



Date: October 9, 2017

Subject: CORE Update Information

From: Don Forrester LMSW, Executive Director

- **2017 Coalition of Residential Excellence National Conference**

Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches hosted the 2017 National Annual CORE Conference in Safety Harbor, FL on September 5-7, 2017. Making Waves and Expanding Horizons In Residential Care was the tagline for the conference theme. Topics centered on best practice and current trends. I'm pleased to report that the conference reviews were extremely favorable. In addition, so was the attendance.

Representatives from twenty-eight different agencies participated in this year's conference with seventy-five participates in attendance. Agency's represented included:

A Kid's Place	Tampa, FL
Alabama Baptist Children's Home	Birmingham, AL
Baptist Children's Village	Clinton, MS
Ben Richey Boys Ranch	Abilene, TX
Boystown	Ovieda, FL
Cal Farley's	Amarillo, TX
Children's Home Network	Tampa, FL

Children's Homes, Inc.	Paragould, AR
Children's Village	Tyler, TX
Cunningham Children's Home	Urbana, Ill
Devereux	Orlando, FL
Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches	Boys Ranch, FL
Florida United Methodist Children's Home	Enterprise, FL
Fosters Home	Stephenville, TX
Georgia Baptist Children's Home	Palmetto, GA
Hands of Mercy Everywhere	Belleview, FL
Hendrick Home	Abilene, TX
Kern Hattin Homes for Children	Westminster, VT
Milton Hershey School	Milton Hershey, PA
Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children	Oklahoma City, OK
Palmer Home	Columbus, MS
Presbyterian Children's Home and Services	Austin, TX
Mooseheart	Mooseheart, Ill
St. Augustine Youth Services	St. Augustine, FL
St. Joseph's Indian School	Chamberlain, DS
STARRY, Inc (affiliate corporation of CAHM)	Round Rock, TX
South Texas Children's Home Ministries	Pettus, TX
Texas Baptist Children's Home	Round Rock, TX

The awards dinner was extremely well done and the Catherine Hershey Awards were well received. Wednesday night was a really nice experience. I've subsequently received feedback from number of folks with very favorable comments regarding the banquet. Our continued thanks to Milton Hershey School for adding that program highlight to each year's conference.

- **Relationship Building and Industry Challenges**

As the newly appointed Executive Director of CORE, the conference provided me an opportunity to meet the majority of our membership and to begin forging relationships that lend themselves to open communication and trust. Although I've been associated with CORE for many years from a provider and board member perspective, my new role as executive director is critically tied to the importance of hearing from CORE's constituency and valuing the kinds of things that we can accomplish by walking together in unison.

Ours is a day in which it is critically important that like-minded, compassionate and professional providers of residential care for children stand together in solidarity. We must have and represent a united front in shielding ourselves from those who are a threat to our sense of calling and the industry in which we work.

It was Solomon who said: "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor." One of the identifiable needs of our industry is a united effort on our part to have a clear and persuasive voice related to legislative issues.

Let me ask you this: Which is more damaging to our reputation and to our future: (1) Proposed Federal legislation that incorporates denigrating assertions concerning congregate care or (2) Those opposing congregate care to subtly suggest that best practice has passed us by and we are no longer relevant?

Let me give you an example. It was probably five or six years ago (time gets away from me) – The title of the proposed legislation didn't carry the name Families First Prevention Services Act of 2017, but much of the intent associated to the legislation was very similar. The bill that was filed in the Senate made these denigrating assertions:

Assertion 1) "Within the current foster care system, children and youth are routinely denied the opportunity to participate in normal, age or developmentally appropriate activities such as joining 4-H and other clubs, participating in school plays, playing sports, going to camp and visiting a friend."

Assertion 2) "A lack of normalcy and barriers to participation in age or developmentally appropriate activities, which are endemic features of the current child welfare system, contribute to increased vulnerability for trafficking, homelessness and other negative outcomes for children and youth in foster care".

Assertion 3) "In order to combat sex trafficking and to improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care, systematic changes need to be made to the current child welfare system that focus on (a) the reduction of youth in congregate care facilities and group homes".

Those three assertions are directly related to "health, safety and well being for children." If the assertions factually and accurately portrayed the landscape of residential care for children across our nation, it would be an egregious omission of justice to let it continue.

Most providers in the industry in which we work could easily refute the three assertions as something other than factual. After all, if a state has a licensing program and minimum standards, the conditions identified would be prohibited.

From my perspective, the largest threat faced by CORE member agencies is that which results from the subtle suggestion that best practice has passed us by and we are no longer relevant. How do we refute that assertion?

The written report is dated June 22, 2017 and entitled "A national campaign to improve foster care". The report begins by describing the downside of the statistically disadvantaged: The statement is made: *"In the U.S., it remains an unfortunate reality that many children—including those born to low-income parents whose families live in poor neighborhoods with low-quality schools or who are members of minority groups—are statistically disadvantaged from the moment of birth or even earlier. Though some are able to break out and achieve educational and economic success, the odds are stacked against these children—now more than ever"*.

The report moves to a subgroup of that group – It talks about at risk children who are removed from their homes by local officials and placed in the nation's foster care system. Of them it says: *"These are the most disadvantaged children in the nation, and therefore have the greatest claim to public support"*.

The report goes on to state: *"There is now almost universal agreement that group or institutional care should be considered an option of last resort. In 2014, a group of ten leading child welfare researchers with extensive careers of research on children felt so strongly about this issue that they issued a "consensus statement" on group care. Their conclusion, stated with admirable conciseness, is that children should be placed in group care only 'when necessary therapeutic mental health services cannot be delivered in a less restrictive setting'. Nonetheless, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nearly 15% of children are placed in group homes or institutional care."*

Collectively, as membership agencies of CORE, we must have outcomes that demonstrate a different picture from the one presented. It is critically

important that we marshal our forces and collectively present a different picture.

- **Legislative Issues**

Toward the end of August 2017, I sent out an alert that reportedly there was suspicion efforts were being renewed on the House side to push through the Families First Prevention Services Act of 2017. Reportedly, according to suspicion, it was thought the ploy for passage would be tied to a funding bill. The vehicle for attempted passage might be a CR-Omnibus Appropriations Bill. Some suspected the FFPSA will be tied to passage of the CHIP reauthorization bill.

To date, those rumors have proven unfounded. CHIP funding committees have passed through committees without introduction of language from the FFPSA.

On October 5, 2017, the Senate marked up CHIP without an amendment related to FFPSA. Similar measures were taken on the House side earlier. However, the provisions the Senate added for financing the amendment were not well received on the House side. Currently, CHIP funding expired on September 30, 2017 and without additional monies the program seems in jeopardy.

- **Placement Practices of States**

I received a message this morning from a CORE member in Arkansas. His message stated:

"Our licensing representative shared that in 2018 no child in the Arkansas foster care system shall be placed in residential. Why? She says there are

grants coming down from the federal government that do not allow monies to go to residential facilities!

We do not accept their money but it's already closing residential programs in our state. Fortunately for us we passed a new set of regulations for a new category—Residential Family Style Care. We are changing to that license by the end of 2017! The Arkansas foster care system will place children in programs with this license”.

Are those of you in other states seeing similar efforts to restrict the use of your agencies? It would be really helpful if we could stay informed of similar trends.

Thank you!