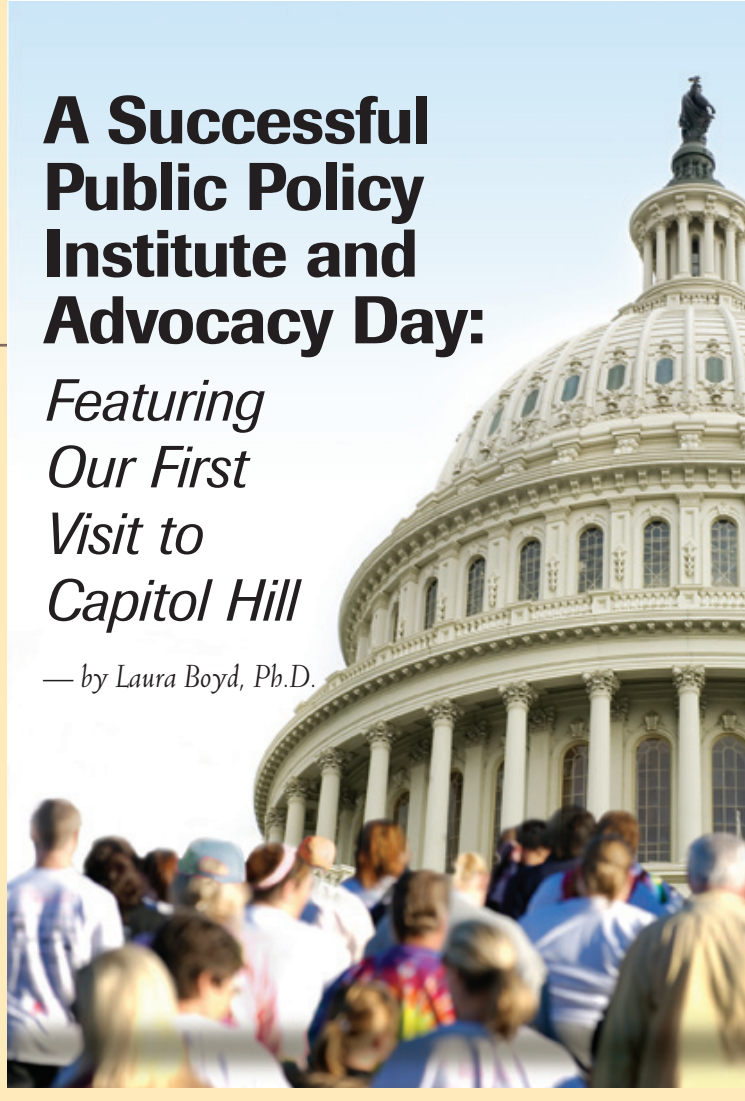


A Successful Public Policy Institute and Advocacy Day:

Featuring *Our First Visit to Capitol Hill*

— by *Laura Boyd, Ph.D.*



Setting a Goal

During FFTA's 7th Annual Public Policy Institute and Advocacy Day in Washington, DC., the two-day event included our first "Hill Day" with over 80 visits to Capitol Hill. Attendees met with legislative staff of U.S. Senators and Representatives. The goal for the event was to discuss proposed legislation to create a new medical assistance category within Medicaid for Treatment Foster Care.

Preparations

The Institute and Hill Day, which took place during National Foster Care Month, exceeded last year's attendance and began with a half-day instructional briefing provided by the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest. Attendees were able to focus on practical skills for meeting with members of Congress. In preparation for Hill Day, the instructional briefing included tips on lobbying and details on the parameters for which non-profit organizations can lobby.

The latter half-day session was devoted to a panel presentation of policies impacting TFC. Panel participants included Patrick Lester, the Alliance for Children and Families; John Sciammana, Child Welfare League of America (CWLA); and Mohini Venkatesh, National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

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(NCCBH). Legislation targeted by FFTA is actively supported by these organizations; likewise, FFTA is actively involved in shared policy efforts with the Alliance, CWLA, and NCCBH. Common agenda items include the White House Conference on Children, teens aging out of care, and reimbursement and program cuts

in human services resulting from negative national fiscal conditions.

Overall, an exciting first day was finalized with an informal, inspiring, and very informative discussion with Diedra Henry-Spires and Institute attendees. Ms. Henry-Spires is a Professional Staff Member for Human Services and Income Policy for the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance. She is the lead advisor to the Chairman on health care reform policy as it pertains to human services

and child welfare. In an exciting give-and-take session, Institute attendees learned about the internal operations of health care reform on Capitol Hill, and Ms. Henry-Spires provided explicit information and examples regarding Treatment Foster Care and the importance of our legislation.

FFTA's First Visit to Capitol Hill

In addition to cooperative weather, attendee excitement was high for Hill Day — our second day of the Public Policy event. As we canvassed the Hill in both House and Senate offices, confidence and satisfaction increased and professionalism and determination abounded! Attendees conducted scheduled meetings with offices and impromptu drop-ins with others.

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The afternoon provided an opportunity to report back about each visit and collect data for follow-up. More than one attendee reported, "I've found my niche!"

Successful Results

The pride and excitement of attendees' Hill experiences was capped on June 9th when legislation, the Medicaid Services Restoration Act of 2009 (S.1217), was filed by Senator Debbie Stabenow (MI) and cosponsored by Senators Blanche Lincoln (AR) and Mark Begich (AK). The addition of these cosponsoring Senators is directly attributed to Hill Day by FFTA colleagues.

Passage of the FFTA legislation allows for a new medical assistance category, which specifically defines and identifies TFC services under Medicaid, thus protecting those services from potentially harmful rule interpretations and reinterpretations in future administrations. Currently, many states pay for TFC partially, or fund it as part of a payment arrangement, such as bundled rate, case rate, fee-for-service, etc. Individual states can bill for the reimbursement of these services through Medicaid rehab monies. The legislation clarifies the appropriateness of TFC services for habilitation and maintaining functional levels for children, as well as rehabilitation of children to best functioning. States would be authorized to exercise whatever payment option for services best fit that individual state, whether that be bundled services, day rates, or some other funding mechanism.

Staying Ahead of Healthcare Reform Efforts

In addition to protecting the integrity of TFC, the bill provides more trans-



Be-Asia Jackson-El, foster parent, Lorton, VA and Jermaine Johnson, Executive Director of Adolescent and Family Growth Center, Inc. (right).

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parency for the delivery of TFC services and is expected to reduce expenditures for federal and state governments by keeping children out of more expensive, higher levels of care, when appropriate. These discussions place TFC in the midst of the health care reform efforts pertaining to strengthening Medicaid. In addition, they reflect the significance of FFTA's voice and TFC services to children throughout the nation.

As FFTA's Public Policy and Government Relations Consultant, I would like to commend and thank all of our attendees. The work to prepare for this event was extraordinary — from scheduling Hill meetings, to preparing materials for congressional offices, to volunteering as dedicated individuals committed to embracing a new experience with enthusiasm! From this point forward, we can work with all of these offices as our legislation is filed. In addition, we will contact members of Congress that we were unable to meet on Hill Day.

Please join me in thanking Melissa Cole, FFTA Administrator, for her

administration of the Institute; Ken Olson, FFTA Public Policy Committee Chair, for his continued leadership of the Public Policy Committee; and all of our devoted and conscientious advocates who participated in this event. A special thanks to Sen. Debbie Stabenow and her staff and to Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin and her staff.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that Senator Stabenow was recognized as the first recipient of the FFTA Legislator of the Year Award "in recognition of her dedication to the well-being of children and families across the United States of America." The award will be personally presented to Senator Stabenow at her home office in Michigan this summer.

Editor's Note: Laura Boyd, Ph.D., is the FFTA Public Policy and Government Relations Consultant. She is also the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Therapeutic Foster Care Association in Norman, OK. The FFTA Board of Directors, Public Policy Committee, State Liaisons, and all FFTA members would like to extend sincere thanks to Laura Boyd for her unwavering commitment and diligent efforts relating to the success of our recent Institute!

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