Dear Assistant Secretary Jennifer Strus,

Spokane County is very disappointed to receive your letter today discontinuing $25,000 in funding for the Parents for Parents Program. This has been a valuable asset for the Dependency process. It is evident from our experience that the findings reported in the Children and Youth Services Review (volume 34, 2012, pp. 2036-2041) of the effectiveness of a parent-to-parent program are true. Following program participation, benefits include:

· Positive change in attitudes

· Increased trust in child protective services

· Better understanding of the role of stakeholders

· Increased awareness of case issues

· Increased belief that parents have control over their case outcomes

· Increased engagement in the juvenile dependency court process

· Increased compliance with court orders and case plans

· Increased participation in visitation

This program demonstrates effectiveness in shaping parents’ attitudes and improving parents’ early engagement in the dependency process. These are critical elements for successful and timely reunification. It could be argued that through early engagement in services, children are placed in foster care for a shorter period of time, thus saving the Department money in the long run.

Since this program is new, there has not been time to adequately evaluate all the perceived benefits and pursue evidence based status. The program does, however, have promising practice status and we are in the process of working with professors from Washington State University to study the evidence based outcomes of the program. With the funding cuts, this study will likely be discontinued along with the program.

Although introduction of the Parents for Parents Program was initially met with some skepticism in Spokane, one local parent attorney summarizes the journey well:

The Parents for Parents program and its Helping Other Parents Engage (H.O.P.E.) class is an instrumental element of Spokane County’s dependency framework. As a dependency attorney, I’ve seen various well-intentioned but ill-fated attempts to engage parents who are CPS involved. In its short lifespan, the current program has surpassed my expectations and provided many of my clients the tools, information, and insight to successfully and quickly engage in their case. I firmly support the program and its mission.

– Craig Smith, Spokane County Parent Attorney

To start a program such as this requires a substantial investment in time, energy and resources to get it off the ground. The hard part has already been accomplished. I fear that by discontinuing the present funding, it will kill a very promising and long-needed program that effectively prepares the soil for the seed.

Although I empathize with the difficult budgetary decisions you are faced with, please re-consider your choice to discontinue this program. It’s my opinion that the cost to benefit ratio is very low.

Sincerely,

Judge Salvatore Cozza