

Children's Planning Council Meeting

November 15, 2006

9:30 a.m.

Room 140, Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles, California

Present: Victoria Lewis Adams, representing Steve Cooley
Bettye Anderson
Charles Avila
Lauraine Barber
Lisa Garrett, representing Philip Browning
Angela Carter, representing Trish Ploehn
Samuel Q. Chan, representing Marv Southard
Priscilla Charles-Carter
Rabbi Bernard Cohen
Deborah Davies
Lupe Delgado, representing Darline Robles
Nancy Diaz, representing Bryce Yokomizo
Jeff Farber
Dorothy Fleisher
David W. Fleming
Chris Floyd
Cynthia Harding, representing Bruce Chernof
Larry Lue
Jacquelyn McCroskey
Jennifer Morrison, representing Russ Guiney
José Ramos, Jr.
Marsha Ramos
Lisa Cleri Reale
Lari Sheehan, representing David Janssen
Nina Aguayo Sorokin
Anita Vigil, representing Robert Taylor
Sharon G. Watson
Phillip L. Williams
Tony Zepeda

In place of Chair Zev Yaroslavsky, David Fleming brought the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. and asked that Council members and the audience introduce themselves.

Approval of the Minutes of September 20, 2006

The minutes of September 20, 2006, as mailed, were approved by acclamation.

Chair's Report: David Fleming for Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky

At this last Council meeting for 2006, Fleming acknowledged the hard work of everyone throughout the year, and highlighted some of the organization's accomplishments. (A full list was included in member packets.) The Council has:

- Released a report commissioned by the Board of Supervisors on the juvenile justice system
- In partnership with the Chief Administrative Office, developed the Family Economic Success plan framework for Los Angeles County
- Coordinated a second successful countywide Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaign, after final results for the 2005 EITC campaign indicated that 29,000 new filers had claimed the credit during that tax season (the goal was 20,000); the Board of Supervisors has approved a third year of funding for the 2007 tax season campaign
- Published the 2006 Children's ScoreCard, raising poverty as a key issue; the ScoreCard received wide news coverage through a successful press conference and media briefing
- Held the 15-Year Anniversary Celebration, which over 400 stakeholders attended
- Co-sponsored a parent organizing network conference with the Asian Pacific American Legal Center
- Worked with supervisors Knabe and Yaroslavsky to draft the Los Angeles County prevention motion

In addition:

- The SPA/AIC Councils co-sponsored (with the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission) a countywide youth summit attended by over 400 youth, focusing on developing leadership skills for young people to help improve conditions in their communities.
- The SPA/AIC Councils support over 60 neighborhood action networks throughout the county.

Nominating Committee Recommendations: Rabbi Bernard Cohen

After thanking chief executive officer Yolie Flores Aguilar for her leadership in the Council's accomplishments, Rabbi Cohen reminded members that the Council had appointed a Nominating Committee on September 20 to develop a slate for the coming year's Executive Committee.

As it prepares that slate, the Nominating Committee's charge is to review the qualifications of prospective Executive Committee members, keeping in mind that body's overall desired composition. Specifically, the group was charged with considering the following factors:

- Opening up opportunities for new leadership
- Preserving some existing leadership for purposes of continuity
- Ensuring diverse representation, both ethnically and geographically

- Recommending representatives with connections and perspectives that are essential to key elements of the Council's new strategic plan

The Committee met on October 25 to develop its recommendations. Prior to considering the slate, however, the Committee discussed needed changes to the composition of the Executive Committee, as suggested by its current members. These changes are intended to reflect the current and emerging structure of the Council—moving for the most part from standing to ad hoc committees—and its increasing focus on community-building efforts. They will also, Cohen said, allow a larger circle of people to give input on decisions.

Upon the recommendation of the 2006 Nominating Committee, **Rabbi Bernard Cohen moved that the composition of the Executive Committee be amended as follows:**

- **Organizational/Constituency category—3 slots (*previously 2 slots*)**
- **Public Member category—3 slots (*previously 2 slots*)**
- **Community Member category—4 slots, including one slot for the chair of the Strengthening Community Capacity Committee (*previously 2 slots*)**
- **Board appointee—1 slot (*no change*)**
- **Foundation Board representative—1 slot for an individual appointed by the board of The Children's Planning Council Foundation, Inc. (*no change*)**
- **Ad-hoc committee ex-officio members (*previously 4 slots for standing committee chairs*)**

Phillip L. Williams seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Cohen then moved that the proposed Executive Committee slate be approved:

- **Organizational/Constituency category**
 - ✓ **Dorothy Fleisher, Southern California Grantmakers**
 - ✓ **Duane Dennis, Policy Roundtable for Child Care**
 - ✓ **Lisa Cleri Reale, United Way Board of Directors**
- **Public Member category**
 - ✓ **Cindy Harding, Department of Health Services**
 - ✓ **Trish Ploehn, Department of Children and Family Services**
 - ✓ **Marsha Ramos, League of California Cities**
- **Community Member category**
 - ✓ **Deborah Davies, SPA 2 Council**
 - ✓ **Jeff Farber, SPA 7 Council (and SCC chair)**
 - ✓ **Larry Lue, Asian/Pacific Islander community**
 - ✓ **José Ramos, SPA 4 Council**

- **Board Appointee—Chris Floyd, Second Supervisorial District**
- **Foundation Board representative—to be selected by the Foundation Board**

Sharon G. Watson seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

Cohen thanked the members of the Nominating Committee for their efforts:

- Duane Dennis
- Dorothy Fleisher
- Cynthia Harding
- José Ramos
- Sharon Watson
- Yolie Flores Aguilar
- Wendy Aron, Third District children's deputy

Flores Aguilar expressed appreciation to the outgoing members of the Executive Committee, who have served for two years—Beatriz Olvera Stotzer, Danny Ramos, Cheryl Branch, Colleen Mooney, Jacquelyn McCroskey, and Bryce Yokomizo, Sara McSweyn, Elisa Nicholas—and to those members who are continuing: Dorothy Fleisher, Cindy Harding, and Sam Chan.

Report on 15-Year Anniversary Celebration: Dan Hutson

The Council's fifteenth anniversary celebration took place at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels on October 19, with more than 400 people attending. The 2006 Children's ScoreCard was released, and a semi-final version of the new Children's Planning Council video was screened. Following that, the 64 parent/youth/resident networks that are active throughout the county were recognized, and the first Leading Boldly awards were presented to 15 individuals.

The next day, a press conference on the Children's ScoreCard got excellent turnout from media representatives. Its findings were covered by numerous major newspaper, television, and radio outlets, as well as a wide range of Internet blogs and news sites. (Copies of newspaper articles were included in member packets.) Hutson will be meeting with various editorial boards to continue to keep alive the issues raised by the ScoreCard analysis. After congratulating everyone on the success of the ScoreCard release and the anniversary event, David Fleming apologized for neglecting to mention in his remarks that day a very important person to the Children's Planning Council—Sharon Watson, its founding executive director, who expressed her pride at being involved with the organization.

Chief Executive Officer's Report: Yolie Flores Aguilar

- Flores Aguilar thanked everyone who contributed to the list of 2006 accomplishments included in member packets, expressing particular appreciation to Supervisor Yaroslavsky and his children's deputy, Wendy Aron, for their leadership. None of the Council's achievements would have been possible without their involvement. Aron is moving to Arizona in the near future, and Flores Aguilar will present a farewell gift to her on the Council's behalf.

- Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke will serve as chair of the Council next year, prior to her retirement from the Board of Supervisors in 2008. The new Executive Committee will host a briefing for her in January.
- A list of meeting dates for 2007 was included in member packets, and attendees were encouraged to note them on their calendars.
- Dr. Tom Klitzner, the Children's Planning Council's representative to L.A. Care, will make a presentation at the Council's January meeting.
- Flores Aguilar welcomed Charles Avila, newly elected convener for the SPA 1 Council, to his first Children's Planning Council meeting.
- On December 7, the presidents and vice presidents of three of the Council's primary funders—the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Marguerite Casey Foundation, and The California Endowment—will meet in Los Angeles to talk about the Children's Planning Council's role as a leading collaborative, the lessons it has learned, and the best practices it has established. They will invite other foundation and community leaders to attend (Evelyn Martinez from First 5 LA, for example, and the people behind the Council's Wellspring grant), and some Council members will also be asked to be part of this gathering.

The meeting's impetus came from conversations with Judy Spiegel, the interim president of Southern California Grantmakers, and activist Torie Osborne. When they learned of the unique partnerships being forged by the Council, they were astonished at the culture change inherent in its work, calling the Council one of the best-kept secrets in Los Angeles and insisting that its efforts be more widely broadcast.

- On December 8, Laura Valles is arranging a consultative session with 29 people from around the country to share research and hear feedback on the Council's curriculum for Latino parents with children ages birth to five years, which will offer training in parenting and leadership skills so these parents can become advocates for their children.
- As Council members were informed via e-mail earlier in the week, Yolie Flores Aguilar has decided to run for the Los Angeles Unified School District's board of education. The Council's Foundation Board has been very supportive both of her decision and of her intention to ensure that the integrity of the Council is preserved. Foundation Board members will discuss her plan in detail at their meeting later this month.

Presentation of 2006 Children's ScoreCard: Jacquelyn McCroskey, DSW

This year's ScoreCard is the seventh in a series dating back to 1994, and includes both quantitative data on indicators within the five outcome areas adopted by Los Angeles County—good health, safety and survival, economic well-being, social and emotional well-being, and education/workforce readiness—as well as qualitative issues raised by parents, youth, and residents at the 2005 community forums held by the SPA/AIC Councils. Measurable indicators can change from year to year, and not everything of importance is being tracked, but the ScoreCard's intent is to study trends over time and to balance empirical data with what's significant to people in their daily lives. Data is broken out by geographic region so that SPA Councils can use the

information in their workplans, and is also disaggregated by racial/ethnic group, even though in many cases that data is only beginning to be collected effectively. McCroskey thanked consultant Becki Nadybal and everyone involved in the ScoreCard's production, emphasizing that the Children's Planning Council does not collect any of this data, but instead relies on organizations and people who do.

Four major findings became evident as the data was analyzed:

- **Poverty rates are on the rise.**
 - Almost half the children in Los Angeles County live in poor families, with about a quarter living in extreme poverty (an annual income of about \$20,000 for a family of four).
 - Almost 64 percent of Latino children and 59 percent of African-American children live in low-income families, compared to 16.5 percent of white children.
 - Data highlights the link between economic well-being and well-being in other outcome areas.
- **About one in every four indicators is moving in a negative direction.**
 - High school graduation rates have been declining since 2002 (even though the method by which they are calculated is increasingly felt to underestimate rates dramatically).
 - Low-weight births have been increasing since 2000.
- **Countywide averages mask significant differences among communities;** data on racial/ethnic and geographic disparities are one of the most important parts of this report.
- **Progress is being made on many indicators of child well-being.**
 - The percentage of children with health insurance has increased from 85 to 92 percent.
 - The percentage of children in foster care is down by 28 percent.

McCroskey commented that the Federal definition of 'poverty' is based on calculations made in the 1960s from the cost of a market basket of food. Food then was determined to be one-third of a family's expenditures—an assumption leading to malnutrition these days, some studies have shown. Three-quarters of the county's children live in families with incomes under 300 percent of the Federal poverty level (\$60,000 for a family of four) and struggle with Los Angeles's high cost of living.

With regard to **living** conditions, communities say:

- Access to jobs that pay a living wage is inadequate; parents must often work multiple jobs and thus sacrifice time with their children.
- High living costs, coupled with low-paying jobs, often result in families being forced to make trade-offs.
- The lack of affordable housing affects families and children greatly, often causing them to move to unsafe areas.

The data agrees:

- The cost of living in Los Angeles County has increased by more than 40 percent since 1999.

- The hourly wage needed to meet basic living expenses for a family of four, with two working parents, increased 22.6 percent between 2001 and 2005, while the median wage increased just 10.5 percent.
- The median sales price for single-family homes increased almost 120 percent over five years, with only 14 percent of households able to afford a home purchase in 2005.

With regard to **learning** and education, communities say:

- Not enough early learning programs and subsidized child care slots exist.
- Children face numerous challenges in school:
 - ✓ Large class sizes with overwhelmed teachers who are unable to attend to individual student needs
 - ✓ Not enough academic counselors
 - ✓ Outdated computers and textbooks
 - ✓ Concerns about violence, access to drugs, and not feeling safe on campus
- Parents want to be involved in their children's education but feel impeded in doing so.

The data agrees:

- Child care supply continues to fall short of demand, with the greatest shortfall of licensed child care in SPA 7.
- On the positive side, nine out of every ten teachers are now fully credentialed.
- However, teachers in Los Angeles County are often responsible for at least 35 percent more students than the national average, and academic counselors are responsible for almost twice as many students as the recommended ratio of 250 to 1.

With regard to healthy **growth**, communities say:

- Residents are united in their concerns about insufficient parks and open spaces where children can play. Parks are scarcest where living arrangements are most dense.
- Residents have expressed a need for more recreation and sports programs for youth.
- More social gatherings are needed to bring communities together and foster relationship-building.
- Not enough supports for families exist, such as parenting classes and parent centers.

The data agrees:

- Almost two out of every three children in Los Angeles County live outside walking distance (a quarter of a mile) of a park.
- On the positive side, two-thirds of children ages 6 to 17 years participate in organized sports, with American Indian children having the highest participation rate among racial/ethnic groups.
- Latino families have the greatest difficulty in obtaining parenting advice—70 percent compared to almost 85 percent or higher for all other major racial/ethnic groups.

The Children's Planning Council can **move to action** on some of these issues by:

- Implementing its Family Economic Success plan, which includes economic and workforce opportunities, asset-building and -leveraging, and access to public benefits
- Expanding its educational reform agenda to include a focus on the health, social, emotional, and safety needs of children
- Working with Probation, law enforcement, and their partners to develop community-based alternatives for youth that prevent their entry and re-entry into the juvenile justice system
- Providing leadership on the emerging agenda around prevention being enabled by the Title IV-E waiver dollars

Lisa Cleri Reale said that United Way is taking on education as a spotlight issue over the next five years, focusing on the transition from middle to high school in grades 6 through 10. Between 72 and 74 percent of African-American and Latino students drop out between ninth and tenth grades, she said, and United Way's assumption is that they are being ill-prepared to enter high school. With better support in middle school and during that transition, drop-out rates should decrease. Parents, too, need help in understanding resources for college, and what classes their children should be taking to prepare. United Way's plan will be available in January.

David Fleming thanked McCroskey for the ScoreCard report, stressing the link between education and the eradication of poverty. When half the students in high school don't graduate, he asked, what are their chances in life? High-paying jobs are available, but many youth are not qualified to hold them because of their lack of basic knowledge and skills. Fleming is particularly glad that Flores Aguilar will bring to her school board candidacy not just a 'siloed' attitude about education, but an awareness of the array of issues involved for parents, families, students, teachers, and principals. The Metropolitan Transit Authority, on whose board Fleming sits, is talking about creating millions of jobs in goods movement—high-paying jobs, with full benefits. "Employment is waiting for people with the background and the ability and the training in this digital world," Fleming said, "but unless we do something about the school system, society won't be in a position to address poverty. To solve the problems that the ScoreCard so vividly describes, we need to start with kids and education."

José Ramos asked about continuing and improving data input from the community, perhaps by holding regular community forums. McCroskey praised the idea, but cautioned that it came with a price tag. Prior to the hiring of Becki Nadybal as data manager, the ScoreCards were essentially produced for free, with the goodwill and cooperation of departments and individuals who felt that data was vital in driving planning. Changing the Children's Planning Council's role so that it actually collects qualitative data on a regular basis would require preparation and investment. A suggestion from the audience about creating partnerships with local colleges, universities, and organizational consultants to use student research projects to obtain data was greeted with interest, and Flores Aguilar encouraged a discussion about investing in community action research.

Remarking on the business 'silo' in many communities, Jeff Farber suggested that business leaders step forward to help build relationships between neighborhood residents and businesses. "At-

risk kids know nothing about the businesses in their neighborhoods," he said, "and don't see any signs of hiring there." As next year's chair of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Fleming will encourage that idea. He already serves as president of Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), which shepherds kindergartners through the K-12 system with mentoring and support so they will go to college, along with a \$6,000 college scholarship. "Business has a deep role in what goes on in the community," Fleming said.

Tony Zepeda promoted a look at prevention in broad terms, enhancing community-based work so that parents encourage their children to stay in school, rather than asking them to drop out to help support the family at a low-paying job. Phillip Williams mentioned the Los Angeles Chamber's UNITE-LA program, of which he is a founder, a vehicle that facilitates education and workforce development programs, cash for college, and other efforts. "We have a platform that's already working," Williams said. "We should explore that, and do it fast." Colleen Mooney related the SPA 8 Council's experience with the major refinery in that area, which has formed a partnership with the local community college to create an educational track that not only supplies its need for skilled workers, but also offers employee 'soft skills'—family supports, relationship-building, personal connections, and finding out where people's interests lie.

Larry Lue emphasized the importance of real jobs at the end of training programs, and of communities gaining the 'soft skills' needed to understand the culture of work. In the Asian/Pacific Islander communities, not having English skills can be a barrier to job training, and even with a translator, parents often don't have the cultural understanding needed about how schools work, for instance, to fully support their children's education. Lue hopes that the prevention initiative and the Title IV-E waiver can help address those language gaps.

Flores Aguilar proposed that a small group come together to discuss the issues in the ScoreCard that most resonate with people, the policy recommendations that might stem from them, and which issues individuals might be personally willing to work on. Council members agreed.

Community Building

Strengthening Community Capacity Committee chair Colleen Mooney introduced the Children's Planning Council video, which summarizes the organization's history and explains the asset-based community development framework being used by the geographically based SPA Councils and the countywide American Indian Children's Council in their work with parents, residents, and youth. Unlike issues-based organizing, this approach focuses on the gifts and assets within a community and on building relationships among people. Specific issues might change, but the group and its leadership becomes embedded in the community.

Examples of action taken include neighborhood clean-ups, building bridges between law enforcement and at-risk youth, ensuring the safety of students crossing a busy freeway entrance, working with city officials to establish a neighborhood pocket park, creating a shuttle service so students have transportation to after-school activities, affecting education policy at the local and state level, and co-hosting a youth summit where nearly 500 young people from around the county expanded their leadership skills. In the video, Chair Yaroslavsky is quoted as saying that, "The Children's Planning Council has had a profound impact on the way the county handles children's and family issues. It has reached out to real people who are affected by our policies, so we can base our decision-making on data—less politics, and more facts. The road is long and

sometimes winding, but we see hope in our ability to come together and in the progress we have made. More is needed, and that's why we're here."

Mooney went on to say that the SPA/AIC Councils believe that change happens not because institutional systems alter, but because civic society shifts. These shifts—which take a major commitment of time, resources, and people—are achieved by an investment in neighborhoods and informal groups of people who choose to work on something important to their communities. Three interrelated components exist within the process: building groups, sustaining groups, and moving groups to action, with people working on projects that make a difference and that they have control over, start to finish.

With regard to **building groups**, the underlying issue in SPA 8 has always been school readiness, a broad-based concern that brings together people who care about children and families and about what's happening in their communities. Kathy Cesarz, an organizer in that area, said that the SPA Council partners with schools and Head Starts, cementing relationships with staff who can identify parents that might want to be more involved in their children's education. A seven-meeting parent curriculum includes watching and discussing a video on school readiness, practicing activities they can do at home with their children, listing assets ('gifts of the hand, heart, and head') they might bring to the neighborhood, talking about power and what it means to be part of a community, and finally deciding on a community project they want to undertake. The SPA 8 Council has also developed a curriculum for forming youth groups, and has tapped into different communities to establish five strong groups at various schools in the area.

Cynthia Perez-Robledo, coordinator for the SPA 7 Council, reviewed the parent workshops and forums held in different areas of that SPA, including the training curricula developed with MALDEF (the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) that focuses first on families and then on organizing. (One training, for instance, gives parents the skills to help get their children to college.) Four SPA 7 subgroups exist in East Los Angeles, as well as those in Downey, Huntington Park, and Whittier. Parents are teaching the MALDEF curricula at various schools up to the high school level, and are obtaining funding for high school tutoring.

According to SPA 4 Council coordinator Celestina Castillo, the six parent networks in that region began with 'knowing circles,' a concept coined by long-time Children's Planning Council consultant John Ott. Because institutions need to support parent organizing and engagement, they are asked to provide meeting space, a staff person to facilitate the gathering, and possibly child care. Parents, however, set the meeting agenda. One group that began in partnership with Children's Bureau, Inc., first involved only parents from that organization's programs, but grew to engage over 100 people within a one-mile radius of the agency. Children's Bureau brought in a trainer to help do a community assessment, and found that many people were concerned about the lack of local places for their children to play. In June 2003, the group decided to establish a local pocket park, which—thanks both to the group's persistence and the agency's connections with city officials—opened in 2006. Another SPA 4 group, in Highland Park, began by assembling information on transportation, education, immigration, and other issues, and by using a 'community organizing and family issues' curriculum to teach basic organizing skills, identify common values, and select a project to work on. Several other groups have used the same tool, while others—parents in Cypress Park with special-needs children, for instance—have come to the council and asked for help.

In SPA 2, said council coordinator Michelle Almanza, three community action groups were formed as a result of the 2005 community forums, while another three grew out of relationships built on the SPA Council itself. Convener Deborah Davies said that concerns voiced in SPA 2 about safety, gangs, and violence in the community led to a collaboration between Probation, the city and county human relations commissions, Grant High School, and other community organizations, which leverages multiple resources to address neighborhood issues. Groups must be formed and run by the community, she said, to sustain themselves.

With regard to **sustaining groups**, Tony Zepeda from the SPA 6 Council expanded on that region's youth activities with the Los Angeles Police Department. "Youth don't want to have just a single basketball game," he said. "They need resources. They need partnerships." Since lack of money tends to be an issue, the next-best thing is resources—and asking to use an agency's space can open the door to working more closely with that organization. Getting people to show up for events can also be difficult, Zepeda said, and the presence of someone from a governmental body can make a huge difference.

Chrissie Castro, coordinator for the American Indian Children's Council, sees sustaining groups as similar to horticulture—as with plants, each group is different, needing varying amounts and types of attention. The AICC created three groups from scratch, and is also connected to four that were already in existence. Each requires a different approach. As Castro provides trainings to new groups, she often thinks of her own volunteer experiences. "Why do you stay active in a given group?" she asked. "You may enjoy the meetings, even though you don't feel that it's moving forward. Or you feel that it's worthwhile, but the meetings are just too far away to be convenient. What makes an individual commit to participating in a group?"

Dick Pancost from SPA 5 stressed the importance of connecting action to community input. In his region, organizers found that 'community safety' meant not just a law-enforcement emphasis on neighborhood violence, but the proper child-proofing of homes and where residents can safely dispose of hazardous items. Pancost also emphasized the value of linking governmental departments and their representatives, giving them time to get to know one another and ask questions. He congratulated the Children's Planning Council on its fifteenth anniversary, and expressed appreciation for the building blocks and partnerships it offers.

With regard to **moving groups to action**, SPA 3 Council coordinator Mark Masaoka put forward the idea that community projects must be inseparable from the process of building the community. When a group gains a better understanding of the systems involved and a better sense of its own strength, taking up a plan of action is a big step forward. The student shuttle service shown in the video stemmed from a MALDEF class that asked parents for their short-term and long-term visions for families in their community, and explored role-playing exercises to get them comfortable approaching community and governmental officials. The parents in that group felt strongly that their children's access to community enrichment programs was important, and they came up with the shuttle idea, developed a route, built allies for the program, and got the Claremont Unified School District to fund it. In moving all its groups to action, the SPA 3 Council fosters three concepts: getting a sense of a strong community interest (to discern what people want to do); getting a sense that parents have the strength, competence, and skills to approach the officials involved; and getting a sense of group's process, identity, and confidence in each other (so they can effectively function together).

José Ramos from SPA 4 said that each interrelated stage—building groups, sustaining, them, and moving them to action—depends solidly on relationships, and each one is different. “How long do relationships take to build?” he asked. “What does it take to do this? We can estimate what the financial cost is, but what are the other costs?”

Jeff Farber from SPA 7 sees *resources* as the flip side of the *relationships* concept. “Organizations in the community need to be part of our relationships, and support our work with their resources—opening the doors of their buildings so people can meet, working with us to create bonds across the service mentality. Parents who come to my agency for parenting classes,” he said, “are the same parents who have kids who need to feel safe in school.” The SPA 7 Council is committed to building resources to which a dollar amount can't necessarily be attributed. “The relationships and intangible support we have from the county and its funding partners,” Farber said, “those are what we capitalize on to take our work to the next level and really sustain it.”

Colleen Mooney noted that the original plan for this meeting had been to identify in small groups the issues from this discussion that most resonated with people, the policy recommendations that might spring from them, and which issues individuals might be personally willing to work on. In the interests of time, that exercise will be postponed, but Mooney asked that attendees complete and hand in the slips of paper asking those questions, and that a concrete conversation about partnerships be scheduled for the January meeting. Chrissie Castro sees that exchange as a preface to the SPA/AIC Councils talking about their workplans, going deeper than a superficial framework. “We all have neighborhood networks in common,” she said, “and we want to devote our time to what makes them work.”

LACountyHelps!: Connie Sullivan

Connie Sullivan from the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Branch briefly reviewed LACountyHelps!, a website (<http://www.lacountyhelps.org>) designed to provide simple, anonymous access to information about health and human service programs and eligibility based on individual or family circumstances. At present, it is available only in English and Spanish, but expansions into Armenian, Russian, Cambodian, and other languages are planned. Its user-friendly design is based on OregonHelps, an award-winning model that has been successfully implemented in three states—Arizona, New Jersey, and Oregon—with very positive feedback from users.

Once users complete a brief online questionnaire about their household (number of members, income, disabilities if any, etc.), a results page displays a brief description of programs for which they may be eligible, along with instructions on how to apply, any required documentation, the necessary forms, contact information, and office locations (with driving directions). The website can be used by Los Angeles County residents as well as county departments and community-based organizations assisting individuals and families who are searching for services. The first phase of the website implementation accesses 26 health and human services programs—including CalWORKs, the Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI), the Child Health and Disability Prevention Program, Community and Senior Services, Children and Family Services, food stamps, general relief, In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, Healthy Kids, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Women, Infant and Children services (WIC)—while future phases will add further programs and services, and enhance the website's

functionality. Sullivan offered a live demonstration to the SPA/AIC Councils and to any other interested organizations.

Dick Pancost, who served for five years on the group that helped develop the site, expressed appreciation for the work done by departments and the Service Integration Branch to implement it. Recalling consultant Margaret Dunkle's 'spaghetti chart' that graphically showed how incomprehensible accessing county services can be, Phillip Williams praised the LACountyHelps! website as "terrific." Access has been a problem for years, and was one of the reasons the Children's Planning Council was formed to begin with. The website underscores an experience families often have if they believe they might qualify for services, Flores Aguilar said, when they finally arrive at the correct department or agency only to be told that they didn't bring the right documents with them. With the website, families will know in advance exactly what information will be needed. "We still have a ways to go before we get to 'one-stop shopping,'" she said, "but this will certainly minimize the back-and-forth that families have been burdened with." County caseworkers will also benefit, an audience member remarked, when they use the website to find out their clients' eligibility and are able to provide a higher level of referrals. "Now I'll know what resources are out there for my client," she said.

Flores Aguilar thanked Sullivan for her presentation, and the Chief Administrative Office and everyone involved in developing the LACountyHelps! website.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Children's Planning Council is scheduled for:

Wednesday, January 17, 2007
9:30 a.m.
Room 140, Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles

There being no public comment, the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.