



Media Release

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Parent Tells of Triumph over Drugs with Help of Child Welfare System
Advocates, others gather on Capitol steps to Observe Child Abuse Prevention Month

Wendy Founds, a 40-year old wife and mother who abused drugs for more than a decade, tearfully told a crowd of child advocates gathered on the steps of the State Capitol on Monday that the child welfare system and law enforcement helped her regain custody of her daughter and her life.

“Had Cassidy not been put in DHS custody, I know we’d still be using drugs,” Founds said of her and her husband. “There were no worse drug addicts than us, but we didn’t want to lose our daughter. Once we realized how serious this was, we never failed another drug test.”

Founds spoke during the State Rally against Child Abuse held as part of April’s National Child Abuse Prevention Month, which is observed to draw attention to the problem and asks citizens to help prevent it in their communities. Nearly 150 people attended the rally.

Addicted to several drugs over the years including methamphetamines, Founds lost custody of her youngest daughter, now 12, twice and spent time in jail before she overcame her drug habit 10 years ago. “When parents are so far into drugs like I was that they’re not taking care of themselves, then they’re neglecting their kids, too. Children don’t have to be beaten to be hurt,” Founds said.

She praised her Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) caseworkers for being “tough but encouraging.” They helped the family get individual and family counseling, sent the Foundses to parenting classes and connected them with CASA.

“DHS and CASA helped us create a firm foundation from which our family could prosper,” she said.

These days, Founds works at Phoenix Recovery Center, a chemical free living program, in Conway and fills in as a counselor at Recovery Centers of Arkansas. She tries to help parents who are going through some of the same things she did. She sees first-hand how alcohol and drug addiction affect families. “I’m working with the parents of abused and neglected children every day,” she said.

Nationwide, there were 3.4 million allegations of maltreatment involving 6.2 million children from

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October 2010 to October 2011, according to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families. In Arkansas, the DHS Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) was involved in 35,743 investigations of alleged maltreatment in State Fiscal Year 2012.

Faced with growing numbers of maltreatment allegations and new research on how to best help families, DCFS Director Cecile Blucker told the people at the rally that Arkansas is transforming its child welfare system into a system that will strengthen families, reduce the number of children in foster care and link parents to community resources that will help them keep their children safely at home.

Arkansas is one of only nine states in the country recently granted more flexibility in how it uses federal dollars to transform its system to better serve children and families. DCFS is using the flexibility in many ways. One new approach is called “differential response.” Differential response is just that -- a different way of responding to low-risk child maltreatment allegations, such as inadequate food or environmental neglect. Rather than approach a family in an accusatory manner, staff will take on a more supportive and engaging role so they can help address a family’s needs.

“We don’t want to take children into foster care if they don’t need to be. We want them to be safe and grow up with their own families whenever possible,” Blucker said.

This approach has been implemented in 31 counties in Arkansas and it is working. It will be expanded statewide by the end of summer. It has allowed DCFS to work more effectively with families and has kept families together.

Blucker said while the new family-centered will not work for every family, it will allow DCFS caseworkers additional time to focus on the more egregious cases of child abuse and neglect. “There are many children in Arkansas who are victims of serious maltreatment such as physical, sexual and severe mental abuse. The goal for these children is to get them out of those dangerous situations and into homes with adults who will love and protect them as soon as possible,” she said.