

Southern California Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

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Cal-ACAP/NAMI/UACF/LETS 2012 Annual Advocacy and Collaboration Conference

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On October 13, 2012, the 4th Annual Advocacy and Collaboration Conference was held at the beautiful Presidio Golf Club in San Francisco, California, sponsored by Cal-ACAP, National Alliance on Mental Illness-California (NAMI), United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF), and Let's Erase the Stigma (LETS). Building on the wide success of last year's conference, child and adolescent psychiatrists, general psychiatry residents, medical students, and child and adolescent psychiatry fellows came together with members from NAMI, UACF, LETS, and special guests representing the Foster Care Alumni of America, for an inspiring day of brainstorming, networking, and action. This year, twenty members-in-training were in attendance and our new collaborative partner, Let's Erase the Stigma, and special guest, Foster Care Alumni of America, added their enthusiasm and insights to the conference.

The day opened with a rousing welcome from Roger Wu M.D., President of Cal-ACAP, and Marcy Forgey M.D., M.P.H, President-Elect. This was followed by the presentation of Cal-ACAP's "Children's Hero Award" to former Assemblymember (now State Senator) James Beall for his work supporting children and families. Senator Beall has authored landmark bills that have improved the care and lives of foster care youth, such as AB 12,



Chris Forsyth, Chief of Staff for Senator James Beall, accepts the Cal-ACAP Children's Hero Award on Senator Beall's behalf from Cal-ACAP President-Elect, Dr. Marcy Forgey.

which extended benefits to foster care youth. He has backed improved coverage of autism spectrum disorders, and has supported mental health and substance abuse parity. Unfortunately, Senator Beall was unable to be present to receive the award because he was scheduled for a last minute appearance to support his candidacy for Senator. However, his Chief of Staff, Cris Forsyth, accepted the award on his behalf and gave a touching and inspiring speech about his own struggles as a youth, which moved the audience and set the scene for a warm and candid day.

Following the award presentation, each representative from the collaborating organizations took to the floor and introduced their organization and advocacy roles. Roger Wu, M.D, discussed the role of Cal-ACAP in advocacy and action. Betty Reinhardt, of NAMI-California, highlighted the long history of NAMI and their important work in mental health advocacy. Oscar Wright, PhD, the CEO of UACF, spoke passionately about the role of UACF in supporting families, and gave a glimpse into his own experiences as a parent of a daughter with a major mental illness. Philippe Fontilea, the founder of LETS, rounded out the introductions by giving an inspiring talk about his own personal decision to start helping those with mental illness and tackling stigma.



Bettie Reinhardt, Policy and Legislative Consultant for NAMI California, describes the history of NAMI's mental health advocacy work.

Paul Yoder, Legislative Advocate for Cal-ACAP, jump-started the advocacy training for the day by providing a detailed and practical look at the key legislative issues and bills affecting child and adolescent mental health in California. This was followed by a series of informative workshops led by the skilled organizational leaders, introducing the essentials of advocacy strategy and collaboration. True to the spirit of the day,

these principles were placed into immediate action during the breakout sessions. The room was divided into groups filled with diverse conference attendees, and each small group brainstormed key issues in child and adolescent mental health. Following a successful and passionate idea-generating session, the group as a whole selected several important topics to work on in a collaborative platform, including plans for a combined legislative day in Sacramento in the spring. The issues identified, all within the theme of access, included: Proposition 30, Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT), Educationally-Related Mental Health Services, foster youth services, and eradication of mental health stigma. Additionally, the group recognized the importance of monitoring the implementation of the Affordable Care Act in California, including which and how mental health services are provided under the law.

After a conference brimming with ideas and collaboration, the day was capped off with a networking hour held for members in training in the stately library of the Presidio. This addition to the conference was funded by a generous contribution from Cal-ACAP and helped trainees connect with others interested in advocacy.

This year, in San Francisco, a sense of connection, passion, and commitment to child mental health was felt throughout the day. Each voice, from the eager students, to the expert advocates present, contributed to making the conference a success. Next year the 5th Annual Conference on Advocacy and Collaboration will be held in Los Angeles, with the hopes of building on this year's momentum. If you are interested in learning more about advocacy in California pertaining to child and adolescent mental health, mark your calendars for next fall. For more information on the next advocacy conference or the legislative lobby day this spring, please email Marcy Forgey, M.D., M.P.H. at scscap@gmail.com.