



The League of Women Voters Washington County



lwvarwc.org

SPECIAL EDITION DECEMBER, 2009, VOL. 56, ISSUE 8

Calendar Reminders

DEC. 14, Monday, 6:30, brief Board Meeting, Karen Rollet-Crocker's home, 951 N. Pembroke Rd., Fayetteville

DEC. 14, Monday, 7:00 – 8:30, HOLIDAY DROP-IN SOCIAL, Karen Rollet-Crocker's home, 951 N. Pembroke Rd., Fayetteville

DEC. 16, Wednesday, 6:30 – 8:30, Foster Care Consensus Meeting, Pat Walker Center for Seniors, 12 E. Appleby Rd., Fayetteville

From Joyce's Desk

The holiday season is in full swing and our statewide Foster Care Study is winding down. Karen Rollet Crocker has generously invited us into her home for our Holiday Drop-In. Please join us for socializing and shared refreshments.

This special edition of the *Voter* is to focus your attention on the issue of transitioning foster children into adulthood and the impact of recent legislation. We are happy to report that new procedures are being developed to prevent the sudden abandonment of foster children at age eighteen, a time when even children with supportive families find difficulty in taking on responsibility.

We hope that you were able to attend at least one of the excellent panels LWVWC has had on foster care. Even if you did not, we urge you to look over the enclosed material and join in the discussion Dec. 16 as we reach our consensus position. Additional items to help prepare you for this topic are available for reference at <http://www.lwvarwc.org/lwvar/lwvarfostercaretransitionstudy.htm>

GIFT OPPORTUNITY TO BENEFIT TRANSITIONING FOSTER YOUTH

LWVWC enjoys gifting a selected group during the holiday and this year we have chosen twenty transitioning foster youth assisted by the Arkansas Support Network. We will collect checks by mail and at our annual Holiday Party. **Please make checks out to Arkansas Support Network with "LWVWC Gift" on the subject line.** This is a tax deductible donation. ASN will divide the donations and provide a personalized gift card to the young person so that they may purchase items of their choice.

Transitioning from Foster Care into Adulthood

The LWVWC Foster Care Panel held on October 14, 2009 brought experienced speakers to discuss foster children who are aging-out of state support. Cecile Blucker, Director of the Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Children and Family Services, discussed the broad transformation of the Arkansas Child Welfare system that is currently in the process of completion; Mona Davis, Planning Manager of the DHS, DCFS, explained the Arkansas Practice Model being developed to address the child welfare system's problem issues; Toma Whitlock, Manager of the DHS, DCFS Transitional Services for Youth, who works directly with the foster teenagers, discussed their problems with the system and what often happens to them after they leave the system; and Becky Shafer, a former foster child who is in the process of starting a project to furnish residence and assistance to girls who are transitioning out of foster care, talked about her proposed services to help meet the needs of these teens.

Problems that need to be addressed: Supervision, staffing, training, client safety, proper evaluation of mistreatment, child fatalities, timely case closures, backlog of overdue case evaluations, data system, lack of management and leadership development, staff training, hot line, quality of casework, support services, wrap around services, lack of foster homes, lack of caseworkers, retention of providers and staff, finding qualified staff and lack of strong leadership.

The Arkansas Practice Model that will be reflected in every level and in every decision is being developed to address these goals:

1. Keep children safely with their families and in their communities.
2. Enhance the children's wellbeing in all of DCFS practices.
3. Use foster care and other placements as temporary services to help achieve reunification.
4. Use permanent placement with relative or other adults who have close relations to the child when reunification is not possible.
5. Adoptions should be timely and well-supported.
6. Achieve successful transition from foster care to adulthood.
7. Evaluations to see that the system is working for the individual child.

The Practice Model Transitional Life Plan will make sure that foster youth are included in the planning stage of transition; that they have Access to services and know about them; that their services start at 17; that everyday skills are taught; that applications for health insurance, education, college, housing, social security cards, personal records etc. are made; that mentors and connections to the community are available; that youth internships and job experiences and socialization are provided. A contract between the child and DHS, with the child's participation in all steps, will be developed, that will include a guardian ad litem, case worker and anyone else the youth wants to invite and that the contract will include specific goals, time lines and an evaluation. There is no way to reenter the program if the youth leaves at 18. There is no special attention to birth control. It is assumed that the primary physician will take care of this.

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS FOR TRANSITION FROM FOSTER CARE TO ADULTHOOD

1. SHOULD THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ARKANSAS SUPPORT THE PROVISIONS FOR TRANSITION IN ARKANSAS ACT 391? (Available at this link: <http://www.lwvarwc.org/lwvar/lwvarfostercaretransitionstudy.htm>)
2. SHOULD LWVAR SUPPORT THE PROACTIVE MODEL FOR TRANSITION CONSTRUCTED BY THE ARKANSAS DIVISION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)?
 - a) Should the model include education in sexuality?
 - b) Should the model include substance abuse education?
3. IF YES, IN WHAT WAYS CAN LWVAR SHOW SUPPORT?
 - a) Encourage public awareness with educational panels, public meetings, letters to the editor?
 - b) Encourage member involvement as mentors to individual young persons?
 - c) Give special support to groups of transitioning youth, i.e. workshops, parties, gifts?
4. SHOULD LWVAR MONITOR THE PROGRESS OF TRANSITION?
5. SHOULD LWVAR MONITOR DCFS EVALUATION PROCESS OF TRANSITION?
6. SHOULD TRANSITION INCLUDE A PROVISION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT AT 18 AND WISH TO RETURN?

SNEAK PREVIEW: HEALTH CARE REFORM RESOURCE MATERIALS

Confused by all the health care reform discussions? The January and February LWVWC programs are going to tackle this huge debate. Sally Kelley has gathered an excellent collection of factual materials on this subject to help understand what the real issues are. Take a look at <http://www.lwvarwc.org/healthcareresources.htm> to begin preparation for future discussions. Share this quality material with your friends and families.

RENEWAL TIME IS HERE!!

If you have not renewed for 2009-2010, please send in this form. Our national roster deadline is January 31, 2010.

League of Women Voters of Washington County
Membership Application & Interest Survey Form

Name _____ E-Mail _____

Address _____ City/Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Dues: Individual Membership, \$40 Family Membership, \$60
Please mail your check to LWVWC, P. O. Box 4, Fayetteville, AR 72702

_____ I wish to limit my membership to receiving the news letter.

_____ I wish to receive calls to action on areas in which I might be interested.

_____ I do not wish to join, but would like to make a contribution (any amount appreciated).

Please check items you might be interested in helping with:

Voter Registration _____

Help with TV Candidate Forums _____

Help with Publicity _____

Assist with Mailings _____

Provide Food for Events _____

Newsletter Editor _____

Lobby State Legislature _____

Provide a Facility/Home for Meetings _____

Provide Transportation to Meetings _____

Attend City Council, Planning Commission, Task Force, Quorum Court, etc. Meetings when needed _____

Other _____

Thank You!