going green and, so far, seems to be going smoothly.”

Duncan and her staff also headed up the rollout of the new Avaya phone system in OFC. It allows staff to:

- Conference with five other staff;
- Transfer calls to county BlackBerry, cell phones or users’ home phone;
- Take advantage of the local call log and speed-dial features.

SACC

More than 3,000 parents responded to the survey SACC conducted in June 2009 — the largest response to a SACC survey ever! Ninety-eight percent of respondents said their children enjoy SACC.

More than 2,700 respondents took the time to provide additional comments on what they like about SACC. Overwhelmingly, parents cited SACC staff at the top of the list. Typical responses include:

- Fabulous staff!!!!!!
- Caring, professional staff who are responsive and really do a fabulous job.
- It’s a great program with fantastic, caring teachers.
- I am so very proud of the SACC teachers; they are good examples for the kids.
- All the SACC teachers have been good role models.
- It has been a godsend. I don’t know of anything else like it, and I’ve been a mom for almost 17 years. It is obvious that the kids enjoy it and reap many benefits from it. The teachers are excellent at leading — it is clear that the kids respect them.
- SACC is like family because we develop a strong bond with the SACC teachers and care about them.
- We have had incredible teachers who have gone above and beyond any expectations.

SACC also surveyed the principals of schools with SACC centers. Ninety-eight percent of the principals reported that the experiences provided in SACC support children’s learning.

In addition, 98 percent of the respondents consider SACC staff part of the school community. As one principal explained, “we have such a satisfying partnership that benefits our students and their families.” Principals also praised the professionalism of SACC staff, the safe environment ensured by SACC staff, and the invaluable service provided for families with students with disabilities.

LOS: Halfway Done!

As of last month, all Lines of Service teams that have Office for Children members have completed two of their four presentations to DFS Director **Nannette Bowler** and her senior staff.

In their first presentations, teams addressed the question, “Where we are now?” They reported on areas of excellence; programs and procedures; and obstacles to getting work done.

The second presentations answered the question, “Where do we want to go?” In this stage, teams examined critical issues revealed in stage one. An example of a critical issue is the need for better communication between program areas and with other county agencies. Work loads and technology were also frequently mentioned critical issues.

In stage three, teams will answer the question, “How are we going to get there?” Teams are now creating detailed action plans for addressing critical issues. These plans will be presented to DFS senior management beginning next month. You can read any team’s presentations; look for files on the “J” drive under DFS/Lines of Service.



Reasonable accommodations made upon request; call 703-324-7162 or TTY 711.

O F C Office for Children
An Early Childhood Education Agency



A Fairfax County, VA
Publication

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