

Statement of

K. Rose Gordy, Director of Family Services

The Columbia Heights Shaw Family Support Collaborative,

Before the

D.C. Council

Committee on Human Services

Tommy Wells, Chairperson

*“Hearing on Proposed FY2010 Budget for
The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)”*

April 3rd, 2009

Good afternoon, my name is Rose Gordy; I am the Director of Family Services for the Columbia Heights Shaw Family Support Collaborative, one of seven collaboratives that partners with CFSA to prevent child abuse and neglect and strengthen families in need. We serve as intermediaries in creating a “wrap-around” child and family support network linking neighborhood leaders, community based service providers, and government agencies. Some of the collaboratives also work directly with youth at risk of dropping out or of entering the juvenile justice system, providing crisis intervention and wrap-around case management toward family stabilization.

In his testimony, CFSA Acting Director Dr. Roque Gerald speaks of the FY2010 proposed budget levels as necessary to sustain achievements to date and to support additional progress in strengthening the local safety net for abused and neglected children and troubled families. The cumulative work of our Collaboratives represents a significant and effective part of that local safety net.

Before the existence of the collaboratives, a comprehensive system of neighborhood based services was not available to families in the District of Columbia. The collaborative model was piloted in the mid-nineties with CFSA and other district funds, and then expanded and institutionalized citywide. The Collaboratives¹ are not typical social service provider organizations, but rather seven variations on a theme of community building.

Our approach is systemic. We support families to stay connected and strong through comprehensive family services, community capacity building and advocacy. Over the years, our work has multiplied and created a ripple effect. Now, in addition to making up the greater part of the city’s system for preventive family services, we also focus on community capacity building; as we move to resolve community problems and issues, we test and develop approaches together with

¹ The actual text presented here is taken directly from the publication, *Scale of Change*, by Andrew White, published by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington, D.C., December, 2008.

partners and clients until we get it right. We have learned time and again from our successes and our failures, and continually tweak our approaches.

We have developed important local and national evidence based models for family based gang intervention work and youth violence prevention, as well as for green job creation in our business corridors. As a result, at CHSFSC we now have an on-going Training Institute that has offered training for several years in our most successful approaches. We have trained youth workers, family social work practitioners, law enforcement agents, court officers and social workers, both locally and nationally. It has not been an easy task to begin to document successes and transmit replicable models, but we continue to move forward in that direction (see attachments).

As of Fall 2008, the Partnership for Community Based Services was fully realized as the majority of CFSA In-home Social Work Units moved to our facilities and began to team in a more direct and meaningful way with Collaborative Family Workers. CFSA Family Workers are now more deeply grounded in the community and our joint work has become a real partnership “in the practice”.

In total, the seven Collaboratives work with several thousand very low-income families each year, including about 2,000 that take part in ongoing case management and family support services. In a city where 12,000 families with children had incomes below the federal poverty line in 2006 and tens of thousands more are increasingly living in near poverty, our reach is far from all encompassing. But we are there and accessible, we are their neighbors; we are flexible, we can do things that government can't do, and we can do them quickly.

We envision socially and economically diverse neighborhoods, which can be maintained as green and secure city spaces, where families are able to meet their basic needs, and all parents,

children and youth can grow and thrive together. This will take the continued commitment, support, and participation of our full village: of our work and yours, of all private and public sectors.

As the pressures increase on all of us and our families due to the critical economic situation, we will see more and more families which under deepening stressors will become increasingly frustrated and distracted by the quest to make ends meet. This raises the risk of increased family and community violence, and child abuse and neglect. To stem this, we need not only to maintain, but to increase existing comprehensive community based supports for our families; this means moving beyond just providing concrete subsidies or material donations. It must mean guaranteeing that all our families can have access to the social and systemic supports necessary to identify and sustain their strengths and maintain their stability.