



A Future Oriented Source of Leadership

## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Entries must be received by July 21, 2006

Please see the "Call for Nominations" letter for criteria and categories before submitting your entry. Please e-mail the completed nomination form in its original format and any supporting documentation in a Microsoft Word document to [kris@ncacdss.org](mailto:kris@ncacdss.org). Nominations may also be faxed to: (919) 786-4019 (attn. Kris Wyatt) or mailed to: NCACDSS, 3824 Barrett Drive, Suite 102, Raleigh, NC 27609. Entries must be received by July 21, 2006.

County Department of Social Services: Durham

Submitted by: Margaret Carmody

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DSS Director Signature: FAXED A COPY WITH SIGNATURE

Project Title: Teen MAPP: Focus on Fostering/Adopting Teenagers

County Tier (Please check one):  Tier 1  Tier 2  Tier 3

To determine your county's tier please refer to the attached chart.

Category: (Please only check ONE)

- Advancement in Staff and Leadership Development
- Empowering Clients to Self-Sufficiency
- Innovations in Services to Customers
- Cost Savings Measures and/or Improvements in Efficiency
- Profiles in Community Collaboration

NC ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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**Please complete the criteria below in the space provided. Answer all questions completely to maximize your score.**

**1. Project/Program Summary: Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget.** Recruitment of foster and adoptive homes for teenagers has been an ongoing concern in Durham County. Teenagers present challenges to birth, foster and adoptive parents that can be overwhelming, frustrating and even dangerous. In order to reduce the number of teens placed in group homes and to increase the number that are placed in a family setting, we targeted our September 2005 MAPP class sessions to include families that were willing to take this challenge. We adapted the sessions to focus on the needs of adolescents and how families can meet those needs. Teenagers can flourish in families who can understand and help them meet their needs. When people inquired about foster/adopting from May – September, we asked what age they were interested in and registered them for this set of classes only if they were open to consider parenting teens. We designed the curriculum within the 30 hour MAPP timeline. We did not expect a significant difference in budget for this class as all professional speakers would share from their area of expertise as an outreach project for their position. We did budget 8 Wal-Mart gift certificates of \$25 each for the teen panel members as incentive for youth to give their time to address the class. We actually purchased 4 gift cards.

**2. Innovation: Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects?** The MAPP curriculum is designed to prepare families to parent children from 0-21 years of age. Small group activities, case examples, class discussions and role plays all include examples of children of all ages. While this information was given to class participants, co-facilitators added more examples of typical scenarios of teenagers coping with the trauma of neglect or abuse, losing their family, and living in foster or adoptive homes. We amended the sculpting activity of Meeting Two by summarizing Lillie's placement at age 6, and having the participants act out a second placement when Lillie is 15 and reports inappropriate behavior by her mother's new boyfriend towards herself and Rosie. The sculpting then reflected a foster care/adoption experience for a 15-year-old instead of a 6-year-old. In Meeting Four that discusses cycle of attachment, we discussed how gangs meet this need and had a representative of the gang prevention and intervention unit of our City Police department who educated the prospective parents about this behavior. We added an energizer that divided the class into five small groups. Each group then brainstormed ways that families could help teens meet one of Maslow's 5 Basic Human Needs (survival, safety, love & belonging, self-esteem and making dreams come true). We closed by reinforcing that if children learn to meet their needs in the context of a family, they rarely participate in gang behavior. This activity empowered the families with positive things they could do, rather than just reject children who may have gang connections or the fear of children developing gang connections. In Meeting Five that discussed managing children's behaviors, we again divided the group up into small groups and each group had a common misbehavior of teens (breaking curfew, internet porn access, coming home intoxicated were a few). They were to discuss the need being expressed by these behaviors, and which of the 15 Ways outlined in MAPP that they would use during a family meeting to address the behavior. Instead of a lecture about moving and disruptions, we invited a panel of 5 teenagers to tell their experiences about being in foster care, having to move, and what underlying messages they assumed were behind the move. Two teenagers came the day of the panel and a third wrote her experiences and this was shared with the class. When role playing in Meeting 8 about the impact on the foster/adoptive family, role plays from the curriculum "Parenting the Child who has been Sexually Abused" were used. The foster/ adoptive parent panel in Meeting Nine was composed of all people who had fostered and/or adopted teens. Handouts from the CSA (Children Sexually Abused) curriculum were included in a resource book given to the parents that also included brochures from programs that serve teens and their families. "Tips for

Talking with your Teen about...” sheets, handouts from the speakers that addressed the class regarding gangs, teen pregnancy, the juvenile court system and Independent Living Resources were also included in the Resource Book. Traditional elements of the MAPP curriculum such as the “People Mover” exercise, the effects of abuse and neglect on children’s feelings and behaviors and the need to maintain birth connections remained the same.

**3. Project Success and Impact: What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration.** Our objectives were to articulate the needs of adolescents in terms that families felt they could meet, to familiarize families with community resources designed to help teens and their families, to demonstrate how foster care and/or adoption affected these needs and resources, and to empower families to make an informed decision about fostering or adopting teenagers. Of the eighteen families who began this class, thirteen families completed all sessions and ten applications were submitted. Three families have been licensed, three families are working with the adoption unit to complete home studies, three were found ineligible due to inadequate space or living/moving out of county and one is in process of licensure. Feedback from the class included that all felt better prepared to parent teens than when they started and that the experience was worthwhile even if they start parenting younger children. We anticipate the long-term affect of this to be five to seven new homes open to teen foster care or adoption. These families have a thorough understanding of the needs of teens and will be effective parents whenever their children reach this age. This will increase options for our teens, decrease disruptions, and increase parent and agency satisfaction with their foster/ adoptive experience. This program included collaboration with Durham City Police, Durham County Health Department, Durham County Juvenile Justice Services, DSS Clinical Services, Durham Mental Health Services, LINKS, and NC Independent Living Resources. Speakers and/or written material were provided by these agencies to familiarize families with community resources and issues relating to adolescence.

**4. Project Effort and Difficulty: How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done?**

Although both facilitators have parented teens, we felt our expertise in certain areas was inadequate as far as parenting sexually abused children, gang prevention and resistance and preventing adolescent pregnancy. Both facilitators were able to attend the NCDHHS Parenting the Sexually Abused Child course by special permission of the trainer. The trainer, JoAnne Scaturo, was available for technical support on three occasions and observed one day of the MAPP classes. Facilitators identified experts in other areas of challenge for teens and their parents and arranged for these speakers to understand the key concepts of MAPP relating to their fields of knowledge so that their presentations supplemented MAPP material. The LINKS coordinator was instrumental in identifying and preparing teens for our panel. We were not able to engage as many teens as we wanted for this panel (we lined up five instead of eight) and for various reasons, we only had two that kept their commitment to address the class. A third teen with a conflict due to acceptance into the Upward Bound program did a wonderful job writing a letter to the class answering the questions and sharing her experiences. Her letter confirmed what the two who were present shared with the class. The foster/adoptive parent panel account of their experiences with children who had been in their homes further enlightened the class about the perspective of the children.

**5. Ability to Replicate Project: Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems?**

This project can be easily replicated in other counties. The adaptations to the MAPP curriculum can be shared with any agency wishing to use them. To minimize obstacles and problems, counties can partner with Durham County Department of Social Services-Family to Family Unit to provide technical assistance in this endeavor. Local community resources will be essential to minimize obstacles and problems.