

fostering perspectives

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North Carolina embarks on major reform of its child welfare system

Thanks to an effort known as the Multiple Response System (MRS) changes are afoot in North Carolina's child welfare system. In the near future, MRS is sure to affect social workers, birth families and their children, foster parents—everyone involved with our state's child welfare system. To help you understand and prepare, this article will provide you with an overview of MRS and explain how this new approach is likely to affect you as a foster parent.



MRS shows North Carolina is serious about family-centered practice.

way, regardless of the nature of the report. Whether the report is about a child who has been left alone for a short period of time or about a child who has been severely and repeatedly abused, policy and law dictate that the response from DSS be the same. This single response is very "investigative" and involves a comprehensive and intrusive effort to identify victims and perpetrators.

This approach has proven to be very effective in cases involving violence against children. However, each year, reports of child abuse account for approximately 10% of the reports of child maltreatment in North Carolina. The other 90% concern child neglect. In these neglect cases, which are often less serious, changes in family relationships and functioning are usually the best means of securing safety for children. In these situations, the investigative and labeling approach to child protection often alienates and discourages family members.

see MRS, p. 2

Our Current System

The overarching goal of child welfare in the United States is to achieve safety, permanence, and well-being for children and their families. Until now, the child welfare system in North Carolina has attempted to achieve these goals through the use of what might be called a "single response system."

In this system, county departments of social services (DSS's) respond to reports of child abuse and neglect in the same

Core Strategies of North Carolina's Multiple Response System

1. Strengths-based, structured intake process
2. Choice of two approaches to reports of child abuse, neglect, or dependency
3. Coordination between law enforcement agencies and child protective services for the investigative assessment approach
4. Redesign of in-home family services
5. Child and family team meetings
6. Shared parenting meetings
7. Collaboration between Work First and child welfare programs

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 in-service training requirement. Questions about this method of gaining in-service credit? Contact the N.C. Division of Social Services at 919/733-7672.

In-Service Quiz, FP v7 #2

1. What is shared parenting?
2. What N.C. newsletter sponsors art and writing contests for foster children that feature cash awards for contest winners?
3. What are three potential benefits of the Multiple Response System?
4. Name five things the N.C. Foster Parents Association accomplished in 2002.
5. What kinds of information are all adoptive parents in North Carolina entitled to receive?
6. What is "Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency"?
7. What kinds of information do North Carolina foster parents always have the right to receive about the children in their care?
8. What is "Light the Spark, Ignite the Spirit?"
9. What activities do Amber and Markeith enjoy?
10. What are child and family teams and how are foster parents involved in them?

N.C.'s Multiple Response System

from p. 1

As a state, we have come to realize that our single response system is not as helpful as it could be for many of the children and families it was designed to serve. North Carolina has recognized that to achieve safety, permanence, and well-being for all children and families, it needs a child

If the shared parenting piece of MRS is to work, foster parents must see themselves as supplementing and supporting birth families, not substituting for them.

welfare system that more clearly demonstrates respect for families, acknowledges their strengths, and supports and empowers them to solve the problems they face.

The Multiple Response System

The Multiple Response System is an attempt to make our child welfare system more family-centered. By giving county DSS's two ways to respond to reports of child maltreatment, MRS enables agencies to select an approach that fits with the level of risk to the child.

Under MRS, rather than treating every report as if it were potentially a serious case of criminal child abuse/neglect, intake reports are carefully screened into one of two approaches. The first, the **investigative assessment approach**, resembles the classic child protective services (CPS) response in which workers perform a rigorous investigation, using forensic interviewing techniques when appropriate. In the second, the **family assessment approach**, child safety is still the first concern, but the overall nature of the agency's contact with the family is much more supportive.

Potential Benefits of the Multiple Response System

- Families may be more willing to engage with social workers and other community resources.
- Children will be as safe or safer than with the current approach, since families will be more likely to accept and receive the services and support they need.
- Foster parents will be in a better position to understand and support birth families, which can lead to speedier resolution of family difficulties and more timely permanence for children.
- Workers will have an alternative to the investigatory approach that will give them more opportunity to teach and support families, thereby addressing the root causes of maltreatment.
- The child welfare system may do a better job preventing abuse and neglect and therefore come to be seen by families as a partner and friendly resource. With these changes, worker turnover may be reduced.

MRS does more than change the way agencies respond to reports of abuse and neglect. Because the aim of this effort is to make the child welfare system as a whole more family-centered, MRS employs seven strategies for reform. These seven strategies, outlined in the sidebar on the

front page of this issue, prescribe changes in the way social workers, foster parents, and others do their jobs throughout the entire continuum of child welfare. Two of these strategies in particular will have a definite effect on foster parents.

MRS and Foster Parents

The two MRS strategies that will most directly affect foster parents will probably be "shared parenting" and "child and family team meetings."

Shared parenting meetings. Shared parenting is an approach designed to build a team focused on the welfare of the child: an alliance among birth parents, foster parents, and social workers. As with any team, trust will be the foundation of this alliance.

Of course, there will be barriers to this trust. Some foster parents, for example, are initially uncomfortable with the idea of helping or even meeting the parents of their foster children. First and foremost, they worry about their own safety and the safety of the children. For their part, some birth parents see foster parents as direct competitors for their child's affection and usurpers of their parental authority. Clearly, ideas and assumptions such as these do not facilitate the building of trust.

That's why, for shared parenting to work, foster parents must be clear about their role, which is to supplement and support birth families, not to substitute for them. Foster parents must see themselves as part of the team working to rebuild and reunite families, and they must be treated with respect by the other members of that team.

Some North Carolina foster parents already see themselves this way, and are fully integrated into the team serving the child and family. Others may not be there quite yet, and so may need support from their agencies and other foster parents.

The central mechanism for building trust and teamwork in the shared parenting approach is an agency-facilitated meeting that occurs as soon as possible after children enter foster care. In fact, under MRS agencies are asked to facilitate a shared parenting meeting **within seven days** after a child enters foster care. After this see MRS, p. 8

VIEWS ON FOSTER CARE IN NORTH CAROLINA

fostering perspectives

Vol. 7, No. 2 • May 2003

Fostering Perspectives is sponsored by the North Carolina Division of Social Services, the N.C. Foster Parents Association, SAYSO (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), and the Jordan Institute for Families, part of the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Address correspondence to *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Jordan Institute for Families, 340 Victoria Rd., Pines Bldg., Room 403, Asheville, NC 28801, State Courier: 12-64-01. Tel: 828/251-6342; Fax: 828/251-6261; 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 parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system can exchange ideas about foster care in NC.

Disclaimer. The opinions and beliefs expressed herein are not necessarily those of the publishers, the NC Division of Social Services and the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Frequency. *Fostering Perspectives* goes out to readers twice a year, in May and November.

Distribution. *Fostering Perspectives* is sent directly to all of North Carolina's county departments of social services and to all foster parents and group homes licensed through the NC Division of Social Services. If you think you should be receiving *Fostering Perspectives* but are not, please contact us at the address above.

Web site. *Fostering Perspectives* is available online at <http://ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp/>.

Lessons taught and lessons learned by Elizabeth Cassedy

Reflections from a foster care licensing social worker turned foster parent

My husband and I became foster parents this past November. I have been a foster care licensing social worker for over 20 years and taught MAPP since it was first introduced into North Carolina, so it was presumed by many that we would be able to do this.

We had discussed being foster parents for many years. When we were making the decision we talked to our minister, to our friends, to a therapist, and to other foster parents. Ultimately, as my husband said, "I kept waiting for God to say 'Don't do this!' and He didn't."

What I particularly want to write about is the shift in my perspective since we became foster parents.

As child welfare social workers, we teach and tell parents to always be respectful and mindful of birth parents—which I truly believe that we must be for the sake of our children. What we don't always do is give foster parents a safe place to talk about their feelings about the birth parents.

When I began fostering I was amazed at the intensity of my feelings and fortunate that I had many safe places to talk. I believe that all foster parents must have a safe place to talk about

It is only by being honest about our feelings and understanding why we feel the way we do that we can help our children.

their true feelings, without fear.

There was, and continues to be (depending on the circumstances), an enormous difference between what we know on an intellectual level and what we experience when our children cry and tell us, "The one who loved me the most is the one who hurt me."

How do we resolve this? We talk to one another, to our licensing worker, to a therapist, to friends at church and, above all, to God.

I remember listening to a foster parent speak at the North Carolina Foster Parents Association conference two years ago, describing how she talked to everyone, asking for advice. She said she even consulted the mailman! At the time I laughed along with everyone else.

Now I know exactly what she was talking about.

It is essential that we be able to talk to others about our feelings without fear of losing our children or fear of condemna-

tion by the child's social worker. It is only by being honest about our feelings and understanding why we feel the way we do that we can help our children

As social workers, we teach foster parents, *the behavior comes from the feelings, and the behavior is not about you*. But my experience as a foster parent has shown me that, in the midst of major tantrums, it's really difficult to remember that it's not about you.

We also ask foster parents to take children to all medical appointments, to take off work and adjust their schedules. I am fortunate to have a flexible work schedule, but within the first two months after our children were placed, I had one child having minor surgery, the other having therapy appointments. This experience made me wonder why more families don't call us asking for help with transportation.

Above all, I've learned that the people I most often call for advice are other foster parents. They have been the ones who offered concrete advice on dealing with food issues. For example, they helped me understand that I was not a short-order cook. We tell parents: *do not have meal time become a*

battle for control. Yet we don't emphasize how important that is. I made the mistake, which I caution everyone against, of offering too many food choices. I learned how easy it is to make many "mistakes."

In MAPP, social workers teach foster parents that transitions take a very, very long time and are an ongoing process. Yet how often have agencies questioned a foster parent's skill if they are still struggling with their children's transition issues? My husband and I remind ourselves it's only been three months, and yet sometimes we think "How many times do we explain this?" to our children.

We have been licensed for a brief period so far, and we are experiencing how disruptive foster care is for children regardless of our best intentions.

Yet, like many foster parents, we feel called to do this at this time, and we are thankful for the blessings our children bring to our lives.

Elizabeth Cassedy is a licensing social worker for Chatham County DSS. She and her husband are foster parents for Orange County.

Governor proclaims May "Foster Care Month"

RALEIGH—Governor Easley has proclaimed May 2003 to be Foster Care Month in North Carolina. His proclamation reads:

WHEREAS, the family, serving as the primary source of love, identity, self-esteem and support, is the very foundation of our communities and our State; and

WHEREAS, in North Carolina, there are over 10,000 children and youth in foster care being provided a safe, secure and stable home along with the compassion and nurture of a foster family; and

WHEREAS, foster families open their homes and hearts to children whose families are in crisis and play a vital role helping children and families heal and reconnect while launching children into successful adulthood; and

WHEREAS, dedicated foster families frequently adopt foster children, resulting in a greater need for more foster families; and

WHEREAS, there are numerous individuals, public and pri-

vate organizations that work to increase public awareness of the needs of children both in foster care and leaving foster care. Additionally, they make the public aware of the enduring and valuable contributions made by foster parents; and

WHEREAS, the foster care system is only as good as those who choose to be part of it;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MICHAEL F. EASLEY, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim May 2003, as "FOSTER CARE MONTH" in North Carolina. I commend this observance to our citizens as an opportunity to spread awareness on behalf of the thousands of children in foster care in North Carolina. I further urge all citizens to volunteer their talents and energies on behalf of children in foster care, foster parents, and the child welfare professional staff working with them during this month and throughout the year.



Gov. Easley

Source: State of North Carolina. (2003). Office of the Governor. Online <<http://www.governor.state.nc.us/News/Proclamations/>>



North Carolina Foster Parents

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

News from the President

by Sheryl Ewing, President of the N.C. Foster Parents Association

I am in the second year of my term as your President of North Carolina Foster Parents Association (NCFPA). I am married to Mark Murphy and I am starting my fifth year as a foster parent with Methodist Homes for Children in Wilmington, North Carolina. We have two birth children still at home. We have fostered seven children ranging in age from three to 13 in our five years of foster parenting.



Sheryl Ewing

I am also the Executive Director for Family Support Network of Southeastern North Carolina, where we help all families who have children with special needs. I spend much of my time helping parents and professionals connect with resources so they can better understand children with special needs and navigate the system of services.

NCFPA's Accomplishments in 2002

2002 was a fabulous year for the NCFPA. Our November state-wide conference was a huge success thanks to the hard work of the planning committee and co-chairs, Becky Burmester and Kay Gillis. Thanks also to the individuals and corporations who contributed to the successful silent auction.

I am happy to report that, due to increased memberships, our finances are stable. More importantly, our association accomplished a great deal last year. For instance, we:

- Contributed to court improvement projects in three court districts across the State
- Continued to participate in the Covenant with North Carolina's Children
- Participated in the NC Kids adoption event in Winston-Salem in November
- Conducted our first annual Walk-a-thon in Fayetteville
- Organized a better conference, with many more participants than ever before
- Increased our communication with members by publishing two newsletters of our own, in addition to the articles that appear in *Fostering Perspectives*

- Created new conference forms, brochures, and packets
- The NCFPA also added *ex-officio* positions to our board to strengthen collaboration with other related agencies. These new members include Karen LeClair from Family Support Network, Jeanne Preisler from NC Kids, Joanne Scaturro from the N.C. Division of Social Services, a SaySo representative, and Dr. Dana Leinenweber from Duke University.

The Association's Focus in 2003

Education and Outreach. This year we will have a part in conducting three foster parent conferences: one in June and two in the fall. For more information about these events, see the box on this page and the Family Support Network article on page 12.

We will also improve our web site (ncfpa.org) and offer training through the site, thanks to a mini-grant from the National Foster Parent Association and FosterNet. The grant will enable us to provide the training, "How To Start Local Support Associations." We would love to see a local foster parent association available for every foster parent in North Carolina!

Finance. As external support decreases and training costs increase, we will continue to seek to expand our budget. We welcome donations of any kind, from personal gifts to corporate contributions of \$1,000 or more. We would also gladly accept donations of paper, office supplies, printing, etc. Finances will also be helped if we can continue to build our membership.

Advocacy. The NCFPA works to advocate for foster parents and foster children. We act in this area through membership on the Pitt County Adoption Enhancement Project Task Force, and through our involvement with local and state collaborations.

Speaking of advocacy, I also wanted to share with you that the N.C. Association of County Directors of Social Services has convened a task force to assess the current foster care board rate payments. Most people don't realize that board rate payments are less than what is legally mandated for child support payments! Information gathered in this assessment might, in the future, be used to advocate for a board rate increase.

Take Note!

- The N.C. Foster Parents Association web site has moved! Its new web address is <<http://www.ncfpa.org>>.
- "Light the Spark, Ignite the Spirit," is a conference open to foster, adoptive, and guardianship parents that will be held June 6, 7, and 8 at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro. You should receive information in the mail about this event. If you have questions, contact NC Kids (1-877-NCKIDS-4).
- **Fall Conferences.** Instead of having one big conference in the fall as it has in the past, the NCFPA will hold a pair of day-long regional conferences: one in the east (Region 4) and one in the west (Region 1). Be on the lookout for more information as fall approaches.

We Invite You to Be Involved

You don't have to be on the board to work with us—we would welcome your participation on any of our committees, which include the Communication, Training, Finance, and Advocacy committees. Visit <http://ssw.unc.edu/fp/vol7_no2/vol7no2.htm> for more information about what these committees do, what they need, and how you can contribute.

We couldn't do any of this without our members. We appreciate your support! If you are a member but are not sure how to be involved please call, write, or e-mail one of us. We are eager to answer your questions and to hear what you have to say. Our mission is to provide you with support and training to help you be the best foster, adoptive, or kinship parent you can be.

If you are not already a member, I hope you will consider joining our association. With your help, we can do even more this year to improve the lives of children in foster care.

Association Update



Need support? The NCFPA is here for you

North Carolina's foster, adoptive, and kinship parents face significant challenges as they try to provide love, nurturance, stability, and—most importantly—a home to the children in their care.

The North Carolina Foster Parents Association (NCFPA) is a place where caregivers can turn for information, training, education, technical assistance, and support. The association, which reflects the geographic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of our State, is committed to working collaboratively with others and to advocating for its members at the county, state, and national levels.

So that it can adequately meet your needs, the NCFPA has organized itself into teams serving the four regions of North Carolina. Each year the association elects officials to represent these regions. To make a request or discuss a concern, use the information below to identify the region in which you live and then contact one of the people from the NCFPA who has volunteered to represent that region.

Region 1 (West)

Counties served: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rowan, Rutherford, Stanly, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey

Region 1 Representatives for 2003

- Rodney Bates. T: 704/788-4669; E: jugdgewapner@aol.com
- Geraldine Fox. T: 704/596-6359; E: gfox6359@bellsouth.net
- Donna Greene. *Vice President* T: 704/882-8729; E: im4givenru@aol.com
- Bobby Toms. T: 704/484-2888; E: bobbytomsbg@aol.com

Region 2 (North Central)

Counties served: Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Franklin, Granville, Guilford, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry, Vance, Warren, Yadkin

Region 2 Representatives for 2003

- Darryl Anglehart. T: 336/449-7508; E: uangelhartins@triad.rr.com

- Edith Fuller. T: 919/269-2090; E: efuller456@aol.com
- Kay Gillis. *Vice President* T: 919/556-6691; E: kgillis@usa.net
- Patricia McCray. T: 336/778-1614
- Jeffery Stevens. T: 336/578-1991; E: jeffreystevens@hotmail.com

Region 3 (South Central)

Counties served: Anson, Bladen, Chatham, Cumberland, Durham, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Orange, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wake

Region 3 Representatives for 2003

- Becky Burmester. T: 919/870-9968; E: becky.burmester@mindspring.com
- Matt Davies. T: 919/471-6216; E: davies2000@earthlink.com
- Carson Dean. T: 919/870-1876; E: cdean@havenhouse.org
- Darnell McDaniel. T: 910-496-3263; E: darnelltg1@aol.com

Region 4 (East)

Counties served: Beaufort, Bertie, Brunswick, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Columbus, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Duplin, Edgecombe, Gates, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, New Hanover, Northampton, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquo-



Matt Davies (Region 3) and Geraldine Fox (Region 1) are just two of the NCFPA board members interested in supporting you in 2003.

tank, Pender, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, Washington, Wayne, Wilson

Region 4 Representatives for 2003

- Sheryl Ewing. *President* T: 910/452-3245; E: fnsenc@earthlink.net
- Mark Holden. T: 910/287-4360; E: markholden@atmc.net
- Lucinda Semidey. T: 910/655-3779; E: tanandlucylu@msn.com
- Lisa Whitman. T: 910/371-0309; E: rljm9@cs.com

Biographical information and photos of many of this year's current board members can be found in the online version of this issue of *Fostering Perspectives*. Just visit <http://ssw.unc.edu/fp/vol7_no2/vol7no2.htm>.

Support Us So We Can Support You!

Our mission is to provide you with support and training to help you be the best foster, adoptive, or kinship parent you can be. If you are not already a member of NCFPA, please join today.

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: NCFPA, P.O. Box 1064, Youngsville, NC 27596. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION.

Membership Dues: Individuals = \$15 Couples = \$25 Local FP assoc. = \$25 Agency/business = \$100

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

Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____ Licensing Agency: _____

Home phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Amt. included: _____ Donation Amt.: _____

The agency role in building and supporting foster parent – birth parent collaboration

by Heather L. Craig-Oldsen

Child welfare agencies will trust foster parents to care for children quite autonomously 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, yet not trust them with information critical to the therapeutic care of the child.

Today most child welfare agencies talk about teamwork, partnership, and collaboration. Too frequently, though, collaboration moves no further than the talk stage. This is probably more an artifact of organizational structure and policy than lack of skills or desire. For example, interpretation of confidentiality policy and/or law can unduly limit a foster parent's access to information about the families of the children in their care and in some cases to peer support. Foster parents caring for children who have been sexually abused should know specifics about who the abuser was, the time of day the abuse occurred, where it occurred and under what circumstances. This helps foster parents manage "trigger" situations with the child and support the birth family's efforts to heal in practical ways.

In order to assure that organizational structure does not get in the way of collaborations between foster parents and birth families, child welfare managers need

to ask two important questions: 1) What policies, practices, and structures discourage collaboration in my agency? 2) What policies, practices, and structures encourage collaboration?

Concerns

A recent survey of foster parents and agency staff revealed the following factors as contributing to poor collaboration:

Lack of clarity regarding the foster parent's collaborative role in building positive alliances with the parents of children in their care. Anecdotal evidence reveals numerous cases of foster parents being told that they do not need to participate in foster care review meetings, or, worse, that they are not allowed to participate in foster care reviews. Agency staff, foster parent guides, and training programs should repeatedly clarify the important role of foster parents in building positive alliances with the parents of children in their care.

Agency staff, foster parent guides, and training programs should repeatedly emphasize the important role foster parents play in building positive alliances with the parents of children in their care.

Separate training. Separate training of CPS workers, foster care staff, adoption staff, foster parents and adoptive parents can serve to discourage collaboration. Joint training is not meant to suggest that everyone is trained to do everything. Rather, joint training would illustrate how the different parts of the system

can work together to develop alliances with families to protect their children.

Confusion about due process and available administrative support. Some foster parents do not understand due process and the administrative support available for foster parents. This lack of understanding often contributes to fear that children will be removed if staff disagree with the way foster parents express needs, confront issues, etc.

With the reduced time frames associated with ASFA, building an organizational structure that supports early collaboration between foster parents and birth parents

see the Agency Role, p. 7

Keeping kids safe on the Internet

1. The Internet is rich with fun and educational resources for all kids. Whether yours are 5 or 15, the main key to their online safety is for you to get involved.
2. Set rules for your kids' Internet use. Establish limits for times and places they can be online, and exactly what they are permitted to do.
3. Protect your kids' privacy. Teach them not to give out personal information about themselves, family, or friends without your permission.
4. Guard against adult content online with the help of a web filter or child-friendly browser.
5. Check in on your kids' online chatting. While chat rooms are great for sharing interests and developing new friends, they can easily turn into uncomfortable experiences.
6. Never let your child meet anyone in person who they "met" online without your permission.
7. Monitor your kids' e-mail. Along with e-mails from family or friends can come many other solicitations, some of an adult nature.
8. Stay informed. Educate yourself about the resources and risks online. Ensure you are familiar and up-to-date on the web sites and chat rooms your kids visit.

Resource: Greater Washington Urban League, Inc.



Clip this agreement out and place it on your computer!

My rules for online safety

- I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/ telephone number, or the name or location of my school.
- I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
- I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online.
- I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. If I do get one, I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact our online service.
- I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
- I will talk with my parents to decide what time of day, how long, and what sites I can visit online.
- I will not break any of these rules.

Child's signature

Source: Reprinted, with permission, from Fostering Illinois, 2002, vol 2

The agency role continued from p. 6

is essential to ensuring timely permanence, as well as the well-being of children. These strategies will help encourage collaborations between foster parents and birth parents.

Encouraging Collaboration

Every agency should have a clear statement of rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders, as in the Tennessee Bill of Rights for Foster Parents, which was promulgated into law last year. (See www.state.tn.us; see also the *N.C. Foster Parents Association's proposed foster parents bill of rights in this issue*.)

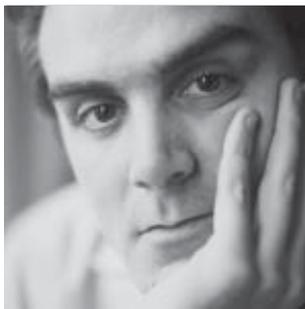
A foster parent trained in policy and procedures, and established as a volunteer with the administrative agency, can effectively serve as a liaison for other foster parents in times of fear, lack of communication, and violation of policy. Tennessee has established this volunteer position successfully. Additionally a foster parent advocate or ombudsman position in the state office has been effective in Tennessee.

Staff and foster parents should be encouraged to voice differing opinions without fear of reprisal. Foster parents who suspect reprisal must have access to a fair hearing and knowledge of due process.

Team or unit management of a case from opening to closing is an innovative strategy and structure for building collaboration. Where team or unit management is not possible, develop clear practice guidelines about communication and transferring information that involves the family, current worker or resource family, and the transitional/newly-assigned worker and/or resource family.

A staff person assigned to work with every foster/adoptive parent association can contribute to collaboration generally.

Although difficult in these fiscally tight times, funding for collaborative activities for foster parents, parents, and staff—such as social functions and meals—contributes to collaboration. One agency in Sioux City, Iowa, has set aside money for foster par-



Staff and foster parents should be encouraged to voice differing opinions without fear of reprisal. Foster parents who suspect reprisal must have access to a fair hearing and knowledge of due process.

ents and birth parents to go out for a meal together, to build a collaborative relationship without the pressures of the agency setting. Sioux City also funded joint support groups for foster parents and parents of children in foster care.

If collaboration is an expected practice, then clear role and practice expectations about collaboration must be stated by every supervisor to every staff person. Also, each supervisor must develop a system for monitoring ways the collaboration expectations are being met, or not being met. Finally, every supervisor should develop and use a feedback system for workers and resource parents rela-

tive to collaboration practice.

Joint training of CPS staff, foster care staff, adoption staff and foster/ adoptive parents should be standard. It is more likely that various staff members will be trained together than it is that foster parents will be trained collaboratively with staff. Some specific and unique training sessions are obviously designed for specific functions. However, any training that relates to collaborative work with children and families should be attended by foster parents as well as staff. If birth parents can be involved as resources for the training, they should.

Finally, it is important to develop a clear mission statement focusing on collaboratively helping families make effective decisions regarding safety, well being and timely permanence. A clear statement of roles and responsibilities of resource families and staff in accomplishing goals through collaboration will emerge from a clear mission statement. Using the mission statement, as well as the role and responsibility statements will serve as a focus for determining accomplishments and success at every staff meeting or training in any agency supported meeting.

Not so many years ago I spoke at a foster parent conference in a Midwestern state. It was, in fact, the first foster parent conference ever held in that state, in part due to an interpretation of confidentiality policy. Up until that time some de-

cision makers interpreted the confidentiality policy to mean that foster parents' names could not be published in any way. Consequently, foster parents could not organize and meet together. Foster parents throughout the state were not allowed to have any contact with parents of children in their care. As I spoke with one foster parent after another I discovered that many of those foster parents were risking their licenses by secretly meeting with the parents of the children in their care. Those foster parents knew that collaboration with parents is good—good for the foster parents and good for the child in foster care.

Heather Craig-Oldsen, is Director of Program Development for the Child Welfare Institute

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TAX UPDATE

Tax Information for Foster and Adoptive Families

Although April 15 has passed, taxes are always a concern. As you plan your strategy for next year, consider the following resources.

Casey's Annual Booklet on Tax Benefits for Resource Families. Each year, The National Center for Resource Family Support at Casey Family Programs publishes a booklet that provides a summary of various tax benefits that may be available to foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers. It is available as a document that can be downloaded and printed. Agencies may edit, reproduce and distribute copies. For a copy of the 2002 tax booklet, go to <http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/federal_tax_benefits.htm>.

NACAC Adoption Tax Credit Fact Sheet. In 2002 the North American Council on Adoptable Children released a fact sheet on the new adoption tax credit for adoptive parents. It explains that parents who adopt children (that is, finalize the adoption of a child or children during tax year 2002 or successive tax years) will be eligible for up to \$10,000 per child in tax credits to offset documented adoption expenses. To access this fact sheet, go to <<http://www.nacac.org/taxcredit.html>>. Also see IRS Publication 968, Tax Benefits for Adoption, which can be downloaded from the IRS website at <<http://www.irs.gov/formspubs/lists/0,,id=97796,00.html>>

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 a parent who has adopted a child through my county department of social services. As an adoptive parent in North Carolina, what information am I entitled to receive and how can I go about obtaining it? The agency I worked with seems unwilling to provide me with further information.

As an adoptive parent in North Carolina, under State General Statute 48-3-205 you are entitled to receive non-identifying information about your child. Although you could not receive an actual copy of your child's birth certificate, non-identifying information that may be released includes the date, time of birth, and weight at the time of birth of the adoptee and the reason the adoptee was placed for adoption. In addition, background information about the birth parents, including age at time of adoption, nationality, ethnic background, race, educational level, general physical description, and any other general information should be provided. The health history of the birth parents and other relatives that might have an effect on the adoptee's mental or physical health may also be included if contained in the case record. This health-related information should include each such individual's present state of physical and mental health, health and genetic histories, and information concerning any history of emotional, physical, sexual, or substance abuse. This health-related information should also include an account of the prenatal and postnatal care received by the minor.

Ideally, you would have received this information prior to the adoption. Although you are now past that point, the first place you should try is still the agency that placed the child with you, which in your case would be DSS. If you have difficulty getting the information from an

individual social worker, try the social worker's supervisor. If for some reason you still have difficulty getting the non-identifying information you could contact Adoption Indexing in Raleigh (Tel: 919/733-3801).

Question: I was the foster parent for a child who was legally free for adoption. I wanted to adopt him, but I was not chosen for the final placement of the child. I thought North Carolina always looked at the foster parent first!

In North Carolina, each county department of social services makes the final decision regarding adoption placements in its particular county. You are correct in thinking these agencies are required to give priority to the child's foster parents when considering adoptive homes for the child. North Carolina children's services standard 96 states: "When the child becomes legally free for adoption, the agency shall give priority to the child's placement provider (relative, court approved non-relative, foster family) who is willing and able to adopt the child unless there is documentation that it is not in the child's best interest." Not knowing the specifics of your situation, it is not possible to say why your county did not choose you as the adoptive placement for this child. I suggest you contact the supervisor of the social worker coordinating the adoption to find out why you were not selected. (Source: http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrenservices/docs/CS_AL202a1.pdf)

Even though you were not chosen to be the adoptive parent for this child, please consider other ways of working with the adoptive family so that you can remain in that child's life—for example, you might be able to set up regularly scheduled visits and respite.

Responses by Jeanne Preisler, Director of NC Kids



Why wasn't I chosen to adopt my foster child?

N.C.'s Multiple Response System from p. 2

initial meeting, shared parenting meetings will occur regularly until the family can be reunited or another permanent plan is identified. (For more on this see p. 10, column 1.)

To help agencies and foster parents prepare for shared parenting and shared parenting meetings, the N.C. Division of Social Services is offering two training courses. To learn about them, consult <[\[www.unc.edu/fcrp/tm/tm_mainpage.htm\]\(http://www.unc.edu/fcrp/tm/tm_mainpage.htm\)>.](http://</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Child and family team meetings. Under MRS, county DSS's hold child and family team meetings with families involved with child protective services. The primary function of these meetings is to engage the family and other interested parties in joint decision-making and to provide the family with support. These meetings address the family's strengths and needs and how these affect the child's safety, permanence, and well-being; the meeting also results in a plan that specifies what must occur to help the family safely parent the children.

Under MRS, child and family team meetings occur **within seven days** of the time the decision is made to substantiate or reach a finding of "services required." Child and family teams are involved with the family throughout the life of the case, even if it is necessary to remove a child from the home due to safety issues.

For foster parents, child and family team meetings can serve several important functions. In some counties, agencies opt to use these meetings to fulfill the MRS requirement for shared parenting meetings. Even if a separate shared parenting meeting occurs, by be-

ing present at child and family team meetings foster parents have the chance to build a relationship with and obtain information from the parents of their foster children. Child and family team meetings, since they occur throughout the life of a case, also represent an important way for foster parents to stay up-to-date and to be active, contributing members of the team serving the family and child.

Timeframes

MRS is being piloted right now in 10 of the state's 100 counties: Alamance, Bladen, Buncombe, Caldwell, Craven, Franklin, Guilford, Mecklenburg, Nash, and Transylvania. In the state's other 90 counties, departments of social services are watching carefully to see what these lead counties learn, and they are preparing to engage in the seven strategies of MRS themselves. It is anticipated that MRS will become the new statewide standard for child welfare practice in 2005.

If you would like to learn more about MRS, consult <<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrenservices/mrs/index.htm>>. If you have questions about how or when MRS will be implemented in your county, ask your social worker.

Shared Parenting: Benefits

By encouraging birth and foster parents to share decisions and work together as a team, shared parenting:

- Maintains the birth-parent/child relationship
- Improves birth parents' self-esteem
- Gives foster parents a realistic picture of birth parents' strengths and deficits
- Gives birth and foster parents more information about the child
- Allows the foster parent to model appropriate behavior and parenting techniques
- Helps birth parents develop an understanding of the child's needs
- Facilitates eventual reunion
- Promotes ongoing support for the family after the child returns home

Source: NYSCCC, 2002

New foster parent training

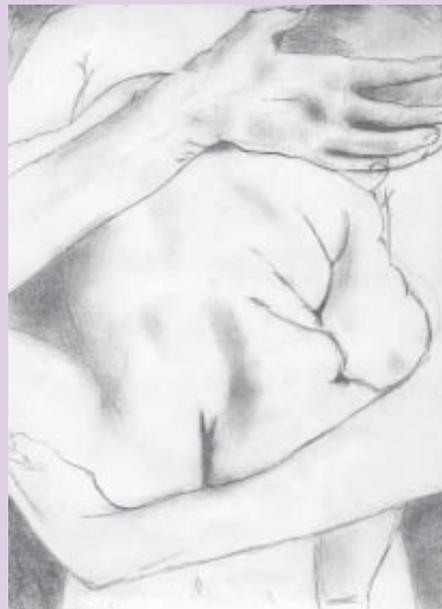
Exciting news! The N.C. Division of Social Services now offers a “train the trainer” course for MAPP/GPS certification for foster parents who have two or more years of experience. Completing this training certifies foster parents to co-lead MAPP groups in partnership with a county DSS or a private child-placing agency.

The Child Welfare Institute, author of the MAPP/GPS curriculum, strongly recommends that MAPP be presented to prospective foster and adoptive parents by a pair of trainers, one of whom is an agency representative and one of whom is a foster parent. Yet in the past, North Carolina’s MAPP certification process has been difficult for foster parents to attend because it has only been held on weekdays during working hours. To make it easier for foster parents to become certified to co-train MAPP, the Division has begun holding this certification training at a more convenient time. The training is:

- Provided in seven days rather than eight
- Offered on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of one week and then Friday, Saturday, and Sunday approximately two weeks later to reduce the amount of time participants must take off from work
- Appropriate for inexperienced trainers, in that it contains information on training and presentation skills, as well as other topics pertinent for foster parent leaders
- Offered in the Greensboro area to provide centralized access for all areas of the state
- Offered at no registration cost (hotel, travel, and food expenses will be the responsibility of the participant or the sponsoring agency)

Contact Sarah West of the Division’s Staff Development Team at 919/733-7672 for more information about this training.

Art Contest Winner



Crystal, age 17, won \$25 for having this drawing published. If you’d like a chance to share your work with FP readers, see the last page in this issue for submission guidelines.

Foster parent training: “Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency”

Here’s an opportunity for foster parents to learn how to teach a course for foster parents AND help foster teens prepare to live on their own.

Independent Living Resources, based in Durham, is recruiting foster parents interested in spending the weekend of October 10–12, 2003 in Burlington to learn what it takes to be a foster parent trainer on topics related to foster teens.

The course, “Helping Youths Reach Self-Sufficiency,” will cover the basics of independent living, including assessing youths, making decisions, and building assets, as well as how to use education, employment, and the community in the process.

Foster parent participants will also learn to organize a two-hour training for other foster parents in their area. Participants will have an opportunity to practice training skills at the seminar. Upon returning home, the foster parent trainers will conduct trainings locally. A follow-up class will be offered several months later for the participants to share their experiences and learn new training techniques.

The course is sponsored by the NC LINKS program and is offered FREE to foster parents. The LINKS program will pay lodging and meals for foster parents to attend. Prior to registering for the course, attendees must ask their licensing worker to support them in this effort to train foster parents.

The seminar begins at 3 P.M. on Fri., October 10 and ends at 1 P.M. on Sun., October 12, 2003. To register, complete this registration form and return it to ILR, Inc., 411 Andrews Road, Suite 230, Durham, NC 27705 or fax to (919) 384-0338. **Registration Deadline: September 5, 2003.** For more information, contact Nancy Carter (800/820-0001; nancy.carter@ilrinc.com).

“Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency” Residency Training Registration Form

Independent Living Resources, Inc.
411 Andrews Road, Suite 230, Durham, NC 27705
(919) 384-1457 or fax (919) 384-0338

Fill out this form (please print) and mail or fax to above address.

Registration Deadline: September 5, 2003

Registrant Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Agency: _____

Agency Address (if different than above): _____

Participant Interest:

How do you plan to use the skills learned in this seminar?

Do you have training experience?

When do you anticipate conducting your first foster parent training?

Time and Location: Friday, October 10 through Sunday, October 12, 2003 at the Ramada Inn, Burlington, NC.

- Friday, 10/10: 3:00 – 8:00 P.M.
- Saturday, 10/11: 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
- Sunday, 10/12: 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Confidentiality and the foster parent's need to know by Joan McAllister

To successfully protect and promote the well-being of the children in their care, foster parents need information. Yet sometimes foster parents are uncertain what information they can reasonably expect to receive when children are placed in their homes. To clarify this matter, we thought it might be helpful to review some of North Carolina's policies related to confidentiality and information-sharing in child welfare.

Protecting the Child and Family's Right to Privacy

North Carolina General Statute 7B-2901(b) states that information contained in social services' records of children in protective custody is confidential, and that, in the best interests of the juvenile, such information should be protected from public inspection. These records may only be examined by order of the court; the exception to this rule is that the child's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) and the child him or herself has the right to see these records. This information is protected because of the child and family's right to privacy. Policy limits the sharing of information regarding children in foster care based on that individual's need to know the information in order to administer foster care services.

In order to care properly for a child being placed in their home, foster parents, relatives, or other foster care providers do need to know as much information as possible regarding the reason for the child's placement and the needs of the child. Confidential information specific to the family's struggles should not be shared unless that information has an impact on the child.

The Role of Shared Parenting

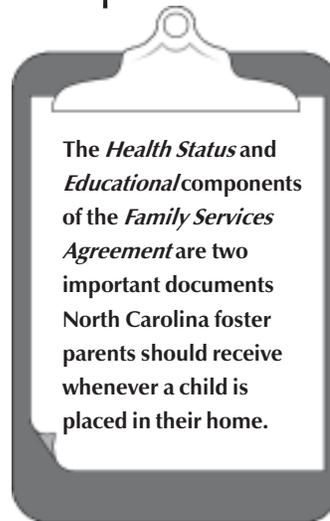
Shared parenting meetings are a way of sharing vital information about a child with the foster parents. During these meetings the social worker, birth parents, and foster parents meet and discuss the care of the child when out-of-home placement is necessary. The meetings provide birth parents with an opportunity to share valuable information about the care of their child with the child's foster parents. Sharing information about things such as the child's favorite foods, toys, sleep patterns, and behaviors helps foster parents care for and comfort the child.

Shared parenting meetings also provide foster parents with the opportunity to share information about themselves and what they have observed and learned about the child in their care. During these meetings, plans can be made regarding visitation, medical appointments, school meetings, transportation, and the like. As foster and birth parents get to know one another, birth parents' anxiety and speculation about the welfare of their children can be put to rest. In their place familiarity, trust, and sometimes even friendship begin to develop.

Foster Parents' Rights

Foster parents always have a right to receive the following:

- **Placement information.** Information about why the child is in foster care and what the primary and concurrent permanency plans are must be provided to foster parents at the time of placement and updated as needed to help the foster parent anticipate and respond to the child's needs. Providing this information also helps the foster parent to be an informed partner in the planning process.



- **Social/behavioral information** must be shared with the foster parent/caregiver at the time of placement, including information about the kinds of behavior the caregiver is likely to encounter and the parental responses that seem to be the most helpful to the child. The child's strengths and abilities should be shared along with any needs. Once this information has been passed along, foster parents and caregivers are responsible for keeping social workers and other members of the team informed about changes in this area.

- **Medical information** must be shared with foster parents at the time of placement and updated as information is received. The foster care provider needs to know of any special medical problems that the child may have. Obviously, this includes the child's HIV status. The *Health Status Component*

of the Family Services Agreement must be completed and provided to the foster parents within seven days of placement. Also, the child must be referred by the placing agency for a physical examination within seven days of placement. The foster parent/caregiver signs the form to verify he or she has received it.

- **Educational information** must be shared with foster parents at the time of placement and updated as information is received. The foster parent/caregiver shall receive the *Educational Component* of the Family Services Agreement, and signs the form to verify receipt. In addition, the foster parent/caregiver should be a part of any discussion regarding Individual Educational Plans or other remedial efforts to assure that the child's educational needs are met.

For further information on this topic, consult "Preparing the Family, the Child, and the Foster Care Provider for Placement" in "Chapter IV: 1201 Child Placement Services" of the N.C. Division of Social Services *Children's Services Manual*. This manual can be found online at <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/CSs1201c6-03.htm#P33_3568>.

Joan McAllister is the NC LINKS Program Coordinator for the N.C. Division of Social Services.

Confidentiality

Foster parents are entrusted with confidential information about children in their care, and learn additional confidential information about children and their families as a result of their work as foster parents. It is the client's right and expectation that confidential information will be respected and safeguarded by the agency. As partners in the provision of children's services, foster parents are bound by the same expectations of protecting confidential information as are agency social work staff members. This means that no information learned as a result of their work as foster parents is to be shared outside of that professional service, even if identities are "disguised." Casual conversations about client information with friends, other foster parents, and others not involved with direct services to the client are prohibited.

SaySo members' suggestions to foster parents by Kay Gillis

On Sunday, October 6, 2002, foster parents Becky Burmester and Kay Gillis joined over 50 young people involved in the group SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) to develop a list of things that the youth want to make clear to the people they live and interact with. The workshop attendees were vocal, refreshing, and full of great ideas. Here are some of the many ideas, opinions, and desires the young people shared that day:

- **Parent us!** Treat us like family members. Don't expect the social worker to be our parent. Would you call a cab for your birth child if he or she had a doctor's appointment? Then why call the social worker to take me to my appointments?
- **Don't embarrass us** by pointing out our situation. Why introduce us as "My foster child?" Why not just say, "This is Peggy Sue," and leave it at that?
- **We are individuals**, not a group. Don't label us. Don't judge me by what another foster child has done. Don't think that we all feel the same or think the same. Each of us has and is entitled to our own feelings.
- **Is it about the money? IT CAN'T BE!** We need people to care about us, not just people doing a "job." The money you get is to provide for our needs, not to "pay" you. We know we eat a lot. If the money you get isn't enough to feed us, do something about it. When we get a job, don't skimp on us. We are trying to get ahead. When we get a job and then you say we now have to buy our own shampoo and deodorant, we figure, "Why try?"
- **Ask us what we need to help us feel like we belong.** Ask our opinion on things. Just because we don't have a permanent home doesn't mean we don't have opinions, feelings, or brains! Don't talk to the social worker about us as if we weren't even there!
- **Help us stay connected and in touch with our birth family and our previous foster families.** Those people helped make me what I am. If I feel that I need those connections, then I do. If I don't want to see them, respect that.
- **Advocate for more, better-trained social workers.** When a social worker has 30 other kids on his or her caseload, no wonder they can't remember my name when we run into each other outside the office or the foster home. No wonder they don't come check on me. I am just their job.

You are my parent for now. If they don't come to see me, you call them and ask why not. We want the social worker to come see us when things are going good, not just when there is a problem.

- **If you have a teenager with children, help us with transitions.** We want to figure out how to raise our kids. We didn't learn that from our parents. We hope we learn it from you.
- **Talk to us, trust us, be honest with us.** Compromise with us—we aren't always wrong, you know! We want to be accepted. Give us unconditional acceptance. We want continuity. We don't want you or the social worker to move us every time there is a problem. Share information about what's going on in the system concerning us!
- **Don't give up on us** when there is trouble. Try to figure out what we need.
- **Teach us, don't just do for us!** None of us are born knowing how to live life. Most kids' parents teach them. We need to learn!

As you can see, these young people had a lot to say!

Next, we discussed how to get some of these things to happen. All of us agreed that it would really take a TEAM EFFORT! The team has to include foster youth as well as social workers, birth families, foster parents, guardians ad litem, and teachers. We need to network with each other. We need to get the word out via newsletters. We need to include youth panels in our training conferences, and the youth need to include us in their conferences. We need to consider a joint conference for youth, foster parents, and social workers. We need to get foster parents and SaySo youth involved in MAPP training.

"Help me stay connected and in touch with my birth family and my other foster families. They helped make me what I am."



"Don't label me. Don't judge me by what another foster child has done. We don't all feel the same or think the same."

"Talk to us, trust us, be honest with us. Compromise with us—we aren't always wrong, you know!"



We learn in MAPP that we all have strengths and needs. The youth in our workshop listed many needs. The N.C. Foster Parents Association (NCFPA) knows that there are many foster parents and social workers reading this right now who have strengths that would help to meet those needs.

If you have the time, we have ways that you can help! Join the NCFPA. Get involved. Check our website (NCFPA.org) and contact a board member to offer your services.

All of us joining hands will build a strong connection.

Kay Gillis is a foster parent and chairperson of the N.C. Foster Parents Association's Communications Committee

Foster teens: Join SAY SO!

SaySo is Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, a statewide association made up of youth who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care: foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

SaySo's mission is to work to improve the substitute care system by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes, and providing support to youth who are or have been in substitute care.

You can be a member of SaySo if you are under the age of 24, are currently or have been in any kind of out-of-home care, including foster or adoptive care. To join, write down your name, address, age, North Carolina county you live in, and the kind of out-of-home placement you are or were in. Send this information to SaySo, c/o ILR, Inc., 411 Andrews Rd., Ste. 230, Durham, NC 27705. For more information, contact us by phone (800/820-0001) or e-mail (sayso@ilrinc.com). Also, visit our website: <<http://sayso-nc.tripod.com>>.

When A Stranger Calls You Mom

Reviewed by Becky Burmester

When a Stranger Calls You Mom is the catchy title of a new book by Katherine Leslie. The author's impressive list of credentials include a doctorate in developmental psychology from North Carolina State University and years of experience as a foster and adoptive parent.

Dr. Leslie has the kind of "in the trenches" experience that gets the attention of foster and adoptive parents.

This kind of "in the trenches" experience gets the attention of foster and adoptive parents. We know that it is one thing to "talk the talk" and another to "walk the walk." Many times we receive advice from childless experts or experts parenting only birth children, and we know that the children we are parenting present us with unique challenges and needs.

When a Stranger Calls You Mom contains some fascinating information about brain development in young children and what happens as a result of abuse and neglect. However, the real clue to Dr. Leslie's presentation of the information lies in the book's subtitle, "A Child Development and Relationship Perspective on Why Trauma-

tized Children Think, Feel, and Act the Way They Do." Yes, this book is somewhat akin to reading a textbook. The good news is that it is a brief one (144 pages), and there is some great information included.

In my typical fashion, I plowed straight through *When a Stranger Calls You Mom*, from Dedication to After Word. However, I know that many of the foster/adoptive parents I interact with lack time and energy for extra tasks. Some are so pressed that they sometimes even read the last several pages of a book first so they can assess whether it is worth reading the whole thing.

If you use this technique, I would recommend that you begin with the Afterword, Preface, and Introduction and then "Parenting from the Trenches" and "Advice to Yet-to-Be Birth Parents." Not only will this will show you what the book has to offer, it will whet your appetite so that you will gladly tackle the entire book, from the beginning.

Dr. Leslie has a website, <www.brandnewdayconsulting.com> that provides information on ordering the book and about workshops she offers.



Becky Burmester

This column appears in each issue of *Fostering Perspectives* and I am always interested in books that you think would be interesting and helpful to foster parents.

We are better foster parents as we continue to learn new skills. Please share your suggestions with me so that others may become better foster parents. You can contact me with questions or suggestions at <becky.burmester@mindspring.com> or 919/870-9968.

Becky Burmester is a foster parent and a member of the North Carolina Foster Parents Association

News from the Family Support Network of North Carolina

by Karen LeClair

The Family Support Network of North Carolina (FSN-NC) is pleased to announce that our offices have moved to a friendly community setting in Carrboro, North Carolina. The new office includes a Family Support Suite with a children's play space and provides families on-site access to the FSN Outreach Library, with its videotapes and books in English and Spanish. Our physical address is 200 North Greensboro, Suite D-9, Carr Mill Mall, Carrboro, North Carolina. Our mailing address is still FSN-NC, CB #7340, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7340. Parking is ample and convenient. Please stop in and visit.

New pamphlets are being developed by FSN-NC to increase awareness and inform families about the particular resources available to them as they become foster and adoptive parents. The topics will include chronic health and other medical issues; emotional/behavioral development; fostering and adopting adolescents; and fostering and adopting transracially. FSN-NC is also developing a video that will involve a series of interviews with foster and adoptive parents discussing the joys and challenges of fostering. The pamphlets and video will be used for training across the state.

FSN-NC is delighted to be one of several co-sponsors of the "Light the Spark, Ignite the Spirit" Conference in Greensboro on June 6-8, 2003. We will be presenting the following workshops: Meeting the Challenges: The Foster Families Project of FSN-NC; Basic Advocacy Skills for Families; Facilitating Networking Among Families; The ABC's of IEPs; and Promoting Effective Partnerships Between Parents/Caregivers and Teachers. We look forward to meeting foster and adoptive families at the conference.

The 2003 Summer Camp Directory, published by FSN-NC, is now available to families and service providers who are looking for camps that serve children with special needs. This directory provides information about day and residential camps, helpful guidelines about what to look for in a camp and a listing of camps by specialty. The camp directory is available online through our web site <www.fsnncc.org>. Please email to <cldr@unc.edu> or call 800/852-0042 to request a copy or for information about resources and services available to families caring for children with special needs.

See you in Greensboro at the "Light the Spark, Ignite the Spirit" conference in June!

Karen LeClair is the Foster Families Project Coordinator with the Family Support Network of North Carolina

My Inspiration

A poem to all foster youth, by Joanne Farkas

You have faced difficult times over and over, and yet you continue to shine.
Your strength and determination are clear, though you know not what you face at the end of the line.



I know you have experienced sorrow that I cannot erase.
But I believe that one day you will find enough joy to take its place.

Watching you grow and helping you learn are my greatest pleasures.
But you should know—my awe for you I cannot measure.

I have faith and believe that you will persevere.
When I see your faces it is clear to me why I am here.

You are the fuel to the fire within me.
And you are truly an inspiration to me.

You are eager to be out on your own.
But please remember to enjoy your youth before it is gone.

Don't be afraid to be who you are,
And never let go of your dreams, and you will surely go far.

So go out and make a world we can all believe in,
And remember, life is a journey, not a destination.

For you are the future, regardless of your past.
And you will make a mark on the world that will surely last.

You are the fuel to the fire within me,
You are an inspiration to us all, you see.

Joanne Farkas is the LINKS Coordinator for Forsyth County DSS

Help North Carolina's waiting children find a home

Open your heart and home by adopting one of North Carolina's waiting children



AMBER

Introducing Amber . . .

Amber enjoys playing with her Barbie dolls, riding her bike and playing with other kids. She likes to dance, play dress-up and have her hair fixed. Her foster parents' practice of having clearly set, high expectations and immediate consequences have improved Amber's conduct. Now she apologizes if she acts up and goes to her foster mom for cuddles and hugs of reassurance.

Through the determination of her foster parents, Amber is finally in a school setting where learning disabilities are addressed appropriately. In this classroom Amber is able to succeed and her reading ability has improved tremendously. She also receives tutoring and she is doing great.

Amber's Birthday: January 19, 1992

A Family for Amber. . .

Amber clearly needs experienced parents who will be able to weather the first difficult months as she learns to trust and feel safe in a new situation. An adoptive family for Amber must be prepared to devote much time and energy as she moves through the expected stages of testing. They will need to be advocates for Amber in the school system and be committed to her. (NC #092-368)

Introducing Markeith . . .

Markeith is a healthy, energetic little boy who likes to play boxing and football. He enjoys playing with his toy cars and trucks or playing in the stationary vehicles at the Children's Library. Markeith is usually a happy child who tries hard to please the adults he cares about.

Plans are in motion for Markeith to attend a specialized school for children who are unable to attend regular classes because of their behavioral and emotional issues. It is hoped that this placement will be positive for Markeith and that he makes significant improvements.

Markeith's Birthday: December 28, 1992

A Family for Markeith...

Markeith is a sweet child who will do well with a family that has lots of patience, structure, unconditional love and the willingness to commit to caring for him. It is important that Markeith be supervised closely with other children, in public places and in bathtubs or swimming pools, both for his own safety and the safety of others. (NC #041-0721)



MARKEITH

For more information call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network, Toll-free hotline: 1-877-NCKIDS-1, www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/adopt



Steps to adoption

1. Choose an Adoption Agency

There are typically no fees to adopt a waiting child through any DSS or licensed child-placing agency contracted through the State of North Carolina.

2. Submit an Application

To begin the process, you will first complete an application for adoption at the agency you select. The agency will ask about your family and the types of children that you would like to parent.

3. Complete the Preplacement Assessment

You will participate in a series of family consultations with a social worker to help you understand both the adoption process and your responsibilities as an adoptive parent. Your agency may require you to take special preparation and selection classes to become an adoptive parent. (Most licensed North Carolina foster parents already meet this requirement.)

4. Work with Your Social Worker to Find the Right Child

Once your preplacement assessment is completed, your social worker will work with you to locate a child whose needs can be met in your family.

5. Visit with Your Child

Once a child has been identified for you, a visiting plan is set up so that the child and family can get to know each other before a placement is made.

6. Bring Your Child Home

All children, even young children, will have some adjustment problems when they join a new family. Your social worker should be there to support you.

7. Supervisory Period

North Carolina law requires your child to be in your home at least three to six months before the adoption process can be legally completed.

8. Legalize the Adoption in Court

It is recommended that you use an attorney for filing the legal proceedings. The legal fees can be reimbursed for waiting children.

To learn more about this process, visit <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/adopt/steps.html>

Association proposes Foster Parents Bill of Rights

The North Carolina Foster Parents Association is urging state legislators to consider passing the following Foster Parent Bill of Rights. Several other states, including Tennessee, have such bills. If you have feedback about the following proposed rights, which have not yet been endorsed by the legislature or made into law, contact the N.C. Foster Parents Association.

Proposed Foster Parents Bill of Rights

WHEREAS foster parents provide a critical service to the State of North Carolina caring for thousands of foster children every year, and WHEREAS foster parents allow the State of North Carolina substantial financial saving each year through providing care to children at extremely low cost to the state, and WHEREAS foster parents provide loving homes enabling children to endure the hardship associated with separation from family, and WHEREAS offering the services of one's family foster care providers

involves tremendous sacrifice and selflessness, and WHEREAS there is a need for statewide uniformity in the effective application of foster care in North Carolina, now therefore, the North Carolina State Foster Parents Association encourages the passage of this Foster Parent Bill of Rights Act.

Foster Parenting is not a lifetime commitment to a child, but a commitment to make it meaningful during a child's lifetime.

North Carolina's Proposed Foster Parent Bill of Rights Act

1. The department and private contractors shall treat the foster parent(s) with dignity, respect, trust, and consideration as a primary provider of foster care and a member of the professional team caring for foster children.
2. The department and private contractors shall provide the foster parent(s) with a clear explanation and understanding of the role the department, private contractors, and birth family members will play in the care of children in foster care.
3. The foster parent(s) shall be permitted to continue his/her own family values so long as the basic rights of the foster child are not set aside.
4. The foster parent(s) shall be provided training and support for the purpose of improving their skills in providing daily care and meeting the special needs of the child in foster care.
5. Prior to the placement of a child with foster care parent(s), the department or private contractors shall inform the foster parent(s) of issues relative to the child that may jeopardize the health and safety of the foster family or alter the manner in which foster care should be administered.
6. The department and private contractors shall provide a means by which the foster parent(s) can contact the department twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week for the purpose of receiving departmental assistance.
7. The department and private contractors shall provide the foster parent(s) timely, adequate financial reimbursement for the quality and knowledgeable care of a child in foster care, as specified by the plan, provided, however, the amount of such financial reimbursement shall, each year, be subject to and restricted by the level of funding specifically allocated for such purpose by the provisions of the general appropriations act.
8. The department and private contractors shall provide clear written explanation of the plan concerning the placement of a child in the foster parent(s) home. For emergency placements (where time does not allow prior preparation of such explanation) the department or private contractors shall include, but is not limited to, all information regarding the child's contact with the child's birth family and cultural heritage, if so outlined.
9. Prior to placement, the department and private contractors shall allow the foster parent(s) to review written information concerning the child and allow the foster parent(s) to assist in determining if such child would be a proper placement for the prospective foster family. For emergency placements where time does not allow prior review of such information, the department or private contractors shall provide such information as it becomes available.
10. The department and private contractors shall permit foster parent(s) to refuse placement within their home, or to request upon notice to the department or private contractors, the removal of a child from his or her home for good reason, without threat of reprisal, unless otherwise stipulated by contract or policy.
11. The department and private contractors shall inform the foster parent(s) of scheduled meetings and staffing concerning the foster child, and the foster parent(s) shall be permitted to actively participate in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child in foster care. This may include individual service planning meetings, foster care review, individual educational planning, and other pertinent meetings.
12. The department and private contractors shall inform foster parent(s) of decisions made by the courts or the child welfare agency concerning the child.
13. The department and private contractors shall solicit the input of foster parent(s) concerning the plan of services for the child; this input shall be considered in the department's ongoing development of the plan.
14. The department and private contractors shall permit, through written consent, foster parent(s) to communicate with professionals who work with the foster child, including any therapists, physicians, and teachers that work directly with the child.
15. The department and private contractors shall provide information regarding the child and the child's family background and health history in a timely manner to the foster parent(s).
16. The department and private contractors shall notify foster parent(s) in a complete manner of all court hearings. This notification may include, but is not limited to, notice of the date and time of the court hearing and the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case. Such notification shall be made upon the department's private contractors receiving of this information, or at the same time that notification is issued to birth parents. The foster parent(s) shall be permitted to attend such hearings.
17. The department and private contractors shall provide upon request by the foster parent(s) information regarding the child's progress after the child leaves foster care. Information provided shall only be provided from information already in possession of the department or private contractors at the time of the request.
18. The department and private contractors shall provide the foster parent(s) the training for obtaining support and information concerning a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the foster parent(s).
19. The department and private contractors shall consider the foster parent(s) as the possible first choice permanent parent for the child, who after being in the foster parent(s) home for twelve (12) months, is freed for adoption or other permanent placement.
20. The department and private contractors shall consider the foster family as a placement option when a foster child who was previously placed with the foster parent(s) is to be reentered into foster care.
21. The department and private contractors shall permit the foster parent(s) a period of respite (free from placement of foster children) in said family's home with follow-up contacts by the agency occurring a minimum of every two (2) months. The foster parent(s) shall provide the department or private contractors with information regarding their need for respite.
22. Child abuse/neglect investigations involving the foster parent(s) shall be investigated pursuant to the departments' or private contractors child protective services policy and procedures. A child protective service case manager from another county shall be assigned investigative responsibility.
23. Removal of a foster child will occur pursuant to North Carolina codes and departmental policy and procedures. The department shall permit the Foster Allegation Support Team (FAST) volunteers to be educated concerning the procedures relevant to investigations of alleged abuse and neglect by the department and the rights of the accused foster parent(s). Such advocate shall be permitted to be present at all portions of investigations where the accused foster parent(s) are present, and all communication received by such advocate therein shall be strictly confidential. Nothing contained within this item shall be construed to abrogate to the provisions of North Carolina codes regarding procedures for investigations of child abuse and neglect and child sexual abuse by the department of social services and law enforcement agencies.
24. The department and private contractors shall provide the foster parent(s) copies of all information relative to their family contained in the personal foster home record.

Sunny's story

by Marion H. Duncan

Editor's Note: the names in this story have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved

I will never forget the first time I laid eyes on the most courageous person I have ever known. This little one also seemed to have a kind of faith I had never witnessed before and probably never will again.

We have pictures in our minds. When I thought of courage before, I had a razor sharp image in my mind, that of a knight in shining armor that comes and rescues everyone in distress. And when I pictured unshakable faith, I pictured an elderly woman with white hair, soft, and pulled away from her face. This lady is clapping and rocking and singing hymns, the way my grandmother used to do. Now, I see another picture.

The very first time I saw "Sunny," I was shocked. He was about the cutest thing I had ever laid eyes on. He smiled and had a round, yellow face. He quickly earned the nickname "Sunny" because of his sweet disposition and because he looked like he had been kissed by the sun.

He was born with a condition known as biliary atresia and would die without a liver transplant. Ed had been up to the hospital a few times and had been "partially trained" for what was about to be!

A home health nurse came over that night and stayed for several hours, showing us just how to measure everything, give Sunny multiple medications, feed him by tube, measure him, weigh him, check for warning signs, and make his totally gross formula. Most of his medications had to be special ordered, as did the many components of his formula. A wonderful family pharmacy agreed to help us.

We began the arduous task of Sunny's care. Sunny was per-

fectly content and acted as though he knew that everything would be just fine, which is more than can be said of the dozens and dozens of professionals who were working in his life.

He continued to smile. He brought instant joy into the room. Most little children do. However, most are not intertwined in tubes and wires. His breathing was shallow due to the fluid buildup in his abdomen. However, he would let out sharp, short cackles, reminding us constantly of how much he enjoyed living. Everyone constantly fretted over Sunny. However, he just smiled smugly and gave everyday proof that he was probably a little closer to Jesus than the rest of us.

He had to constantly go to some doctor's office and be poked and probed, measured and weighed. I cannot tell you that he did not put up the typical battle when he saw a needle. However, he loved his doctors and nurses. It was as if he knew they were his lifeline and that only through their skills, God's grace, and the unselfishness of another family could he prosper. He did pretty well. Between the coughing, constant dirty diapers, projectile vomiting, and bouts of fever, Sunny was just your typical kid—or should I say, anything but.

Sunny was perfectly content and acted as though he knew that everything would be just fine, which is more than can be said of the dozens and dozens of professionals who were working in his life.

Sunny got sicker and weaker; and we prayed for a miracle, he never actually got critical before a donor was found. After the surgery, Sunny was much weaker and sicker. He continued to smile. His face was now white. Even the whites of his eyes returned. He looked great but felt terrible. He continued to smile and light up every room he entered. Many times this was a hospital room, as he now was quite susceptible to germs and was constantly sick. He went from doctor to doctor and had to have test after test and procedure after procedure performed. He was hospitalized several times in critical condition. However, a turning point did come, just as we had been assured.

Sunny amazed us all as he suddenly began to show signs of regaining strength and putting some weight back on. He was a little fighter and also very confident from the beginning that he would fine. We knew he was just a little toddler, but

he possessed an angelic face, disposition, and faith that all would be well. He never showed signs of fear.

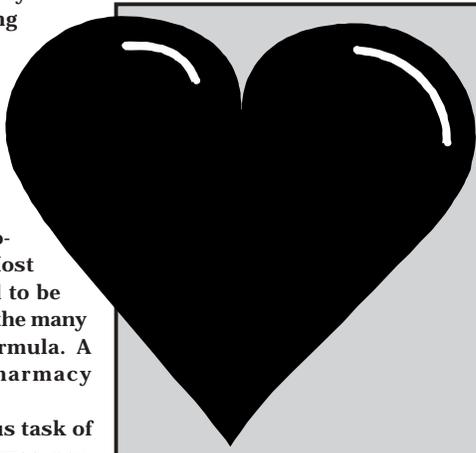
Ed and I have foster parented many children, some medically fragile. However, none required anywhere near the care Sunny did. However, he brought an equal amount of pleasure into our hearts and lives!

After Sunny's surgery, we were all so relieved. However, we had accomplished a bitter-sweet victory. We also thought of and prayed for the family who gave Sunny the gift of life in a time of grief.

We know that Jesus laughs when he sees Sunny run and play like a typical kid these days. He went back home to his biological family, which is where he belongs. His care is simpler now. Now his family and friends can reap the same benefits we did from knowing and loving Sunny.

When I think of courage and faith now, I always think of Sunny. I also have another razor sharp image, that of Sunny's donor. I am sure Jesus often bends down and touches her hair and kisses her soft cheek. She received the ultimate reward!

Marion Duncan is a North Carolina foster parent



Untitled poem by Jeremy

This poem is for the people that care a lot.
They took me in and gave me all I've got.
They've showed me a different way to live.
And they've showed me how good it feels to give.
They've kept me off the streets and out of trouble.
And they help me through my problems no matter how difficult or simple.
When I leave them it's going to make me sad.
Because I'm starting to think of them as my mom and dad.

Reprinted from the National Advocate (Oct./Nov. 1992), newsletter of the National Foster Parent Association. It was submitted to that publication by Jake Terpstra.

Writing Contest

First Prize: \$100
Second Prize: \$50
Third Prize: \$25

Send us a letter answering this:

If you could write a letter to your birth parent, what would you say?

Deadline: August 30, 2003

Anyone under 21 who is or has been in foster care or a group home can enter. Mail your letter to:

John McMahon, Editor
Fostering Perspectives Newsletter
Jordan Institute for Families
340 Victoria Rd.,
Pines Bldg., Room 403
Asheville, NC 28801

Include your name, age, address, social security number (used to process awards only, your confidentiality will be protected) and phone number.

We're Also Seeking Artwork

Submissions can be on any theme. Submission requirements described above also apply to submissions of artwork, which should be mailed flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.

Foster youth speak out!

Did you ever wonder what youth in foster care would say to foster parents and social workers if they had a chance?

On Sunday, October 6, 2002, over 50 young people involved in the group SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) got together to make some things clear to the people they live and interact with. Not surprisingly, they had a lot to say. For example, they said:



"We want to figure out how to raise our kids. We didn't learn that from our parents. We hope we learn it from you."

Ask us what we need to help us feel like we belong. Ask our opinion on things. Just because we don't have a permanent home doesn't mean we don't have feelings, or brains!



Turn to page 11 to learn more of what these young people had to say.

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Views on Foster Care in North Carolina

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

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