

Mississippian saluted nationally as Woman of Vision

By Seetha Srinivasan • Contributing columnist • May 24, 2010

Carol Burnett, founding director of Mississippi's Low-income Childcare Initiative, was honored on May 20 in New York at the MS Foundation's annual National Salute to Women of Vision.

Burnett is one of six recipients of a Gloria Award, which celebrates women nationwide who have successfully advocated for changes in policy on behalf of families and communities. Warmest congratulations to Carol Burnett on this signal recognition!

The Mississippi Low-income Childcare Initiative is a statewide, nonprofit organization whose chief purpose is to advocate for increased public investment in quality child care for all working families.

It began in 1998 in Jackson when child care providers, parents, and community leaders united to act on their concerns about the need for affordable child care services for low-income families in Mississippi, the only state that does not have a state-funded program and relies fully on federal funds.

The link between the availability of quality child care for low-income families and the ability of parents (often single mothers) to seek and maintain employment is well-documented, and yet this crucial support to achieve economic self-sufficiency is woefully lacking in the state.

Research indicates that welfare recipients who join the work force are 82 percent more likely to stay working if they have affordable child care, and yet only 35 percent of eligible children in Mississippi are enrolled to receive such care.

A family of three with an annual income of less than \$35,000 is eligible, and 55 percent of Mississippi children under five are in this category.

Burnett leads the agency's grassroots efforts in educating policy makers and the public to see the

people behind these numbers and to advocate for systemic changes.

MLICCI offers workshops throughout the state that advise on: funding sources for child care; services for low-income families and how best to access them; and how government policies may affect resources for child care.

The agency also offers training on best child-care practices.

In the 12 years that MLICCI has been in existence, it has successfully supported: health and safety standards for unlicensed providers in the child care subsidy program; a hearings process in the child care certificate program; posting of policy information on the state Department of Human Resources website for easier access; and increased funding for the subsidy program.

Increased funding remains a major goal of the agency (and its partners). Another goal is rule changes to enhance parents' access to services and retention of the services once they are obtained.

MLICCI is funded by individuals, faith-based and civic organizations, businesses, and national and regional foundations.

In 2009 the Women's Fund of Mississippi, in keeping with its mission of economic self-sufficiency for women, became one of the first agencies in the state to award a grant to MLICCI.

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The Mississippi Low-income Childcare Initiative's efforts on behalf of the state's disadvantaged demographic help itself achieve economic security are truly noteworthy, and we applaud Burnett for the recognition that she has received as its director.

All of us Mississippians have a responsibility to support the agency's efforts, with the ultimate aim of making the work of the MLICCI unnecessary - with congratulations to Burnett for a job well done.

Seetha Srinivasan is director emerita of the University Press of Mississippi and a reader member of The Clarion-Ledger Editorial Board.

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