



## Gail Duncan Retires

This month, after 30 years with the Office for Children, I.T. Manager **Gail Duncan** will retire from county employment.

Although a number of OFC staff have worked with Duncan for many years, no other coworker has known her longer than **Julie Mayock**.

**Mayock**, who works in OFC's School Age Child Care program, was in 5th grade when she first met **Duncan** back in 1969 or 1970. **Duncan** was **Mayock's** swimming teacher at Camp Mayfield.

Since then, **Duncan** has been a bus driver for the school system; a gymnastics and tennis instructor for the recreation department; and a lifeguard for the Park Authority. She joined OFC in 1981 as a SACC teacher at Garfield Elementary School.

"Some of the current regional supervisors had **Gail** as their supervisor when they were SACC teachers," says **Kathy Uhrich**, who, along with her fellow SACC Regional Supervisors

**Veronica Letsinger** and **Milton Whitfield**, worked with **Duncan** back in the '80s.

**Duncan** moved from SACC to the OFC director's office in 1999. Since 2000, she has headed OFC's I.T. efforts. Some of the projects **Duncan** has directed include:

- Launching OFC's public website and InfoWeb site;
- Launching OFC's interactive voice response system, which allows child care professionals to register for classes through an automated phone system;
- Launching SACC's personnel database;
- Launching the SEMS database, which combined SACC's registration and accounts receivable databases;
- Moving OFC programs from paper-based filing systems to Documentum, which allows staff to image, store and access forms and paperwork electronically;
- Launching an online application that allows child care professionals who care for children in the child care subsidy program to enter child care attendance records and claims for reimbursement online;
- Launching SACC's Parent Online system, which lets parents pay SACC bills, check their children's enrollment status, and view the information needed for child care tax deductions;
- Partnering with several county agencies to develop a video conferencing system that links the Pennino building with human services sites across the county and with state officials in Richmond;
- Heading OFC's "Going Green" efforts, which range from handling more paperwork electronically and buying recycled ink cartridges to printing exclusively on recycled paper;
- Launching the Minute Menu system, which allows child care professionals who participate in the USDA Food Program to track meals and snacks online;
- Providing data entry tablets to child care specialists so they can remotely enter data into the OFC information system during child care home inspections;
- Moving the Head Start data management system to a web-based application.

"I didn't do any of that alone," **Duncan** stresses. "I had fantastic people working with me."

**Duncan** is ending her tenure by launching a child care mobile app, and setting up a new child care management system.

"**Gail** has been a phenomenal asset to our management team," says OFC Director **Anne-Marie Twohie**. "We'll miss her depth of knowledge about OFC programs, and her can-do attitude."

## Betsi Closter Returns



Please welcome **Betsi Closter** back to the Office for Children! She has been reappointed to her position as OFC's School Readiness Coordinator.

**Closter** will have oversight of OFC'S

Virginia Preschool Initiative, the Institute for Early

Learning, the Employees' Child Care Center, and the northern region of the Infant and Toddler Specialist Network. She'll also head up the county's School Readiness Community Collaborative Council, which facilitates collaboration among community organizations, county agencies, public schools, families, and child care professionals to support young children's school readiness.

In addition, **Closter** will lead the county's Neighborhood School Readiness Team initiative. The teams are based in Fairfax County neighborhoods that have a large percentage of families with low incomes. The teams create a continuum that supports families as they prepare their children for school. This important initiative is a partnership among OFC, the public school system and Fairfax Futures.

## Nannette Walks a Mile in CCAR Shoes

**Kristen Nicklas** and **Mindy Beamer**, Child Care Specialists in the Child Care Assistance and Referral program, recently had a special colleague shadow them as they assisted a parent in the child care subsidy program.

As part of Department of Family Services Director **Nannette Bowler's** personal initiative to connect with employees by experiencing our work first-hand, Bowler joined Nicklas and Beamer in the Reston Regional Office.

"**Nannette** was able to observe the intake process of a family that walked into the Reston office to submit their annual recertification paperwork," **Beamer** said.

**Nicklas** explained: "When this family came into our program several years ago, their income was so low that it was under the federal poverty guidelines (\$18,312 for a family of 3). On the day **Nannette** was with us, the parent was submitting her annual paperwork and reported a change in employment and income. She had been hired by a county agency! One of the main goals for our program is to provide

quality child care in order to help families become self-sufficient. So it was very exciting for us to have Nannette see the success of our program. This parent is on her way to becoming self-sufficient and is very appreciative of our services."



**Kristen Nicklas** and **Mindy Beamer**



## Social-Emotional Training

The Office for Children partners with child care providers to help them prepare young children to succeed in school. Research shows that a key to children's future academic success is strong social and emotional skills.

"Family child care providers have a powerful role in fostering strong relationships and social-emotional well-being in children," says OFC's Virginia Preschool Initiative Director **Carol Osborn**.

The way child care providers interact with children can help children feel good about themselves, interact positively with others, and express emotions appropriately. Having these skills allows children to start school better able to pay attention to teachers, follow simple instructions, try new things and solve problems.

**"Family child care providers have a powerful role in fostering strong relationships and social-emotional well-being in children,"**

**Osborn** recently presented a workshop on social-emotional development to child care specialists in the Community Education and Provider Services program. CEPS specialists visit family child care homes as part of the permit process, and also to monitor providers who participate in the USDA Food Program. The home visits give specialists a chance to offer practical guidance to child care providers to help them enhance their program's quality of care.

"We want children's social-emotional development to be supported and enhanced by their relationship with their child care provider," explains CEPS Director **Catherine Sauer**.

# New Year, New Focus

The Office for Children's Institute for Early Learning will offer a number of new classes to child care professionals this fall.

"Mother Nature's Child: Growing Outdoors in the Media Age," will explore strategies for helping children of all ages learn to love being outdoors.

"Outdoor play benefits children in a wide variety of ways, so we encourage child care professionals to include it in their programs as much as possible," says IFEL Director **Karen Quist**.

According to a CNN report, 70 percent of U.S. children are deficient in vitamin D. Playing outdoors helps the body make vitamin D, which is necessary for healthy bones and controlling blood pressure. In addition, outdoor play helps fight childhood obesity by allowing children to run, jump, crawl, climb and engage in other vigorous physical activity.

**Quist** adds, "Playing outside helps satisfy children's natural curiosity, contributes to their understanding of the world we live in, and helps them develop an appreciation for the environment."

IFEL's annual professional development day, which will be held at the Government Center October 29, will allow child care professionals to earn six hours of training credit in one day while attending new workshops such as, "Discover Math and Science Using Children's Picture Books," and "Designers in the Making: Building With School-Age Children."

Other new IFEL courses include "Art and the School-Age Child" presented by School Age Child Care Regional Supervisor **Kathy Uhrich**, "School Age Literacy and Print Awareness" presented by SACC RS **Hemlata Bargoti**, and three new Wolf Trap workshops: "Did You Hear It? Learning the Science of Sounds," "A Zoom in



the Room: Using Puppetry to Reach and Teach the Highly Active Child," and "Agoo Amee: Engaging Young Children in Call-and-Response Experiences."



## Child Care App for Mobile Phones

Fairfax County residents can now search for child care on their mobile phones. The Office for Children's new mobile app allows families to find child care providers with a county permit or state license, and child care centers, near their home, work site or children's school.

Users can tap the screen showing the child care program's phone number, and their mobile device will auto-dial that number. The app also allows users to touch the child care program's address on the screen and retrieve directions to the address through Google Maps. A future release will show child care programs on a map that are within a certain radius of the user's ZIP code.