

# Voices



children & families of iowa

Stories and voices of hope.

Volume 115, Issue No.4 2011-2012

## Increasing Number of Children With Mothers in Prison Face Huge Hurdles

**S**eventeen year-old Deanna\* and her 11 year-old brother Brenton\* have watched from the sidelines as their mother Rene\* has gone in and out of jail for most of their lives. Rene has been serving her most recent sentence for more than a year. The children live with their grandmother, are seldom in contact with their father, and have few details surrounding their mother's various arrests. "I think my mom was caught stealing," says Brenton. "I don't really know, but I think she might be able to get out soon."

The female population in US prisons has exploded over the past two decades, due in large part to the introduction of mandatory sentencing laws for drug-related offences. More than 75 percent of the women currently behind bars have children, but there are very few procedures in place to coordinate the care of their children while their sentences are served. Childcare responsibilities often fall on extended family members, with the majority of children going to live with grandparents. Caregivers may struggle to make connections with these children who often feel misunderstood without the tools to handle the emotions and challenges they face. "Everybody looks at us and thinks we are going to end up like her," says Deanna.

The kids are withdrawn, do not participate in activities, and have few friends they can talk to about their situation. At the same time, this is the only way they've ever known their mother. Both children choose not to visit her in prison. "She hasn't been there for me," says Brenton. "She has made a lot of bad choices."



Last fall Deanna and Brenton started meeting individually with a counselor from Children & Families of Iowa. The sessions give them each a chance to voice their frustration and anger. Brenton's therapist says that he is learning how to talk about his feelings towards his mother, and learning strategies for coping with the teasing and harassment he goes through at school. Deanna has been able to identify and verbalize some of her goals for the future. "I am not going to make the mistakes she did," she says, referring to her mother. "I want to become a graphic designer, or maybe do something with music."

Families in which a parent is incarcerated usually face a steep uphill battle. Low income, little education, substance abuse and/or language barriers may be contributing factors to criminal involvement. The children face huge odds to their educational and personal success. Children & Families of Iowa's programs, including mental health services and mentoring programs, offer support, guidance and positive adult role models to children and their families coping with the turmoil of a parent in prison.

*\*Names have been changed to protect confidentiality of clients.*

*More hope inside!*

Why We Give ■ Events ■ Capital Campaign



# Why We Give: Stories of Hope from People Who Give Back

## Bedroom Makeovers

Made up of the wives of Hy-Vee executives, the Hy-Vee Wives group is dedicated to community service. For more than 20 years at Hy-Vee's corporate Christmas meeting, the group has decided on a project. The wives wanted to be more hands-on in their giving this year.

"We are following Hy-Vee's corporate example of giving back to the community," explains Tami Watson, one of the wives. The group took a suggestion from Children & Families of Iowa (CFI) board member and Hy-Vee executive, Michael Skokan, and looked to CFI. They chose to provide room makeovers for 11 residents in CFI's boys and girls group homes. Lowes Home Improvement Center gave the group a 25 percent discount on painting supplies, and Sherwin-Williams donated paint in the colors requested by the youth. Group members donated the necessities to update each room, including bedding, dishes and other items that they can take with them when they transition out of the system.

During the week of January 9, 2012, the group spackled walls and painted rooms and hallways. Additional volunteers came

to help, including six teens. "We couldn't have finished in a week without their help. They painted closets and matched donations to rooms," said Deanna Skokan, the volunteer who organized this project for Hy-Vee.

It was heartwarming for the group to hear and see the youths' reactions. "Many of the thank you notes we received said: Thank you for caring about me," said Deana. "Hy-Vee receives requests for big donations all the time. Small things, like the bedroom makeovers can mean even more to a teenager. It touches these kids' lives to know that we care about them."



## Past Event Chairs Reflect on "Tango Lessons" Learned

This year's 10th annual Tango gala will continue the decade-long tradition of gathering supporters together for wonderful music, exceptional food, auction items and gaming tables, all to benefit the programs of Children & Families of Iowa (CFI). As this important milestone draws near, we talked with two previous Tango chairs and asked them to reflect on the impact this event has had on them over the years.

Michele Griswell has been involved with Tango since its inception. Michele recalls, "In 2000, I was a member of an ad hoc committee that was working to re-define the mission of CFI's Domestic Violence Services. We faced funding cuts from both public and private donors, and we needed to attract a younger, more casual supporter if we were going to keep this program operating." After a few years of being known as the Garden Party, fellow board member Sharon Krause donated use of the Kum & Go facility in 2002 and Tango was born!

"My involvement with CFI keeps me in touch with community needs and supporters in Central Iowa," says Michele. "Being able to provide services at the time of critical need is part of CFI's mission, and seeing the results is so rewarding."

Attorney Julia Lawler-Johnson also served as a Tango past chair. "My husband [Scott Johnson] and I are strong believers in helping people, and children in particular, during vulnerable periods," she says. "We support CFI and Tango because it's a great fundraiser, an awareness builder, and a really fun community event!"

### Past Honorary Tango Chairs:

Arthur & Gloria Filean  
Larry & Kathi Zimpleman  
J. Barry & Michele Griswell  
Ron & Ruth Pearson  
Governor Tom & Christy Vilsack  
Steve & Cathy Lacy  
Stan & Jodi Reynolds  
J. Scott Johnson & Julia Lawler-Johnson  
Jeff & Tracy Rommel  
Greg & Stephanie Burrows - 2012 Chairs



Michele and Barry Griswell



# Mark Your Calendar

for these upcoming events

## 10th Annual Tango – Saturday, August 11, 6:30 – 11 p.m.

One of Central Iowa's most anticipated social events, Tango, will return again in late summer. Silent and live auction items will be available, as well as last year's popular gaming tables. Enjoy live music and hors d'oeuvres, all while helping raise much needed funds to help support individuals in your community.

## Panera Princess Party – Saturday, September 22, 8 – 10 a.m.

*(Note: This date has been changed from September 15.)*

Princesses of all ages will want to be at CFI's annual Princess Party, sponsored by Panera Bread and hosted at their Jordan Creek Town Center location. Enjoy a morning of breakfast, princess games, activities, a raffle and silent auction. All proceeds go directly to support CFI programs that help children in need. Tickets are \$12 per person. Additional activities include:

**Meet live princesses • Crafts and games • Special movie screening\*  
Professional portrait with Pixi\* • Glamour packages\***

Registration will be available online at [www.cfiowa.org](http://www.cfiowa.org) in August. Pre-registration is required and this event does sell out. Check our website or "like us" on Facebook for registration information.

*\* Additional fee applies.*

For additional information about upcoming events, visit our website at [www.cfiowa.org](http://www.cfiowa.org) or "like us" on Facebook.



## Thank you to everyone who attended Kidsfest 2012!

Hundreds of vendors and volunteers brought their enthusiasm and dedication to children's welfare issues by participating in Kidsfest 2012 at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. A record of \$181,000 was raised and more than 15,500

individuals came out to support Central Iowa children in need. Families enjoyed the many activities, including wildlife exhibits, inflatables, the pedal tractor pull and kids glamour spa. Special appearances were made by Dora the Explorer, Spider-Man, Star Wars characters and Veggie Tales, and for the very first time, Queen Robota – the amazing eight-foot comic robot!

Kidsfest is made possible through the generous support of our sponsors. One hundred percent of each ticket price goes directly to CFI programs, helping the most at risk members of our community.

Mark your calendars for **March 1-3, 2013** for next year's Kidsfest. Visit us online at [www.cfiowa.org](http://www.cfiowa.org) or "like us" on Facebook for the latest information.

# Building Futures Capital Campaign



Children & Families of Iowa's first major capital campaign in more than 20 years continues to bring in much needed funding for improvements at all seven CFI Des Moines area facilities. The Building Futures Capital Campaign began in early 2011, and to-date has yielded more than \$2 million towards the overall goal of \$3.4 million.

Since our last major capital campaign more than 20 years ago, the number of lives we touch every year has more than doubled. And while it is truly an honor and a privilege to reach out to so many more families, it has taken a toll on our facilities.

To keep pace with the increased demand for services, we have focused on being good stewards of our funds. We are proud of the fact that of every dollar raised, 90 percent goes directly to provide services to clients; however, this leaves very little for capital needs.



We have put together a comprehensive plan to bring our buildings up to the standard they need to be for our clients and ensure they remain in good condition. Making our facilities safer, making them better equipped to help those in need, making them more efficient – it is all part of the plan to better serve our community.

Led by our tri-chairs, the 12 member campaign cabinet has been hard at work securing pledges, and we hope you will consider giving as well. Use the enclosed yellow donation envelope to help us provide more efficient, safer and more accessible support to Central Iowa's neediest children and their families.

Your donation will go a long way in our mission of **restoring hope, building futures, and changing lives.**

For more information on CFI's Building Futures Capital Campaign projects, please visit [www.cf Iowa.org](http://www.cf Iowa.org).

*Capital Campaign tri-chairs:  
J. Scott Johnson, Jeff M. Rommel, and Daniel J. Houston.*

*New ways to give at  
[www.cf Iowa.org](http://www.cf Iowa.org)*

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage PAID  
Des Moines, IA  
Permit No. 195