

PORTRAITS OF HOPE

Spring 2023



Ade Jembe Fola is an organization dedicated to using African drums and dance to engage with youth. Its founder, Jamil Adéwalé Kasumu, helped the Stanley G. Falk School celebrate Black History Month.

President's
Message

Rebuilding with
Rachael

Family Bonds
Are Thicker
Than Blood

Donor
Spotlight

A Message From President & CEO, Elizabeth McPartland

Dear Friends,

As the anniversary of 5/14 rapidly approaches, C&FS will honor the memory of the lives lost in this tragedy via a myriad of ways.

First, we commit to being present and intentional in our relationships with our colleagues and how they might be coping at the time of this anniversary, recognizing the loss many carry with them. While our community is forever changed, we are reminded that healing is a communal activity and requires us to remain connected to ourselves and each other. Through the support of Black owned businesses, we will provide a number of group and individual healing opportunities for our colleagues. This includes a range of activities pertaining to physical, spiritual and emotional care. We prioritize taking care of our team, so they may serve the community during this difficult time.

Second, it is critical that we continue to learn from this racially targeted event. In our pursuit of fighting systemic racism, C&FS has offered opportunities to both the public and our internal team to become informed allies. Child & Family Services' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program hosted a two-part online seminar called "Resistance is Necessary: How Black Resistance Benefits Everyone." Our speakers were leaders in the Black community here in Buffalo, and they created a discussion that was candid and informative.

Our educational programming is not limited to Black History Month; it is continuous throughout the year. C&FS is conducting more internal and external events, including a recent Lunch and Learn analyzing how the myth of the "Strong Black Woman" trope in media negatively effects on the lives and mental health of black women.



Speakers at "Resistance is Necessary: How Black Resistance Benefits Everyone."

Top row (l-r): Kelly Wofford, ECDOH; Rahsaan Delain, Collaboration on Poverty Elimination.

Bottom row (l-r): Kara Oliver, Tapestry Charter School; Rene Petties-Jones, NFJC of WNY; Will Green, Center for Urban Education.

Finally, we continue to examine our internal policies and procedures, and identify ways to dismantle institutional racism. Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committees at the agency and school are active and continue to examine our internal practices, identifying what changes are needed in order to create a more equitable and inclusive organization, which ultimately fuels better care for those we serve.

We will continue this intentional work for generations to come with your help and support.

We remember, we reflect, and we recommit to the work that remains ahead of us.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth McPartland".

Elizabeth McPartland, LMSW, MBA
President and CEO, Child & Family Services



Rebuilding with the Rachael Warrior Foundation

“Rachael loved bubbles from the time she was little,” described Lauri Wierzbicki. “When we help someone, we refer to them as one of our ‘bubbles.’”

Turning tears into bubbles is the cornerstone of the work being done at the Rachael Warrior Foundation. Mark and Lauri Wierzbicki started the Rachael Warrior Foundation in 2018 in honor of their daughter, Rachael. Earlier that same year, 22-year-old Rachael Wierzbicki lost her life due to domestic violence. Vowing to keep her memory alive and to help prevent this from happening to someone else’s child, Mark and Lauri have dedicated themselves to providing aid and support to those in crisis situations due to domestic violence through their foundation.

The shared missions brought together the Rachael Warrior Foundation and Child & Family Services Haven House. Lauri and Mark became friends and supporters of the Agency and partnered with Haven House to help support more domestic violence victims in our community. Haven House has been the beneficiary of the foundation’s leading annual fundraiser. In addition, Lauri and Mark have been a part of Haven House’s Fashion Show with a Twist fundraiser as they debuted their modeling careers, walking the runway for the first time! They have been proud advocates speaking at C&FS events, sharing their daughter’s story and legacy with supporters.

“We know how hard it is for women to leave an abusive relationship,” said Lauri. “When they finally do make that move, having a safe place where they can move forward is huge. It gives them hope.”

Earlier this year, the Rachael Warrior Foundation announced a new partnership with Haven House called “Rebuilding with Rachael.” This \$125,000 gift includes funds for capital improvements at Haven House along with the creation of a five-year endowment fund in honor of Rachael.

We’ve been very blessed in our fundraising thanks to those who knew Rachael and those who just want to help prevent domestic violence,” said Mark. “When we looked at organizations we want to work with and support, Haven House is at the top of the list because it truly is on the front lines of helping survivors.”

This endowment fund will not only help ensure the life-saving programming Haven House provides will continue for years to come, but it will also honor Rachael in our community. While her life was taken from us too soon, her light will continue to shine brightly as we share her story for many years to come.

Thank you to Lauri and Mark Wierzbicki and the entire board of directors at the Rachael Warrior Foundation for creating pathways toward freedom for domestic violence survivors.



Lauri and Mark Wierzbicki modeling at the 2022 *Fashion Show with a Twist*.



The Rachael Warrior Foundation delivers a check to Child & Family Services.

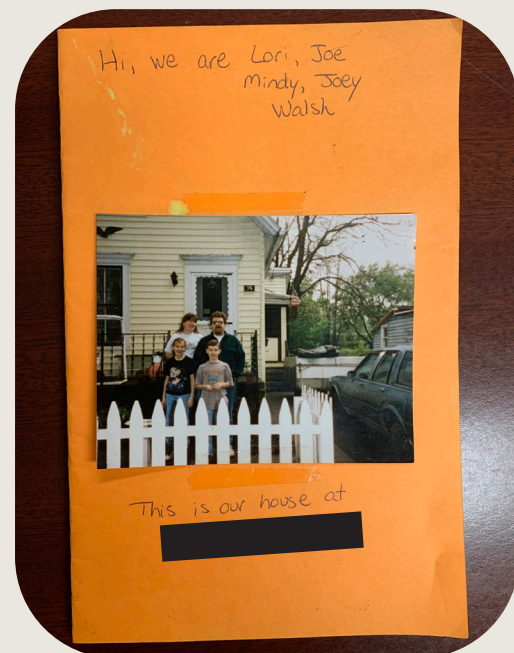
Family Bonds Are Thicker Than Blood

When Mindy Walsh was 11 years old, she was driving on the thruway with her parents and brother when a Child & Family Services' Foster Care and Adoption billboard caught her father's eye. He asked Mindy's mother to quickly write down the phone number on it.

"My parents always said, 'The more kids the merrier!'" laughed Mindy.

That moment forever changed the lives of Mindy and her family. Over the years, the Walsh family hosted eight foster children. Each child who came to live in their home was greeted with a homemade booklet filled with photos of the Walsh house, highlighting rooms, family members and pets. For a young person coming into a new environment, it was the perfect way to feel welcomed and included.

"Seeing what some of those kids went through at such a young age, especially when I was a teenager, really taught me how hard life can really be for people," Mindy noted. "We were fortunate to be able to be there for children when they needed us."



The Walsh household's welcome booklet



Mindy Walsh holding her family's welcome booklet.

Unfamiliar with Child & Family Services prior to seeing the billboard, the Walsh family appreciated the variety of what the Agency had to offer. "I remember going to classes at Child & Family Services when I was twelve years old. The Agency had so much training, so much follow-up, and so many resources available for my family," observed Mindy.

The Walsh Family adopted the first two children who stayed with them, then adopted two other children a few years later. Other foster children stayed with them for various spans of time and then returned home. Throughout everything, Mindy recalls a joyous home. There were spur-of-the-moment trips to go ice skating and chaotic family dinners filled with laughter. For Mindy, it never mattered that some of the children were born to other parents. They were all family to her.

"It was the best thing for me. All these experiences created who I am. Blood does not mean anything. My siblings are my siblings," said Mindy. "My sister and I always laugh because people always tell us they see the resemblance."

Donor Spotlight: Ellen Kennedy

“Social work really demands that you have an ethical value system,” said Ellen Kennedy. “You need to genuinely believe in the dignity and worth of every human.”

Ellen is a social work expert. She has been a strong supporter of Child & Family Services since 1964 when she first joined the Agency, then called the Children’s Aid Society, as a social worker. After working at C&FS for over 17 years, she taught social work at Buffalo State College until she retired in 2006. As a member of the C&FS Board of Directors from 1992-2008, Ellen received C&FS’ William B. Hoyt Advocacy Award in 1999 and the John N. Walsh Jr. Board Appreciation Award in 2006.

“I just knew I wanted to help people, whatever that might mean,” said Ellen when asked why she wanted to be a social worker. “I was drawn to working with children and families.”

Ellen also, quite literally, wrote the book on social work. When she worked for the Children’s Aid Society, she and her co-workers co-authored a book called *Child Abuse: A Community Challenge*. The Agency used a publisher in East Aurora to print the book in the 1971.

Even with her incredible individual accomplishments, Ellen knows that it truly takes a team effort to make an impact. “When I started at the Children’s Aid Society, we had such a tight-knit group,” said Ellen. “When you work in child protection, you must be a community; you are not an individual worker in that setting. It was, and continues to be, such a supportive environment.”

Ellen noted that being a social worker takes a special type of person who can remain objective in their mission. Sometimes there is a lack of closure, as a worker might not know how things turn out for a child down the road. This makes the triumphs all the more special.

“There was a little guy in Residential Treatment who, out of the blue a few years ago, sent me a Christmas card. Then I received another the year after, and I kept getting them,” recalled Ellen. “I can’t help but think that something good happened to him.”

Even though she is now happily retired, a lifetime of social work keeps Ellen invested in the news coming out of Child & Family Services. “I always valued so much of what the Agency has been about – how the protection of children was the most important thing,” Ellen explained. With a smile, she added, “Any social worker worth their salt has been at Child & Family Services.”





GRANTS 2021-2022

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Johnson & Johnson Foundation

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Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

John R. Oishei Foundation

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Circle of Love (\$1000-\$1,999)

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Cheektowaga, New York 14225
(716) 842-2750

Center for Resolution & Justice
Tri-Main Center
2495 Main Street, Suite 357
Buffalo, New York 14214
(716) 362-2323

Cheektowaga Counseling
3901 Genesee Street, Suite 110
Cheektowaga, New York 14225
(716) 681-5718

Connors Children's Center
824 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14209
(716) 884-3802

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Tri-Main Center
2495 Main Street, Suite 357
Buffalo, New York 14214
(716) 681-4300

Downtown Counseling
330 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14202
(716) 842-2750

Foster Care and Adoption
824 1/2 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14209
(716) 882-0555

Haven House
Domestic Violence Hotline
(716) 884-6000
www.cfsbny.org/hh-chat/

Stanley G. Falk School
848 Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14209
(716) 882-0090



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