

ANNUAL REPORT

Year-Ending June 30, 2001

The year concluded saw the implementation of our new Building Families FAST (Foster and Adoptive Support Team) Program. The first foster children served by this new DCF-funded program began arriving in July and within a short time the program was filled to its capacity of thirty-three children at any given time. Because the children receive three months of service each, the program is designed to serve 132 children per year. The five new staff hired to assist in the running of this program were trained initially and then began service. Staff training remained an important emphasis throughout the year for all agency staff. Our new collaboration with Hartford Behavioral Health greatly assisted in this effort. Their clinicians provided clinical support each week at our staff meeting to discuss behavioral issues and a quarterly staff training day to delve more deeply into selected psychological issues related to our foster children and their parents. Our new collaboration with Family Life Education began with that agency providing a full-time respite care worker under contract for our Building Families FAST Program. This worker provided respite care services primarily to children aged two to seven.

Our original "Y-US Program" was renamed the Better Horizons Program during the year, to differentiate the name of the agency from this program since there was now another major agency program called Building Families FAST. Better Horizons continued as in the previous year, maintaining at least forty-eight slots for children at any given time.

A new agency website was established during the fall at www.y-us.org which provides basic information about programs, history and a short picture tour of agency sites. A new GMC 15 passenger van was leased in September, giving the agency three vans for the first time in our history. To help ensure future stability for the programs of Y-US, our Board of Directors established a small agency endowment with some reserve funds on hand. Our first outside donation to this new endowment came last December. It is hoped that over the coming years, generous people will leave a permanent impact on our community through donations to this new fund.

A new meeting area was established late this winter in the dormitory area of our Bloomfield Retreat House in Bloomfield through the generosity of the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation. New heavy-duty commercial couches allow for a comfortable meeting area for adult staff with peer groups of the children we serve to work on issues such as anger management and loss and separation from biological parents.

In the fall, a sixteen-year-old girl and a seventeen-year-old boy became our first "Junior Youth Workers" in a new mini-pilot program. These two teens each work two afternoons per week with our Hartford Better Horizons Program. The teens cook, serve and clean-up dinner for the younger program participants, as well as assist the adult Youth Workers with arts and crafts and other duties as needed. These jobs help the teens with real work experience and provide role models for the younger children.

Last winter, after some research, the Board of Directors, with the support of the Executive Director, chose a boy and a girl to serve as Youth Advisors to the Board. These two youth participate in the Board's Program Committee. Like most youth-serving agencies, it is too often all adults making decisions that profoundly effect young people. This is one small way for us to at least begin to hear some of the concerns they have as we consider decisions which will impact them.

On June 2, our Second Annual Celebration of Caring Hearts was held at our Bloomfield Retreat House. There was some rainy weather, which forced the event to be held inside this year. Susan Campbell, columnist for The Hartford Courant, once again served as our Master of Ceremonies.

During the year, none of our twelve Board Members departed, but two new members were added in the spring: Jose Ricardo-Rivera and Patricia Gray.

As the year came to a close, DCF asked us to nearly double the capacity of our one-year old Building Families FAST Program. We began preparations, though the actual start would be next fiscal year. With this news, a search began for a new Hartford facility. The current space at 2074 Park Street was small when we moved into it in September 1999, but was all we could afford given the size of the agency at that time. By year-end, a strong possible new location had been selected, but no final deal

had been secured.

Respectfully Submitted,

Louis Gilbert, Executive Director