



From the Corner Office...

KASSERIAN INGERA?

The African greeting above has continually resonated over the past few months as our agency prepared for two crucial external assessments. Our Education Services Department must remain in compliance with standards developed by Cognia and LCYDC must maintain agency wide policies and practices established by the Council on Accreditation (COA). Ongoing adherence to regulations is expected and every four years both entities “tap us on the shoulder” and request an opportunity to closely inspect how well we are implementing all that is expected. And folks, what is expected is significant. Cognia wants to know about pedagogy, curriculum and classroom management methodologies while COA wants to learn about our company ethics, quality improvement, governance and outcomes. Between both organizations, LCYDC is required to address more than two thousand policy and practice standards!

Here’s the thing – Cognia and COA are rigorous in their review efforts. They engage experienced Peer Reviewers who are serious in determining whether agencies are continually changing and evolving to best serve clients, employees and stakeholders. And yes, the information being requested and required during the reaccreditation process can get very technical, and daunting. However, if we could distill all two thousand plus requirements down to two words, those two words might be...Kasserian Ingera. Permit me to explain using the brief excerpt below:

*“...Among the most accomplished and fabled tribes in Africa, no tribes are considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It is perhaps surprising to learn the traditional greeting that passed between these mighty and feared warriors. “Kasserian ingera?” one would always say to the other. It means - **And how are the children?**”*

Those individuals in our workplace who focused most intensely on our Cognia and COA reaccreditation efforts would often become beleaguered and frustrated; those of us who would have to put aside pressing matters to provide self-study documents or reports could become snappy or dismissive; the Peer Review Team members from Cognia and COA could also tire from all that was required to be accomplished in just a few days. The thing that all groups – regardless of the position or role held – had in common, was a collective resolve to keep what was best for children, teens and families at the forefront. Indeed, we were able to get past our frustrations and barriers in unified agreement that these efforts were necessary and required if we were to have the best outcomes for those who need the services we provide. And it seems that both Cognia and COA would answer the Masai warrior’s question affirming that, for the most part, the children, students and persons served by LCYDC are well.

We are pleased to share that the Chanticleer Learning Center is now duly reaccredited by Cognia and that LCYDC is fully reaccredited by COA! The hectic 2020/2021 Self Study and the Site Visit processes are in the past; the hard work, service and sacrifice continues into the future as we keep the question - kasserian ingera? – at the forefront of the many paths that we forge ahead.

Laura Cooper, Executive Director



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 3/7 Rakista Hale
- 3/8 Regina Ransom
- 3/12 Ericeiyah Darden
- 3/13 Christina Kindred
- 3/17 Alyasa Brown
- 3/18 Krista Collins
- 3/21 Kayla Stone
- 3/22 Penny Rajsimumang
- 3/22 Elaine Tucker
- 3/24 Jamia Driver
- 3/24 Ebony Harmon

- 3/29 BreeAnna Tinsley
- 3/30 Leslie Higgins
- APRIL BIRTHDAYS**
- 4/1 Emily Wilson
- 4/3 Jeffrey Coffman
- 4/6 April Williams
- 4/10 Bettye Ray
- 4/11 Kristy Noelting
- 4/12 Stanley Garrett
- 4/13 Shelia Buckley
- 4/20 Shemeka Brock
- 4/26 Ivan Niwamanya
- 4/27 Melvin Wright
- 4/30 Barbara Williams

NEW HIRES

- 2/1/2021 Tranesia Brown, Assistant Operations Manager
- 2/10/2021 Mallory Copeland, Residential Specialist

- 2/10/2021 Carolyn Harris, Residential Specialist
- 2/10/2021 LaCreshia Smith, Residential Specialist
- 2/10/2021 Brooke Burns, Residential Specialist
- 2/22/2021 Fred McCrimmon, Residential Specialist
- 3/8/2021 Doreene Carlisle, Operations Manager Passage Girls
- 3/11/2020 Annie Holloway, Housekeeping Specialist
- 3/15/2021 Jessica Mersino, PQI Manager



CENTER SCENES...

COMFORT BOXES 2021

From birth to early childhood, children use their five senses to explore and try to make sense of the world around them.

It is an important part of early childhood development and providing opportunities for children to actively use their senses as they explore their world through 'sensory play' is crucial to brain development.

Learning through sensory exploration comes naturally to babies and young children, which makes sense when you consider that the skills, they will come to rely on to build an understanding of objects, spaces, people and interactions are yet to be fully developed.

As adults, our senses provide us with vital information that we use to inform decision making thousands of times a day. We may take this ability for granted and barely notice it, but it's for this reason that helping children to learn about their own senses is so important. Come join us as we celebrate 1 amazing year since we implemented our Comfort Box Program here at LCYDC. We're still doing what we do best, offering hope to families...strengthening communities.

The products contained in our comfort boxes continue to be carefully selected by our experienced therapists and staff and are kid, parent, and/or teacher-tested and approved. The costs of these boxes are very low as well, and they remain budget friendly. Each child upon arriving at our facility is presented with a box that contains innovative sensory products, fidget tools, educational toys, occupational therapy tools, autism or special needs toys for learning, play, self-regulation, sensory integration, handwriting, motor skills development, fidgeting, and much more.

Our aim with these sensory or comfort boxes is to help our children relax, focus and calm down to a particular scenario or event. It helps them grasp things with decreased fear and discomfort and enables them to play naturally. Sensory toys for kids help them develop social learning skills like planning, negotiating, and sharing.



SPEAKING OF FOOD...

Project Uplift wants to take the opportunity to recognize the incredible generosity of the General Motors (GM) Corporate Giving foundation. GM recently donated \$10,000.00 to keep the Uplift Food and Supplies closet stocked so that our AU Student-Volunteers can grab healthy food items and necessities as their funds dwindle throughout the semester. Thanks GM - your incredible gift is helping us to "Find New Roads" here in Lee County.



HRC AT LCYDC

The Human Rights Committee (HRC) at LCYDC is continuing to make an impact in the lives of those we serve. Eighteen months ago the agency determined that monthly external review and discussion of significant incidents, policies and procedures was necessary to further our agency mission. We are ever so thankful to our external volunteers who give of their time and talents to advise, inform and recommend. These community investors include: Ashley Wood – East Alabama Mental Health; Honorable Ben Hand – Municipal Judge; Beth Smith – Lee County DHR; Sidney James – Cary Center; Leslie Wisner – Oak Park Pharmacy; Dora Freeman – Lee County Family Court; Pam Seidler – Twin Cedars; Sara Cox – East Alabama Mental Health; Honorable Mike Fellow – Family Court Judge.

Sharlene McDaniel – LCYDC Board; Terri Huffman, Auburn City Schools; Lynda Woods – Talladega College; Vertrina Grubs – Southern Union State Community College. LCYDC's Case Advocate, Hannah Deep, manages the HRC meetings with support from Deputy Director Birmingham and other agency staff. Our thanks to all who are helping us to improve to better serve those who need us most.

WELCOME JESSICA MERSINO

Lee County Youth Development Center would like to welcome Jessica Mersino to our team. She hails from the Alabama Council on Human Relations and is a former Early Head start Home-based Educator. She earned her bachelor's in psychology and Christian Counseling in 2014 from Liberty University and plans on receiving her master's in professional counseling this May. She is also a loving mother of two beautiful children. Ms. Mersino will be our agency's Performance and Compliance Manager. Welcome aboard Ms. Mersino. We look forward to your added value to our team.



SCHOOL'S IN SESSION – WITHOUT WALLS

COVID-19 has caused some schools to permanently close, others to seek out virtual options, but not here at our day school. TLP students have the pleasure of continuing their schooling in a COVID safe environment with the added benefit of safe social interaction. We are thankful to the Chanticleer Day School educators for their support from January to present. On March 22nd, our TCP students return to Opelika High to complete the school term as in-person leaders.



FROM FARM TO TABLE

There are many farm-to-school programs, at the national, state, and local level. The overarching objectives of these programs are simple: incorporate fresh, local produce into school nutrition programs. The basic principles of farm-to-school programs are:

- Improve student health by providing a variety of nutritious and fresh food options,
- Provide hands on nutrition education based on local food systems and tastes,
- And to support the local economy by providing business for community and family owned farms.

These programs have the potential to provide meaningful connections between the farm, the classroom and the table. Overall, the studies have found that students who participate in these programs demonstrated increases or improvements in the following:

- Consumption of fruits and vegetables,
- Knowledge about sustainable agriculture and growing cycles,
- And developed the ability to identify local produce and recognize seasonality.

In addition to the positive impacts that farm-to-school programs can have on children, there are several other stakeholders that can benefit from Farm-to-School initiatives. Teachers reported participating in school lunch more often and being more conscious of dietary behaviors. Foodservice staff saw farm-to-school programs as an opportunity to develop innovative seasonal recipes and new uses for local produce. With that said, Lee County Youth Development Center is pleased to announce a new partnership with a local farm to ensure the freshest highest quality produce is fed to the children that we serve. Better development begins with better food options. Bon appetite.

