



# Report to the Community

Issue 1, October 2015

## Best-Practice Spotlight

### **HOMEBUILDERS®: Intensive Support Keeps Children Out of Foster Care Safely**

In a major move to keep more families together safely, District child welfare social workers have gained a powerful tool for family crisis intervention that lessens the need to remove children from home. **HOMEBUILDERS®** is a nationally recognized, evidence-based model for providing intensive, short-term services that help parents address the issues that are putting their children at risk of entering foster care.

With funding from the DC Child and Family Services Agency, the East River Family Support Collaborative (Ward 7), in partnership with Catholic Charities, is the first District provider to offer the **HOMEBUILDERS®** approach. Trained therapists with small caseloads are available to families around the clock to:

- Spend eight to 10 hours a week working with the family in their home. This includes being on call to the family 24/7 for emergencies.
- Assess the family's needs—both adults and children—and work with them to build on their strengths to develop and follow a safety plan.
- Identify and link the family to appropriate community resources based on their needs and encourage and support parents as they work on their issues.
- Stay involved with the family for an average of four weeks—or more, if necessary.

CFSA social workers can refer families for this intensive intervention 24/7 by following instructions posted for them on the [CFSA website](#). This summer, one such referral made a tremendous difference for a large and struggling District family.

#### **With Timely Help, a Family Pulls Through Together**



Terra Martin (second right, back row) and her children faced and overcame a crisis while staying together with intensive help from the community-based HOMEBUILDERS® program.

Reports of numerous serious difficulties prompted CFSA to refer Terra Martin to **HOMEBUILDERS®**. Martin and eight of her 10 children were living with her boyfriend and his grandfather in a two-bedroom apartment. Life in the home had become volatile. Police responded to a fight and arrested Martin and her boyfriend.

In her first **HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup> meeting, Martin attempted to share the family's history and concerns over constant interruptions from her boyfriend. Due to the lack of privacy and need for a cooling-down period, the **HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup> therapist rescheduled the meeting for the next day. But within an hour, Martin called the therapist to say the situation was getting worse and she really needed to find other housing. The therapist and Martin developed a plan for de-escalating the immediate situation to keep the family safe. However, Martin called again around 1 a.m. stating that her boyfriend was still ranting. Remaining on the phone with Martin for the next two hours, the therapist managed to keep Martin calm. She offered to explain Martin's situation to the police when Martin's boyfriend called them twice to have the family leave immediately.

After a sleepless night, the Martin family left the apartment and met with the therapist. A number of interventions helped them move from crisis to stability.

- The **HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup> therapist connected Martin to local resources for women facing domestic violence, and CFSA worked to get the family into a local shelter. While it is never easy to find space for large families on short notice, CFSA got the Martins into a shelter that same day.
- For a month, the therapist spent eight to 10 hours a week observing and working with the family. She looked at how the children interacted with each other and with their mom. Although one of the reports to CFSA about the family had been "unsupervised teens," the therapist found quite the opposite. The family was always together, and Terra Martin was very protective. The therapist talked with her about how to compromise with older children and what activities were really appropriate for teens.
- The children had a habit of physically fighting among themselves and with other children. The therapist modelled for Martin, and then supported her in using and enforcing, disciplinary tactics such as time out. She also helped the children resolve differences through talking. Although some of the children were very young, the therapist got them to

discuss changes they wanted for their family. The children eventually understood their family could fall apart unless they worked together to get along. This helped them to accept and participate in other helping services they needed. With the therapist's support, Martin tapped male members of her extended family to mentor her boys.

- After a month, the therapist recommended that the Martin family remain in **HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup>

for an additional two weeks. Her concerns were that they were still living in the shelter, and one of the boys was hospitalized after a violent

tantrum at school. One solution was to connect the family to the Child and Adolescent Mobile Psychiatric Service (ChAMPS), a stabilization service that makes house calls to families with children experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis. CFSA has a contract for this service with Catholic Charities.



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In the end, the collective efforts of the Martin family, **HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup> therapist, CFSA social worker, and others on the service team paid off. The Martin family journey continues, but reflecting on her family's success in the program, Terra Martin says, "**HOMEBUILDERS**<sup>®</sup> taught me goals for how to deal with multiple kids at one time. Kids are unique in their own way. What worked for four of my kids didn't work for three of my kids. Everybody gets disciplined different and rewarded different."

Today, the Martin children are doing well in school, and the family is living in stable housing. Terra Martin has completed her associate's degree in paralegal studies,



creating a pathway to a brighter future for her family.

## A New Direction in Child Welfare

by Debra Porchia-Usher, Deputy Director, CFSA Community Partnerships

The success story you’ve just read is about one of more than a dozen new services CFSA has launched so far to increase support for District families. Once upon a time, District child welfare removed children at a very high rate. Today, we’re writing a very different story, and it’s all about strengthening families.

CFSA Caseload	September		
	2009	2015	Trend
Children served at home	49%	60%	↑
Children in foster care	51%	40%	↓

About three years ago, the DC Child and Family Services Agency began consistently seeking relatives as the first resource for children who had to leave home to be safe—and also working to keep parents and children together safely whenever possible. As a result, our caseload split of serving children at home versus in foster care, which had hovered around 50-50 since 2009, began shifting and is at 60-40 today. Children grow up best in their own families and communities, so why not do all we can to help their parents keep them safe?

### Changing Community Needs

To meet this goal, the District must have effective services that help parents before, as well as after, they reach the crisis point. That is why CFSA is intentionally transforming the local child welfare system long geared for foster care to one that is very good at supporting and strengthening families. Under a robust strategy we call Safe and Stable Families, we are working with

community partners to increase investment in preventing child abuse and helping families keep their children safe without entering foster care.

### A Stronger, More Nuanced Safety Net

Imagine a robust local safety net composed of a network of public and community-based organizations providing proven preventive and supportive services for families. Help ranges from one-time or short-term supports to long-term, intensive assistance depending on family needs. This help is available in neighborhoods throughout the city. Families all over town can tap friendly, effective services in the communities where they live before they get overwhelmed and in crisis.

### Community Capacity

In the 1990s, the District established a unique local network of neighborhood-based providers known as the **Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives**. These valuable resources serve thousands of District families, children, and youth each year. Under Safe and Stable Families, CFSA is enhancing our long-time partnership with the Collaboratives as they evolve into community service “hubs.” In this role, the Collaboratives serve as primary coordinators of existing and new community-based services in their target neighborhoods. They are pursuing development and expansion opportunities that have the potential to benefit their communities for years to come.

Along with more than 30 states, the District is fortunate to have gained approval to participate in the child welfare **IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project**. It gives us the flexibility to use funds formerly earmarked for foster care to test innovative approaches to preventing child abuse and strengthening families. I’m pleased to share how new services, such as **HOMEBUILDERS®**, are making a difference and look forward to many more improved outcomes for children and families under Safe and Stable Families.

For more information about Safe and Stable families, contact Dr. Ruby Nelson, program manager, CFSA Community Partnerships Administration, 202-727-5702, [ruby.nelson@dc.gov](mailto:ruby.nelson@dc.gov).



### **Collaborative Solutions for Communities**

1816 12th Street, NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20009  
202-518-6737 • [www.wearecsc.org](http://www.wearecsc.org)



### **East River Family Support Collaborative**

3917 Minnesota Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20019  
202-397-7300 • [www.erfsc.org](http://www.erfsc.org)



### **Edgewood Brookland Family Support Collaborative**

200 K Street, NW, Suites 1 and 3, Washington, DC 20001  
202-832-9400 • [www.ebfsc.org](http://www.ebfsc.org)



### **Far Southeast Family Strengthening Collaborative**

2041 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE, Suite 304,  
Washington, DC 20020  
202-889-1425 • [www.fsfsc.org](http://www.fsfsc.org)



### **Georgia Avenue Family Support Collaborative**

4420 Georgia Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20011  
202-727-1815 • [www.gafsc-dc.org](http://www.gafsc-dc.org)



### **D.C. Child and Family Services Agency**

200 I Street SE, Washington, DC 20003 • (202) 442-6100  
[www.cfsa.dc.gov](http://www.cfsa.dc.gov) • [dc.mandatedreporter.org](http://dc.mandatedreporter.org)  
[www.fosterdckids.org](http://www.fosterdckids.org) • [www.adoptdckids.org](http://www.adoptdckids.org)



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DC Child and Family Services Agency

The DC Child and Family Services Agency is a first responder to child abuse and neglect in the District of Columbia, taking reports 24/7 at 202-671-SAFE. CFSA protects child victims and those at risk and assists families in staying together safely. CFSA publishes this report to the community about the Safe and Stable Families program quarterly.