

Circuit 15 Update

The Quarterly Publication for the Florida Department of Children and Families in Palm Beach County

DCF prepped to serve residents after hurricane

For state and local agencies providing critical life, health and safety services, annual preparation for Hurricane Season begins long before the first tropical storm is named.

"As the saying goes," said Circuit 15 Director of Administrative Services Stephen Faroni, "we hope for the best and prepare for the worst."

Months of planning prior to and during Hurricane Season are designed to ensure that DCF employees in Palm Beach County are able to conduct crucial child protective investigations, refer vulnerable adults and seniors to needed caregiving services, sustain access to substance abuse and mental health services, and quickly issue emergency food stamps to tens of thousands of residents.

Teams of child protective investigators and adult protective investigators, for example, are

stationed with Palm Beach County sheriff's deputies before, during and immediately after a storm.

Employees in the Department's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program Office maintain close contact

with local clinics, recovery centers and shelters, enabling treatment and counseling services to indigent residents, children in foster homes and others.

And in the event that Palm Beach County is declared a Disaster Area by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, scores of ACCESS employees and other DCF staff are slated to set up tents at four local parks to issue emergency food benefits.

The "Food For Florida" program provides food assistance to families and individuals af-



ected by a disaster. The emergency food stamp program was enacted after Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004 and Wilma in 2005. After Frances and Jeanne, DCF issued - in a matter of five days - more than \$37 million in disaster food stamp benefits for more than 380,000 Palm Beach County residents.

After Wilma, the Department issued more than \$49 million in disaster food stamp benefits for more than 422,000 Palm Beach County residents.

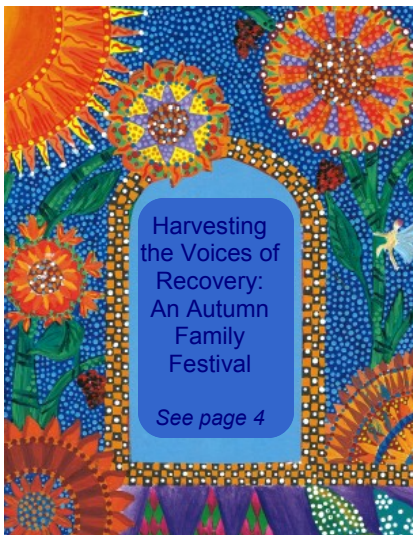
Several changes are being planned to the Food For Florida program, if needed this year:

- Residents will be able to pre-register for food assistance by going to www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/access/fff/
- Eligible residents will be able to leave the site with

an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, used to purchase food. (After previous storms, residents had to wait to receive the card in the mail.)

- A fourth park has been added to serve Palm Beach County residents. If needed and accessible after a storm, Dyer Park in West Palm Beach, John Prince Memorial Park in Lake Worth, Lake Ida Park in Delray Beach and Airport Park in Belle Glade will be used to distribute emergency food stamps.

In the event of a hurricane, DCF staff may get information about the status of specific offices and service centers by calling the Employee Emergency Information Line at 1-866-315-9538. (The line will be activated only in the event of a storm or other disaster.)



Artwork by Debra Williams

DCF strives to treat 'foster kids' as 'normal kids'

In a Sept. 3 memo, DCF Secretary George Sheldon reiterated his desire for the Department and its partners to make normalcy for children who have been removed from unsafe homes a priority. Here are excerpts from that memo:

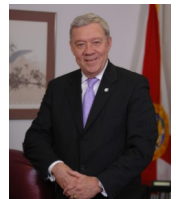
Recently, a young person told me: "Stop calling us foster kids! We're just kids."

It's great advice, but it's not just about what we call these young people...it's how we treat them. So I am calling on everyone in the

child-welfare community to make it a consistent and high priority in the months ahead to assess every decision and action by the standard of whether it treats children in foster care like every other child.

Youth in foster care should be able to do things that any other child does, within the limits of their abilities, their foster parents' own attitudes, and common sense. Their families experienced some-

thing severe enough to warrant the child's removal, and some of them need special care. Instead of continually reminding them and all their friends of this one feature of their lives, we need to focus on all the opportunities open to them. We need to think of them as the normal kids they are.



DCF Secretary
George Sheldon

DCF employee award ceremony celebrates “Shining Stars”

Children’s Legal Services Attorney Daniel Lieberman helped to simplify the paternity testing for prospective fathers, enabling immediate results during dependency hearings at the courthouse. Child Protective Investigator Vivian Mullins, a DCF veteran of more than 20 years, has shown compassion and concern for the families she’s working with and has been a team player who has worked to improve production. Maureen Pollard, an Economic Self-Sufficiency Supervisor at the Lake Worth Service Center, has mentored young adults in the Independent Living program, teaching them clerical and other skills as new Department employees. And a team of ACCESS employees significantly reduced the wait time for clients

with little or no income.

Those are the “Shining Stars” of Circuit 15, employees who were recognized Aug. 13 at an awards ceremony hosted by the Southeast Region Employee Recognition Committee.

A total of 203 Circuit 15, Circuit 17 and Southeast Region employees were nominated for awards this summer.

At ceremonies in Palm Beach and Broward counties, all nominees received certificates and goody bags, while winners also received a white DCF golf shirt embroidered with the committee’s Shining Star logo.

To nominate a co-worker for an award, go to: http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/ser/ser_employee_recognition.shtml



Regional Director Perry Borman presented posthumous certificates of recognition in honor of two beloved DCF employees, Ms. Onetta Willis (above left) and Mr. Gilberto Perez (above right). Ms. Willis, who died in July 2009, worked in the ACCESS Program as an Economic Self-Sufficiency Specialist II in the Belle Glade Service Center. She had worked for the Department for more than 25 years beginning in Hendry County, later transferring to Palm Beach County. Mr. Perez, who died in June 2009, worked as a paralegal specialist, effectively the office manager for Children’s Legal Services. He had started working for the Department in 1995, left in 1997 and returned in 2000.

The winners of the Galaxy Award for Team Work are (left to right): Stephanie Mims-Lane, Stanley Jean, Samara Marcinkoski, Rekha Vyas, HoYee “Cindy” Fung, Jamekia Howard and (not



pictured) Patricia Rodriguez, Anne Batchler, Michael Lynch, Stella Visacki, Ana Costa, Dotlin Williamson, Rosa Alvarez-Casado, George Lopez, Mellody Wright, Joan Garden, Bethania Guzman and Hermanise Benoit. Also not pictured is Maureen Pollard, who won the Shooting Star Award for Leadership.



Photos by Richard Sprague

(Above) Daniel Lieberman accepts the Luminous Award for Innovation, and Vivian Mullins (above right) accepts the Super Nova Award for High Performance.

It was HOT...HOT...HOT!

Regional Director hosts sizzling 4th of July BBQ



Photos by Richard Sprague and Elisa Cramer

At a cookout July 2, Circuit 15 employees headed to the parking lot outside the Sapodilla Avenue offices and enjoyed a summer feast.

Employees took their appetites...

The food, cooked by grillmasters Perry Borman, Jonathan Hackley and Joseph Martin, was *hot!*

Employees took their dancing shoes...

The music by “Calypso Ken” Yorke was *hot!*

And they gladly used fans handmade by Cynthia Lawlor...

Because, yes, the midday summer temperature was *hot!*



Circuit 15 Update is a quarterly publication designed to inform employees and community partners about the Florida Department of Children and Families in Palm Beach County. To conserve paper, and printing and postage costs, this newsletter is distributed electronically. Please forward comments, submissions to be considered for the next publication, or any other inquiries to:

Elisa Cramer

Director of Communications
FL Dept. of Children and Families
Circuit 15 - Palm Beach County
111 S. Sapodilla Ave. 301 D
West Palm Beach, FL 33401
OFFICE: (561) 837-5686
FAX: (561) 837-5106

elisa_cramer@dcf.state.fl.us

New law requires electronic fingerprinting prior to hiring

Beginning Aug. 1, 2010, Florida enacted "important changes to ensure the safety of Floridians who are so dependent on the quality of the people caring for them," DCF Secretary George Sheldon said, referring to House Bill 7069, which changed critical aspects of the background screening process.

"This new law will require background screening of job applicants, employees and volunteers who come in contact with children, the developmentally disabled and vulnerable adults."

The most significant change to the Department of Children and Families' providers is that employers will not be able to employ applicants for positions

of special trust or responsibility until the applicants are cleared by a complete background screen. That background screen must include a fingerprint-based search of criminal records in Florida and nationally.

In order to timely meet the needs of our partners, the Department is requesting that providers ask applicants to submit fingerprints using electronic LiveScan through private vendors.

LiveScan results can be received by the Department in as little as 24 to 48 hours. This is in contrast to hard copy fingerprint submission results being received and processed by the Depart-



ment anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. A listing of LiveScan vendors in your area is provided by accessing the "LiveScan Locations" link on the left hand side of the webpage:

www.dcfbackgroundscreening.com

There are many other changes that took effect on Aug. 1, changing the background screening process.

The Department encourages everyone to review a summary of all the changes to the background screening process by visiting:

www.dcfbackgroundscreening.com



DCF ensures access for deaf, hard-of-hearing, limited-English speakers and others with disabilities

The Department and its contracted providers of client services want to ensure persons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, have Limited-English Proficiency and other disabilities have access to all programs, benefits and services.

The Department and its contracted providers of client services will provide, at no cost to the client or companion, appropriate auxiliary aids, including qualified/certified American Sign Language interpret-

ers and qualified foreign-language interpreters where necessary to afford persons an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from the Department of Children and Families' programs and services.

Auxiliary aids include, but are not limited to, Braille and taped materials, qualified interpreters, readers, assistive listening devices and systems, television decoders, visual fire alarms using strobe lights, captioned films and other assistive devices.

Auxiliary aids or language interpreters will be available for use by customers and

potential customers with impaired sensory, manual or speaking skills in each phase of the service delivery process (e.g. telephone inquiries, requests, intake interviews, service delivery, counseling, complaints, testing, treatment, training, etc.).

For more information, DCF employees can read the Southeast Region Auxiliary Aids Plan at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/~ser/HR/SoutheastRegionAuxiliaryAidsPlan2010.pdf>

A list of interpreters begins on page 43 of the Auxiliary Aids & Services Plan, and Single Points of Contact throughout the Region are found on page 20.

DCF honors Youth Leadership Academy grad, CEO of foster care agency

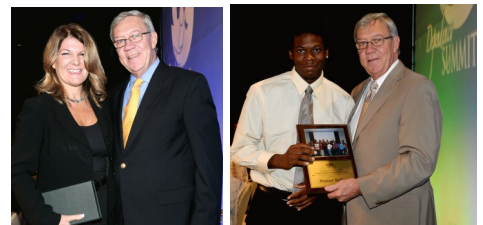
During the 2010 Dependency Summit in August, DCF Secretary George Sheldon honored 17-year-old Prosiser Walker, a graduate of the Florida Youth Leadership Academy, and Judith Warren, the CEO of Child and Family Connections.

Judith received the Judicial Circuit Award, which celebrates an individual within each judicial circuit from whom others seek advice on how to solve problems and best help

families within their community. Judith was nominated in Circuit 15 (Palm Beach County) for leading the child welfare community in building relationships with the Department, the judiciary and community providers.

"She was central to the enhancement of Family Preservation service delivery and incorporated prevention services for young children into all aspects of case management, including a specialized team for the new Family Drug Court," her nomination said.

A former child protective investigator, Judith now serves on both the statewide Independent Living Services Advisory Council and the Road to Independence Redesign Committee. "Her leadership has not only built local partnerships, but has developed statewide collaboration as well," the nomination said. "She is always the first to step forward to work to remove obstacles and build partnerships. Her expertise has been



a valuable and critical part of our successes in Circuit 15."

Prosiser joined graduates from each circuit in the state. "He is an excellent student. He was a joy to mentor," said DCF Licensing/Adoption Specialist Roz Davis.

DCF, community to 'Harvest the Voices of Recovery'



There will be a Chili Cook Off contest. And Cupcake Wars will yield scrumptious treats. And you won't want to miss *Recovery's Got Talent!*

But the real star of the Sept. 25 event at the South Florida Fairgrounds will be you!

This year's "Harvesting the Voices of Recovery, Now More Than Ever" will draw dozens of local substance abuse and mental health treatment programs and an internationally known therapist, author and researcher to focus on...YOU.

The free resource fair, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Sept. 25, is being hosted by the Circuit 15 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Program Office, in collaboration with the Palm Beach County Substance Abuse Coalition and community-based substance abuse and mental health pro-

grams.

Michael Counes will invite attendees to join Floridians for Recovery, a private, not-for-profit coalition of advocates and consumers advocating for substance abuse education, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services.

Dr. Barry Duncan, author of *What's Right With You* and 14 other books, also is scheduled to attend. Dr. Duncan is the co-developer of the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS), Session Rating Scale (SRS), Child ORS, and Child SRS measures "designed to give clients the voice they deserve as well as provide clients, clinicians, administrators and payers with feedback about the client's response to services, thus enabling more effective care tailored to client preferences." Because of his self-

help books, he has appeared on *Oprah*, *The View* and several other national TV programs.

"His latest self-help book, *What's Right With You*, challenges the business-as-usual mentality of 'What's wrong with you' and instead demonstrates how to rally natural resources and resiliencies to overcome life challenges."

For more information about Dr. Duncan, go to www.whatsrightwithyou.com or www.heartandsoulofchange.com. And plan to attend "Harvesting the Voices of Recovery" on Sept. 25, from 2 to 6 p.m., at the South Florida Fairgrounds!

Call (561) 650-6860 for more information.

Leadership Palm Beach County teams with DCF to boost food stamp access



Members of the Leadership Palm Beach County Class of 2010 joined DCF Circuit 15 executives after the class presented their Civic Engagement Project.

Ever wish you could draw upon free, skilled and talented consultants to give you a fresh perspective on a challenging situation?

The Florida Department of Children and Families in Palm Beach County got just such an opportunity when the Class of 2010 of Leadership

Palm Beach County sought a Civic Engagement Proposal.

Selected by class members for their eight-month project, the DCF proposal – "Feeding

Families Pays" – was an effort to help Palm Beach County realize the nutritional and economic benefits of a fully utilized food stamp program.

At the time the project was proposed in the fall of 2009, fewer than half of the county's residents eligible for food

stamps were believed to be receiving them. That was a loss of nutritional value and an estimated \$153.1 million loss of local revenue.

In June, a team of the Class of 2010 project members presented to the Department improvement possibilities to "get more qualified applicants to and thru the SNAP Application Process." The team had studied the application process, having visited the service centers in Palm Beach County, the Call Center in Miami and the intake unit in West Palm Beach. The team also compared Florida's process to the other states. Ultimately, the team provided recommendations and observations about the Web site,

the application, internal processing procedures, the workplace, employee motivation, the phone system and Community Partner support.

"It's always positive to get feedback that is designed to improve the operations," DCF Southeast Regional Director Perry Borman said. "The class showed a sincere interest in our proposal and in wanting to assist the community."

The team's suggestions and recommendations are being reviewed by the Department in Palm Beach County and in Tallahassee for potential statewide improvements. For more information about Leadership Palm Beach County, go to www.leadershippbc.org

Palm Beach County youth catch spirit of Myron Rolle Academy

Six Palm Beach County youth in foster care attended the Myron Rolle Leadership and Wellness Academy at Camp Blanding Florida National Guard base in July. The camp is named for former Florida State University football

player and Rhodes Scholar Myron Rolle, who now plays in the NFL for the Tennessee Titans.

DCF Southeast Region Director of Support Services Dennis Miles for the second year in a row mentored the youth, who conquered a climbing wall and

participated in such activities as a Brain Bowl. They also spent time with Myron Rolle and others, who shared stories of personal success and encouraged the youth to work hard and pursue their dreams.



Photos by Carrie Hoepner

Marvin Howard, 13, Teko Chatman, 12, and Stephanie Pericles, pictured with a mentor, enjoy the Myron Rolle Academy.

Palm Beach County honors refugees for perseverance

Florida welcomes about 25,000 new refugees every year – people who have fled their home country because of fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion. The Department of Children and Families' Office of Refugee Services helps refugees gain economic self-sufficiency and social adjustment within the shortest time following their arrival into the United States.

"It's not easy," Hiram Ruiz, DCF's Director of Refugee Services, told 80 new American citizens at a June 16 naturalization ceremony in Royal Palm Beach, "and a lot of people struggle. But, hopefully, with our help and their own resiliency, they



DCF Director of Refugee Services Hiram Ruiz welcomes new U.S. citizens.

do make it."

The special naturalization ceremony was in honor of World Refugee Day, celebrated worldwide on June 20. For the second year, Palm Beach County joined in

the annual World Refugee Day celebration, recognizing the plight of more than 43 million who have fled their home country or have been internally displaced.

"Sadly, persecution continues around the world, as we speak. These are mothers, fathers and children...persecuted because of their ethnicity," Mr. Ruiz said to the new citizens and their families at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Royal Palm Beach. "Today, you are no longer a refugee. Today, you are a U.S. citizen. You have a new permanent home."

Throughout the month of June, local libraries displayed books about refugees and posted a bibliography of such stories on their Web sites. On June 25, the West Boynton Branch hosted a film screening and discussion of the award-winning movie *God Grew Tired of Us*, a story that follows the "Lost Boys" of Sudan through adversity and triumph in their relocation to the United States. Aimee Cerricharo, an attorney specializing in

immigration issues at St. Thomas University Human Rights Institute, led the talk.



On June 14, Refugee Task Forces of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties hosted a movie screening at the IMPROV at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood.

Florida's Refugee Services Program (www.dcf.state.fl.us/refugee/) partners with several agencies and organizations to provide adult education, case management, child care, youth and family services, job skills training, employment, health services, employment-related immigration services, interpretation and integration assistance. Call Miriam Bracero-Rosario, Community Liaison in Palm Beach County, at (561) 837-5022.



WXEL's weekly radio talk show, "Florida Forum," on Aug. 22-23 featured a **Special Panel on Refugee Services and Human Trafficking** in Florida.

Missed it? Go to this link:

www.publicbroadcasting.net/wxel/jukebox?action=viewMedia&mediaId=920996

The panel featured DCF Director of Refugee Services Hiram Ruiz; DCF Statewide Human Trafficking Coordinator Regina Bernadin; Brandy Macaluso, former chair of the Human Trafficking Coalition Palm Beach; and Genevieve Cousminer, executive director of the Coalition for Independent Living Options, Inc.

Youth in foster homes no different than other children

Continued from page 1

Florida law requires rules "balancing the goals of normalcy and safety for the youth and providing the caregivers with as much flexibility as possible to enable the youth to participate in normal life experiences."

In other words, we need to act like good parents.

All good parents worry about the safety of their children, but they know that children have to face the risks of daily life if they are to build confidence and character, gain life experience, and, ultimately, achieve happiness. So we let them drive, play sports, go on field trips, visit friends, have friends over, go on dates, and face new challenges every day.

Our challenge is to give them the tools for making good decisions and acting responsibly. All children are entitled to the most normal lives we can offer

them.

Our policy is this: Every child in our care is entitled to participate in age-appropriate enrichment, extracurricular and social activities. Caregivers should assess the appropriateness of the activity based upon the child's age, maturity, abilities and interests, but the assessment should be reasonable and avoid intrusive or bureaucratic actions such as "background screenings" unless there is a reasonable basis for doing so. Caregivers should know who their kids will be with and make provisions for their safety, but exclusion from an activity should occur only after consideration of less stringent alternatives.

The decision is up to the foster parent. We have licensed them for this responsibility. We need to treat them like parents, with the same authority to make decisions in the best interests of their children. Case

managers may need to be involved on some issues of expense, and they, along with the rest of us, are there to provide counsel, support and oversight. We need to consult biological parents whenever it's reasonable, unless parental rights have been terminated. With reunification as our goal, we need to ask biological parents about their views on activities for their children and make a determination that takes their preferences into account.

We will promptly review any state or local rule, operating procedure, policy or custom that prevents or creates barriers to normalcy, including the use of terms that reflect bureaucracy rather than normal language. We invite anyone to tell us where we can improve and urge each Community Based-Care agency to review its own rules and practices using this guideline.

Finally, we have to stop refer-

ring to these young people as just "foster kids," and refer to them as kids or children or teenagers. They are simply children in foster care - and not for long, if we are doing our jobs well. A kid's job is to be in school, to learn from teachers, and to develop relationships through friends, peers, clubs, sports and activities, since it's these skills that lay the foundation for successful lives as adults. It's what many of us experienced as we grew up and what we want for not just our own children, but for all children. Youth in care are no different.

Our decisions will not always turn out perfectly, as so many parents find with their own children, but our decisions have to be continually focused on the overall well-being of our children, not just a bureaucratic requirement or a "safe" decision. It is the right thing for our kids.

Boys & Girls Club co-op accepts EBT cards for fresh fruits, veggies

Several teens at the Boys & Girls Club of Palm Beach County have sacrificed cheerleading, summer field trips, dance practice and other activities to work after school and on the week-ends. But surrounded by a garden of fresh pineapples, papayas, lavender, rosemary, aloe, mint, lemongrass, peppers, tomatoes and eggplants, these young entrepreneurs were not complaining.

In fact, as 17-year-old LaPorsha Lewis said of the fresh food market that requires her and her club members to rise and shine at 7 a.m. every other Saturday: "It's fun."

"You can sit back and say, 'At least that family has something to help them.'"

The Rise & Shine Food Co-Op sprouted from a business class taught by Leadership Palm Beach County's Class of 2009 and a survey the teens conducted of the families attending the Boys & Girls Club.

"Their needs were being able to put food on the table," said 15-year-old Brianna

Hollins, "and spend time together."

So, the teens decided on their core values and selected a name that reflected them – **R**espect, **I**ntegrity, **S**ervice excellence and **E**nduring relationships. With mentors, sponsorships and community partners, 12 teens are employed to run the Rise & Shine Food Co-Op. They developed the budget, marketing plan and materials to solicit memberships.

The teens have been recognized by local and national media (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032619/ns/nightly_news_with_brian_williams#32500185) and have received grants and awards.

"Random people come up to us and say, 'We saw you on TV,' " beamed 15-year-old Taylor Ambrose.

The co-op has brought not only recognition; it's meant travel and experiences beyond what the teens imagined. Brianna and 16-year-old Clynisha Clark cite an especially memorable highlight – traveling to New York to present the project to all Boys & Girls Clubs in the nation.



The Rise & Shine Co-Op is open at three locations:

- 10 a.m. – noon: Boys & Girls Teen Center, 350 S.W. 10th St., Belle Glade – 561-992-5399
- 8 a.m. – 10 a.m.: Florence De George Boys & Girls Club, 4105 Pinewood Ave., West Palm Beach – 561-881-0593 or 561-881-9565
- 8 a.m. – 10 a.m.: The Naoma Donnelley Haggin Boys & Girls Club, 1451 S.W. 7th St., Delray Beach – 561-279-0251.

A one-time membership fee is \$10. Each distribution is \$30 (meat, fruit, vegetables, bread and nonperishable items) or \$15 (which includes a hefty supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, minus meat). The Rise & Shine Co-Op accepts Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards from food stamp customers.

For more information, visit www.bgcpcb.org/riseandshine

Hotline serves homeless veterans



The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has established a toll-free hotline to serve homeless veterans and those veterans at risk of becoming homeless.

To reach the 24/7 hotline, call **1-877-424-3838**.

In addition to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, the VA has established an online veterans chat site, which also provides 24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week counseling services for homeless

veterans. For more information, go to www.va.gov/homeless/



Check backseat before leaving car

The Department and the Palm Beach County Safe Kids Coalition remind parents, relatives, professional caregivers - anyone driving young children - to look in the backseat before locking their cars and walking away.

The Coalition in July launched the "Look Before You Lock" campaign to help remind drivers that children can suffer severe injury and die if left in hot cars. Banner ads have been posted on Palm Tran buses. Window shade decals and door hangers are available.

Call Safe Kids at (561) 841-3500 for more information.

Price of bus passes to increase Oct. 1

Effective Oct. 1, 2010, Palm Tran Connection will make some changes to the existing Bus Pass Program.

The price of the 31-Day Bus Pass will increase to either \$10 or \$15, depending on each client's income level. For example: Clients with income levels equal to or less than 100% (\$10,830) of the Federal Poverty Level, with a family size of one, will now be required to pay \$10 for each 31-day bus pass purchased. Clients with income levels in excess of 100% but not greater

than 150% (\$16,245) of the Federal Poverty Level, with a family size of one, will be required to pay \$15 for each 31-day bus pass purchased.

Palm Tran Connection no longer will accept the food stamp benefit letter for eligibility. Recipients who used their Food Stamp letter to qualify will need to be recertified, under the new eligibility guidelines.

For more information, call the Bus Pass desk at (561) 649-9848.



Source: Palm Tran Connection Bus Pass Department

Florida receives \$11.5 million bonus for food stamp accuracy

Florida was again named the best in the nation for food stamp payment accuracy and also earned the distinction for the most improved in correctly handling benefit denials and closures.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced in June that the diligent work of Florida Department of Children and Families employees has earned the state a bonus of more than \$11.5 million.

Florida's bonus was the highest of any state, accounting for 39 percent of the awards nationally. It is the largest bonus ever awarded to a state for such excellence since the USDA bonus program began in 2003.

The bonus, DCF Secretary George Sheldon said, "recognizes the meaningful and significant efforts our Department is making to ensure Floridians are provided the service and attention they deserve. It is a tremendous honor to hold the No. 1 spot two years in a row in such

a complex program, and it is a true reflection of the tireless efforts of our employees."

Florida's Food Assistance Program (also known as SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is the fourth largest in the country, providing more than \$4 billion worth of benefits to more than 3.5 million people in the past year.

In Palm Beach County, more than \$167 million in benefits were awarded from July 2009-June 2010. There were more than 100,000 clients each month.

Last year, the state earned a \$7.1 million performance bonus for best accuracy, and in 2008 the state was awarded \$5.5 million for most improvement in that category.

This year, for the work done in fiscal year 2009, Florida received \$7,754,744 in the best payment accuracy category and \$3,797,503 for the most improvement in correct processing of denials

and closures.

Just four years ago, Florida's error rate of 8.59 percent in food stamp processing was one of the highest in the nation. The bonus award is for an error rate of 0.70 percent.

**Food stamps
can help fill your
grocery bag.**



It's easier than ever to...
See if you're eligible.
Apply for benefits.
Check your existing case.

**No waiting in line!
No busy signal!**

**Go online
anywhere
anytime**



www.myflorida.com/accessflorida

New income limits aim to reach more in need

Starting July 1, 2010, the gross monthly income limits increased for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Florida. That means that families earning slightly more than previously allowed may now be eligible for food stamps.

How much can you earn and possibly still be eligible for food stamps? As of July 1, here are the Federal Gross Income Limits by household size:

- 1 \$1,805 (up from \$1,174)
- 2 \$2,429 (up from \$1,579)
- 3 \$3,052 (up from \$1,984)
- 4 \$3,675 (up from \$2,389)
- 5 \$4,299 (up from \$2,794)
- 6 \$4,922 (up from \$3,200)
- 7 \$5,545 (up from \$3,605)
- 8 \$6,169 (up from \$4,019)

Also effective July 1, 2010, there is no asset test for food stamp eligibility for most households.

To find out more about the requirements and benefits available, visit: www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/access/docs/factsheet.pdf

To apply for food assistance, go to: www.myflorida.com/accessflorida

If you already receive food stamps and need to update information or check the status of your account, create a MyACCESS Account at: www.myflorida.com/accessflorida

The Department of Children and Families complies with state and federal nondiscrimination laws and policies that prohibit discrimination based on age, color, disability, national origin, race, religion, or sex. It is unlawful to retaliate against individuals or groups on the basis of their participation in a complaint of discrimination or on the basis of their opposition to discriminatory practices.

If you require Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations, please notify Michelle Bergen at michelle_bergen@dcf.state.fl.us or (561) 837-5078.

Wallet-sized resource card to help survivors of domestic violence

DCF child protective investigators and case managers with Child and Family Connections, Inc., are now distributing wallet-sized cards that refer domestic violence survivors to community resources.



The cards were created by a local Domestic Violence Steering Council, in response to feedback from victims. The group is working with law enforcement to begin providing the cards to victims when responding to Domestic Calls.

The committee also has completed a map of the system leading to an advocate. The goal was for all agencies that

work with a survivor of domestic violence to know how to connect that survivor to an advocate.

If you have been hurt or are afraid, help is just a phone call away. For safe housing, access to counseling for you and your children, or help with moving expenses, call **1-800-355-8547** or **1-800-973-9922**. If you need a restraining order, help with medical expenses or other services, call **1-866-891-7273**. If you need a divorce, custody/visitation help, immigration help, legal representation at restraining order hearings or other legal services, call **561-655-8944**.

Save the Date

- Sept. 23, 6-7 p.m. "Milk Party" sponsored by The Children's Movement of Florida at The Harriet Himmel Theater at CityPlace; contact: kerline.boursiquot@childrensmovementflorida.org
- Sept. 25, 2-6 p.m. "Harvesting the Voices of Recovery, Now More Than Ever," South Florida Fairgrounds in West Palm Beach, (561) 650-6860
- Sept. 30, 9 a.m. -5p.m. "Spotlight on Sickle Cell: Medical Challenges and Resolutions" Professional Development Program, Doubletree Hotel, 4431 PGA Blvd., Palm Beach Gardens; registration is \$60. Call (561) 833-3113
- Oct. 1, 8:30 -11 a.m. Domestic Violence Awareness Month Opening Ceremony and Breakfast, Guest Speaker: Judge Sheree Davis Cunningham, RSVP by Sept. 24, (561) 624-6648
- Oct. 7, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Faith-Based Summit on Human Trafficking, Clayton Hutcheson Agriculture Center, 559 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach; Free; Continental breakfast begins at 8 a.m.; Pre-register: (561) 265-3797 ext. 106 or jescalante@avda-fl.com
- Oct. 14, 8 a.m.-4p.m. Domestic Violence Summit (8-hour training event), Crowne Plaza, 1601 Belvedere Road, West Palm Beach; CEU and CLU Hours Available; sponsored by the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence; (561) 624-6648
- Oct. 16, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m., West Palm Beach VA Medical Center 2010 Open House, VA Medical Center - Main Atrium, 7305 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach
- Oct. 28, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Faith-Based Summit on Human Trafficking, West County Senior Center, 2916 State Road 15, Belle Glade; Free; Continental breakfast begins at 8 a.m.; Pre-register: (561) 265-3797 ext. 106 or jescalante@avda-fl.com
- Oct. 29, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., "Rx for Change...Targeting Prescription Drug Abuse" Conference, Palm Beach County Convention Center; (561) 833-1234
- November is National Adoption Month
- Nov. 14-20 is National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week



Demystifying DCF
What does the Department of Children and Families do in Palm Beach County?

- }] Family Safety
 - Child Abuse Investigations
 - Foster Care
 - Adoptions
- }] Adult Protective Services
- }] Food Stamps
- }] Substance Abuse Treatment
- }] Mental Health Treatment
- }] Refugee Services

Call 561-837-5686
To learn more about DCF or schedule a presentation

Our Mission

Protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency.

Our Vision

We will be recognized as a world class social services system, delivering valued services to our customers. We are committed to providing a level and quality of service we would want for our own families.