

**News from the North Dakota Department of Human Services  
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**Bismarck area residents honored at child welfare conference**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services honored two area women at the 2007 Children and Family Services Conference in Bismarck yesterday. Jennifer Wetsch-Jessen was named the 2007 Outstanding Child Protection Services Worker, and Sanya Kom was awarded the 2007 Outstanding Former Foster Youth Award.

They were among 12 individuals who received awards at the annual training and recognition event. Award recipients were nominated and selected by child welfare professionals for their efforts to support foster children and their families, and for their leadership and personal achievements.

“The award recipients exemplify the best of the best,” said Dawn Pearson of the department’s Children and Family Services Division.

She said Wetsch was selected for her ability to develop effective relationships with children, families, and partners in the child welfare system; her commitment to clients; her advocacy on behalf of children and families while focusing on the best interests of children; and her dedication to family reunification and other permanent planned living arrangements for foster children. Outside of work hours, Wetsch coordinates and facilitates Nurturing Parenting Programs in the community.

Kom is one of two former foster youth honored. A full-time nursing student and mother of three, Kom makes time to advocate for other foster youth. She has participated in the State Youth Advocacy Group, Children and Family Services Review training sponsored by the department, foster youth panel presentations at conferences and trainings, and youth stakeholder meetings.

During the 2007 state legislative session, Kom testified before lawmakers in support of additional services for youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

In North Dakota, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations – Division of Juvenile Services, counties, private agencies, the Tribes, and foster parents provide child welfare services. On any given day, about 1,400 children are in foster care in the state – many as a result of abuse or neglect situations.

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