

fostering perspectives

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Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

Step into my shoes

In her poem "Have You Ever" Shebra, a 16-year-old in foster care in North Carolina, asks:

*Have you ever lived my life?
Spent one minute in my shoes?
If you haven't then tell me why
You judge me as you do.*

These questions are natural for someone who is experiencing the stigma and labeling that sometimes come with being in foster care.

They're also relevant for the rest of us. All of us, at one time or another, have felt the pain of being unfairly judged.

Many of us also know from experience the bad things that can happen when decisions are made and actions taken based on false assumptions about another

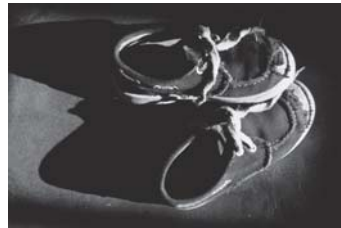
person's character, skills, or motivations.

In the face of other people's hasty conclusions we all want the things Shebra longs for: Respect. Compassion. Understanding. Acceptance. Justice.

In the child welfare system, negative assumptions about others can hurt collaboration, undermine healing and partnership, and interfere with efforts to act in the child's best interests.

The best protection against these negative outcomes is, in the words of Steven Covey, to "seek first to understand"—to listen with an open heart, to delay judgment as long as possible, and to remain open to new information.

Admittedly, this can be hard to do in the stressful world of child



welfare, but we believe that it almost always pays off in the end—especially for the kids.

To promote understanding and empathy among those who work in the child welfare system, this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* gives you an opportunity to "step into the shoes" of a birth mother, the birth children of foster parents, a former foster child turned adoptive mother and child advocate, and many others.

An excerpt from . . .

Have You Ever?

By Shebra, age 16

Have you ever lived my life?
Spent one minute in my shoes?
If you haven't then tell me why
You judge me as you do.

Have you ever woken up in
The morning wondering if this
Was your last day on earth?
Have you ever left your house
Unsure if you'd return?

Have you ever seen your mom
Get beat by your step-dad,
Messed up on booze?

Have you ever had an unwanted
Pregnancy and been forced to
Choose?

Have you ever sat beneath the stars
Hoping God will hear you?

Coming full circle in my lifetime

by Co-Wefa Lyda

My name is Co-Wefa Lyda. I am a wife and mother of five boys between the ages 4 and 35. I am also a grandmother of four, a sister, an aunt, and a friend.

I am also a child of North Carolina's child welfare system.

People always ask me, what do you remember from when you were little? Actually I remember a lot. I remember being left for days at a time with my two little brothers who were one and two years old at the time. I was only about four years old at the time.

Our closest neighbor was 10 miles away, so I took care of us the best I knew how. I remember keeping a fire going in the wood

cook stove so I could heat my brothers' bottles. I don't remember how I managed. I just remember doing it.

When my parents did come home they were drinking and hurting each other, so I would hide my brothers and myself under the bed or in the closet—any place I could find so we would not be hurt.

Then one day my aunt and uncle came and found us. My youngest brother and I went to live with my grandparents and my middle brother went to live with our other grandmother. The next thing I really remember is going to the courthouse with my grand-

mother. The judge said we were going to a new home.

I also remember my mother was standing at the back of the room when we turned to go. I do not think she spoke to us as we left.

As we went back to my grandparents' home my grandmother told us we would be going to a new home with lots of boys and girls to play with and we would have everything we needed. She packed the few things we had and we were on our way to Eliada Home for Children, which at that time was an orphanage.

When we got to Eliada everything seemed so huge to

cont. p. 2



Co-Wefa and her brother Randy at Eliada Home in the 1950s.

Coming full circle from page 1

me. As the house parents took us to our dorms I was still holding my brother. At that time I was four and he was two. I can still picture it. As they take him away from me he is trying to hold on with all he has. He's screaming, "Mommy! Mommy!"

I was only four but I had already become the mother in our family. I was his mama.

I don't really remember the first few years at Eliada. It was our home and we were expected to act like it was, so we did. I saw my brother at meals and at church. Our grandmothers and brother came to see us some Sundays. There were no social workers or therapists there at that time. I was never told why I was there or what happened to my parents. I still have unanswered questions.

At Eliada I was a good child who coped by trying to take care of the little ones as if I was the mother. Many years have passed and I still have not lost that today!

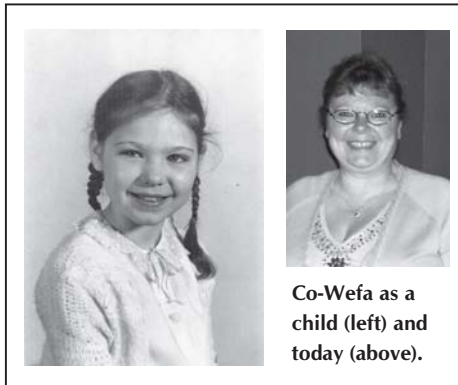
Still, I did not talk very much. It was just easier to stay quiet. If you did not talk you were seen as a good child. You were not expected to let anyone know how you felt. You did not express the fear and feeling of being lost. I did all that was expected of me and did well. But I also grew up lonely, sad, and with very little self-esteem.

I do remember Eliada's farm and the animals. How I loved the horses! They listened when I talked and loved me no matter how I was. That love has followed me through my life and it is no surprise that we have six horses at our house today. There is nothing like cleaning a barn out when you are depressed or feeling sorry for yourself.

One of the other things I remember well from Eliada is birthdays. On your birthday you got to choose a cake color and flavor and what you wanted on it. It was the only time in your life you did not have to share. But of course we did share. Oh, how small the pieces are when you have 125 brothers and sisters! As you might imagine, birthdays are very important at our house now.

I graduated from high school and married way too young. I soon found myself divorced with two children of my own and a third we had adopted. I was not a good mother back then, but I had an ex-husband who was a good father. While I grew up, he took care of the boys.

Eventually our youngest son came to live with me. When that happened I realized that if I did not grow up I would be just like my mother and not care for my child. So I recalled the lessons I had learned at Eliada and pulled myself up by my bootstraps. I took care of my son while my other two boys stayed with their dad.



Co-Wefa as a child (left) and today (above).

I also know what it's like to lose a child. When he was 12, one of my sons was riding his bicycle and was hit by a car driven by a 17-year-old. He lived for two and a half days after the accident.

Life can be hard, but as I say now, "I was not born this way; life made me this way."

But there have been many bright spots in my life, too. Twenty years ago I met a wonderful man and we have been together ever since. I have had jobs I loved, watched my other sons grow up, marry, and have my grandchildren.

It has been a full life, but there was always a part of me that was looking for something. Then in November 2001 my husband and I got a call from our local DSS inviting us to come to a meeting. Friends of ours needed us to take their eight-week-old little boy home with us because they could not take care of him. We became foster parents at Eliada Home—the same place I grew up!

I never dreamed I would become a parent again at age 53. Or that I would finally find the calling I had been hunting for my whole life. But I have, and now I teach and take part in as many child welfare issues as I can.

I am on the board of NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NCFAPA). When I gave a keynote address at the NCFAPA's 2006 conference I knew it was time to tell my story for all the children in the system who need to be heard and given a chance to have a happy childhood. As I got ready to give my speech I realized I had come full circle in my lifetime.

How many of us are blessed to feel that way at age 55?

I am an active member of the Board of Eliada Home for Children. Chairperson of the Eliada Alumni Association, member and vice-chairperson of the Buncombe County Children's Collaborative, and chairperson of the System of Care training in Buncombe County. I am a certified MAPP/GPS facilitator, train families and agency staff in shared parenting, and teach first aid and CPR. I also home school a 5-year-old.

In the book I am writing, "Coming Full Circle in My Lifetime," my dedication will be to all the children who have been, are, and will be in the child welfare system.

"I was not born this way; life made me this way." This is how I look at my life. There are not enough hours in a day to help the children in North Carolina's child welfare system.

As one of those children myself I never thought I would be given the chance to stand up and speak for children, or to teach birth parents, kinship parents, foster parents, and adoptive parents. How blessed I am!

Contact Ms. Lyda for training or speaking engagements at 828/684-6011 or chlyda@hotmail.com.

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Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Jordan Institute for Families, 1459 Sand Hill Road, No. 6, Candler NC 28715. Tel: 828/670-5051; Fax: 828/670-5053; E-mail: johnmcmahon@mindspring.com.

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Mission. *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare workers and foster and adoptive parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system can exchange ideas about foster care and adoption in our state.

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Looking for insights that will help you care for kids better?

A Review of Foster Care and Adoption-Related Books by Becky Burmester

The theme for this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* is “step into my shoes.” Currently I am unable to wear my shoes (or at least any of my shoes on my left foot). What I first thought was a slight sprain has been correctly diagnosed as a minimally dislocated fracture. Let me assure you that “minimally dislocated” can be downright uncomfortable!

Actually, now that I have my stylish “fracture shoe” to wear all of the time except in the shower and in bed, my foot is less achy.

But come to think of it, isn't my situation with the broken bone in my foot very similar to the dislocation experienced by children in care, their birth families, and foster parents?

As foster parents we try to make things better for the kids. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. How can we experience more successes?

Blessedly few of us have the life experiences of the families whose children we care for. Lacking that experience we need to find other ways to walk in their shoes. It is important to the success of the children that we understand where they are coming from and the struggles they face every day to reconcile what *should be* with *what is* in their lives. I found the following resources helped me do this.

Truth Be Told

In *Truth Be Told: A Foster Child's Recollection*, Tashima A. Dukes shares her experiences with foster care and her strong ties to her mother who, because of her own difficulties, could not be a good enough parent. (No one is perfect, but good enough is the minimum acceptable standard.)

To step into the shoes of this story the reader needs to be a person of faith or one who understands the power faith can have in someone's life. The author absolutely would not be who she is were it not for her very strong Christian beliefs. Her book is a testimony to those values that her faith provides.

The seventh chapter, “Truth Uncovered,” contains the 12 principles of ethical conduct for social workers according to the International Federation of Social Workers (adopted July 1994) as well as five additional principles the author suggests.

While all of the principles are certainly appropriate, I especially identified with the five principles Ms. Dukes added. They are:

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you
- Watch what you say
- Know why you are here

- Always be honest
- Work in harmony with others

I try very hard to live my life following these principles, though I know that I fall short of meeting them much of the time. Never far from my thoughts is “there, but for the grace of God, go I.” When I imagine my loved ones in situations similar to the children sharing my home, it becomes very important that I walk in the shoes of the family, the social worker, the children, and anyone else involved with the children.

Truth Be Told: A Foster Child's Recollection is available for \$14.95 plus shipping and handling from:

Foster Children in Focus, Inc.
PO Box 30171
Elkins Park, PA 19027

It is also available via the web at <<http://www.tashimadukes.com/home.html>>.

Rise

Walking in the shoes of a birth family is difficult for me when my focus becomes too narrow. Birth families are so much more than the reason their children came into care. Youth Communications has a publication entitled *Rise* that is written by and for parents involved with the child welfare system. Regular readers of this column know that I am a big fan of *Represent* magazine, which is written by and for youth in the child welfare system.

The articles in *Rise* are **so** real. They address some of the same issues we as foster parents encounter. How quickly should reunification proceed? What are reasonable expectations as a child moves home? What is the role of family therapy in reunification? How can an attorney help with reunification efforts? How can parents deal with the ways the past influences the present as they parent their child?

The parents published in *Rise* lay their souls open for inspection. They share the experiences they have had with their children, and they share their fears.

Walking in the shoes of the authors of the stories in *Rise* expanded my understanding of birth families.

To receive a free copy of *Rise* send your name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number to:

RISE
224 W. 29th St. 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001

Be sure to indicate the number of copies you wish to receive: 1, 5, 10, or 20 are free.

Blessedly few of us have the life experiences of the families whose children we care for. Lacking that experience we need to find other ways to walk in their shoes. The written resources on this page helped me do this.



For When I'm Famous

The last resource I wish to share with you is *For When I'm Famous: A Teen Foster/Adopt Lifebook*. This spiral-bound book was developed by Beth O'Malley, an adoptee and a social worker. Ms. O'Malley's passion is helping young people put down roots.

Growing up she experienced a hole in her life—emptiness—the blanks in her past. Children in foster care share her experience. Many times they cannot even put this experience into words.

For When I'm Famous is a very low-key, nonthreatening tool for getting the past and present down on paper. This book would not be something that a young person (or you and a young person) could complete in one sitting.

Many of the pages get at the truth of the child's life. For example, the “Why?” page explores the reasons a child believes he or she came into care. There are pages for details about each foster care placement. There are pages for remembering the good and the bad. The book concludes with the “Life Plan Page.”

This book could be a useful for tool for a young person seeking to fill in the emptiness and for the foster parent wanting to walk in their shoes. The book can be ordered by calling 800/469-9666 or by writing to:

Adoption-Works
25 Harborview Ave.
Winthrop, MA 02152

The cost is \$11.95 plus \$3.95 shipping and handling.

I am looking forward to wearing my own shoes again soon, but I plan to continue to try to really walk some of each day in the shoes of others.

Please share with me any resources that you think others might find useful. You can write to me (Becky Burmester, 625 Down Patrick Lane, Raleigh, NC 27615; becky.burmester@mindspring.com) or call me (919/870-9968). Happy reading!



The voice of a parent involved with the child welfare system

by Philneia Timmons, a parent in New York City

About 7 p.m. there was a knock on the door. I was afraid I already knew who it was and that my family was in trouble.

The problems started when my son was 10 years old and his grandfather died. His grandfather was more like a father to him than his own father. Many times when my son would visit their house, his father wouldn't be there, but his grandfather was, and they'd sit and talk and have fun.

Anger in his Eyes

Before his grandfather died, my son was basically well-behaved. After, he had so many questions, like, "Where do people go when they die?" I could see the anger in his eyes and hear the fear in his voice. I believe his feelings were even stronger because losing his grandfather brought up the sad feelings he had about his father not being around.

My son began to retaliate against his father, me, and just life itself. He was getting in trouble just about every day in school. He wasn't working and he was being disruptive. I was running to the school so often that I had to quit my job. I felt so frustrated, I didn't know what to do.

Eventually I started to hit him, even though I don't believe in hitting kids. One night I hit him with a belt because his teacher had called to say he had cursed in class. He screamed so loud when I hit him that I stopped, but the damage was already done. The next day the school informed me that they had found bruises on my son's body. ACS came that night. [*The Administration for Children's Services (ACS) is responsible for providing child protective services in New York City.*]

'We Received a Call'

When I answered the door, there was a social worker there named Mrs. R., her assistant, and a police officer. They said they wanted to ask me a few questions.

Mrs. R. handed me a paper and asked to see my children. (I also

have a daughter.) She said, "We received a call from your school that your son had bruises on his arm and upper thigh." Mrs. R. insisted that I lift my children's clothing. When I did not comply, Mrs. R. asked her assistant to lift them and then she took pictures of the bruises on my son's left arm and thigh. Then she told me my children were being removed.

As they left my house, I felt like a piece of my heart was being ripped out.

'My Children Need Me'

After my children were taken, I went through terrible pressure and depression, not knowing whether my children were safe. I could not eat or sleep many days and nights.

I felt so much anger. I'd often ask myself why ACS couldn't help while my children were home. "My children need and want to be with me," I'd think. "If you're helping us, then help us together. I'll do whatever it takes, you can still make your home visits, every day if you'd like. Just please release my children to me."

Emotions Running Wild

Then there was the anger that I felt toward myself. Growing up, my mother would often hit me with belts and even extension cords. Sometimes her anger was out of control. I felt mistreated and misunderstood, and I would rarely speak to my mother even though what I was looking for was guidance, acceptance, attention, and a way out from the madness and the pressures that I felt as a child.

When I gave birth to my son, I vowed that I would never hit my children the way my mother hit me.

But when my son's behavior got so bad, I was angry and desperate and I just wanted to do something to stop it. I knew how I acted after my mom hit me—I was so hurt and afraid of another beating that I'd stop doing whatever it was I just got hit for. I thought a beating would make my son stop, too.

I never imagined it would mean

"Many times I had to hold back frustration that felt like a ball of fire. I thought about ice, snow, and winter to calm me down. I controlled my temper, and it paid off."



I would lose my kids. I was so angry at myself because my children had to suffer for what I'd done. I cried myself to sleep many nights. My emotions were really running wild because I loved my kids so much and it hurt so much to lose them.

Starting to Cooperate

For the first couple of months, my anger kept me from doing what the system told me I needed to do. I wasn't going to counseling because I felt I didn't need it. Whenever I went to see the caseworker, I wasn't cooperative because I just wanted to smack her.

But after a few months of rebelling, I realized that I couldn't let that continue because there was too much at stake—my children. The longer it took me to get proper visits with them, the harder it was going to be to get them back permanently.

So I prayed, I read the Bible, I told myself again and again to calm down. I forced myself to get my emotions under control. I also decided that if I was going to change my situation, I couldn't just depend on my caseworker or my lawyer. I would have to learn what I could about the system myself.

I Was in Control

I went to the library and the librarian gave me *The Family Act Book*, a very thick blue book with information about the system. It said I had the right to visit my children, the right to be a part of making decisions about their

medical care and education. It said I could even attend parent-teacher conferences.

I wrote the information down in a notebook. With that knowledge, I would go to meetings at the agency or ACS and I would quote different sections of the book. I wanted them to think I had real power behind me, so when they asked me where I got my information from, I'd lie and say that I had my own lawyer. I spoke calmly but firmly and I carried myself in a way that let them know I was in control.

Many times I had to hold back tears, anger, frustration that felt like a ball of fire. Inside I often felt hot and furious. But I thought about ice, snow, and winter to calm me down. I controlled my temper, and it paid off.

A Person, Not a Case

The agency began to look at me as a person, not as a caseload and docket number. It helped, too, that I began to comply more fully with their requirements. I went to therapy and I completed two parenting skills classes. I also began working at the Child Welfare Organizing Project, where parents who have children in the system advocate to improve how the system treats parents.

Because of all that, I gained permission to take my children to school every day. I took them to doctors' appointments and therapy, too. Eventually I was allowed to spend time with them on the weekends.

Accepting My Son's Ways

Soon I realized that I had to calm down, not only with the system but with my son, too. For a while after my son went into care, he had even more problems than he'd had before. His behavior in school grew worse and he didn't want to do any work at all. He was probably sad and mad that he'd been taken from me.

I was frustrated but I told myself that all I could do was talk to him. I just told him over *cont. p. 5*

continued from page 4

and over how important school is and that I'd gone to school, too. Maybe because I was calmer, he began to respond a little better to me. I also think his therapist helped him. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable with her—I felt like she was judging me—but my son liked her.

One day my son said to me, "Mommy, you're always telling me what to do." He said, "Ma, I would feel better if you said, 'Just try to do it.'" When he said that I realized that maybe I was too demanding and I had to accept that my son had ways of his own.

Help Us at Home

Still, there were limits to how much I could do until I finally was given a caseworker who really worked with me. I've had three caseworkers during the two years my children have been in care. The first two never once made a home visit.

A few months ago, I was given my third caseworker and she's beautiful. I almost love her. She saw how hard I was trying, and she gave me weekend and overnight visits. I appreciate that she acts like she trusts me and cares about my children and me.

Soon my two children will be released into my care full time. I have some worries how long it will take my children to get used to being home. Sometimes my son and I still have our turbulences. But he and I have grown and our relationship has improved.

Looking back, I did need help with my son because I felt out of control and that was affecting my relationship with him. But I don't believe that my children needed to be taken from me. I wish that I had been given help while my children were still with me instead of having them thrown into the system.

Philneia's children are now home and she is working as a parent advocate with New York City's Administration for Children's Services.

This story is reprinted, with permission, from *Rise*, © 2006 by Youth Communication/New York Center, Inc. (www.youthcomm.org). *Rise* is a new magazine written by and for birth parents involved in the child welfare system. If you have a story to share or if you would like up to 50 free copies of *Rise*, e-mail [Nora McCarthy <nora9000@hotmail.com>](mailto:NoraMcCarthy@nora9000@hotmail.com)

Reunification in North Carolina in 2003

To work effectively with children and their families, foster parents need to have realistic expectations. These expectations should be based at least in part on what we know about what happens to children and families involved with the child welfare system. In this spirit, we offer the following

Figure 1

Destination of NC Children Leaving Foster Care in 2003

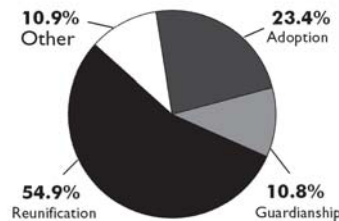


Figure 2

Time to Reunification in NC in 2003

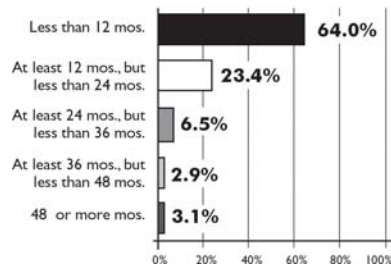


Figure 3

Percent of NC Children Who Left Care in 2003 Who Were Reunified

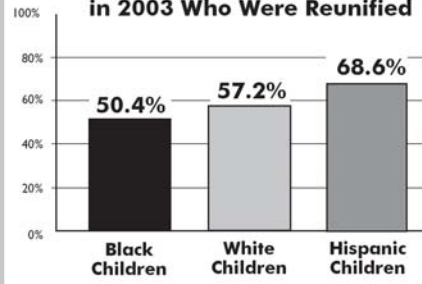
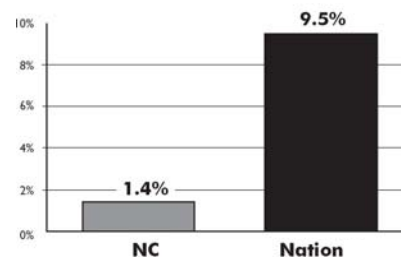


Figure 4

Reunified Children Who Re-Entered Care within 12 Months in 2003



information about the reunification of children in foster care in North Carolina. This information is drawn from *Child Welfare Outcomes 2003: Annual Report*, which was released in fall 2006 by the US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Currently 2003 is the most recent year for which the federal government has complete statistics.

What Do We Know?

Reunification is the most likely outcome for children placed in foster care. In 2003, of the 5,067 children who left foster care in North Carolina, 2,784 (54.9%) were reunified with their families. Figure 1 illustrates the different destinations of the children who left foster care in 2003.

When reunification occurs, it usually happens in less than 12 months. Sixty-four percent of the NC children in foster care who were reunified with their families in 2003 spent less than 12 months in foster care. This percent falls short of the national median of 72%, but it represents an improvement in performance for North Carolina since 2000, when the percentage was only 59.2%. Figure 2 illustrates the amount of time the children who were reunified in 2003 had spent in foster care before returning home.

Reunification was not equally likely for children of all races in North Carolina in 2003. Although reunification was the most likely outcome for foster children of all races in 2003, as Figure 3 indicates, White (non-Hispanic) children were somewhat more likely to be reunified than Black (non-Hispanic) children, while Hispanic children (any race) were reunified more often than White children.

Relatively few North Carolina children re-enter foster care after they are reunified with their families. Although in 2003 North Carolina did not perform as well as most states when it came the percentage of children who were reunified within 12 months of their entry into foster care, our state had a very low percent of children re-entering foster care.

In 2003, only 1.4% of children entering foster care in North Carolina had been in foster care during the preceding 12 months. As Figure 4 illustrates, this is significantly lower than the national median for this performance measure.

This suggests North Carolina does a better job than many states of ensuring that sufficient changes have occurred in birth families before children return home and/or that sufficient post-reunification services are provided to birth families.

The GAL perspective by John McMahon

Many foster parents are not entirely clear about the role that GALs (guardians ad litem) and CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates) play in the child welfare system. This article provides a brief overview of their role.

NC's GAL Program

North Carolina's GAL program, which is run through the Administrative Office of the Courts, provides trained, independent advocates to represent and promote in court the best interests of abused, neglected, and dependent children. To fulfill this mission, the GAL program recruits, screens, and trains volunteers to gather and present facts to the court in child abuse and neglect cases in North Carolina. In 2003, more than 3,800 GAL volunteers were involved in the cases of 15,706 children.

Who Are GALs?

Anyone can apply to become a North Carolina GAL. In addition to a written application and a personal interview, applicants must undergo a criminal record check. The volunteer must then complete 25-30 hours of training, which may include court observation. The training prospective GALs receive emphasizes that every case is different and that as they reach out to each new person, GALs must remain neutral, calm, objective, and respectful.

GALs are appointed for two years, but appointments may be extended. GALs are supervised by professional program staff.

What Do They Do?

Whenever social services files a petition with the courts alleging that a child is abused or neglected, the court must appoint a GAL to represent the child's interests in the proceeding. If the GAL is not an attorney, the court must also appoint an attorney to work with the GAL to represent the child's legal interests. In dependency cases the judge is not required to, but may, appoint a GAL and attorney advocate for the child.

A GAL's overall duty is to protect and promote the child's best interests. He or she is responsible for (1) investigating to determine the facts, the child's needs, and the resources available in the family and community, (2) recommending services and interventions to ensure the child's



The GAL's job is to be the voice of the child at meetings and in court.

safety and to ensure children who have been removed from their homes will find permanent homes as soon as possible, and (3) offering evidence and examining witnesses in court.

Within these broad functions GALs have a lot of latitude with regard to how they gather information. Some spend a lot of time talking with foster parents, foster children, teachers, etc. Others find out what they need to know

without much personal contact. Some want to be a part of the child's life. Others see their role as that of an objective third party who monitors the provision of services to the child.

Confidentiality

Usually the court order appointing the GAL authorizes him or her to obtain any information or reports he or she considers relevant to the case. Whenever a GAL exercises this authority, he or she must present the court order that contains that authorization. The person or agency from whom information is sought may want a copy of the order. The GAL must protect the confidentiality of information he or she receives.

A medical or mental health provider, a school, or any other agency or professional from whom a guardian ad litem seeks information should provide the information promptly, unless the GAL does not have a court order authorizing him or her to obtain confidential information or federal law or regulations prohibit disclosure of the information.

What Makes a Good GAL?

To answer to this question we spoke with a guardian ad litem program administrator. She told us that if a GAL is good at what he does, teachers, social workers, and others will describe him as cooperative, accessible, and committed to finding solutions for the child.

In the box at right you will find statements from GALs and CASAs from around the country explaining how they see their role and why they do what they do.

To Learn More

Being a volunteer GAL gives you the opportunity to make a real difference in the life of a child. To learn more about this program and how you can help, visit <http://www.nccourts.org/Citizens/GAL> or send e-mail to gal@nccourts.org.

GALs and CASAs Speak Out

Patricia Mastagh (South Bend, IN)

My motivation for volunteering for CASA came as a result of my work as a foster parent. My foster child had a CASA volunteer. Seeing her advocate for my foster child, I became interested in the program. After I adopted my foster child, I also became a CASA volunteer. My work with the children I advocate for is very rewarding. My favorite motto is, "A hundred years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove ... but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

Jan Masenthin (Topeka, KS)

My motivation to become a CASA volunteer was the mountain my husband and I had to climb in order to rescue and finally adopt our niece and nephew. If they had a CASA volunteer, it wouldn't have taken my Annie and Ernie 13 years to get the permanent home that our other children have had from the day they were born. NEVER turn your back on a child in need. Number one is always a child's safety. Without freedom from abuse and neglect, a child cannot reach beyond fear and hopelessness. I believe we can achieve amazing things for these kids if we keep up the one-on-one work that gives us the opportunity to make a difference.

Jutta K. Young (Columbia, SC)

I grew up in an alcoholic home. I survived because people, other than those who were supposed to, cared about me. I turned out OK, and it is my desire that all children who are victims of abuse and neglect know that they can be OK, too! Working with children is what I have been called to do. The one thread that we as adults have in common is that regardless of background, education, career, or finances, we were all a child at one time. Children do not need much, only love and attention. Neither of these costs anything and requires only that we give of ourselves. And, when we do, we receive so much more in return. Seeing the world through the eyes of a child, what a difference we can make!

Suzanne Harrison (Nashville, TN)

While going through a divorce, I saw how helpless and angry a daughter could become because she could not tell the judge what she wanted, nor have a say in her own life at a time when her life was scary. So, I was delighted later when I ran across CASA, an organization that would speak for children, giving them a feeling of having some say in the court. I immediately wanted to be a part of that. Now, after six (soul-satisfying) years with CASA, when I first meet the children — Adrian, Jehoshua, Kevin, Marrell, Leshonda, Zach and others — it's still like falling in love. I see awesomely wonderful things in each of them. I want to be a part of making their life good for them. I want them to feel my respect for them and thus respect themselves, to acknowledge their fears so they can be dealt with, to love whomever they choose guilt-free.

Reprinted, with permission, from "Personal Portraits of CASA and GAL Volunteers," which first appeared in *The Connection* (Fall/Winter 2003) <www.casenet.org>

A social worker's heartfelt tips for foster parents by Jenifer Montsinger

The child welfare system is complex and often confusing, even for those who are a part of it. The vulnerable child for whom you are providing foster care has been hurt physically and/or emotionally by those he should have been able to trust. This makes yours one of the most difficult and critical jobs within the whole system: helping the child heal. To succeed, you must be able to help him feel good about himself, which also means feeling good about where he came from.

As a social worker in this system, I can appreciate the conflicting feelings this must at times create for you. I can't change those feelings, I can only try to help you use them creatively to become a more effective member of the team serving the child in your care.

The more you know about what I need and expect from you as the child's foster parent, the more successful we will be as a team. The suggestions and thoughts I have to offer will, I hope, pave the way for a stronger working relationship.

Trust me to give you accurate information as I know it

When a child needs placement, I often know very little about him. I will tell you everything I know that is relevant to his care, but we may quickly learn that our initial information was woefully inadequate. Please don't assume I have tried to mislead you. If you are just learning from me about something important, it is because I've just learned it as well. In fact, since you are living with the child, you may find out before I do. If so, please share it with me in detail as soon as possible so we can figure out how to handle it.

Keep good notes

Write down what you observe and learn about your child. Keep records of conversations with teachers, therapists, doctors, family members, and anyone else you have contact with. This information will help us plan for the child. Share the information with me so that I have a clear picture of how the child is really doing.

Understand that child welfare laws both guide us and place limits on us

There are things neither you nor I can do without permission from the parent or the courts. This includes everything from authorizing HIV testing to having ears pierced. I know this can be frustrating for you and for the child, but we must work within the framework of the law. If there is a valid reason for requesting permission for something (e.g., a non-emergency medical procedure), we will do all we can to get the proper consents.

Don't make decisions or plans about services for the child without talking to me first

Remember that we are both part of the child's team and we must be planning jointly. If your child needs a special service, I will need to figure out how it can be authorized and funded before we make any official commitments. If a specialized service is to be provided, it must be authorized in advance by the custodial agency (DSS).

Be empathetic, not sympathetic, toward your child

Sympathy implies pity and a lack of control over one's environment. Sympathy encourages dependence. We want our children to develop self-confidence and an appropriate sense of control over their lives. Empathetic responses recognize and acknowledge problems, but they challenge one to find solutions. This approach gives the child a solid foundation for learning to solve problems.

Talk to me!

If I'm not giving you the support and guidance you need, tell me. You usually do your job so well that I may assume you don't need much from me. I should be visiting with both you and your child regularly. If I'm not, remind me that we're overdue for a meeting. You have a right to expect me to take time for a private conversation with you. Hold me to that.

In return, keep in mind that I need to be able to visit with your child privately to make an independent assessment of how he's doing. Help me do this in a way that feels comfortable for him. My meetings with him are to strengthen the trust between the two of us, not to check up on you, so please encourage him to talk to me about anything that is important to him.

Remember your MAPP/GPS training

Be realistic about the child's relationships and interactions. Children retain their ties to their families of origin throughout their lifetime, regardless of the treatment they might have received. No matter what your personal feelings about the child's family might be, for the sake of his emotional well-being, you must respect that relationship.

Don't expect the child to verbally express his appreciation for the care you have provided. Instead, look for the nonverbal cues—

"Talk to me! If I'm not giving you the support and guidance you need, tell me.

You usually do your job so well I may assume you don't need much from me."

hugs, seeking you out to talk about something that is important to him, letting you comfort him when he is sad. These are his "thank you's." Your job is done well when the child's foster care placement ends in a permanent placement that everyone can celebrate.

Licensing social workers are here to support, guide, train, and advocate for you!

If you are having difficulty communicating or getting things done, ask for help. Don't let a misunderstanding fester. Most problems have a constructive, positive solution if they are addressed promptly. Your agency should have provided you with a handbook which gives you information about how your agency operates and who does what within the system. If you have questions about any of this, ask your licensing worker. Be sure you understand and comply with the requirements for in-service training, home visits, inspections, and medical exams in order to keep your foster home license current.

My commitment to you is that I will try to talk to you regularly, keep you up-to-date on what's happening with your child's service plan, find opportunities to tell you how much I appreciate the nurturing care you are providing, and include you as an equal partner in serving the child. If I have a concern about something, I will try to work with you in a constructive way to solve the problem. If you have a concern, please share it with me in a way that allows for constructive problem-solving.

Our needs, and those of the child, are best met when you and I have a mutually respectful relationship that is directed at the primary goal of achieving a permanent, safe home for OUR child.

Jenifer Montsinger is a social work supervisor at the Orange County Department of Social Services.



Next Steps

Strengthening your relationship with social workers who come into your foster home is one of the best ways to ensure the safety and well-being of the kids you care so much about. So the next time a social worker visits your home, why not bring out this article and discuss it? Understanding one another's points of view is essential to a successful partnership on behalf of children.

What's it like to be a birth child in a foster home?

The writing contest in the last issue of *Fostering Perspectives* was a departure in some ways. Instead of asking for responses from children and youth who are or have been in foster care, as we usually do, this time we put the focus on a group of kids that is unquestionably affected by the child welfare system but often overlooked—the birth children of foster parents. For this contest, we asked them to tell us what it was like to be a birth child in a foster home and what they had learned from this experience.



Their answers, which you'll find on these pages, are diverse and eye-opening, reassuring and surprising. The lessons these children say they have learned include:

- How to handle stress
- People don't always love you back (sometimes they don't know how yet)
- It's important to listen to everyone
- Kids need a home and a parent to love

I hope that as you read the words of these children you will think about your own experience and what you have learned from your own work in foster care.

—John McMahon, Editor

Thomas, age 15

Being the birth child in a foster home is not as fun as I thought. My mom, dad, brother, and I adopted a 13-year-old boy. Here is what I learned—that you don't get what you think you are going to get. Becoming an older brother is not easy when you have been the young one for 14 years of your life. Mom can't do it all and you have to help. Plus, it makes it hard in school, too. People think that you are crazy for adopting a 13-year-old child and not a baby.

Being the birth child in a foster home is hard, but you should never say, "I give up, I can't do it!" Say, "I can do it!" because it will be worth it in the end to have a little brother. Take it from me.

Thomas received \$15 for having his letter published

Here is what I have learned—that you don't get what you think you are going to get.

Eli, age 10

I live with my grandmother. Last year she asked me if I would like to help her keep foster kids in our home. I said I'd love to! We both enjoy having kids around.

The first kids to come stay with us were twins, a boy and a girl When they went to live with another family I was sad and missed them.

Now we have a boy my age living with us. This has been harder for me. Sometimes we fight and sometimes we are friends. He's even in my class at school, so sometimes I get tired of seeing him so much. I'm glad he lives with us, even if we do fight. I don't always like sharing my room and toys, but I like having a brother.

My granny has thought up ways to help us get along better. She lets us both have quiet time when we need it. And we each get at least one day a week to spend with her by ourselves doing whatever we want to do. The hardest thing for me was learning to share my granny. This has helped a lot.

I hope we get lots of other kids to live with us. It is fun learning about them and making new friends. *Eli's letter won first prize, for which he was awarded \$100*

I don't always like sharing my room and my toys, but I like having a brother.

1

Daniel, age 10

My family met Tina over a year ago and decided to become a foster home for her and her 15-year-old sister, Britney. Tina and Britney moved in just after Christmas.

When they first came into our home I didn't know what to expect. I felt a little nervous and a little scared.

Once they moved in things were a little rough around the edges. We had arguments and differences, but we got over most of that. Britney decided not to stay with us. I got very mad at her because I trusted her. I learned that sometimes people won't love you back. I think she doesn't know how yet.

Tina stayed with us. She needed us and I really needed her. I think it was meant to be because God brought us together. I learned about how to handle stress because Tina has been and is going through it. When I need her she tries to be there for me. If she cannot I can understand because I love her with all my heart. Sometimes we get in arguments but we try to stop and think it through. I love being a little brother. Tina is a great big sister. I hope we can adopt her soon.

Daniel's letter won second prize, for which he was awarded \$50

I learned that sometimes people don't love you back.

2

Michelle, age 10

Being a birth child in a foster home is sometimes simple and sometimes tough. It is fun because you get to meet new kids to play with. It is hard because they don't do things the same way we do because of the way they have been brought up. I have learned that it is not as easy as it sounds to have a brother or sister because they are different. I also learned that having other kids at home is fun, but you have to always remember that they might not stay. *Michelle received \$15 for having her letter published*

It is sometimes simple and sometimes tough.

Danetta, age 11

3

Hello! My name is Danetta and I am in the sixth grade. My mom was glad that someone wanted to know how I feel about foster children, but I was SERIOUS.

Foster children are OK sometimes. The first ones we had were two sisters. They were 13 and 15. I was eight years old then so they were older than me and they liked to help. They didn't give me any problem. They left after a few days and I was really sad and missed them.

Another girl came. She was 13 years old and a big troublemaker. She argued with my mom and took my things and my clothes. I still liked her but she left after two years with us. I was confused but I knew what was right for our family.

Now we have another girl. She was six when she came to us. Now she is eight years old. She is short and skinny. . . .She has been here for a long time. A long, painful time. She was lying and stealing a lot, but mom helped her. I've learned that children need a home and a parent to love. So I have to put up with her and her big mouth. I think she is hyper. I'm glad my mom has children that she can take care of, but sometimes they can get on your nerves, especially if they are small and get all the attention from mom. At one time I thought she had ruined my life and mom loves her . . . more than me. But mom said she has a lot of love for many children, so now I try to play with her and love her. *Danetta's letter won third prize, for which she was awarded \$25*

Jacob, age 8

My parents have been foster parents since I was a baby. I have had some really good times with the foster children who have lived with us. I have a lot of fun playing with the boy who lives with us now; he is 8 years old, like me. When he first moved in he was scared and missed his mommy. I showed him around his new school and helped him make friends.

Some foster children have taught me hobbies like making bracelets, fishing, fixing bikes, drawing, and working with computers. That is what I really like about foster care, the kids all know something different and I get to learn new things. I share what I like, and let the kids play with my toys and books.

My family and I pray for the children each night and hope that they have a fun time with us and aren't too sad about missing their mom and dad. I know it would be hard to have to move from my family so I try to help the foster children feel comfortable and happy when they move into our home.

Jacob received \$15 for having his letter published

The kids all know something different and I get to learn new things.

Meosha, age 16

. . . I have learned that the life that I have, a lot of children would love to be in my shoes. I learned not to take my parents or the privileges I have for granted. I also learned that this isn't a perfect world, but it is what you make it. Having foster children in my home is a good real-life experience for me because you can hear the things they went through and it gives you strength and encourages you to help those in need.

Meosha received \$15 for having her letter published

I have learned not to take my parents or the privileges I have for granted.

Kennethra, age 12

My parents have not been fostering long. In April 2006 we took in our first [placement], a 6-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl that we hope to adopt. Our family decided to foster/adopt because my mom is a social worker for foster care and she is always helping children and we wanted to give a home to a child.

Being the only birth child in a foster home can be real stressful at times, but other times it's wonderful! Being the birth child in a foster home, I have learned that at times it's going to be hard, but at times you have to take the time to think about the foster child's background that they come from.

Kennethra received \$15 for having her letter published

Hannah, age 8

Being a foster sister is fun! Our adoption agency is private and we only take care of newborns. Sometimes I get upset when my mom has to take care of the baby because I need her, too. It's very hard to be with the babies for a long time and then say good-bye. I always kiss the babies and tell them that I love them. I ask my mom if the family is nice or has any children if I'm not there when we give the babies to their forever families. I've learned that I can open up my heart and make room for each baby that we care for. I've also learned that it is hard to love someone for just a little while, but God always has another baby brother or sister for me to love.

I've learned that I can open up my heart and make room for each baby we care for.

Hannah received \$15 for having her letter published

Nicholas, age 6

Even though my mom and dad have had seven foster children I am still loving this whole family VERY MUCH! It's strange but in my heart I have loved my foster brother and sisters very much! It feels weird that there's only three birth children and only seven foster children. But I still love it.

I have learned that you always have to listen to everybody, especially Jesus and your parents! I know what it feels like having a baby foster sister or brother because I've had a baby foster sister that always wanted to play with me and my sisters and brother.

It's nice to meet new people but the saddest part is that they have to go. But that's part of it. But that's OK.

Nicholas received \$15 for having his letter published



North Carolina Foster and

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

From the association's president by Stacey Darbee



Stacey Darbee

2007 Institute

I can hardly believe it's that time again. Time to begin planning to attend the 2007 NCFAPA Training Institute! Our theme this year is "Honoring Connections: The Key to Hidden Treasures."

The institute will be held again at the Sheraton Imperial in Durham, April 20-22, 2007. Due to the record attendance last year, we are holding 200 guest rooms at the rate of \$76 per night. We are also offering a great new reservation option: log on to <www.NCFAPA.org> and you will be pointed to a Sheraton site set up specifically for the Honoring Connections institute.

Please reserve your room now—without a doubt, they will sell out!

Web News

We are reconstructing our web site so please visit often for updates. We will also post institute information as soon as it's available. We hope to have online registration available in January 2007. Watch for it! We have great plans for this site, but we also want to hear from you. What you would like to see on this web site? What would be helpful to you?

Advocacy

NCFAPA continues to collaborate with many other state agencies and associations in legislative efforts. Be on the lookout for future news regarding our next foster care/adoption awareness effort presented to the legislature in Raleigh. If you have knowledge of or a pas-

sion for advocacy on behalf of children, please contact the NCFAPA office.

Training

At the end of June 2006 NCFAPA sponsored a leadership forum in Black Mountain. Fifty-three association members participated in an excellent weekend of learning, with lots of fun thrown in!

NCFAPA is expanding our efforts by recruiting foster, adoptive, and kinship parent liaisons in each county. Those already on board participated in the leadership forum, along with all of the board members. The liaisons will act as communication agents between NCFAPA and county departments, agencies, associations, and support groups. They will also be invaluable as we plan and implement regional events in the state. If you'd like to learn more about this program, please contact our office via phone or e-mail.

On October 14, 2006 NCFAPA continued its leadership training by offering a free day of "Starting and Sustaining Local Support Groups and Associations." This event will be led by a trainer from the North American Council on Adoptable Children and will take place at the Village Inn in Clemmons.

We know it can be hard to maintain small groups. Please know that NCFAPA can offer encouragement, support, and technical assistance to help your group establish a solid foundation. We are very excited to be able to share this opportunity with parents!

Important New Law

On July 3, 2006 President Bush signed the "Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006." This new law makes changes to home study and other requirements to facilitate interstate placement of children in foster or adoptive homes.

Although most of this legislation pertains to changes in interstate placement procedures and will affect a small number of people, there is one piece that pertains to all foster parents. Section 475(5)(G) of the Social Security Act [42 U.S.C. 675(5)(G)] now states "the foster parents (if any) of a child and any pre-adoptive parent or relative providing care for the child are provided with notice of, and a right to be heard in, any proceeding to be held with respect to the child." This bill went into effect October 1, 2006.

This section of the bill requires the following changes: to be eligible for Court Improvement Program funding, states must institute a statewide rule requiring state courts to ensure **notice** to "**any proceeding**" (no longer subjective) regarding a child to that child's foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers. The other change is that instead of an *opportunity* to be heard, it now states that foster, pre-adoptive and relative caregivers have a **right** to be heard. 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.

The NCFAPA made several attempts to learn how our state will implement this new law, but the process is not yet clear. Tune in to <www.NCFAPA.org> for updates.

Nov. Is Adoption Awareness Month

Right now North Carolina has well over 1,500 children in foster care who are legally free for adoption. As of 2005 there were in excess of 114,000 children **waiting** nationwide.

If you are an adoptive parent you know what an impact adoption has on children's lives. Please make a special effort this month to speak up to neighbors, friends, co-workers, and your faith community about all of these children in need of a special, loving family to call home. Remember—kids can't wait!

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 \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a couple. **Associate Membership** (\$50 for an individual and \$100 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.: _____

Adoptive Parent Association

PO Box 26170 • Greensboro, NC 27402-6170 • 866/623-7248 (toll free)



Honoring NC's foster and adoptive parents and their partners

The NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association's 9th Annual Training Institute, *Honoring Connections: The Key to Hidden Treasures*, will be held April 20-22, 2007 at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel and Convention Center in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. At this event we want to celebrate the people who make a difference for children and families. We would especially like to honor those who have been innovative and progressive in seeking out and preserving connections (in many shapes and forms) to serve children and families.

Therefore we are asking you to submit nominations for a foster family, an adoptive family, and a human services provider or community partner in your region of the state who has made a difference for North Carolina's children and families. We're proud to provide you with this opportunity to honor and recognize these special individuals.

Please use the nomination form below to submit nominations to Joanne Scaturro via fax (919/733-9204) or e-mail (Joanne.Scaturro@ncmail.net) by **January 31, 2007**. A committee of the NCFAPA's Board of Directors will review the nominations and award one foster family, one adoptive family, and one human services provider or community partner per region. Winners will receive an award and be honored at April's training institute. Thank you for joining us in celebrating the efforts of people who care for our children and families.

Nomination Form

Nominee is a: Foster family Adoptive family
 Human services provider Community partner

Nominee's name: _____

Nominee's address: _____

Nominee's county of residence: _____

Phone(s): _____

E-mail: _____

Nominated by: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

E-mail: _____

On a separate sheet answer this question: **How has this nominee *Honored Connections* to change lives?**
(250 words or less)

Deadline: Submit nominations to Joanne Scaturro (fax: 919/733-9204; e-mail: Joanne.Scaturro@ncmail.net) by **January 31, 2007**.

2006 Honorees

The following are excerpts from the tributes written about the people who were recognized at the Association's 2006 training institute.

Region 1

Carolyn and Keith Pettis (Foster Parents). Carolyn and Keith treat their foster children as they do their own children and always build on the child's strengths. They have made a difference in every way possible to everybody on the team.

Mary Knight (Adoptive Parent). Mary embraces shared parenting and believes all children should remain connected to their birth families. She is truly a woman to be admired and applauded for her diligence in working on behalf of children and families.

Reehan Black (Community Person). Mr. Black serves our community as the owner of Youth/Adult Care Management where foster and adopted children in Cabarrus County and surrounding areas get the emotional care they need. He has helped us gather gifts for the children during the holidays and always makes sure children have what they need.

Region 2

Debbi Causey (Foster Parent). Debbi Causey not only serves as a GAL, but also has two birth children, three adopted children, and one teenage foster daughter in her home right now. She is a perfect example of how to show love and caring to everyone.

Steven G. Case (Adoptive Parent). Steve is doing an outstanding job raising—and home schooling—four children who have been traumatized. His ability to run a home that is serene and tidy and still make it to games and extracurricular activities is amazing. Steve is humble, friendly, and very much deserves to win foster and adoptive dad of the year!

Marsha Marshall (Human Service Provider). The foster care supervisor in Stokes County, Ms. Marshall is a true advocate and child welfare warrior. So many times, our workers do not receive recognition for their efforts, and we present our candidate as a truly outstanding individual: mother, social worker, advocate, supervisor, and implementer.

Region 3

Pamela and Julius Allen (Foster Family). As soon as the Allens became licensed they accepted a medically fragile child. At various times they have also parented two teenage boys, two teenage mothers, their babies, and several other children. I have never worked with a family that is so caring, loving, and flexible and that truly works toward whatever is in the child's best interest.

Vicky Jordan (Adoptive Family). Vicky has been licensed with Montgomery County since September 2002. As a single parent, Vicky has lovingly fostered many children of different ages, sexes, and ethnic backgrounds. The child in whose life Vicky has made the biggest difference is now her adoptive daughter.

Marie Montague (Human Services Provider). Marie is the backbone of Child Placement Services at Durham County DSS and "knows how to make a way out of no way." Without her the agency, the foster parents, and the children would not be the same.

Region 4

Lisa and Dan Parker (Foster Parents). In foster car since August 2001, J. was hostile to all caregivers. Then she was placed in the home of Dan and Lisa Parker, the first real family J. had ever known. Loving, patient people, Dan and Lisa provided a structured, supportive home for J. They demonstrated the power of unconditional love and made J. part of their family.

Deborah and Christopher Battle (Adoptive Family). My name is Terrence Battle and I want to nominate Deborah and Christopher Battle. I have been in their home since 2001 and this has been the best 5 years of my life. No one could ask for better parents.

Ezra and Thelesa Fauth (Community Persons). Ezra and Thelesa have made a difference in the lives of so many. They have fostered numerous children, provided respite for other foster parents, mentored biological and adoptive parents, and currently are providing a home for a 15-year-old foster child and her newborn son. Dare County is honored to have this family as foster parents and proudly nominate them for the difference they have made to North Carolina's children and families.

SaySo "Cleans Up" for Make a Difference Day by Melinda Medina

For the past two years, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo) has sponsored a Make a Difference Day project called, "Give a Child a Smile" which involved collecting suitcases for foster youths in North Carolina. Foster youth across the state voted this year at the annual SaySo Saturday conference for what they needed. The majority of the youth said hygiene products. So the focus of "Give a Child a Smile" for 2006 will include dispersing hygiene products to youths requesting products for themselves and area youths.

We need to hear from YOU! Contact us if you are a foster youth or know a foster youth who is interested in receiving hygiene products. We will only send products to those youths who contact us. We are also collecting donated hygiene products or money to purchase products. Please send all requests and donations by October 27, 2006 to:

Melinda Medina

SaySo, Inc.

411 Andrews Road, Suite 230

Durham, NC 27705

1-800-820-0001 or melinda.medina@ilrinc.com

This year's Make a Difference Day is on October 28, 2006. Requests need to include: Name, address (to ship products), city, zip, e-mail or phone number, and preferred hygiene products. Please also indicate how much hygiene product you need to distribute to other foster youths in your area (at LINKS or SaySo meetings).

New SaySo Board Members Add Some Spark!

Nine elected SaySo Youth Board members climbed to new heights in June as they joined current board members on the Sandhills High Adventure Course in Pinehurst. SaySo Orientation is an annual event to help board members learn to work together, recognize strengths, and set goals for the upcoming year. As SaySo expands, the youth board needs leadership and teamwork from all members to come forth and join the ranks. SaySo youths are working to create an organization capable of growth and new ideas. We love new blood!! This year, SaySo Board members have set goals to: (1) expand the funding base of the organization, (2) provide support and connections to local chapters, and (3) enhance accountability of Board members.

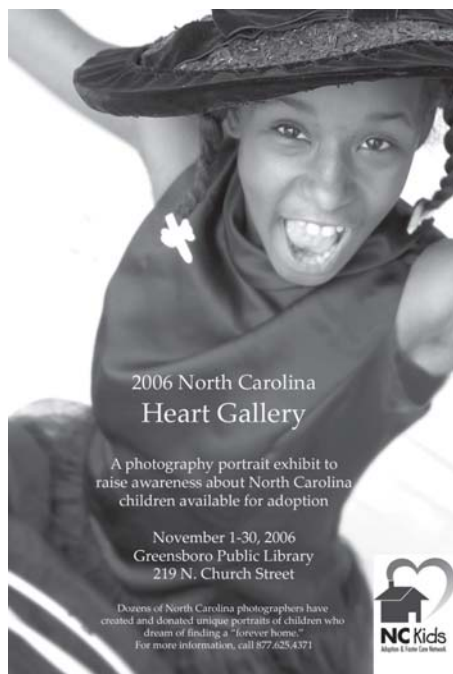
Top 10 Ways to Get Involved with SaySo

(P.S. participating in any SaySo event is free)



1. Encourage current and former foster youths to become members of SaySo – it's free and they will receive six newsletters per year about upcoming events, news, stories, and information.
2. Encourage youths to become a SaySo Page (spring 2007). See our next newsletter for more information.
3. Youth can write articles, poems, and stories for SaySo newsletters.
4. Youth can attend our annual SaySo Saturday (March 3, 2007) and other leadership events.
5. Make SaySo aware of issues youth in your area are facing.
6. Let SaySo know what activities or projects you think SaySo should be involved in.
7. Ask local businesses, churches, and groups to hire foster teens (including short-term and temporary help).
8. Encourage former foster youths who have aged out of the system to mentor current youths transitioning into adulthood.
9. Donate your time, talent, and treasure to the enhancement of SaySo and its members.
10. Register your **Food Lion MVP card** to raise money for SaySo. Go to www.foodlion.com. Click "Lion Shop and Share" located "In the Community" section. (Registering your MVP card will not affect any MVP discounts.)

Please e-mail [<sayso@ilrinc.com>](mailto:sayso@ilrinc.com) or call (800/820-0001) for information on any of the above items. Also, visit SaySo's website at [<http://www.saysoinc.org>](http://www.saysoinc.org). Thank you.



2006 North Carolina Heart Gallery

A photography portrait exhibit to raise awareness about North Carolina children available for adoption

November 1-30, 2006
Greensboro Public Library
219 N. Church Street

Dozens of North Carolina photographers have created and donated unique portraits of children who dream of finding a "forever home."
For more information, call 877-625-4371



Visit North Carolina's Heart Gallery

NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network will be hosting a Heart Gallery exhibit in November 2006 in celebration of Adoption Awareness Month. The event will be held at the Greensboro Public Library, 219 N. Church Street, between November 1-30.

This exhibit will feature striking portraits of children in North Carolina's foster care system in need of a permanent home.

NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network is partnering with the art community, generous businesses, and the NC Division of Social Services to bring us this remarkable photography exhibit. Professional and amateur photographers volunteered their expertise to create visual images of the children.

The children featured in the Heart Gallery are in state care with the goal of adoption. Most have been waiting for at least one year to find a family to call their own.

The goal of the Heart Gallery is to educate

the public about the well over 1,500 children in foster care in North Carolina awaiting adoption.

Since it was introduced in 2001, the Heart Gallery concept has spread nationwide, with wonderful results. After New Mexico's first exhibit, 50% of the people who expressed interest in foster care and adoption completed the licensing process, a 5% increase from the year before. Following Connecticut's Heart Gallery event in 2004, 19 foster children were placed in permanent homes.

In addition to being effective child-specific recruitment tools, Heart Galleries also educate communities about the role played by county departments of social services. Media coverage for these exhibits is always strong and positive.

For more information on North Carolina's 2006 Heart Gallery or to feature a child, please call NC Kids at 1-877-625-4371.

A reader asks ...

If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina, please write, e-mail, or fax your question to us using the contact information found on page 2. We'll do our best to respond to your question either in a direct reply or in a future issue of this newsletter.

Question:

I am beginning the process of adopting a child from the foster care system. The child's social worker has mentioned post-adoption services several times. Can you explain what these services are and how I would benefit?



Post-adoption services can assist all family members following the finalization of an agency adoption. The traumatic experiences children may have endured in their birth families, coupled with multiple placements in foster care, accentuate the importance of post-adoption services. Adoptive children who have behavioral difficulties or emotional problems place challenges on the whole adoptive family. Post-adoptive services and supports seek to reduce the risk of adoption dissolution and sustain healthy family relationships. These services can address many post-adoptive issues, such as the following:

- Loss and grief issues
- Understanding the social and emotional issues of adoption
- Trust and attachment issues
- Educational deficiencies due to multiple moves in the foster care system or other causes
- Identity formation
- Medical concerns, and
- Cultural or racial issues

Adopted children often revisit these issues during each stage of their development. Post-adoption services give adoptive parents the tools and resources to deal with the adoptive child's special needs.

Post-adoption services do not solely focus on the needs of the child. These services can also address any issues adoptive parents bring into the adoption process, such as their own loss and grief issues due to infertility or the stress of the adoption experience in itself.

There are four main categories of post-adoptive services:

1. Educational and informational services (parenting education/training, seminars/conferences, background information on the adoptive child)
2. Clinical services (mental health services, therapy/counseling)
3. Material services (financial assistance, books and magazines, etc.)
4. Support networks (adoptive parent support groups, local or regional support groups, respite care, peer support groups for adopted children)

Financial assistance in the form of adoption assistance is offered in order to finance needed services, such as tutoring, respite care, therapy, medical needs or camps. This funding comes from state and/or federal funds. Medicaid is also offered to the majority of children being adopted out of the foster care system.

Post-adoption financial assistance should be discussed with you prior to the finalization of the adoption. In order to learn about the specific supports and services in your area following the adoption, talk with your adoption worker. You can also learn more about post-adoption support in North Carolina by going to http://www.practicenotes.org/vol10_no1.htm. In some counties, post-adoption services are offered directly through the county department of social services. Other counties contract with private agencies to provide post-adoption services. Your family will definitely benefit from post-adoption services. These services will help sustain permanence and stability for your family!

Response by Beverley Smith, Director, NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network



"Ambition"

by Natasha, age 13

I try my hardest to let go
Of my painful past and all of my foes
My heart thumps from the misery.
Thump! Thump! That you would not see
By looking at me
Hands that do not belong there grab my
Heart
And try their hardest to pull it apart
I feel my heart ripping and breaking
Rip! Rip! Because inside I'm always aching
And outside I'm always faking
*As quiet as a lamb, as tough as an ox
As fierce as a lion, as sneaky as a fox*
I walk head down into a new place
Come out with pride plastered on my face
Looking back at my past, I trip and fall
At that point I lose it all
I look up and see a light and start to
Climb
When I reach it I won't fall back
Down this time
To be continued . . .

Natasha received \$15 for having her poem published

NC Foster Care Facts

- Currently there are approximately 11,000 children in foster care in our state.
- North Carolina has approximately 7,200 licensed foster parents. This figure includes parents who provide family foster care and therapeutic foster care.

Source: NC Division of Social Services, Oct. 2006

The Central Directory of Resources: Where foster and adoptive parents find answers

by Tamara Norris

Stand in the shoes of a parent fostering for the first time, and you will have lots of questions. *What is my role in helping develop my foster child's IEP at school? Does the child I'm fostering have a speech delay?* That same parent will likely need answers for a different set of questions if he or she chooses to adopt. *What financial changes can I expect when I adopt? Do other adoptive parents share my feelings?*

Resource specialists at the Central Directory of Resources (CDR) help foster and adoptive parents find answers to such questions. A service of **Family Support Network of North Carolina**, the CDR provides information and referral for families with children who have special needs and their service providers. Through a toll-free phone number (800/852-0042), referrals are made to service agencies, parent programs, support groups, and disability organizations on a local, state, and national level. Some agency referral information is also available on the Internet at <www.fsnncc.org>.

Foster and adoptive parents can contact the CDR about a wide range of issues. For example, if a child placed in a foster home has a known medical or behavioral diagnosis, the foster parent often needs information about the condition and how best to manage it. Other times the foster parents may suspect a problem, but aren't sure which service providers can evaluate their child. Foster parents can turn to the CDR when they need information about the service systems that their foster child may need: early intervention, health care, social services, mental health, schools and so on. Foster parents who adopt often have questions about post-adoption support and changes in finances and service delivery.

For all of these questions, the resource specialists can search the CDR database for issue-specific information (e.g., behavioral issues or respite care) or for disability-specific information (e.g., ADD) and referrals. Resource specialists also direct callers to reliable Internet sources of information and mail printed materials in response to caller requests. Printed information is provided on diseases, disabilities, chronic illnesses, and related issues. The CDR has a Spanish-speaking resource specialist and some printed information is available in Spanish. All services are offered free of charge.

A Part of Parents' Support System

The CDR serves as part of the parents' support system. Resource specialists can walk parents through what to expect and what is helpful to know, even if parents don't yet know what questions to ask. The CDR can help save parents time in going from agency to agency — either on the phone or traveling from office to office — to find the services they need.

Resource specialists also refer callers to their local Family Support Network affiliates in North Carolina. The 18 Family Support Network Local Program Affiliates offer:

- Parent-to-Parent Support, which matches trained support parents with parents in similar situations who would like to connect with someone about their child's needs
- Support and information for families with children who have special needs, as well as for families whose children have been born prematurely or are at risk for other reasons
- Ongoing support and information to families as children grow
- Support groups, training, and social activities for family members
- Info, resources, and training for families and service providers
- A family-centered perspective to collaboration between families and service providers

Resources for Foster and Adoptive Parents

Some national resources of general interest to foster and adoptive parents include:

- [Casey Family Programs](http://www.casey.org). (www.casey.org)

Casey Family Programs' mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care. They develop tools, practices, and policies to nurture all youth in care and to help parents strengthen families at risk of needing foster care. Casey's Media Center includes the newsletter "Fostering Families/Fostering Change."

- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](http://www.childwelfare.gov). (www.childwelfare.gov) This useful site is home to the National Adoption Directory Search, which includes state-by-state contact information for a variety of adoption-related organizations and services including licensed public and private adoption agencies, support groups, state registries, and more.
- [North American Council on Adoptable Children](http://www.nacac.org). (www.nacac.org) NACAC's parent support services include leadership training, publications that provide resources and information to adoptive families, and phone consultation and materials to address parents' questions about adoption subsidies for children who have special needs.

Tamara Norris, MSSW, MPA, is the Information and Referral Coordinator for the Family Support Network of North Carolina

Sheryl Ewing, Executive Director, Family Support Network of Southeastern NC, Inc. and former President of the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and Fern Gardner, CDR Resource Specialist contributed to this article.



The CDR serves as part of the parents' support system. Resource specialists can walk parents through what to expect and what is helpful to know, even if parents don't yet know what to ask.

Meet Your New ETV Coordinator

The NC Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program offers grants to foster youth and former foster youth to attend colleges, universities, and vocational training institutions. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year for four years as they pursue higher education. The funds may be used for tuition, books, or qualified living expenses related to post-secondary education. This program is administered by the Orphan Foundation of America.

Our state's new ETV Program Coordinator is Amanda Elder, a former foster child and an Orphan Foundation of America scholarship recipient. Amanda says, "I can relate to the ETV students with a level of understanding and compassion that someone without this type of experience is unable to offer."

"I received my undergraduate degree in Psychology from UNC-Greensboro and I am currently finishing Master's degree in the same field. My hope for this position is to be able to be an inspiration and role model for youth in care and to show them that they can overcome past experiences and become successful, productive citizens."

You can contact Amanda by calling 800/585-6118 or e-mailing nc@statevoucher.org, or go to <www.statevoucher.org> for more information.

Help us find families for these children



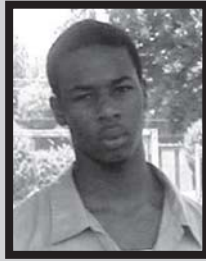
Akeba



Jasmine



Angie



Jonathan



Candice



Keyonda



Carl



Melody



Jalisa



Trey

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!

Akeba (born 5/1/91)

Akeba is a loving, humorous, friendly, and helpful young man. He enjoys playing board games and going to amusement parks and the library. Akeba is interested in sports, especially basketball, football, and karate. He thinks he would like to be a police officer when he grows up. Akeba attends a specialized school that provides the appropriate skills and challenges he requires to be academically and personally successful. (NC #020-2664)

Angie (born 7/25/90)

Angie is a bright and helpful girl who likes to please others. She likes being active and enjoys cheerleading and basketball. Like many teen girls, Angie is into singing and dancing. Her favorite vacation spot is the beach. Her career goals include becoming a pediatrician or joining the Air Force. Her teachers say Angie is very bright and can be helpful in class. Angie hopes to have a mom and dad who will encourage her ambitions and help her reach her goals. (NC #083-2140)

Candice (born 3/5/97)

Candice is a happy child with a good heart and personality. She is an outgoing, loving child who is full of life and energy. Candice enjoys playing outside, swimming, making things with beads, and riding her bike. She dreams of owning her own cosmetology shop and buying a car and a house. Candice attends regular classes at school where she receives some assistance with reading to help her keep up with the class. (NC #003-2657)

Carl (born 2/1/96)

Carl says people like him because he is funny and smart. He is very creative and has already built a clubhouse and boat and is now rebuilding a go-cart. Carl has a wonderful rapport with his foster dad and enjoys spending time with him building and working on projects. Carl also likes to play video games and chess. He is extremely intelligent and his desire for good grades usually assures that he finishes his work. (NC #008-2656)

Jalisa (born 3/7/91)

Jalisa is a very bright girl with tremendous strengths. Outgoing and vibrant, she can be a leader in many situations. Jalisa has a lot of hobbies that keep her busy, including arts and crafts, knitting, drawing, fixing hair, and playing on the computer. She is also very athletic and enjoys sports, particularly running track. She is an intelligent girl with the ability to excel academically. Jalisa needs parents that can offer guidance and understand her ways of expressing herself. (NC #092-1977)

Jasmine (born 2/27/91)

Jasmine's caseworker describes her as caring, sensitive, and helpful. She is generally a quiet and lovable child. Jasmine is wonderful with small children and works well with them. She bonds easily and is loyal to her friends and family. Jasmine enjoys swimming, skating, and dancing, and she hopes to become a professional dancer. Special education classes allow Jasmine to work at her own rate and level of understanding. (NC #009-871)

Jonathan (born 12/20/89)

Jonathan possesses some good leadership qualities and is very loyal. He enjoys playing basketball and baseball, video games, and fishing. Jonathan is looking forward to being able to date girls. He does not mind working to buy the clothes and other things he needs and wants. Jonathan is so bright that he has already received his GED and is now taking classes that will transfer to a four-year college. (NC #009-872)

Keyonda (born 8/21/94)

Keyonda is described as likable, witty, and spontaneous. She is outgoing and enjoys meeting people. Keyonda likes to play computer and video games and spend time with her friends. She has set goals for herself that include going to college and playing basketball in the WNBA. Keyonda attends specialized classes where she is better able to stay on task. She has made a lot of progress and her attitude is much more positive since moving in with her current foster mom. (NC #047-2265)

Melody (born 5/8/90)

Melody has a beautiful smile and is quick to laugh. She is an endearing and responsible girl with a true zest for life. She is always respectful and desires to please those she cares about. Melody is a talkative young woman who enjoys offering suggestions. She loves clothes and likes to wear the latest fashion trends. Melody also enjoys horseback riding, writing, and shopping. She dreams of going to college, becoming a crime scene investigator, then getting married and having a family. (NC #019-2658)

Trey (born 5/13/95)

Trey is an outgoing and talkative young man who is a born performer. He is creative, witty, outspoken, and very sweet. His caseworker reports that Trey "marches to his own beat." He hopes to become a singer when he grows up. He also likes to listen to music, talk, play outdoors, and ride his bike. Trey attends specialized classes at school where he has more opportunity to work at his own pace and on his own level. (NC #092-2611)



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:

Tell us about something that seemed bad at the time but turned out to be a good thing.

Deadline: February 12, 2007

Mail your submission to: *Fostering Perspectives*, NC Division of Social Services, 1459 Sand Hill Rd., No. 6, 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 in *Fostering Perspectives*, for which they will also receive a cash award.

We're Also Seeking Artwork and Other Writing Submissions from Children and Teens in Foster Care

Submissions can be on any theme. The submission requirements described above apply. Artwork should be mailed flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.



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

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 v11#1

1. In her column, the president of NCFAPA describes a new federal law. What are the implications of this law for foster parents? What do you think about this change?
2. What did you learn from Philnea Timmons' story?
3. In 2003, how many children left foster care in North Carolina? Of these, how many were reunited with their parents?
4. Most GALs in North Carolina can ask for (and receive) any information they think is relevant to the child's case. What gives them this power?
5. What are the eight suggestions Jenifer Montsinger makes to foster parents?
6. Name three lessons that the children published on pages 8 and 9 say they have learned by being the birth children of foster parents.
7. When is the next NCFAPA training institute?
8. What is the CDR and how does it benefit foster and adoptive parents?
9. Think of someone you might nominate for the Honoring Connections Award. Name three things you could do to be more like this person.
10. Name three things you have learned from your experience as a foster parent.

Old Life's New Beginning

by Tasha, age 16

As I lay here in my bed
I think of all the things I've said
Things from the past, and still today
How I thought I'd live in my own special way
It didn't happen, it wasn't true
From what I now know and been through
My life's been hard, and really rough
Sometimes I think I've had enough
Until I realized I'm not alone
There are some people who have shown
That they care, and want me here
They helped me fight away my tears
They took me in like a family would
They made me feel happy, and really good
I couldn't help but to smile
They told me I could stay awhile
So as I open my eyes and look around
I see a new family that I have found
Who can show me what's best and right from wrong
To show me I'm loved, and that I belong
It seems my life's at a new beginning
Forgetting my loss, and gaining my winning
So when I grow up, and decide what I want to be
I'll look back on what they've done for me
How my life was changed by their big hearts
And how they told me, I will go on with more new starts.

Tasha received \$15 for having her poem published



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