

fostering perspectives

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Successful foster parenting can require new approaches

When they became foster parents Jim and his wife, Stella, were full of passion and confidence. Raising their children hadn't always been easy, but the kids were all grown and living successfully on their own. They felt sure their experience and their open hearts would allow them to provide an excellent home for teens in foster care.

Now they have doubts. The 14-year-old in their home, DJ, is giving them trouble. No matter what the issue—school, house rules, behavior—nothing they do seems to work. Everything becomes a power struggle.

Jim and Stella feel as if, overnight, all they know about getting kids to listen and cooperate has simply evaporated.

A Common Problem

Jim and Stella face a common problem. Many foster parents tell children, "I'm going to treat you just like I treated my own children. What I expected of them, I'll expect of you."

In some ways this is a good message because it says "I will treat you fairly, as one of my own, not as a *foster child*." In practical terms, however, this approach doesn't always work.

Why? Because the behavior of some children in foster care has been shaped over time—by inconsistent parenting, abuse, neglect, multiple previous placements, and other factors—to the point where "typical" parenting techniques will not work.

Kids in care may need parenting interventions unfamiliar to the average parent.

Kids in foster care often require more structured parenting interventions to address negative behaviors and increase positive, pro-social behaviors. These interventions are seldom in the average parent's repertoire. To succeed, foster parents must learn them.

"Back to School"

If you are a foster parent we hope that this is a message you have heard in the pre-service training you received before you were licensed, in conversations with your agency, and through your contact with other foster parents.

If you face challenges in managing the behavior of children in your home, your first step should be to contact your agency for support. Asking for help is a sign of strength!

Also, there are many resources out there about parenting children with difficult behavior. Two we recommend are:

- *Off Road Parenting: Practical Solutions for Difficult Behavior* by Pacifici, Chamberlain, & White (2002, Northwest Media Inc.)
- Foster Parent College, which offers a variety of affordable online courses related to behavior management and parenting strategies < www.fosterparentcollege.com >

If, like Jim and Stella, you are having a particularly hard time with power struggles, you may also find the sidebar helpful.

Getting Out of a Power Struggle

Most parents have experienced a power struggle at one time or another: you ask a child to do something, they refuse or are openly defiant, and you engage in a back-and-forth struggle to get the child to comply. In other words, you get sucked into it.



The first step to getting out of a power struggle is recognizing when you are in one. Most power struggles occur after a stressful event for a child, and generally happen because his feelings are keeping him from moving toward his "real" goal. He becomes focused on proving he is right (which is impossible since his behavior is driven by irrational beliefs) rather than being focused on "getting what he wants."

If they are not careful, parents likewise can become focused on "winning the argument" rather than on getting what they want. No matter how hard we focus and try to avoid power struggles, there will still be times we find ourselves being pulled into one or right in the middle of one. Here are some suggestions if you find yourself in the thick of it.

- **Exit and Wait.** Remove yourself from the confrontation—don't be an audience for your child. Your attention and presence can be a powerful reinforcement. You might calmly say, "Yelling and talking to me in that tone of voice is not respectful, so I am going to leave right now and talk to you later."
- **Regain your composure** before addressing the situation. You are more effective when you're calm and collected.
- **Don't confuse this with a "teachable moment."** Trying to teach or implement an intervention *during* a power struggle is seldom effective.
- **Keep it short and to the point.** Say something neutral. Lecturing only fuels the fire.
- **Avoid arguing.** Arguing with a young person about their failure to follow your instructions *maintains* the struggle. It doesn't help kids to listen and mind.
- **Know when your buttons are being pushed.** Adolescents often attempt to push your buttons to keep you in the conflict. Don't get pulled in!
- **Misbehavior is not a personal attack on you.** Rather, it's the child's attempt to regain or maintain control.
- **Plan ahead and pre-teach!** Think about how you will handle potentially tough situations in advance. Talk with your child about expectations and consequences.
- **Energize and recharge!** Take time to relax and relieve stress. *Don't* spend that time thinking about the problem.

Once the power struggle is resolved, focus on restoring the relationship. Don't dwell on the past by bringing it up again: let everyone move forward.

As a foster parent, you need to take care of yourself. Stressful events such as power struggles can leave even the most seasoned parent feeling exhausted. That is why it is essential for you to develop strategies that help you to energize and recharge.

My life, your life, our connection by SaySo, Inc.

My name is Nicole Lyght, and I'm a member of the Board of Directors of SaySo. Beginning with this article, *Fostering Perspectives* is introducing a new SaySo column called "My Life, Your Life, Our Connection." Every column will present a profile of someone in foster care and invite young people to write in with comments or questions. In the next issue of *Fostering Perspectives* we'll share your comments, answer your questions, and present a profile of another SaySo member.

Foster parents and social workers, for this column to work we really need your help. Every time you get an issue of the newsletter, please make a point of sharing this column with youth in foster care. Sparking a dialogue among youths about important issues is what this is all about!

George's Story

George Duvall entered foster care at an early age due to neglect. George's goal was always to return home. His delinquent behaviors—such as stealing, running away, and fighting—eventually brought him to a boy's camp in rural Kentucky. Soon he figured out how to "play the game" to get visits with his mother. His "good" behavior made it possible for George to live in a foster home. His first foster family was Caucasian (George is African-American) so he soon discovered that he could be loved by people different from himself. His stories of growing up in this home are very funny.

As George grew up, his foster family moved and his best friend's family became licensed so he could live with them. George found his forever family with this family he chose himself. He has learned that family can have different meanings and that love can also be different—none of them better than the other. George was an athlete and attended college playing football.

George and his best friend/brother are joined by their forever commitment to each other. His story touches both youths and adults and allows us all to laugh at the human part of foster care.

* * * * *

When I heard George Duvall's story, I realized that although every foster child's experience isn't the same, we are all the same in a sense: we are all striving to get to where we think we need to be and we do any and everything to get there. Luckily in the end, we find out the truth and do nothing but grow and prosper from it.

I was personally in a situation where I felt I needed to be with my mother and my family to succeed. However, most of my life was spent in foster care, away from my family.

Listening to Mr. Duvall was very inspiring and helpful because it let me know that I may not have a normal life, but I am a normal foster child.

Nicole's Story

I was born in 1987. I lived in Virginia with my father for two years after I was born. I then moved to North Carolina with my mother at age three. When I was four my mother and I began to move around. By age seven I had moved from NC to Tennessee, Tennessee back to NC, NC to Virginia, Virginia to Florida, Florida back to Virginia, and Virginia back to NC. In that time I had lived in an apartment with no lights or water, with a friend of my mother's, in an abandoned house, in a public bathroom, a shelter, and finally in a house with my biological family in Durham.

We didn't stay with our family long, though, because of my mother's attitude. We then moved out on our own to Chapel Hill, where we lived in another four houses in two years.

Then I was taken into foster care. I was on my way to the bus to go home when a man and a lady approached and asked me to stay off the bus. I overheard them talking to an authoritative person. They were saying that I wasn't allowed to go home. My first instinct was to run, but I was obedient, so I stayed. I then learned why I wasn't going home. I was eight years old and in the third grade. I had only been in that school for five or six months and had already missed 80 school days. Further investigation discovered that my mother was doing drugs. They said she was not a fit mother.

So I was taken into foster care. I lived in four foster homes and one group home throughout my years in foster care. I lived with very different people and learned many different things.

Because of that there is never a day that I regret being in foster care. I've had opportunities that I would not have had if it wasn't for foster care. I went to school, did well, and am now in college. I've been to the Bahamas three times on three different cruise ships. I've been to Beyonce and Chris Brown Concerts. I've just been blessed to do things I thought I'd never do or experience.

I'm now a junior at North Carolina Central University. School is paid in full, I have a job, my own car, and I'm even back with my biological family. And after 10 years of not being there, my mother came back and is now staying with my family and me. Life has been so good to me, and so has the foster care system. Being in care has taught me one thing...the system works, you just have to make it work with you.



Nicole Lyght



George Duvall

Your Response

- What feelings came up as you read Nicole's story?
- Did something Nicole said or did in her life resemble your own?
- Would you like to ask her something about how she not only survived foster care, but thrived?
- How do you thrive and make the best of not being with your biological family?
- What can you say to other youths about how you have learned to work with the foster care system?

E-mail your responses to sayso@ilrinc.com.

Encourage kids in care to read and respond to this article!

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Helping children by engaging their parents

by Donna Foster



Donna Foster

Kim was 12 years old and had been in foster care for some time when she came to live with us. As we got to know one another, I asked Kim why she left her other foster homes, where she had been placed with her sisters. She was very clear: "I wanted to see my Mom and my sisters hated my Mom. I wanted to go home with her and I felt no one there (at the foster home) would help me."

After hearing her viewpoint of her past life and future plans, I understood why Kim voiced her demands from the start. She wanted to see her Mom, talk about her Mom, and one day, go home to her Mom.

What she didn't know about me was that, as a foster parent, I believe the stronger the healthy connections are between a child and her birth family, the more resources I have available to help the child.

I never discourage children from talking about their birth families. Understanding their families aids me in understanding the children. If I want to do my part in helping children understand their situations and plan for their futures, there isn't any room for judgment. Who they are is where they have come from. The people who take part in the growing years of a child make an imprint on the child's life; they all become a piece of who and what the child becomes.

Engaging Kim's Mom

Kim's mother was very angry at me and at DSS. She resisted the Judge's orders: parenting classes, therapy, stable employment, and adequate housing. She had a job and was ready for a larger apartment if the children could come home. But she felt she didn't need to do the other things.

When I first met her she was forceful and angry. But when I acted in ways to build her trust in me, such as sitting behind her in court to support her and giving her updates on Kim's daily developments, she mellowed. In time, she did all she was ordered to do. Kim's mother had a personal disaster which lengthened Kim's return, but throughout the years, she showed her love to Kim. Kim and I wrote a letter to the Judge stating our strong support for reunification and listed the factual proof of Kim's mother's involvement with her.

In the five years Kim lived with us her mother and my husband and I shared in parenting Kim. Her mother attended all of Kim's school events, meetings, and church activities. She and I developed the house rules and consequences and we enforced them together. She chose to use the same discipline plan with Kim on her visits home.

Kim's grandmother stepped forward when

Kim's mother needed a support person to help her raise Kim in her teen years. In the end, Kim, her mother, and her grandmother lived together for two and a half years until Kim went out on her own.

Kim needed this time to reconnect with her family. There were hard times (raising a teen is difficult for any parent) but the good times were wonderful. Kim regained her relationships with her siblings as the years passed. I felt instrumental in aiding Kim on her adolescent journey and we will be there for her throughout her life.

An unexpected benefit to being a foster parent for Kim and working with her birth family was that our two families became one. Kim never felt she had to choose one family over another.

Not all children have happy endings. There are birth families who don't want to cooperate or are dangerous to their children and others. There are absent parents. There are children who don't want to reunite.

Even so, there are ways to help children gather information about their families and understand their situation. Time spent helping children fill in their life's gaps through talking and creating a life book builds a stronger relationship between foster parents, social workers, and the child. In the end, the child wins.

*Donna Foster, an author, national trainer, and consultant, lives in Charlotte, NC. This article has been adapted from "The Voice of a Child," in *Fostering Perspectives* v. 4, n. 2.*



I hated for the night to come

by Violet Rittenhour

I thought I'd lose my mind when my kids were in care

After my kids were taken, I felt so empty inside. Food didn't seem to have taste. And I hated for the nights to come. The nights felt the worst. I didn't know if my kids were safe and warm.

Sometimes I would go in their room and sit on their beds. I left everything as they had left it. My daughter's pajamas were still under her pillow. Their toys were waiting for them. The Lunchables were in the fridge, but my kids were gone.

Like a Bad Dream

I couldn't put them to bed singing a song we made up called "Good Night." I couldn't comb my daughter's hair. Laquesha has long pretty hair. I wondered, "Will someone take time and comb it?" I couldn't make sure Robert's clothes were neat. I couldn't give him his man cologne in the morning or a goodbye kiss. These things worried me to death.

Sleep would come and it all seemed to be a dream. I would wake up thinking my kids were in their room. But then I'd go in their room and they weren't there. Sometimes I would sit and wait for Robert to run out and give me a kiss. Or for Laquesha to run out and say Robert was still asleep. Sometimes I would even hear them calling me, like I was going crazy.

Pacing and Crying

I thought I was losing my mind. I would pace back and forth. I would sit in corners of my house unable to breathe, crying until I thought my heart would stop. I would look at the clock thinking, "My kids are eating lunch now," or, "School is out."

I'd think, "I'm their mother, and I don't know if they're safe." I wondered if they were scared. I wondered how they were being treated. If they had breakfast every morning. If someone put the covers

on them at night. It was pure torture for me.

Then September 11th came. That sent me over the edge. I didn't know if my kids were scared. I couldn't hold them or comfort them. I couldn't talk to them about what happened. The days seemed to blur. I just cried a lot. I didn't sleep much. The nights were so bad I would wait 'til day to sleep.

Praying for Relief

I began to look at myself and think, "How can I hold my life together? It seems so hard when everything is falling in." I knew I had to hold on for my babies, but I felt so helpless. Part of me gave up believing that I would ever have my kids again. I gave up on life.

Not killing myself was a hard battle. At times, I walked down the street, praying for death to come. I prayed for a truck to hit me, for something to happen so I could die without having to do it to myself.

'We Will Be Family Again'

Fridays were the best and the worst. That day I visited my children. I loved seeing my kids, their beautiful eyes and smiles. But it just killed me to leave them. I'd feel so sad. I always cried when I got home, because they were not home with me. They should've been in their beds and able to play with their toys. I felt that a good mother should never have to visit her kids two hours a week in a room.

At those times, I felt I'd give anything for things to go back to the way they were: My kids playing in the park, and me taking pictures like the proud mom I am. Then I'd swear to myself, "We will be family again." I'd look forward to that. I lived for it. And in time I made it happen.

"Reprinted with permission from Rise, Copyright 2006 by Youth Communication/New York Center, Inc. (www.youthcomm.org).

Fostering the child witness of domestic violence By Crystalle Williams

Amanda and Michelle, her foster mother, are in the kitchen standing side by side, drying the dishes and talking about their day. Allen, Michelle's husband and Amanda's foster father, walks in from outside. He gives them both a smiling "Hello," grabs an apple, and gives his wife a peck on the cheek as he walks out of the room.

Silence falls. Amanda seems lost in her own world. Then, out of the blue she says to Michelle, "It's good that he doesn't hit you in front of people."

Taken aback by the comment and hoping she had heard wrong, Michelle asks, "What did you say?"

After a pause Amanda says, "It's good that he waits to hit you until I'm not around."

Michelle replies, "Honey, he never hits me."

With a confused look on her face, Amanda says, "But I thought he loved you."

Although the names have been changed, this conversation really happened to a friend of mine, a former foster parent. The fact that it did underscores an alarming reality: right now there are children in foster homes all across the country whose experience has taught them that domestic violence (DV) is a natural part of adult relationships.

Foster parents contemplating this fact usually ask two questions: how can I know if the children in my home have been exposed to domestic violence and how can I help them if they have?

What is Domestic Violence?

To answer these questions we must first understand the unique dangers and dynamics of domestic violence.

The NC Division of Social Services defines domestic violence as, "the establishment of control and fear in an intimate relationship through the use of violence and other forms of abuse including, but not limited to, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, economic oppression, isolation, threats, intimidation, and maltreatment of the children to control the non-offending parent/ adult victim." Domestic violence is a behavioral choice that is made by the batterer. The batterer chooses to use power and control tactics, including violence, in family relationships. This is a pattern of behavior that occurs over time. Physical violence is only a part of the dynamic.

Effects on Children

Children who see, hear, or are otherwise aware of domestic violence in their homes experience a broad range of responses. Some appear to be unaffected. Others experience negative developmental, emotional, psychological, and behavioral consequences.

There are things foster parents can do to help children recover from exposure to domestic violence.

Short-term effects in children exposed to battering include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbances, separation anxiety, depression, aggression, passivity or withdrawal, distractibility, concentration problems, hypervigilance, and desensitization to violent events. Child observers of domestic violence also tend to have a higher rate of academic difficulties than other children (Weinstein, 2002).

The good news is that once safety and security are provided to these children, symptoms tend to disappear. Studies have demonstrated that, among children exposed to the most severe domestic violence, over 80% tested psychologically normal, were self-confident, had positive images of themselves, and were emotionally well (Weinstein, 2002).

Although much less common, the long-term effects of exposure to battering can include delinquency, higher risk for substance abuse, a propensity to use violence in future relationships, and a pessimistic view of the world (Weinstein, 2002).

Roles Children Play

As you would expect, children exposed to violence in their homes experience a variety of feelings, fears, and concerns. To deal with these feelings and to survive and function, most children develop coping strategies. Even when they are no longer in that environment, children may continue to use these coping strategies.

In their book *Helping Children Thrive: Supporting Women Abuse Survivors As Mothers*, Linda Barker and Allison Cunningham (2004) explain that in families experiencing domestic violence, children often take on one or more of the following roles that help them and their families cope:

Caretaker. Child is responsible for household duties, child care, homework, etc. Will present as a mini-adult, with parentified behaviors. Even in foster care, this child will often continue attempts to parent siblings.

Confidant to the Victim and/or the Abuser. Child is privy to a parent's feelings, concerns, and plans. Child may serve as a "reality check" for the victim when he or she minimizes or denies that events have occurred. May receive special treatment from the abuser and be told justifications for the abuse. Child may be asked to keep secrets. Child is often rewarded for reporting back on the adult victim's behavior.

Abuser's Assistant. Child is co-opted or forced to assist in the emotional and/or physical abuse of the victim parent.

Perfect Child. Child tries to prevent the violence by excelling in household duties,

school, and other activities, by never arguing, rebelling, misbehaving, or seeking help. This child has little patience for siblings in the home who are not perfect.

Referee. Child tries to mediate tension in the home and keep the peace.

Scapegoat. Child is seen as the cause of the family's problems; child's behavior is used to justify the violence. Child may be special needs, be involved in the juvenile justice system, or a stepchild to the abuser.

Barker and Cunningham note that a single child may play multiple roles. Roles may change over time, or they may play different roles in specific incidents. Depending on the roles they play, children may be forced to choose between the abuser and the victim parent. As a result, they may have feelings of guilt or grief over the things they have done. Understanding what roles the child has played and allowing the child to talk about how he or she has coped is an important first step in understanding how to help. Listening without judgment is key.

Resiliency and Recovery

A number of factors may influence how an individual child responds to being exposed to domestic violence. These factors include the level of violence, the degree of the child's exposure to the violence, the child's exposure to other stressors, and the child's individual coping skills. Not surprisingly, the child's age affects his or her ability to cope with exposure to domestic violence: younger children are more vulnerable. The victim's relationship to the child and the presence of a parent or a caregiver to mediate the intensity of the event are also potential factors in a child's reaction (Weinstein, 2002).

The most common indicator of cont. p. 5



Crystalle Williams

What NOT to Say

When talking to a child or adult who is the victim of abuse, choosing the right words is key. Inappropriate or inadequate verbal responses—even if they are not intended to be hurtful—can feel like a second victimization for the person. This can make the initial victimization that much more difficult to resolve. Attitudes or questions that may re-victimize include:

- Disbelief ("Are you sure this happened?")
- Blame ("What did you do to set him off?")
- Cultural insensitivity ("Isn't this accepted in your culture?")
- Judgment ("How can she stay!?!")
- Minimizing ("The pain will go away, things will get better")

Source: Ganley & Schechter, 1996; Cromwell, 2003

continued from page 4

resiliency in children exposed to domestic violence is the strength of the bond with the battered parent, and/or access to a healthy, close relationship with a non-violent adult figure. Perhaps the most harmful thing that can happen to children who witness violence is the destruction of the mother/child relationship (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002).

Identifying the Child Witness of DV

How can you know whether a child you are caring for has witnessed domestic violence? Your first step should be to talk with the child's social worker at the time of placement. If there is an indication domestic violence has occurred, ask about the harm to the child that was found during the child protective services (CPS) assessment or during the CPS In-Home process. Case documentation should reflect how the abuser's behavior directly affected the child and how the child views the violence.

Due to the secrecy in which domestic violence thrives, it may be unknown that DV is part of the family dynamic, and the child may enter foster care for another reason. In these cases foster parents or other trusted figures are often the first people the child feels safe enough to tell about the violence.

If a child begins to disclose domestic violence or any other form of maltreatment, foster parents should listen without judgment; don't tell the child how to feel or what to say. Children don't always need advice, but they do need to vent and problem-solve. Let them use their own words, even if they are offensive to you. Trust can be built here.

Do not promise not to tell anyone what is shared. Rather, say, "I won't share the information unless I feel there is someone who can help. I will tell you who I feel we need to share this information with" (Foster, 2000). Help children identify their own strategies for coping.

More Things Foster Parents Can Do

If you are caring for a child who has witnessed domestic violence, one of the most important things you can do is to make every effort to model healthy relationships with your spouse, partner, and friends.

That doesn't mean there should never be conflict in your home—disagreements are an unavoidable part of human life, and learning how to resolve them non-violently is a necessary lesson for children to learn. When you argue or disagree, know that the children in your home are watching to see how you and your partner resolve the situation.

Also, be mindful of how you react to common stressors such as losing your parking space, getting rude service at a restaurant, etc. It is common for batterers to react ag-

Understanding and Helping Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Know that children may feel:

Afraid:

- Their mom/dad will be hurt or killed
- They or their siblings will be hurt or killed
- They'll make things worse if they tell
- The battering parent will hate them if they tell

Angry:

- With the battering parent, the parent being abused, siblings, other family members, and with themselves for not stopping the violence

Confused:

- They may love and hate the battering parent
- They may not know what causes the violence or how to stop it
- They may be unsure whether it is abuse at all

Helpless:

- To stop the violence
- To escape the abuse permanently
- To get help for themselves, the batterer, the abused parent, siblings

Guilty:

- They believe they cause the violence
- They believe they should intervene but sometimes don't
- They may have unhealthy ways to help them cope, feel better, or "escape"

Source: NCCWDVC, 2002

To support these children:

Identify and support those factors that shield children living in violent homes from harm. **Protective factors** include:

- Child has a positive relationships (with family members, neighbors, and friends) that will support him during a crisis
- Child is self-reliant and willing and able to seek help
- Child's caretaker is willing to seek help for domestic violence
- Caretaker's primary concern is the safety of the child
- Adult victim has good parenting and coping skills

Source: Ganley & Schechter, 1996



gressively (cursing, yelling, sarcastic undertones) to everyday stressors, so even if you are not violent, try to model your reactions carefully.

Foster fathers are best positioned to model non-violent fathering, co-parenting, and respect. Be mindful that this may be the first time the children in your home have seen a man react differently to everyday stressors. Reinforce the idea that battering is a choice—people choose to behave violently to solve problems and/or get their way.

Other ways foster parents can help children who have witnessed domestic violence include:

Do what you can to engage in shared parenting. Many assumptions are made about the decisions that victims of domestic violence make. Often we mistake the battered parent's actions or lack of action as an inability or unwillingness to make decisions and to keep children safe. If they remain in a relationship with the batterer, people sometimes conclude that adult victims don't care about the children or are oblivious to the dangers involved. Please keep in mind that many parents remain in violent relationships because it is the only way they feel they can keep the children safe. Once the relationship is over, a custody battle is likely, and the batterer will often be granted unsupervised visitation with the children, which may increase the risk to the children. Batterers generate all kinds of risk,

and there are specific risks associated with staying in the relationship and with leaving (Davies, 1998). Your attempts to understand the battered parent's experiences and protective efforts, even if the person is still in the relationship, will help you better understand how to help the child.

Don't focus on negatives or bad memories. Let children talk freely about their good and bad feelings or memories about the batterer and the abused parent. Batterers are not typically violent every day, so there are some good times that the child may want to tell you about. At the same time, don't force the child to talk.

Be on alert when these children begin to date. This goes for males and females, as they both need to learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. The lines of communication must be open without judgment in order for foster parents to be truly effective. Talk to teens about the dangers of dating violence and signs to look for, such as jealousy, isolation, and stalking. Insist on meeting the person and his or her family. Encourage teens to read about dating violence online and to keep themselves informed.

Conclusion

As foster parents, you are in a great position to make a positive difference in the lives of these children. By modeling appropriate conflict resolution, providing nurturance, reserving judgment, and seeking to understand the child's individual experiences, you could be a resiliency factor for a child in your home.

Crystalle Williams, MSW, trains on domestic violence and other topics for the NC Division of Social Services. For a DV resource list go to <www.fosteringperspectives.org/DV.htm>



NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Visit the Association's Web Site at <www.ncfapa.org>

Shining the spotlight on foster parents!

by Stacey Darbee



Stacey Darbee

From the Association's President

This year foster parents, families, and children will be in the spotlight as the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, the NC Division of Social Services, and their partners advocate for higher board rates for children in care.

When we say we're on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, we don't exaggerate!

NCFAPA encourages you to become educated on this issue and to be proactive in getting the support that foster parents need.

As foster parents we take on a commitment that few in our society would even dream of. True, child welfare professionals, mental health practitioners, and child advocates give energy, blood, sweat, and tears. But no one else demonstrates the level of commitment that a foster parent has. When we say 24/7, we actually mean 24/7!

From early morning to the chaos of bedtime and often throughout the night, foster parents are at the ready. Foster parenting is not a challenge to be taken lightly—it is for generous souls who are hearty of heart, flexible, and thick skinned. We aren't super heroes. But we are every day heroes.

It is time for foster parents to ask for what they need. There is no shame in asking for the support necessary to do what we do in the very best way possible. That support comes in many different shapes and forms. This year we are asking for an increase in the rate at which foster parents are reimbursed

for expenses they incur in caring for children. In other words, we are asking for an increase in the foster care board rate.

Hitting the MARC

In October 2007 a study was published about establishing foster care "minimum adequate rates for children" (MARC) across the country. This report was a joint venture of Children's Rights, the National Foster Parent Association, and the University of Maryland- School of Social Work, working in conjunction with a large advisory group. This report, "Hitting the MARC," is the first study that calculates the **real** expenses of caring for a child in foster care in the United States. This report will be essential data we need as we educate the General Assembly and the public about the costs associated with raising children in foster care. To find this report visit <www.ncfapa.org> and click on the "Resources" tab.

NCFAPA fully endorses the legislative agenda of the Covenant with North Carolina's Children, a statewide advocacy group. This agenda supports a board rate increase and additional foster care funding by the state to fully secure federal Chafee Funds.

Another Successful Conference

Our 10th Anniversary Conference, *Shining the Spotlight...A Decade of Dedication* was

held in Winston Salem April 25 – 27, 2008. It was truly remarkable! Over 500 of North Carolina's foster, adoptive, and kinship parents joined together for a weekend of learning, sharing, resting, games, and some dancing fun. Family Feud will never be the same again!

This year we offered 55 different workshops and institutes. We were especially proud to "up the ante" and provide some higher-level training for more experienced parents. Participants asked for humor and fun and we obliged, giving them Family Feud and the comedy of Joanne Scaturro and Donna Foster. Once again we focused our closing session on Advocacy for ourselves and our children, as Ms. Karen McLeod, President/CEO of the Child and Family Services Association-NC, discussed issues in North Carolina that are of great importance to us all.

Updated Website

Over the past year our website has changed, evolved, and grown. It is now fully functioning and we hope that you will visit it often. There you will find links to other conferences and training of interest and also surveys and information specifically for parents in North Carolina. Look to it often for news, surveys, updates, and member benefits.

Join the Association!

Membership is open to anyone interested in strengthening foster and adoptive services in North Carolina. Send this form, with payment (DO NOT send cash), to: NCFAPA at UNCG, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION.

Regular Membership is open to any foster or adoptive parent and is \$50 for an individual and \$75 for a couple. **Associate Membership** (\$100 for an individual and \$300 for an organization) is available to those who do not qualify for Regular Membership.

First name #1: _____ First name #2: _____

Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____ Licensing Agency: _____

Home phone: () _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Amt. included: _____ Donation Amt.: _____

Family Support Network of NC

Promoting and providing support for families with children who have special needs

- Does your child have special needs?
- Do you need help finding information, resources, and services?
- Do you want to know more about a special need, disability, or diagnosis?

Hablamos español

- ¿Su niño tiene necesidades especiales?
- ¿Usted necesita ayuda para encontrar información, recursos y servicios?
- ¿Usted desea saber más acerca de alguna necesidad especial, discapacidad o diagnóstico?

The Family Support Network of NC provides

- Parent-to-Parent Support
- Education & Outreach
- Information & Referral
- Research & Evaluation

Contact us at: **800.852.0042, www.fsnn.org**

 Family Support Network of North Carolina
Serving families since 1985 through a network of affiliated local programs

2008 NCFAPA award winners

The NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association's 10th Annual Training Institute, *Shining the Spotlight—A Decade of Dedication!* was held April 25–27, 2008 at the Twin City Quarter in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. At this event we celebrated the impact foster and adoptive parents have on children and families in our state.

Prior to this event we asked you to submit nominations for a foster family or adoptive family in your region of the state who has put a spotlight on building a child's self-esteem, or who has gone above and beyond in their dedication to children and families.

The winners received an award and were honored at the event in Winston-Salem. We are proud to be able to present you with profiles of the statewide winners, Steve and Kim Wilkins (adoptive parents) and Barbara Taylor (foster parent). To read the profiles of the other eight award winners please go to <www.fosteringperspectives.org/v12n2/winners.pdf>.

Statewide Winner for Adoptive Parents

Steve and Kim Wilkins, Brunswick County (Region 4)

Nominated by: Columbus County Department of Social Services

Steve and Kim Wilkins have been a foster care placement for Columbus County Department of Social Services since June 9, 2004. The Wilkins accepted a four-month-old child with special needs directly from the hospital. Kim visited with "Allie" while she was still hospitalized to learn procedures to care for her many medical problems.

Numerous times they have taken Allie to Duke, Chapel Hill, or New Hanover hospitals and stayed with her day in and day out, worried if she would be alright. The Wilkins communicated with medical staff to learn about her condition and how to enhance her care and make sure her needs were being met. Allie's physical and mental development has surpassed the doctor's expectations because of the hope, care, and love given by Steve and Kim.

The Wilkins made several adjustments to properly care for Allie, such as modifying their home to accommodate a wheelchair and purchasing a wheelchair-accessible vehicle to transport her. Now as

she is advancing to a larger wheelchair, they are facing a bigger problem of the chair not going through the interior doorways of their home.

Kim travels over three hours each month to take Allie to visit with her sibling, who lives in a medical facility. Allie has received the best of care and love that any child could ever have. The Wilkins always inquired about the adoption of Allie, and we are pleased to announce that the Wilkins received a Decree of Adoption for Allie on Valentine's Day 2008. This is truly an adoptive home that sets the standard for exemplary dedication and commitment to a child.

Statewide Winner for Foster Parent

Barbara Taylor, Wake County (Region 3)

Nominated by: Vera Khayrallah, Wake County Human Services

Barbara Taylor has been licensed with Wake County Human Services for 26 years and has had many foster children in her home. She is our teen foster mom and has taken children ages 16 to 21 years.

Barbara Taylor has demonstrated great passion and care for the children, many of whom had serious challenging behaviors and issues. She takes children not many people would take. She sees potentials despite the challenges.

Barbara is the queen when it comes to teaching children independent living skills, encouraging them to stay in school, learning job skills, and guiding them to make good choices. She has made a difference in the lives of many young adults through her advocacy and commitment. Many children were helped by Barbara to have a good start in adulthood; some continue to keep in touch with her.

Ms. Taylor also participated in PALS/LINKS meetings with her foster children. She served as a support to other foster parents caring for older children, and has spoken on panels encouraging new foster parents to consider taking older children. Barbara has been a great asset to our agency and to our older children. For all that I extend my heart felt thanks to her.



Camps for families with children who have special needs

Have you heard about the 2008 *Summer Camp Directory* put together by the Family Support Network of North Carolina?

This free directory is a resource for family members and service providers looking to provide summer camp experiences for children. The directory lists nearly 75 North Carolina summer camps, both day and residential, that serve children who have special needs.

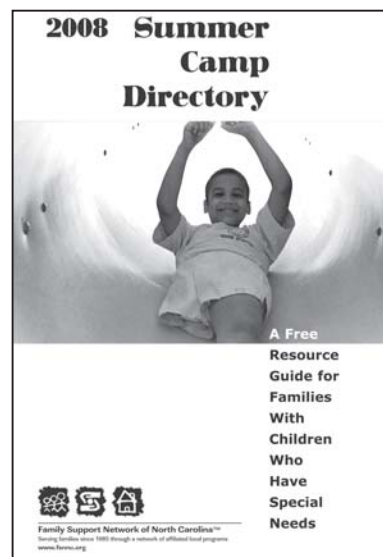
Special needs addressed by the camps in this year's directory include: asthma, autism, burns, cancer, chronic illness, craniofacial anomalies, deaf or hard of hearing, developmental disabilities/delays, diabetes, emotional difficulties/behavioral challenges, epilepsy, academically gifted/talented, learning disabilities, lupus, muscular dystrophy/other muscular disorders, physical disabilities, sickle cell anemia, and traumatic brain injury.

The directory also suggests questions parents can ask when looking for a camp to meet their child's needs. These include:

- How do you apply and what is the deadline for submitting applications?
- What are the opening and closing dates?
- Is transportation provided?
- Is the program designed for children with specific disabilities?
- Does the camp meet state and local health standards and regulations?

If you have a child with special needs and need help finding information, resources, and services, you can call 800-852-0042, toll free, to talk to one of the Family Support Network's resource specialists, or contact them by e-mail (cdr@med.unc.edu).

To read or download FSN-NC's 2008 *Summer Camp Directory* just go to www.fsnn.org.



Kids' Page

Words and Pictures by and for Children in Foster Care

Vol. 12, No. 2 • June 2008

Interviewing our foster and adoptive parents

In the last issue of *Fostering Perspectives* we asked young people to interview their foster or adoptive parent about why they chose to be a foster or adoptive parent and what it's like to be one. Here are the top three responses.

—John McMahon, Editor



Tyrone, age 11

1

I interviewed my 80-year-old grandmother. She lives in Monroe, Louisiana and was not greatly affected by Hurricane Katrina. She only lost some vinyl siding and shingles off her house. She was very grateful it was not worse. For twenty years she provided safety, housing, and love to over 83 foster children. Upon her relocation from New Hampshire to Louisiana, she was informed by the state that she was too old to be a foster parent. The news broke her heart.

When my grandmother retired from working, she was bored. It was then that she decided to be a foster parent, "I wanted to fill a void in a child's life." She started with a kinship program taking care of family members. Many of the children called her "Mom." She was the only mother many of them knew. Even today she is still considered family because they love her.

She does not have any regrets. "I always put my best foot forward," my Nana says. Many times, people think that being a foster parent is unique, but my grandmother does not feel unique because she says, "I am the same person I was before."

It has been an enjoyable experience for her "because I love children." Her most memorable moment was when she took in a bi-racial girl who did not want to live with her. In the end, they became very close and still see one another today. Her greatest joy is that her oldest son now has two adopted sons and I am one of them.

Tyrone's letter won first prize, for which he was awarded \$100.

Ebony, age 15

3

Why did you choose to become a foster parent?

My mother and all her siblings were in foster care. When me and my siblings were little she would tell us about their terrible experience when they were in foster care. She would tell us how they worked on a farm and their foster parents beat them and they didn't feed them. So my mother and her siblings had to steal food from the farm because they were not being fed. When she would tell us the story it really was upsetting to hear, so when I was 12 I told myself that I would become a foster parent and keep children from getting mistreated like my mother and her siblings did.

What is it like to be a foster parent?

It can be both difficult and rewarding. The difficult part is that at times you feel that no matter what you do it is never enough. Most foster children are afraid to open up because of what they have been through in their past and it can make you feel bad. However, the rewarding part is that being a foster parent makes you feel like you are giving foster children a better life than what they had before. *Ebony's interview won third prize, for which she was awarded \$25.*

Heather, age 12

2

Heather interviewed her adoptive parents.

How did you find out about foster/ adoptive parenting? Why were you interested in it?

M: We found out by our babysitter, Regina. She is a foster parent. We had three boys and we wanted a girl.

Tell me about the foster parenting classes.

M: We inquired in September and started the next class in January. The classes took six weeks. Before our first class I was nervous. Our class had a lot of people in it. I'm quiet in groups of people that I don't know.

D: I was nervous also.

How long was it before you got your first children?

M: We were licensed in April. In June two children came into our care. At first it was exciting and scary—we only knew a limited amount of the information about the children. The most nervous part was the 72 hr. meeting.

D: It was different staying up at night with a baby that you're just meeting.

How did your kids react to the children you fostered?

M: The oldest [age 7] had mixed emotions. The middle child [age 4] was loving but possessive over his toys. The youngest [1 year] had no cares.

When did your first foster children leave? How did you feel?

M: They left three months after they came. I felt sad, but glad they went with their grandmother.

D: I was sad, but they went to a good home.

What made you decide to adopt your foster child?

M: She fit in our family. We knew when she was placed here it was an adoptive placement. After all the trials and learning to trust it all worked out.

How do you like fostering?

M: I like it, but it can be challenging at times. For example, before we adopted her, our daughter would try to get us to make her leave.

How long will you continue fostering?

M: We have five children. One of the five is still waiting to be adopted by us. After his adoption we'll be done.

Who was the most helpful person you talked with about your foster and adoptive children?

M: Our social worker, Marcie. During the trying times she would put you in the child's shoes and have you look at it from their view. She had our daughter (who we were going to adopt) write us a poem once the adoption was close. She also had our daughter write on the back of the adoption card, "I'm ready" with her adoptive name written on it. She also came to the adoption signing with us and took pictures.

What advice would you give other foster/adoptive families?

M: Talk to your social worker. Have an open mind. Put yourself in the child's shoes. Know that there will be trying times.

Heather's interview won second prize, for which she was awarded \$50.

What made you decide to adopt me?

SaySo: Still celebrating after all these years!

by Nancy Carter



CASTLE MCCULLOCH, Jamestown, NC — On March 8, SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) celebrated not only its tenth birthday, but ten years of improvement in services for North Carolina's foster teens.

Without a doubt, ten years is a noteworthy milestone for a youth-driven advocacy organization made up of young people experiencing their own transitions and challenges. Reaching this milestone speaks to the spirit of SaySo. This organization is creating opportunities for members to learn how to improve their lives and the future of youths who come after them. Many SaySo members have come to realize the issues they speak out about today will impact future youths—and that they have benefited from previous SaySo members speaking before them.

Alumni returned to SaySo Saturday remembering their mission of “yesteryear”—to provide post-secondary educational opportunities, continue Medicaid after aging out, participate in foster parent training, help recruit families who want teens, start a newsletter, have a website, and help legislators know that foster youths are their children and should not allow anyone to make policy about them, without them.

Two hundred people attended SaySo Saturday to celebrate ten years of educational and advocacy success. While the wind blew the doors open, the audience heard from George Duvall, a national speaker from Kentucky, foster alumni, and comedian who brought his humor and insight that connected everyone in the room.

SaySo presented a lifetime achievement award to Joan McAllister for her many years of service to improve the lives of foster teens in North Carolina. Joan has been an adult advisor to SaySo and will soon reach retirement. The group honored her with a standing ovation as she accepted her award.

The Board members acknowledged two new local chapters (Wayne County and Crossnore School) as well as several sponsors for providing financial support for the conference, including the Fenwick Foundation, Bob Galen, Ruth Kravitz, Gina Trianfo, Denise Weeks, and of course Castle McCulloch, which donated the space for this event. Create-A-Cake graciously catered the luncheon, provided the decorations, and beautiful cake at a substantial savings. Clearly this event was unlike any other SaySo Saturday as a result of their contributions.

Some young people entered the Crystal Garden with awe—having never experienced such an elaborate event. This was an experience to remember.

After the luncheon, awards, and keynote, each region made a presentation and announced their newly elected representatives which comprise the 2008-09 SaySo Youth Board of Directors. The following board members will participate in an orientation retreat and commissioning ceremony in June as they begin their one-year terms:

- Region 1: Cherish C., Rachel S., Samantha H.
- Region 2: Chae C., Jasmine E.
- Region 3: Keyona R., Jasper H., Melissa A.
- Region 4: Alexis D., Nicole L., Erica F.
- Region 5: Brittany H., Deborah J., Shametta W.
- Region 6: Chaney P
- Returning: LaRico C. (Co-Chair)
Reneka C. (Treasurer)

From an adult's point of view, SaySo has come a long way in a short ten years. But to a youth, ten years is a lifetime. Their investment in SaySo now will provide them support to finish school, invest in their life, and serve future generations of foster youths.

As foster parents and concerned adults in their lives, encourage your young people to learn about SaySo, participate in local activities, join the organization (it's free), and visit the website often (www.saysoinc.org).

Other SaySo Activities

- **SaySo Survivor 3** (April 11-13 at Camp Chestnut Ridge). An annual leadership retreat for 60 youths building on their resiliencies and enhancing their call to share with other youths.
- **SaySo Page Week** (May 18-23 in Raleigh). SaySo members participate annually for one week working side-by-side with legislators and state administrators. This program has helped lawmakers see our foster youths as people, not numbers.
- **LINK Up Youth Conference** (July 2008 in Winston-Salem). One of two life skills conferences held annually. Visit our website (www.saysoinc.org) to register and for exact dates.

Foster Care in North Carolina Is Changing for the Better	
Ten Years Ago	Today
Young people wanted to speak to legislators and child welfare administrators about their ideas and what life as a foster youth was really like.	We have direct contact with legislators every year through SaySo's Page Program and youth speak regularly at conferences and policy committee meetings.
Young people in foster care wanted to have their ideas heard about their plans for their future.	Today they have the right and <u>responsibility</u> to create their own goal plans and they can attend leadership retreats such as SaySo Survivor to empower youths.
Young people wanted direct information about resources, not just what adults told them.	Today SaySo sends information to over 500 members in newsletters, six times a year directly to our youth members AND we have a website with information.
Young people wanted “normal” opportunities to go to school like other kids without being buried in debt and receive support to reach their educational goals.	Today we have ETV, tuition waivers, e-mentors, and now NCREACH that helps adoptees get an education, too.
Young people wanted help to be adopted if that was their choice.	Today we have more teenagers finding permanence through adoption and guardianship than ever before.
Young people asked for continued health care.	Today we have Medicaid eligibility after age 18.
Young people asked for increased opportunities to work and practice life skills so they could be prepared.	Today we have a thriving LINKS program, Real World programs, work experiences are encouraged, and LINK Up conferences lay a foundation for life skills planning.
Young people wanted to support others in care.	SaySo has distributed thousands of suitcases, duffel bags, and hygiene packs and contributed to youth needs not covered in “normal” foster care.
Young people wanted to be part of foster parent training and helping dismiss the idea that teens in care are “bad” kids.	Today many counties involve teens in training, and teens speak at foster parent conferences, participate in radio and TV promotions, and are involved in recruiting foster and adoptive homes for teens.
Over half of young people in foster care did not complete high school.	Today 68% are finishing high school or GED and hundreds are participating in college programs.



Books on the nightstand

Book reviews by Becky Burmester

I'm still reading but at the moment I am concentrating on hair (more specifically the African-American hair on the heads of my children) and children's self-esteem issues. Rita is 5 years old and Shawn is seven. Neither one care about the color of their hair but they definitely have ideas about how they want their hair to look. Quite honestly they want "white" hair. Shawn wants bangs and his God-given hair is totally unsuited for bangs. Rita would like her hair either in a pony tail or long and swinging and her hair is like her brother's, kinky. What's a parent (cross-cultural parent) to do? I hit the bookshelves and the bookstores with a vengeance.

No Lye

First off my bookshelf was *No Lye!* by Tulani Kinard. I have owned this book for years. I bought it on the advice of a cross-cultural (white) mom who had found it helpful. The book

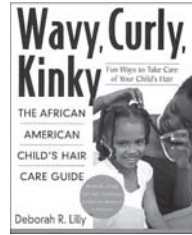


was the tipping point in favor of locking her daughter's hair. The results were attractive and the child who struggled with sensory integration issues was less stressed when her hair was lower maintenance. I reread large sections and admired the gorgeous pictures and decided to seek more help. *No Lye!* has excellent information about the care and styling of black hair for those seeking to go natural. My black friends borrowed the book and said it was great.

But, I was uncomfortable with how adult the styles in the book were. The how to of shampooing, conditioning, drying, and combing were covered thoroughly. But this all-thumbs mom needed more help.

Wavy, Curly, Kinky

Wavy, Curly, Kinky by Deborah R. Lilly seemed promising with its cover photo of child and adult and a blurb that promised "hundreds of care tips, techniques and styles for newborns to teens." This is a book to share with your children. The book is divided into sections by age group and sex. There are lots of pictures for both parent and child to consider.



And, how are my children wearing their hair? Rita is wearing her hair primarily in braids, with mom putting it into twists when we can't get a time with the friend that braids it for us. Rita still wishes that she could wear her hair down, but she likes the compliments she gets when it is braided. Shawn is wearing his hair pretty short after trying to grow it longer. He has some sensory integration issues and found combing out his longer hair painful and his parents refused to let him go out with matted hair. His hair is short but his head is not shaved and for now that is our compromise.

You Be Me I'll Be You

Hair down and self-esteem to go! *You Be Me*

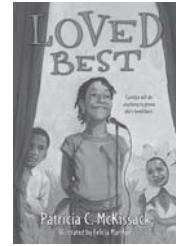
I'll Be You by Pili Mandelbaum is a delightful picture book addressing the issues of differences in hair and skin across racial lines.



Most of the time our two children are inclined to want our skin to be brown like theirs. This book is a discussion starter for the issue of accepting and liking who you are.

Loved Best

Loved Best by Patricia C. McKissack is a chapter book that we have just begun reading as a family. Carolyn is the oldest of three children and as the story begins she is positive she is loved best because she is the oldest. The chapters are brief but the message of loving all children in a family is highlighted in each chapter. The illustrations by Felicia Marshall are lovely black and white drawings. This book is brief enough to be read at a single sitting, but we are reading two chapters nightly to extend the time we spend talking about loving each other as individuals and not loving one person more than another.



What's on your nightstand? Please share titles of books that you enjoy and that make the life of a foster or adoptive parent easier. Becky Burmester 919-870-9968 or becky.burmester@mindspring.com

Making an appearance at a court hearing

On July 3, 2006, when President Bush signed the "Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006," all foster parents and pre-adoptive parents or relative caregivers in the U.S. were guaranteed the **right to be notified** of any court proceedings with respect to the children in their care, and the **right to be heard** in those proceedings. This law does not make foster parents a "party" in court, nor does it give them "standing" in court, but it does mandate that if you choose, your voice and your important, vital knowledge of the child will now be heard by the judge.

Thanks to this new law, many foster parents are finding themselves in a courtroom for the first time to attend an official hearing. Incredibly, most court hearings often last less than 10 minutes. With such little time before a judge it is critical for foster par-

ents to be properly prepared and ready to state their position before entering the courtroom.

In general, foster parents should focus on providing first-hand, factual information and not offer opinions about other people involved. It is generally best to refrain from offering opinions about the case worker, the child's birth parents, attorneys, or others.

Helpful information for the court includes visits between the foster child and the child's parents or other family members such as:

- Dates of visits
- A brief, factual description of the child's behavior before and after the visits. Carefully describe only the child's behavior or appearance unless a child welfare agency has specified supervision of birth-parent visits as part of your role as a foster parent. In that case, follow

the instructions of the child welfare agency on reporting child and birth parent interaction.

- A brief description of any arrangements for sibling visitation.
- Dates of contacts between the child and the child's parents or other family members including telephone calls, letters or email.
- In general, foster parents should not comment on the *reason* for a child's behavior or appearance.

Source: Deihl, 2006



Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers have a right to be notified of court proceedings and a right to be heard in court.

Introducing a new tool to enhance monthly agency visits

Foster parents, think about the last time a foster care social worker came to your home. What was helpful about the visit? What might have made the time more useful? Did you have a chance to ask questions and give input about what is needed for your family?

Increased Focus on Visits

On both the federal and state level, increasing attention is being given to the quality and frequency of visits between social workers, children in care, and their caregivers. Results from the first round of the federal Child and Services Reviews (CFSRs) found that these visits can play a crucial role in meeting the safety, well-being, and permanency needs of children in care (Nat'l Conf. of State Legislatures 2006; USDHHS, 2006).

As a result, a new federal law was passed: the Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-288). This law requires states to document that 90% of all children in foster care are receiving monthly face-to-face visits with their child welfare workers, and that a majority of these visits are taking place in the residence of the child (e.g., in the foster home).

In addition, states must have standards for the **content** of those visits; in other words, the state must provide some guidance to agencies and workers about what should take place during the monthly visits. Eventually, states will face financial penalties if they fall short on these mandates.

NC's Efforts to Enhance Visits

Actually, North Carolina began focusing on the quality of foster care home visits even before the new federal mandates. The NC Division of Social Services launched a collaborative process in spring 2006 to create a new tool to enhance foster care home visits. The Division contracted with the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-CH School of Social Work to coordinate the project.

The development of the tool began with the formation of an advisory group comprised of representatives from private and public child placing agencies, the Division, its academic partners, and board members of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association.

This advisory group helped draft a tool called the **Monthly Foster Care Contact Record**. To ensure it worked, the tool was tested for four months by 25 child-placing agencies (14 public and 11 private). During the pilot, 128 child welfare professionals used the tool in 596 foster homes with 884 children in care. As part of its evaluation, the Jordan Institute received formal and informal feedback from child welfare workers and foster parents who used the tool during

the pilot. The tool was then revised based on the pilot experience and approved by the advisory group, the Division, and the Children's Services Committee of the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services.

What's the Contact Record Like?

The Contact Record is a 4-page, 7-item tool designed to be a guide for monthly visits. This tool prompts **county DSS agencies** to address the following things when they visit children in care and their foster parents:

- Priorities identified in the last visit
- Changes in the household
- Cultural and ethnic considerations
- Relationships in the foster family
- Social support and respite needs
- Services and training needs
- Relationship with the agency, court process, child's plan, upcoming events
- Safety and supervision in the home
- Child behaviors and parenting skills
- Schooling/education of child
- Physical health and mental health of child or other members of foster family
- Visits, interactions with birth family, and shared parenting
- Priorities from this visit
- Follow-up activities

Discussing or addressing these areas regularly should help North Carolina (1) ensure the safety and well-being of children in foster care, (2) make agency visits with children and foster families more productive and consistent, (3) encourage honest, supportive relationships between foster parents and agen-

cies, and (4) make documentation more consistent and streamlined.

How Should It Be Used?

The Contact Record is intended to be used as a guide for conversation, not a checklist of items to read off every month. Workers are advised to continue to have their typical, open-ended conversations with foster parents and children in care, and then to simply use the tool at the end of the visit to summarize, ensure that important topics are not overlooked, and plan follow-up.

How do foster parents who have experienced this tool feel about it? Most foster parents interviewed after the pilot test liked the thoroughness, consistency, and follow-up the tool provided, and some saw it as a helpful support. One said, "As foster parents, we know what our responsibilities are to the children. But this was about do **I** need anything. That's usually the last thing asked...It makes me feel a whole lot better to know they care about me."

Coming Soon

It is anticipated that the Monthly Foster Care Contact Record will go into statewide use some time during 2008. An online training is being developed to help support the implementation. After the use of the tool becomes statewide, the Division will continue to talk with agencies and foster parents about its effectiveness and how it might be improved.

To Download a Copy of the Tool

Go to <<http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/ContactRecord.pdf>>.

How to Make the Monthly Foster Care Contact Record Work for You

- Keep a blank copy on your fridge, so you can remember questions or issues that come up during the month.
- The tool includes an area for your input on the child's case plan, on how shared parenting and birth family visits are going, on your ideas for in-service training or other supports for your family, and on any other unmet needs for the child. Take time to reflect on these issues before a visit and then discuss your ideas with the social worker.
- The tool can provide a way to get difficult topics onto the table. You can problem-solve with the social worker, either with or without the children present, about how best to address concerns.
- Make a blank copy of the tool for yourself so you can take notes DURING the visit; that way you'll have a record of the follow-up activities for which you and the social worker are responsible.
- Social workers will spend some time alone with the child during each visit. Give them as much privacy as possible, and allow the child to take the lead in whether he or she wants to talk about the visit afterwards.

On their way: Helping guide youths toward the future

by Nancy Carter and Trishana McKendall

To succeed in the adult world, a young person needs marketable skills. Foster youths are no exception. In fact, statistics of youths who have aged out of foster care indicate these young people need marketable skills even more than those who have families as “back up” support. Statistically and financially, it makes sense to invest in building skills in young people today rather than pay for rehabilitating them later as adults.

Fortunately, the LINKS program in North Carolina and a variety of educational and work experience options are targeting these young people and the adults working with them more than ever. Here is some basic information about programs that will help youths get on their way!

On Their Way and OnYourWay.org

On Their Way is an instructional DVD and guidebook that helps demonstrate to caregivers what they can do on a daily basis to help guide



youths (of any age) to plan for their educational and career goals. *On Their Way* was created by Independent Living Resources with NIH funding and foster parents' input.

The guidebook provides additional information not covered in the DVD such as discussion points for meals, family activities, and advanced understanding of adolescent development. The curriculum takes caregivers through eight topics: education, career interests, decision making, finances, getting help, staying healthy, housing, and staying connected.

These categories also correspond to a free, secure website <www.OnYourWay.org> that offers youths age 13 and older a place to store valuable information and provides self-discovery activities to help youths determine a future path. By using their own password, youths will always be able to obtain their history and other critical documentation required in the adult world.

OnYourWay.org and *On Their Way* work in tandem, understanding the importance of caregivers' influence as young people move towards self-sufficiency. Adults are encouraged to help youths work the site and complete their profile before aging out of foster care. Foster parents set the price of *On Their Way* at \$19.95. For more information, call 800/820-0001 or visit www.ilrinc.com. To find these products online at <ilrinc.com> search for “150B.”

State and Federal Programs

NC's Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program.

This program StateVoucher.org assists youth who were involved in North Carolina's foster care system on or after their 17th birthday or were adopted at or after the age of 16 from our state's foster care system. All candidates must have graduated high school or have received a GED and be preparing to enter a college, university, or vocational training institution. ETV can pay up to \$5,000 yearly; the actual amount is based on the cost of tuition and the level of financial aid awarded to the student. ETV funding pays for school-related expenses such as tuition, books, and computers. Students apply directly on line at <www.statevoucher.org>. This website contains a wealth of information regarding other sources of aid, North Carolina colleges, community colleges, and vocational schools, and other information useful to any student. For additional information, please contact the child's DSS social worker or LINKS coordinator.

NC Reach. The NC Legislature recently approved



funding for this scholarship program for all young adults ages 18 through 25 who have either aged out of foster care in North Carolina or were adopted from foster care in North Carolina on or after their 12th birthday. This scholarship program is called NC Reach. The Orphan Foundation of America manages the program and provides case management services to all scholarship recipients.

NC Reach scholarships will pay for the remaining cost of attendance, as defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, at any branch of the UNC system or at any of NC's Community Colleges. Federal grants, including the Education Training Voucher and Pell grants, will be applied to the costs of attendance first. Legitimate student loans incurred by students after July 31, 2007 may be eligible for repayment through this program, up to the determined cost of attendance after that date.

Through NC Reach students will be eligible for up to eight semesters of assistance, so long as they make satisfactory progress toward the completion of their academic program. Students will remain eligible for assistance until their 26th birthday. To learn more visit <www.ncreach.org>

For information about the UNC constituent universities, go to <www.northcarolina.edu/content.php/campus/campusmap.htm>.

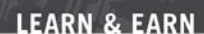
For information about North Carolina community colleges, go to <www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/colleges_map.htm>.

NC Department of Labor Apprenticeship and Training Bureau.

To provide alternatives to a four-year college degree, the Department of Labor has devised an apprenticeship program, with an arm of the program tailored to work with older adolescents. This program lists more than 1,000 “apprentice-able” occupations such as aviation safety equipment technician, cabinetmaker, floral designer, and much more. Did we mention you will be paid while working as an apprentice? Interested high school/GED graduates or students age 16 and older should speak to their school guidance counselor about the apprenticeship program and ask them to contact their local Apprenticeship Representative. To learn more go to <www.nclabor.com/appren/students.htm>. For a listing of Apprenticeship Representatives go to <www.nclabor.com/appren/offices>.



Learn & Earn Online. Thanks to Gov. Mike Easley and the NC General Assembly, North Carolina



high school students have the option of enrolling in online college-credit courses at no cost to the student or their families. Learn & Earn students can take college freshman courses while still in high school, which increases their chances of graduating from college early. In 2007 approximately 300 high schools participated in the program. To tap into this educational service, speak to your high school guidance counselor. To learn more, visit <www.ncpublicschools.org/learnandearnonline>

WIA Youth Councils. Youth Councils are a relatively new feature of the local workforce development system mandated by the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Twenty-four Youth Councils, appointed by local Workforce Development Boards across North Carolina, are working to



continued from page 12

support and promote a comprehensive and systemic approach to youth services that will enable youth to be successful in education and in the workplace. Eligible youths ages 14 – 21 years must be low income and face challenges to successful workforce entry (youths in foster care are considered a target population). Youths will engage in activities to prepare them for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Some programs include tutoring and study skills in addition to internships, job-shadowing, occupational skills, and leadership training. All programs provide summer employment; year-round activities are left to local discretion. To learn more, go to <www.nccommerce.com/en/workforceservices>. To locate a youth council, visit <old.ncjoblink.com/centers2/centerview.asp?type=w>

Vocational & Technical Education

The NC Department of Public Instruction is the agency that prepares and plans for the vocational and technical education of students. As instructed by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998, DPI must submit a four year plan designed to meet the training and workforce needs of the state and local communities of the established schools.

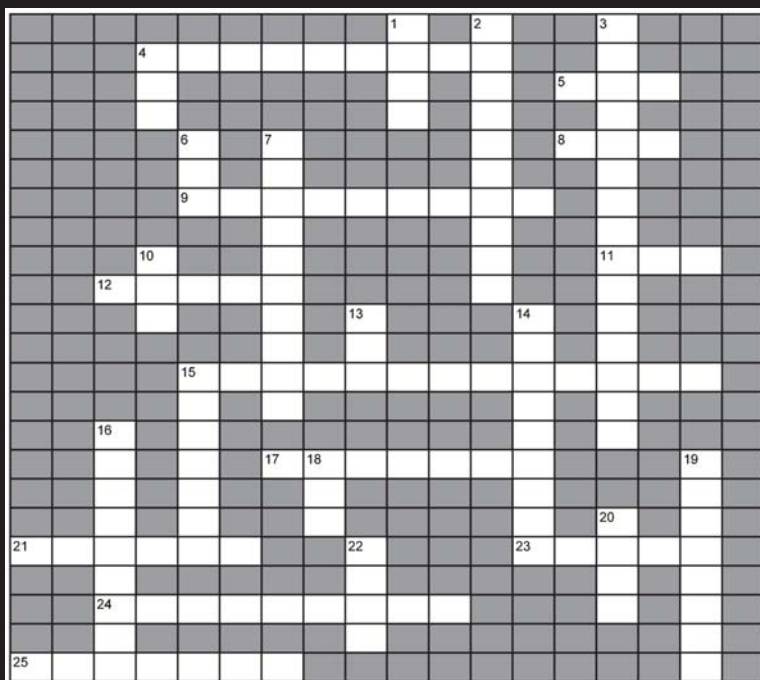
Every school district in North Carolina provides “hands-on” learning for students that often involve partnerships with local community colleges and businesses. Evaluations of students involved in vocational and technical education indicate decreased drop-out rates and more school satisfaction. Since the goal of vocational and technical education is to meet the community workforce needs, the range of course topics vary from community to community. For instance, biomedical courses are offered in areas with large pharmaceutical companies; agricultural courses in farming communities; computer and technology courses in hi-tech, business areas, and so forth.

To learn about the vocational and technical education options in your area, visit your local school district’s website or call the coordinator of vocational and technical education at your child’s school.

Nancy Carter is the Associate Director of Independent Living Resources, Inc. Trishana McKendall is a Child Advocate with North Carolina’s Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office.



Crossword Puzzle: North Carolina’s New Foster Home Licensing Rules



Across

4. Age of someone living in your home that will need to complete training if they will help care for children
5. Otherwise known as a Person-Centered Plan
8. In order to be considered a relicensure, foster parents must submit their paperwork within ____ year of their license expiring
9. When you or the Division end your foster care license, you ____ your license
11. Every new foster parent must have a high school diploma or a
12. Children should be protected from bodies of water by a _____
15. Every new parent must have a GED or a high _____
17. If an exception is requested to exceed the capacity for a family foster home, the agency must assess the family’s _____, skill, and stamina to care for all children
21. The _____ home assessment now must address parents’ willingness to participate in shared parenting
23. If an exception is requested to exceed the capacity of a family foster home, the agency must assess the family’s ability, _____, and stamina to care for all children
24. Agencies can no longer license _____ of their employees
25. Therapeutic foster homes can no longer have this in their home

Down

1. How many total children are allowed in a Therapeutic foster home?
2. When the Division removes your license for cause
3. Foster parents now have the right to a copy of their _____
4. Number of Therapeutic children allowed in home
6. This is not an acceptable bed for a child
7. How many inches tall does a fence around water need to be?
10. How many extra training hours must a Therapeutic foster parent receive to be licensed?
13. If your license has lapsed for more than ____ years, you may need to take 30 hours of training again
14. Agencies are no longer allowed to license their own _____
15. If an exception is requested to exceed the capacity of a family foster home, the agency must assess the family’s ability, skill, and _____ to care for all children
16. How often your licensing worker must meet with you: _____
18. Each child must have his or her own _____
19. Exceptions to the capacity of children in home are most often granted because of _____
20. If you or your agency wishes to terminate your license, the agency must get you to ____ the actual termination paperwork
22. The total number of children allowed in a family foster home

Answers

For an answer key, go to <www.fosteringperspectives.org/v12n2key.pdf>. To read the new rules go to <www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/licensing> and click on “foster care rules.”



A reader asks ...

Dealing with insensitive remarks: Tips for transracial adoptive parents

Question: I am the prospective adoptive parent of a multi-racial sibling group. Our racial differences are quite obvious and sometimes we hear insensitive questions and remarks from others. Do you have any tips to help transracial adoptive parents address issues associated with our unique family identity?

Though transracial adoptions are becoming more common, society does not always value or understand differences and diversity, which creates extraordinary challenges for transracial families. Our race-conscious society leads people to question the authenticity of a family unit when family members look different from one another. Often, transracial families spend a lot of time confronting these questions and validating the realness of their family. Transracial families must empower themselves with confidence to rise above these challenges and embrace the richness and rewards of diversity.

Realistically, parents cannot always prevent and protect their children from the slights of the world, so they must educate and prepare their children to recognize and manage these situations. Multi-racial families must learn how to cope and respond to the realities of racial biases on an individual and family level.

Know Thyself

In order to appropriately prepare children, parents of transracial families must become self-aware through the examination of their own prejudices, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about race and ethnicity. These beliefs and attitudes will influence your ability to parent a child of another race. Children can learn inadequate coping skills and model inappropriate behaviors if their parents have unresolved prejudices and racial issues. Parents of a transracial family must model patience, be open to working with diverse people, and create an environment that respects and values differences.

Be Positive

Addressing the issue of race should be done in a positive manner. While race and ethnicity are a part of our everyday lives, not every situation is related to these factors. As the parent, you must be able to talk about race and ethnicity so your children know that you feel comfortable discussing these issues,

whether positive or negative. Use ordinary, day-to-day opportunities, such as a television show, to address the issue of race with your children. As a family, point out similarities and differences between family members to illustrate that differences are normal and acceptable, and despite these differences, family members have much more in common with one another.

Instill Pride

Transracial families must assess how their current lifestyle (neighborhood, schools, family friends, etc.) supports or denies their children exposure to diversity. Children should not be denied their innate sense of belonging or connection; they should be encouraged to explore and embrace their culture and to surround themselves with adult role models of various races and ethnic backgrounds. This will also help the adoptive parents increase their awareness and ability to understand the child's experience. However, be mindful of the balance between supporting a healthy exploration of culture versus alienating your children by constantly reminding them that they are different.

Transracial parenting should include helping your children learn about their race and culture, instilling a sense of cultural pride, and building a healthy self esteem for your children. Although difficult to discuss, children need to learn about the historical images, beliefs, and stereotypes about their racial/ethnic group. This information allows children to truly understand their cultural history and defend their racial/ethnic background when confronted with stereotyped images. More importantly, increase your children's understanding that all racial groups have good and bad historical figures that made both positive and negative contributions to society.

Teach Appropriate Responses

The family unit should not tolerate any remarks made in regards to differences in individual characteristics, whether it is race, culture, sex, disability, religion, etc. Parents should teach their children how to respond to racially-biased remarks in a manner that does not impose shame or lead to physical aggression.

Parents in transracial families must learn to be advocates for their children in all settings.

Responding to an Incident

Should a racial incident occur, you must support your children and be prepared to deal with the situation immediately. Racism must be confronted openly. Failure to address the situation can be interpreted as acceptance or approval. Addressing the incident immediately will also provide your children with a rich learning experience as they gain the tools and problem-solving skills to deal with future instances of racism.

Talk about Feelings

Supporting your racially diverse family also means helping your children discover and express their feelings regarding their racial experiences. If age-appropriate, talk to your children about how you can support them when racial issues come up. This will increase your children's overall confidence and capability in dealing with racial issues on their own.

Cultivate Support

Transracial families should surround themselves with support, which includes your immediate family, other transracial families, and members of your child's racial group. A community of support will help stimulate your thinking, provide inspiration and ideas, provide cultural diversity, and challenge you in constructive ways. A support system can also help you come up with tangible resources, reactions and quips when dealing with insensitive questions. Talk with your adoption agency to learn about area support groups, meetings, events, training and/or counseling options for your family. There are also numerous books, magazines, journals, websites, and on-line groups dedicated to the topic of transracial adoptions and multicultural families.

Parents in transracial families must learn to be advocates for their children in all settings. Look for opportunities to educate others on transracial adoptions; give an adoption presentation within your community (schools, churches, or civic groups) to raise awareness. Through the efforts of transracial families, our society can learn to value the richness of diversity!

Response by Beverley Smith, Director, NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network. If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina, send it to us using the contact information found on page 2.

Help us find families for these children



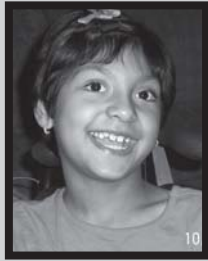
A. J.



Marilyn



Jamar



Noelia



Kerry



Ronnie



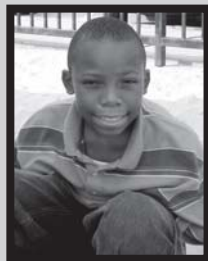
Kimwil



Shebra



Laura



Tevin

Do you remember what it was like waiting for Christmas morning to arrive when you were a child? Imagine waiting for a forever family to find you! A day in the life of these waiting children can seem like an eternity. Help us NOW by bringing this page to your workplace and by showing it to your friends. You can make a difference that will last a lifetime!

A.J., age 14

A.J. is described as a polite, talkative, and lovable boy who is wise beyond his years. He always kisses his foster parents goodnight and tells them he loves them. A.J. enjoys playing the violin, playing cowboys, watching movies, and drawing. He thinks he'd like to join the Coast Guard someday or become an architect. (NC #031-2506)

Jamar, age 17

Jamar is a spirited, funny, and delightful boy. He is considerate of others' feelings and enjoys helping people. Jamar is best known for his positive attitude and beautiful smile. He is very creative and enjoys expressing himself artistically. Jamar is also a talented singer who dreams of attending college and becoming an electrical engineer. (NC #044-1145)

Kerry, age 14

Kerry is maturing into a responsible young man. He is very good at helping out around the house and volunteering to do things like bring in the groceries. He enjoys watching science fiction and action movies, playing video games, and going out to dinner. Kerry has his own cat and takes very good care of it. (NC #060-0520)

Kimwil, age 13

Kimwil is a caring, loving, and active girl. She is a gentle soul who is open to learning new things and taking on new tasks. She loves animals and says dogs are her favorite. Kimwil enjoys shopping, getting her hair done, and going to movies. She loves coloring, making beaded jewelry, and sometimes likes to play basketball or football. (NC #060-2853)

Laura, age 15

Laura likes to take care of others, but is also a strong advocate for herself. She is very good at expressing her thoughts and concerns. She is also good about asking for help solving problems when she needs it. Laura's interests include dancing, singing, and doing hair and makeup. She is quite athletic and enjoys PE class and school sports. (NC #019-2671)

Marilyn, age 16

Marilyn is a quiet, soft-spoken girl with a beautiful face. She loves art, design, and fashion and plans to become a fashion designer. Marilyn also enjoys track, gymnastics, and going to amusement parks or the beach. As an all-around regular teenage girl, Marilyn is also interested in boys and music. (NC #043-2637)

Noelia, age 8

Noelia's wonderful, big bright smile grabs everyone's heart when they see her. She is fed mostly through a tube, although she can eat by mouth. Noelia understands some of what is said to her, but is unable to communicate more than about ten words. She has limited control over her body, but she is able to scoot across the floor. (NC #076-2878)

Ronnie, age 12

Ronnie always has a smile to share. He loves to read and has a wonderful imagination. Ronnie has a great deal of fun singing and dancing to old rock songs. He likes the water and enjoys going to the lake. Ronnie wants to be a firefighter and a professional bull rider when he grows up. (NC #003-2520)

Shebra, age 17

Shebra is one of those people with her own distinct style. She is very good at fixing hair and hopes to become a cosmetologist. Shebra has had an opportunity to work for a local florist and loves the creativity of working with flowers. She also enjoys participating in church-related activities such as choir and performing in church skits. (NC #073-1829)

Tevin, age 13

Tevin is an independent young man who prefers being by himself. His favorite activity is playing basketball. Tevin also likes to draw, read, and write and often spends hours doing so. Tevin likes visiting the barber a couple of times a month to keep his hair neatly trimmed. He enjoys church, but is not too crazy about singing in the choir. (NC#043-1736)



For more information on these children or adoption in general, call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 <www.adoptnckids.org>

Writing Contest

If you are under 18 and are or have been in foster care, please send us a letter or short essay in response to the following:

Some NC teens live in group homes because there aren't enough foster families that will take teens. What's your reaction to this? What do you think would change the minds of families who are reluctant to care for teens?



FIRST PRIZE: \$100
SECOND PRIZE: \$50
THIRD PRIZE: \$25

Deadline: August 4, 2008

E-mail submissions to johnmcmahon@mindspring.com or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, NC Division of Social Services, 1459 Sand Hill Rd., No. 6 (DSS), Candler, NC 28715. Include your name, age, address, social security number (used to process awards only, confidentiality will be protected) and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards specified above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published, for which they will also receive a cash award.

We're Also Seeking Artwork and Other Writing Submissions
Submissions can be on any theme. The submission requirements described above apply. If sent via U.S. Mail, artwork should be sent flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.

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fostering perspectives

Jordan Institute for Families
UNC School of Social Work
Campus Box #3550
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550

Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy reading *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of credit toward your training requirement. Questions about this method of gaining in-service credit? Contact the NC Division of Social Services at 919/733-7672.

In-Service Quiz, FP v12#2

1. Why do "typical" parenting techniques sometimes fail to work with children in foster care?
2. What were some of the things that Violet Rittenhour worried about when her children were in foster care? How did their absence affect her?
3. Donna Foster believes "the stronger the healthy connections are between a child and her birth family, the more resources I have available to help the child." Based on your experience, do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Name four things foster parents can do to help the children in their homes who have witnessed domestic violence.
5. What is "Hitting the MARC"?
6. How many North Carolina camps for children with special needs are listed in the Family Support Network of NC's *2008 Summer Camp Directory*?
7. In March 2008 the group SaySo celebrated its tenth anniversary. Name five things this group has contributed to/accomplished in the past ten years.
8. Foster parents, relative caregivers, and pre-adoptive parents now have a right to be heard during court proceedings. What kinds of things should they be prepared to share in court? What kinds of things should they avoid sharing?
9. The Monthly Foster Care Contact Record is North Carolina's new tool for enhancing visits with children in foster care. What can foster parents do to make the Contact Record work for them?
10. Name five things parents can do if they find themselves in the middle of a power struggle with their kids.

The Story of a Child in Foster Care

by Isaiah, age 10

Being in foster care is not hard, but it is hard at the same time.

Leaving your parents is hard. Staying with nice people is not hard.

Sometimes I feel like I can just cry because when you leave a foster parent you don't want to go. That's what happened to me. I liked staying with my last foster parents until I had to leave. We might meet again somewhere, somehow, but I don't know.

Now I live at Ms. E's and that's a real blast. For now everything is all dizzy and fuzzy, but I'll get used to it.

One day I hope I'll grow up to be a successful man of the future.

Isaiah received \$15 for having his essay published.

I'm in a new foster home. For now everything is all dizzy and fuzzy. But I'll get used to it.



NC Facts: Adoption from Foster Care

In federal fiscal year 2005-06, 1,234 children were adopted from foster care in NC. The children's median age at adoption was 5.29 years; 47% were male. Ninety-four percent had special needs.

- 54.1% were adopted by their foster parents, 23.3% were adopted by a relative, and 22.6% were adopted by a non-relative.
- 73% were adopted by married couples, 24% by single women, 3% by single men
- The median time between TPR and adoption was 7.36 months.

Source: USDHHS, 2008