

## Joyce James Honored in Two Cities

### *National award from D.C. conference also spotlighted at San Antonio conclave*

DFPS Deputy Commissioner Joyce James received the Betsey R. Rosenbaum Award for Excellence in Public Child Welfare Administration at the spring conference of the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA) in Washington, D.C. on April 4, 2009.

Jerry Friedman, executive director of [American Public Human Services Association](#) (APHSA), presented the award named in honor of APHSA's former director of children and family services. The Rosenbaum Award is offered annually to an outstanding administrator of a state or local public child welfare agency.

DFPS Commissioner Anne Heiligenstein attended the conference where she spoke in support of James. Heiligenstein said, "As a lifelong advocate on behalf of children and families, Joyce James embodies the vision and values of Child Protective Services."

Heiligenstein and the Child Protective Services (CPS) leadership team nominated James for the award. In their nomination they explained why James deserved the honor:

Joyce James has dedicated her entire professional career to advocating for all families and children, improving the Texas child welfare system, increasing public awareness about the disproportionate number of African American children in the child welfare system, creating diversity in the workplace and being a strong and effective leader.

"I am proud that Commissioner Heiligenstein and the CPS leadership nominated me, and thrilled she traveled to Washington, D.C. to participate in the award ceremony," said James. "After listening to her remarks, I could not be prouder of the work we have done in Texas for children, youth, and families."

"Certainly, I am honored to receive the Rosenbaum Award," James continued. "But I share the honor with the passionate and committed staff of CPS whose work on behalf of children, youth, and families, has elevated the Texas child welfare system to new heights. I am also grateful to the Texas Legislature, the Health and Human Services Commission, and the Department of Family and Protective Services. This award honors their role in enabling my accomplishments."

Dr. Kathleen Belanger, assistant professor at Stephen F. Austin State University's School of Social Work, also nominated Joyce James. As she rose through the ranks of CPS, Belanger noted, James not only brought her passion for children to administration, but kept her focus on sound science, solid policy, steady implementation, and consistent publication. "Truly impressive numbers have been recorded in support of



*Joyce James*



*DFPS Director for Policy and Program Debra Emerson and AAICPC Project Manager Carla Fults with Joyce James in San Antonio ([see details below](#))*



*Joyce James addresses the AAICPC conference*

the CPS cultural shift to a family-centered practice model," wrote Belanger.

## Spotlight in San Antonio

Joyce James' passion for her work was born out recently at another national conference, this one in San Antonio for the [Association of Administrators for the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children](#) (AAICPC) on April 18. James received a standing ovation after giving a riveting speech at the President's Reception.

AAICPC President James Graves spotlighted the Rosenbaum Award while introducing James as "an amazing administrator who never lost sight of what it means to reach out to one family, one child."

The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) is a statutory law in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is a binding contract that establishes uniform legal and administrative procedures governing the interstate placement of children into foster care and adoption. Moving through foster care towards adoption moves displaced children towards, in the lexicon of social work, permanency.

"Permanency is a topic that is near and dear to my heart," James told the crowd. "In my opinion, it is the absolute most important word in the life of a child."

"Those of us in child welfare have a moral *and* professional responsibility to champion the needs of children and families through a shared commitment to understanding the meaning and importance of permanency," James continued.

"The question I ask myself on a daily basis," James said, "and the question we must all ask ourselves, is whether what we do for the children and families we serve is what we would do for our *own* children and families."

"Being a foster child is not the same as being adopted," James insisted. "Put yourself in the child's place: What would *you* want?"

James used the forum to praise Gina Gelnett, deputy compact administrator for the Texas Interstate Compact Office and AAICPC vice president. James thanked Gelnett and her boss, DFPS Director for Policy and Program Debra Emerson, "for the amazing improvements they have made over the past four years. Under Gina's leadership, the Texas ICPC office is a true model for other states."

Because of Gelnett, Emerson, and their staff, said James, the department has a clear understanding of the purpose of ICPC. "That purpose is not paperwork, but rather *permanency* work."

In Texas, CPS removed paperwork barriers for approximately 1,400 children in six months. That happened, James asserted, because "we allowed ourselves to put a face on the children whose futures were being held in limbo."

Ultimately, said James, "We must not focus on what is easy but rather on what is right for children."

Gelnett reported that this was the first time in 30 years that the AAICPC conference had been held anywhere in Texas. Everyone she spoke with was impressed with San Antonio's expansive Texas hospitality.

## A Career of Collaboration

Joyce James began her career 30 years ago as a CPS caseworker. She became DFPS assistant commissioner for Child Protective Services in 2004 and rose to the position of deputy commissioner earlier this year ([read more](#)). In nominating James for the Rosenbaum Award, Commissioner Heiligenstein and the CPS leaders highlighted the agency's many accomplishments under her leadership. These include:

- A tremendous increase in adoption.
- The strengthening of kinship caregiver support.
- The inclusion of the parent and youth voice.
- The innovative use of Family Group Decision Making.

James has previously received several national honors including the Valeria Bullard Black Administrator of the Year Award (2006) and the Director's Award of the Family Preservation Institute of New Mexico State University, Las Cruces (2006). Her most recent award was the 2007 Commissioner's Award, a nomination made by the Texas Governor and presented by the Administration for Children and Families.

Joyce James is the also the founder of Project HOPE - Helping Our People Excel - a community initiative that was the first major signpost in her work addressing the over-representation of African American children in the child welfare system. Today, James is widely recognized as a national leader in reducing such racial disproportionality and, in Heiligenstein's words, "generously shares her leadership skills and experience in technical assistance to other states" as they ramp up their own efforts to reduce racial disproportionality.

In her nomination, Heiligenstein spotlighted James' skill at collaboration. "Ms. James advocated for the creation of a close working relationship between Casey Family Programs and Child Protective Services, resulting the Texas State Strategy, a collaborative partnership" ([learn more](#)).

James agrees, saying "I am keenly aware of the contributions of partners like Casey Family Programs, private providers, and other community stakeholders in the work we have done. Without them, I could not have received this prestigious award."

- San Antonio reporting and photos by [Mary Walker](#), Region 8 Public Information Officer