



# Children & Family News

June 2006

*N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update*

## Cairns to retire, but dedication to children will continue

"And how are the children?" It is a question Gladys Cairns wants everyone to ask during conversations.

Children have been her priority since before she was named administrator of child protection services for the North Dakota Department of Human Services - 27 years ago. Children, she says, will remain her priority as she retires June 30<sup>th</sup> to enjoy more time with her children and grandchildren, and to pursue her passion for volunteering.

Department Executive Director Carol Olson said, "It has truly been an honor to work with Gladys. I value the contributions that she has made."

"Gladys has had a stellar career marked by her dedication and service to children," said Paul Ronningen, Children and Family Services Division Director. "She has such a wealth of expertise. I consider her a mentor and appreciate the leadership that she has provided in the division. Her absence is going to be greatly felt."

That ripple effect will reach beyond the department. Over the years, Gladys has worked closely with other agencies and entities involved in serving children and families including the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Public Instruction, county social service offices, law enforcement personnel, states attorneys, and the medical community.

Her work has been guided by a personal philosophy that can be described

as going one step beyond the Golden Rule – a sort of "pay it forward." Gladys said she believes that people should "Do unto others as you want others to do unto others, and eventually it will benefit the children."

Her career accomplishments are numerous. However, her co-workers singled out several as significant.

### Created ND Parent Aide Program

Gladys created North Dakota's parent aid program, which for the past 20 years has provided paraprofessionals to work in the home with parents strengthening their parenting skills and guiding and mentoring them so that children can be safe and families can stay together. She wrote the grant for the start-up funding, developed statewide services, and secured funds to sustain it. Today in North Dakota, there are about 60 trained parent aides working with families. Division staff members believe that this service has had a huge impact by preventing child abuse and neglect.

### Helped Establish Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota

Gladys helped create *Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota* – a statewide nonprofit organization that works to prevent all types of child maltreatment.

### Worked to Create Children's Advocacy Centers

She spearheaded the creation of two children's advocacy centers in North Dakota. Located in Bismarck and Fargo, these centers involve the medical, social services, law enforcement, and legal communities and use a multidisciplinary team for the assessment and investigation of child maltreatment cases including sexual abuse and physical abuse. Specially trained personnel complete medical examinations

### Retirement Party for Gladys Cairns

Fri., June 30<sup>th</sup>

1 - 3 p.m.

Program at 1:30 p.m.

Refreshments

Pioneer Room,  
Judicial Wing, State  
Capitol

Over→

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and interview children suspected of being maltreated. This reduces additional trauma to children and ensures that the various entities involved in investigating, providing services, and enforcing the law, have what they need to do their jobs. The centers also advocate for and refer children and families to other services as needed.

### **Formed ND Child Fatality Review Panel**

Gladys also devoted her efforts toward preventing future tragedies. She was the presiding officer on the task force that drafted and supported the passage of legislation creating the multi-agency North Dakota Child Fatality Review Panel. As child protection services administrator, she remains the presiding officer over the panel, which reviews deaths of all children (under 18 years of age) in the state. Panel members share information and review the circumstances surrounding child deaths. They look for patterns or trends to identify possible prevention strategies and to recommend changes in policies, practices, and laws to prevent deaths.

### **Supported Specialized Training**

A huge advocate for training, Gladys has devoted her talents toward training child welfare practitioners. Recently she was involved in the work plan for the Children and Family Service Training Center to launch supervisor training statewide. Gladys has also provided funding and training opportunities so that professionals from other service delivery systems could learn about the importance of preventing child abuse and neglect, as well as strategies to effectively address child abuse and neglect within the service delivery systems.

### **Developed Citizen Review Committee**

Under Gladys' leadership, North Dakota recently established a Citizen Review Committee with representatives from each region. The committee's role is still being defined, but it will add "citizens voices" to the review of policies and procedures.

### **Established Child Protection Teams**

Effective child protection services require the support and involvement at the local level. Gladys led the way in establishing local multidisciplinary teams to

## **Champion For Children Award – 2005 Gladys Cairns**

The Champion for Children we honor today,  
Is more dedicated than mere words can say.  
Children and families are first on her list;  
An advocate for all...afraid some might be missed.

Her passion for children is second to none,  
As a leader, she makes sure the right things are done.  
Those blocking her path must often step aside,  
"Stay focused on the mission," is her greatest sense of pride.

Recognition of others she is quick to proclaim,  
But acknowledging her is a whole different game.  
She quietly goes about protecting each kid;  
Shunning recognition... her own ego hid.

A tear in her eye and a break in her voice,  
Reminds each of us there is really no choice.  
We must serve these children, for they are alone,  
Neither abuse nor neglect can this woman condone.

So Gladys, you are the Champion today,  
Our wishes for peace and goodwill go your way.  
When you look at the clock, be reminded of the hours,  
You spend making life better for your kids and ours.

Our Deepest Respect and Gratitude,  
The ND Alliance for Children's Justice

provide expertise and support to the social workers and supervisors who do child protection work.

At the state level, a Child Protection Service Task Force develops improvements and best practices to strengthen child protection services in the state.

One of her colleagues summed up Gladys' gifts, saying: "She understands the importance of providing families with mentoring, assistance, and guidance through the collaboration of many public and private partners."

**Please join the department and division on June 30<sup>th</sup> as we celebrate Gladys Cairns** and her many contributions to North Dakota's children! A retirement celebration will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Pioneer Room, located in the Judicial Wing of the State Capitol.

### **ND Department of Human Services Children & Family Services Division**

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