"Techies. Computer gurus. Database experts."

You know who they are—they’re the staff of the Children’s Department who walk you through a problem, recover phone lines during a crisis, or save your computer from those pesky viruses, making the jobs of frontline staff much easier to manage.

For their efforts to calmly tackle computer problems and other technical glitches that would stop most of us dead in our tracks, this issue’s Team Spirit Award goes to several MIS staff members pictured here.

“This is just a great crew of people. They really know their stuff and come when staff are counting on them,” said Gena Mitchell, MIS manager.

For some MIS staff, troubleshooting a problem can even happen from a hospital bed. Harris Qureshi, database administrator, was visiting a coworker, Emily Reed, in Christiana Hospital last June. During Emily’s hospital stay, the Department’s “SUN” servers went down, so Qureshi and Reed dialed into the Biggs Data Center from a laptop computer to work on the problem.

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Secretary DeSantis recognized the “behind the scenes” efforts of the MIS crew. “Their work is often the type that goes unnoticed — until the day when someone can’t log onto their computer, use their email, or access the database — then, we all sit back and wonder, ‘What would we do without the team at MIS?’

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“See and Heard” is the quarterly newsletter of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (The Delaware Children’s Department).

SPRING 2002

FRONT PAGE

DELWARE CHILD ABUSE REGISTRY BEING REVIEWED

Delaware’s Child Abuse Registry has been the source of public attention and scrutiny during the past few months. The registry is a database of names of individuals who have been substantiated for abuse or neglect of a child. In July of 2001, a Child Abuse Substantiation workshop began meeting to examine and recommend changes regarding which individuals on the registry are reported out, and for how long.

The workshop’s recommendations are not intended to second-guess the investigation policies and procedures of our Division of Family Services,” said Carlyse Childers, director of DFS. “Those remain both legally and ethically. Rather, they serve to provide individuals the opportunity to appeal being placed on the registry and to be removed after a certain amount of time.”

MISSON STATEMENT

Our vision is to provide leadership & advocacy for Delaware’s children.

Our primary relationship is to protect and promote a community of services for children who have experienced abandonment, abuse, exploitation, mental/physical illness, neglect, or survival stress and in so doing develop a holistic approach to enable children to reach their fullest potential.

VISION STATEMENT

Three of the Child Police

The accomplishments of the MIS team have reached far and wide during the past few months, and include:

• Recovery of phone lines, fax lines, the email system, and FACTS after the phone lines at the Youth and Family Center campus were severed during a construction accident on Route 111.
• Keeping up with FACTS database growth.
• Working “programming magic” to extract useful data from the database system to facilitate development of the FACTS Client Payment Application. (This ensures on-time and proper payments to foster parents and others who help take care of our kids.)

• Performing the Windows/IX Windows 2000 migration on 1,200 computers in less than a month’s time.

• Reducing monthly available HelpDesk calls to less than 1.5 per 100 employees.

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In fact, they are stronger than most because they are survivors. Sometimes it takes years to convince them of this and sometimes, you can never convince them,” she added.

Pepper’s coworkers have lauded many of her accomplishments and her work for children including:

• Her outstanding “connection” and relationships with children:
• Her efforts to work with families, which has made a “multigenerational impact” on the children and parents.
• Her expertise with FACTS (Family and Child Tracking System), and
• Her willingness to go beyond “the call of duty.”

Laurie’s compassion and charity have not gone unnoticed. In addition to fulfilling her role as a family service assistant, she supports many community service events and humanitarian causes. She has tutored elementary school students, opened many weekends attending activity fairs, coordinates adopt-a-family programs, and delivers “Thanksgiving baskets to the needy.”

She is a wonderful example of someone who truly lives our vision to ‘think of the child first,’” said Secretary DeSantis. “She has set some remarkable examples for her coworkers, her families and the children she helps.”

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We've accomplished a great deal for kids, and although there's much more to be done, we are taking bold steps to better meet the needs of our children and youth. These enhancements will strengthen foster care and help build the continuum of services we need to serve 21st century kids," said Secretary DeSantis. "With the support of hardworking foster parents, staff, and partners who 'think of the child first,' our foster care system can continue to offer children and youth a safe place to live and a sense of hope for their future!"
The caseload ratio for probation officers in the Division of Youth Rehabilitation Services has increased to an average of 60 youths on probation per case-carrying staff. Needless to say, higher caseloads limit the time spent with each youth and the effectiveness of Probation Officers working with juveniles.

In this issue, the Team Spirit Award went to the core team of Mike Cattermole, Joe Conaway, Lisa Distefano, Shirley Lerner, Kim Martins, Debra O’Neal, Charlita Shamburger, Rick Shaw and YPS Director Nancy Pearsall for raising the alligator and winning.

The frustrations of our Probation staff led to a 2-day retreat where 34 members of Community Services assessed its service delivery against best practice. They produced a plan to reengineer Community Services to provide better service to kids in our care through more appropriate caseload distribution among staff, and to do it within existing resources. The changes aim to enhance public safety, impact on youngsters on probation, and job satisfaction for Probation Officers. The plan, as well as the effort to produce it, brought high praise from Secretary DeSantis. It has since been presented to key staff to the Governor.

“Kids will have better access to their probation officers and more intensive community services,” says Nancy Pearsall, Director of Youth Rehabilitation Services. “It’s not easy, but it was important to everyone in the room that we overcome this challenge.”

Currently, staff have a mixed bag in terms of a caseload. They are responsible for kids on probation for a range of oversight. The reengineering plan calls for caseloads of kids needing consistent levels of service. “Youth and their families will be assigned based on their risk and needs, instead of a one-size-fits-all mentality,” says Shirley Lerner.

“This will allow better bonds. Kids will know that they are not just kids who have to be seen. They’ll see that their probation officer cares and is putting more time into assisting them in getting their lives on track,” adds Charlita Shamburger, who notes that staff will have more job satisfaction. “Most of the complaints we heard had to do with not enough time with the youth due to high caseloads resulting in too much paperwork/computer time. Now they’ll be able to spend more time with the people in their care.”

To do this, the plan assigns smaller caseloads to staff who will focus on kids needing more intensive services.

The team process in itself had great benefit for all involved. Working with all levels of staff, from the frontline to the Director level, has given everyone a better perspective of the issues we deal with in the unit,” says Lisa Distefano.

“The frontline staff have a better idea about the budget process and constraints, and management has a better idea about the day to day difficulties staff face when their workload is unmanageable.”

“This is a most ingenious initiative,” says Mike Cattermole.

The Team Spirit Award is well deserved by these folks. “The staff identified a problem, put their heads together and came up with a viable solution. This group has alone a terrific job — we can all be proud of them. We need more of this kind of collaboration,” said Secretary DeSantis.

The Team Spirit Award goes to (left to right, back row) Nancy Pearsall, Joe Conaway, Kim Martins, Lisa Distefano, Rick Shaw, (front row) Charlita Shamburger, Mike Cattermole, Debra O’Neal and Rick Shaw.

Their collaboration will create improved community services for kids based on staff recommendations. The Team Spirit Award went to (left to right, back row) Nancy Pearsall, Joe Conaway, Kim Martins, Lisa Distefano, Rick Shaw. (front row left to right) Charlita Shamburger, Mike Cattermole, Debra O’Neal and Rick Shaw.

“This has been an excellent experience for me professionally, and it was lovely to collaborate with such a diverse group. We all have very unique qualities that we bring to the Team.”

Rick Shaw says the whole effort demonstrates that “staff input alone count, and people listen when ideas are put forth in a positive and constructive manner.”

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“Teen and Heart” is the quarterly newsletter of the Department of Services for Youth and Their Families (The Delaware Children’s Department). To tell us what you think: 1-302-633-3500 e-mail: seenandheard@state.de.us

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SUMMER 2002
The Delaware Children's Department is committed to a child-centered, holistic system of care that can meet the needs of 21st century kids. Much like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, we must follow a path filled with obstacles to reach our destination. We began our journey with four separate and distinct silos, and little collaboration or communication among our divisions. To transform the Department, we need to "Think of the Child First" both literally and strategically. Our five strategic initiatives are Child Focused System, Holistic Service, Inspired Workforce, Leading Edge Management, and Dedicated Partnerships. This is how our committed workforce with a big heart can work smarter and summon the courage to achieve our vision of a child-centered, holistic system of care.