

Public Testimony
1/29/07

Julie A. Fleck, Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Sunburst Community Service Foundation
40571 MT HWY 35 East
Polson, MT 59860

Provider of In Home Services

Thank you for your time, dedication and commitment to the residents of Montana and for listening to the many voices here today. I am Julie Fleck, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who is employed by Sunburst Community Service Foundation, a non-profit agency that provides services to children and families. Funding for the important work we do is provided by Child and Family Services. We work together with Child and Family Services to help break the cycle of abuse and neglect, by providing support, education and skills to children and families.

Today I am a voice for the children. A voice for the children who cannot be here today to speak for themselves. Children who are vulnerable and dependent upon all of us for protection and care. I am standing in for the neglected, the children who eat dry ramen noodles for dinner, who have no sheets on their beds, children who have been exposed to drugs and alcohol before they have taken a breath, who have witnessed Mommy being hit, children who have been through what we can barely imagine.

The voices of children call us to do better. The State of Montana has skilled, trained professionals who are passionate and tireless in their efforts to investigate child abuse and neglect and to make appropriate decisions about children's well being. Networks of community support, funded through Child and Family Services are working to safely prevent child abuse and neglect, to assist in re-unification and help children have forever families. The Department of Child and Family Services and these networks are stretched thin. Caseloads are high. This directly affects the quality of care for children and families, burnout and turnover of workers. Funding constraints tax community agencies to meet the challenging needs of families.

How do we as individuals, communities and government choose to use our resources? We know the cost of abuse and neglect. We know the generational effect of abuse and neglect. The statistics of those in prison who have been abused and neglected is well known. The cost in terms of dollars and lives is immense. We do know how to do better by our children and families. The research has been done. The education, skill and dedication to do better by our children and families is here in Montana. It is our obligation and that of government to do better by our children, to protect fully, to rehabilitate and strengthen lives. This cannot be done with current caseloads and staff turnover resulting from burnout. The public has entrusted you. You are acting as our voice. When reviewing budgets and dealing with the variety of needs calling for increased resources, we trust that you will hear the voice of the children, that you will stand in for the children and families of Montana.