

# fostering perspectives

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www.fosteringperspectives.org

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

## Ashley's Story

My aunt punched my mama in the face one time. She didn't want my mama to come in one night. So she punched her. We was all standing out there and playing by the rocks and my aunt punched my mama. Then my mama went out and was walking backwards and she yelled and cussed. My aunt just slammed the door and everyone left. We all walked back to our apartments. I liked our old apartments but there was shooting and stuff and then you have to wake up.

They took me from my mama because she drank and did drugs and she couldn't stop. My mama's friend gave my sister some drugs and it was light brown. My sister almost threw up on me. My mama and her friend would go to the store and get beer and me and my sister would get juice and candy and not drugs or drink. My mama and her friend would fight and knock stuff down. That's why I'm glad her friend moved out.

I love my brother and sister. My brother lives with his daddy. Before that he lived with his foster mom. My sister and me live with our foster mom.

Before that we all three stayed in that other foster home. They used to beat me. I asked the lady if I could sit in the chair and she wouldn't let me. The other children there didn't want to play with me. It was a white lady. We stayed there when I was moved from my aunt.

We stayed with my aunt when I was first moved from my mama. My aunt and them kept fighting and saying cusswords and knocking lamps down and knocking flowers down and I was scared and stuff. Then I went to the white lady. My brother slept on the floor and floors are dirty. But soon I moved to where I am now.

Now I stay with my foster mom and I call her Mama. But I'm not really supposed to call her "Mama" because I went to see my real Mama and she said, "Don't call her Mama, just call her by her name."

I think she don't like her or something.

*Ashley is seven years old. She received \$15 for having her story published in Fostering Perspectives*

Now I stay with my foster mom. But my real Mama said, "Don't call her Mama, just call her by her name." I think she don't like her or something.

## Foster parents fill a tall order

She's seven years old. She is in the second grade and LOVES school. She got an award for perfect attendance. Her favorite breakfast is waffles from our heart shaped waffle maker. She goes to Brownies every other week and has earned four badges. I sewed them on her vest. She is so excited about her upcoming dance recital. She is very proud of the library card that has her name typed right on it. She worries about whether her friends will come to her birthday party and if they will all be in the same class next year. She is my Goddaughter.



Kay Gillis

As I watch her play in our yard, I read Ashley's story. Ashley is seven years old. How many schools has she been in? How many days has she missed? How can she catch up on all those missed lessons? She worries about shootings at her old apartments and when that will happen here. She worries about how her brother is doing in his daddy's home and when she will get to see him. She worries about her new home, because if her mama doesn't like her foster mom, maybe she shouldn't either.

To Ashley, a life of cussing, punching, throwing things, drinking, doing drugs, and moving from place to place is normal.

Then she comes to live with one of us: a foster parent. How strange it must seem! Now she's expected to sit at a table for meals and go to school every day. She's expected to tell us—without throwing things—when she's upset or angry. She's expected to get along with her new "siblings," even though her mom and her aunt could never get along. She is expected not to worry about her family, to trust us and her case-worker to know what's best for her. She is expected to be like my Goddaughter.

As foster parents, we want to bring about positive changes in Ashley, to show her a different way of life. We want her to have a bright future, to teach her to succeed. We want her to feel safe and secure, optimistic and loved. We know the process will be slow, but we believe it can be done. That's why we're foster parents.

But as we care for our children we must always remember one essential fact: Ashley and the other children in the child welfare system will never stop loving the families they came from. They will never lose the craving to be loved by them.

That's why, if we really want to help children feel good about themselves, we must help them feel good about their families. Not only that, but we must reach out to birth families and have meaningful contact with them. For the sake of the children, we must be Family Preservationists, as well as Foster Parents.

It's a tall order, I know. But then, creating the changes we want for all the Ashleys of the world is a tall order, too. And there's no group I know of better equipped to fill tall orders than foster parents.

*Kay is a foster parent and a Regional Vice President for the NC Foster Parents Association*

# Sustaining connections when siblings are separated

They can be comforters, caretakers, role models, faithful allies, and best friends. Most brothers and sisters share years of experiences that form a bond, a common foundation they do not have with anyone else. If their birth parents were unable to provide the necessary care, sibling attachments can be even closer.

Brothers and sisters separated from each other through foster care and adoption experience trauma, anger, and an extreme sense of loss. Research suggests that separating siblings may make it difficult for them to begin healing, make attachments, and develop a healthy self-image. Indeed, because of the affection they share, separated siblings often feel they have lost a part of themselves.

For these reasons, North Carolina policy explicitly states that siblings must be placed together whenever possible, unless such a placement would be contrary to a child's developmental, treatment, or safety needs. Policy also states that if siblings are separated, frequent and regular ongoing contact must be arranged and facilitated (NCDSS, 2004).

Here are some ways social workers and foster, relative, and adoptive parents can help separated siblings stay connected:

## Develop Your Knowledge

- Separation anxiety will be strongest immediately before or after placement. Be sensitive to the loss the children are feeling. Many will experience

separation from siblings in the same way they experience separation from their parents. Respond accordingly.

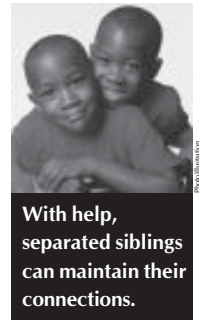
- Understand that strong, healthy attachments between brothers and sisters promotes other vital life attachments—including attachment to foster and adoptive parents.
- Recognize that supporting sibling connections requires resources: transportation, phone access, etc.
- Because it can be so beneficial, even if children seem passive or uninterested, parents and professionals should encourage contact between siblings unless prohibited by a therapist.

## Take Action

- Learn about your children's history with their siblings. Ask them how they feel about their brothers and sisters.
- Maintain frequent (at least monthly) contact through visits, phone calls, e-mail, and letters.
- Meet in a place that is appropriate to children's needs. For example, siblings often feel a surge of energy and emotion when they are reunited. Settings that require them to be calm and quiet may not work.
- Finding time to bring siblings together is hard for busy parents. Consider finding someone outside the family who would be willing to make this his or her only assignment.
- Have a group portrait made. Send

prints to each sibling.

- Plan get-togethers or birthday parties for siblings. Send cards and help your kids to celebrate their siblings' birthdays.
- Promote contact with "siblings" who are not biologically related, but who have formed attachments after living together in foster care. Though not legally recognized, this bond can affect children's long-term development.



With help, separated siblings can maintain their connections.

## Sources and Further Reading

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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 and adoption in our State.

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

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## Sibling placement: Research to practice

Barriers within the child welfare system sometimes keep siblings apart when they enter foster care. However, the authors of "Siblings and Out-of-Home Placement: Best Practices" suggest these barriers can be identified and minimized. The article, which appears in the October-December 2003 issue of *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, summarizes existing research on sibling relationships in families where children have been abused and neglected, discusses the conditions that sometimes lead to separation, and offers practical solutions to support maintaining sibling relationships during placement.

The authors suggest that the first step to removing barriers to sibling placement is for child welfare agencies to establish a policy—like North Carolina's—that states that, absent a compelling reason, siblings should always be placed together when they enter foster care.

A second step should be the active recruiting of foster and adoptive families that are willing to accept siblings. Knowing how to obtain waivers, such as when space or family size becomes an issue, can be essential.

Finally, the article offers a multidimensional assessment tool to assist caseworkers in evaluating the following issues in sibling cases:

- The sibling relationship
- Safety, including risk factors
- Benefits to children of keeping siblings together
- Benefits to children of separating siblings
- Children's wishes and expectations
- Available families

The full text of "Siblings and Out-of-Home Placement: Best Practices" can be found on the Alliance for Children and Families website at <[www.alliance1.org/fis/](http://www.alliance1.org/fis/)>.

Reprinted from the *Children's Bureau Express*, March 2004. <<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/>>

# Separation, loss, and foster parent retention

Foster parents are in a tough position. On the one hand they are expected to welcome unfamiliar children into their homes, invest in them emotionally and physically, and help them through a difficult time.

On the other hand, this intense investment is supposed to be temporary. When the placement ends, foster parents were historically expected to disengage in a way that is helpful to the child and everyone else involved. In the hustle and bustle of a placement move, whether the child is going home or moving somewhere else, foster parents' feelings of loss are often given inadequate attention.

## Agency Factors

In 1989, Lois Urquhart conducted a study to determine whether foster parents' experiences of separation and loss affected their decision to continue fostering children. She surveyed 376 foster homes, 275 of which were licensed and open to children, and 101 of which had been previously-licensed but had closed within the past three years.

She found that both groups of families expressed love and affection for their foster children and sadness at their loss. The two groups also felt similar levels of anxiety and uncertainty regarding foster care placements. Urquhart found that "although open home respondents more often knew how long a placement would be, both

When changes are made in a child's placement, foster parents' feelings of loss are often overlooked.

groups rarely knew from the outset a child's length of stay in their homes" (p. 203).

Urquhart did find two key differences between open and closed foster homes. The first emerged when she asked foster parents how well their

agency prepared them for the separation and the grief they would feel at the end of a placement. While 36 percent of foster parents from open homes felt they had been taught skills for coping with a child's removal; only 19 percent of closed homes felt they had been adequately prepared.

The other significant difference between open and closed homes had to do with the degree to which they felt their agency supported them before, during, and after separation. Foster parents from open homes felt they were better supported by their agency in every category assessed. Parents from open homes were also provided with information about and contact with former foster children more often than were parents from closed homes.

Urquhart concludes that foster parents who are "unprepared or unsupported for the separation and loss experience can be considered foster parents at risk" of leaving foster care (p. 206).

## Emotional Factors

To continue on in their work after the end of a placement, foster parents need to resolve their grief. One step in this process—



Foster parents who left and those who stayed on expressed similar amounts of emotion. The difference was in how much support and preparation they received from their agency.

expressing the pain associated with the loss—can be especially difficult for some foster parents.

In *When Foster Children Leave: Helping Foster Parents to Grieve*, Susan Edelstein (1981) identifies four obstacles that prevent people from expressing grief over a loss. Foster parents can run up against any or all of these.

First, grieving is difficult when the relationship to the lost person was ambivalent or hostile. Foster parents may experience mixed feelings about foster children, especially those who are prone to act out. A second barrier to fully expressing feelings of loss when a child leaves the foster home is the number of other demands placed on foster parents. Usually, there are other foster and biological children still in the home. Foster parents must continue to attend to these children, leaving little opportunity to express themselves.

Expectations can be another barrier. It may be an unspoken expectation that foster parents should not get too attached to the children in their homes. Foster parents who express feelings of loss may be considered weak by their agency or other foster parents; they may even have their ability to foster questioned.

The final barrier has to do with differences in individual personalities. Some people have a need to always appear confident and independent, and grieving makes them uncomfortable; they view the vulnerability that is part of grief as a sign of weakness.

For suggestions of ways social workers and their agencies can support—and retain—foster families, see the box at left.

## References

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- Urquhart, L. (1989). Separation and loss: Assessing the impacts on foster parent retention. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*, 6(3), 193–209.

*Reprinted from Children's Services Practice Notes*, 2(4). <[www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)>

## Tips for Social Workers: Supporting Foster Parents When Placements End

What can social workers do to help foster parents deal with the feelings of loss that come at the end of a placement? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Be direct and honest** about the duration of placement; share updated and relevant information with foster parents on an ongoing basis.
2. **Learn about the stages of grief.** Coping with foster parent anger (or despair) may be easier if you see it as a natural part of the grieving process.
3. **Send a condolence note** after the placement ends. Make a follow-up phone call to express your appreciation and concern.
4. **Allocate resources.** If possible, your agency may be able to assign a social worker to each foster home. This worker could be a stable presence for the foster parent to turn to at the end of a placement.
5. **Increase foster parent training** related to separation and loss. This will help them understand their own reactions to loss, as well as the reactions of their foster children.
6. **Connect to community support.** Foster parent associations and self-help groups are another avenue of support during times of separation.



# N.C. Foster Parents Association

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

## Letter from the Association President by Sheryl Ewing

Thank you being a foster parent. You may never know how you are changing—or saving—a child's life, but have faith and trust that you are. I appreciate you and the NC Foster Parents Association Board of Directors appreciates you.

We have just had our annual Board of Director's Retreat and you will meet our new Board members in this issue of *Fostering Perspectives*. Every time we add new members we get excited about all the possibilities and things we are going to do for North Carolina's foster, adoptive, and kinship parents!

### Our Goals for 2004

**Conferences.** Our goal is to provide affordable, accessible training opportunities to as many of North Carolina's foster and adoptive parents as possible. Therefore we will offer a conference on April 24 and 25 in Research Triangle Park. Starting this year, our annual two-day conference will always be the last weekend of April so we can give you information to take back to your community to celebrate May as National Foster Care Month.

Our grant from the NC Division of Social Services helps support these conferences so we can provide wonderful training at a low cost.

**Advocacy.** Last year we helped get foster care board rates increased, proving that NCFPA advocacy efforts have a real and positive effect on the lives of foster parents. This year we will continue our efforts, in part through our membership in the Covenant with North Carolina's Children <[www.ncchild.org/covhome.htm](http://www.ncchild.org/covhome.htm)>.

If you are interested in joining our Advocacy Committee, contact me (e: [fsnsenc@earthlink.net](mailto:fsnsenc@earthlink.net); t: 910/792-6133) and I will let you know when they meet. Any member of the NCFPA may serve on this committee. We still need a Foster Parents Bill of Rights for North Carolina!

An important part of advocacy is participating in statewide activities. That's why the NCFPA has members involved with the following:

- SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out). We have a member helping with "Giving a Child a Smile," SaySo's

project for Make a Difference Day

- The NC Division of Social Services Child and Family Services Plan
- The MRS (Multiple Response System) Advisory Council
- The Early Intervention/Child Protective Services Collaboration Committee
- The Covenant with North Carolina's Children
- The NC LINKS Advisory Council

One of our Board members also assists her local DSS with MAPP training as a trainer. We also have Board members trained as Shared Parenting trainers. And we have Board members who are leading and starting new local foster parent associations and adoption support groups.

**Membership.** The larger our organization is, the easier it will be to make North Carolina the best place to foster and adopt. Therefore, in 2004 we are going to look at new ways to increase our membership. The NCFPA wants to be an advocate for foster and adoptive parents with a LOUD voice. If you are not already a member, please join us.



Sheryl Ewing

### New Board

We have a new slate of officers:

- Sheryl Ewing, *President*
- Donna Greene, *Secretary*
- Matt Davies, *Treasurer*
- Gerri Fox, *Region 1 Vice President*
- Kay Gillis, *Region 2 Vice President*
- Region 3 and 4 Vice Presidents: vacant

Donna Greene has been nominated and is running for Vice President of the National Foster Parent Association for Region 4. We are very excited to have someone from North Carolina on the National Foster Parent Association Board.

Additionally, we are successfully collaborating with NC Kids and the Family Support Network of North Carolina. We have been writing letters of support for possible grants where we would assist with increased support services for foster and adoptive families.

We appreciate hearing from you. We want to know: How can the NCFPA serve you better? What are your top three wishes as a foster or adoptive parent? What are your top three needs? E-mail your thoughts to [ncfpa@uncg.edu](mailto:ncfpa@uncg.edu).

Thank you again for all you do to help North Carolina's families and children.

## Support Us So We Can Support You!

The mission of the North Carolina Foster Parents Association 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, 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 at UNCG, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION.

**Regular membership** is open to any foster or adoptive parent and is \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a couple. **Associate membership** is \$25 per person and is for anyone who is not a foster or adoptive parent.

First name #1: \_\_\_\_\_ First name #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

County: \_\_\_\_\_ Licensing Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Amt. included: \_\_\_\_\_ Donation Amt.: \_\_\_\_\_

# Passage to Adoption: A camp for older youth in foster care

As part of her work with Campaigns for Kids, a nonprofit that consults with foster care and adoption agencies, Diane Delafield often interviewed teens in foster care. As she did, she came to understand that, though they often live in supportive, nurturing foster families, many of the youth cleared for adoption have behavioral, emotional, and psychological issues that make the transition to adoption difficult.

What these youth needed, Diane realized, was a camp that offered a healing program that would make the path to adoption easier for them to travel. As she envisioned it, this camp would be safe, yet transformational. It would be a place where youth could have experiences that would support their passage both to new families and to meaningful, productive adult lives.

When she looked around, Diane found very few camps like this, and none in North Carolina. And so last year, working with her colleague, Tina Peterson, and her friend Chris Weaver, the director of a 4-H Education Center, she set out to create one.

## Passage to Adoption

Under the auspices of her nonprofit organization, Under One Sky, Diane and her friends have developed a vision and a plan for a camp for older youth in foster care whose track is adoption. The camp is called *Passage to Adoption*. If adequate funding can be secured, the camp will be developed and tested in a comprehensive three-year pilot at the Swannanoa 4-H Education Center, a 90-acre camp in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville.

**The Campers.** The program is designed to serve youth who are at least partially clear for adoption, including youth who have an identified family and may be living with them while they go through the legal adop-

tion process. Based on interest already expressed by county departments of social services, the camp will host 32 to 48 youth during its first year. In the second and third years, new groups of 48 teens will be added.

**Duration.** The program will include a ten-day summer camp during June 2004, 2005, and 2006, each of which will be followed by fall, winter, and spring retreat weekends that will include a family retreat for foster families, prospective adoptive families, and social workers.

**Activities.** The camp will offer youth activities, workshops, and discussions about adoption basics (what it is, its potential benefits), grief and loss, adoption recruitment, and other relevant issues.

The youth will also direct their own learning by choosing small-group workshops in life skills, creativity, team-building, and leadership. These workshops will be led by experienced instructor-mentors. The camp cabin-counselor team will consist primarily of students from schools of social work across the state.

## A Recruitment Connection

During the camp, youth will be invited to partner with camp staff and Campaigns for Kids staff to create their own personal recruitment materials. The youth will have the final say in how these materials will be used. Participating county DSS's will receive the following recruitment materials for each participating youth:

- A 3-5 minute child-specific video co-produced and scripted by the youth
- A child-specific profile that includes photographs of the youth, and quotes
- 24 digital photographs
- 15-20 minute, professionally recorded interview
- 30-second radio public service announcement

## Matching with Parents

As part of the ten-day camp experience, qualified prospective parents will be recruited by NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network and invited to attend an orientation with social workers at a comfortable nearby facility.

Parents will then attend the camp's culminating celebration, "Sharing the Gift." Here prospective parents will interact with the youth in a neutral, relaxed setting to help facilitate potential matches. Youth will present the results of their work at camp to families, including personalized profiles that the youth have created with the help of camp staff. The youth's choice to interact with the prospective parents will be respected, and the emphasis will be on the personal growth and self-esteem of each youth.

## Funding

Passage to Adoption is being funded by foundation grants, county DSS's, individuals, churches, and businesses. Under One Sky is in the process of applying to foundations to fund the first three years of this



A "Reflection Circle" at the Swannanoa 4-H Education Center, where the *Passage to Adoption* camp will be held.

pilot project. Summer camp 2004 is contingent upon receiving a portion of these grants prior to June. Under One Sky will implement the three-day opening retreat even if grant funding does not come in prior to these dates, since this event has been paid for by county departments of social services.

For more information about this program, contact Diane Delafield ([dianecfk@ioa.com](mailto:dianecfk@ioa.com); 828/645-1046). To learn about the application process to serve as a volunteer or to join the camp staff, contact Chris Weaver ([chris@swan4h.org](mailto:chris@swan4h.org); 828/686-3196). To make a financial contribution online, visit [www.networkforgood.org/donate](http://www.networkforgood.org/donate), and enter the organization name Under One Sky; or mail your contribution to Under One Sky, Inc., PO Box 8411, Asheville, NC 28814.

## Announcing Undy Sunday!

The NC Foster Parents Association has made May 30, 2004 "Undy Sunday." Working with churches from across the state, the NCFPA is asking that people bring a package of new underwear or socks to church with them to be donated to children in care. We are making this effort because unfortunately many children enter foster care with little or no clothing. Foster parents are usually able to find used clothing, but secondhand underwear is less than desirable.

With the proliferation of methamphetamine labs across the state, the situation worsens. Children removed from these home drug labs are not allowed to bring ANY of their own belongings because of the toxicity of the dust in the labs.

After May 30 the NCFPA will pick up the donated underwear and deliver them to the county DSS's for distribution to the children. Check the NCFPA website ([www.ncfpa.org](http://www.ncfpa.org)) for the information needed to have your church take part in this effort and for a list of participating churches. Questions? Send an e-mail message to [ncfpa@uncg.edu](mailto:ncfpa@uncg.edu) or [kgillis@usa.net](mailto:kgillis@usa.net).



# Dear foster parents . . .

## An open letter from Heather, a former foster youth

Dear foster parents,

I have been adopted twice now. I read Debbie Gallimore's article [in the last issue of *Fostering Perspectives*] and I do agree with her that if you respect and "take in" a foster child's family, that child will take you (the foster parent) in. I find this true in my life.

Now that I am adopted for the second time I find it harder to trust and become dependable upon my adopted parents. From a personal experience I will say that it hurts whenever "my" parents talk negatively about my family and I find it harder to respect them afterwards. Our real family is something that was taken from us and we acknowledge that every second of each day. It hurts us worse every time someone mentions our family, it is offensive and your words will never go away.

It is not easy for a child to adapt to a new family. The best way to earn a child's trust, respect, and dependence is to re-

spect their feeling toward their family.

Most of my life I have been independent and parentless (referring to parental care and guidance), so when I was adopted for the

second time "my" parents did not and sometimes they still do not understand why I'm not getting along with them. I am still not used to being able to depend upon anyone and my trust in anyone is gone.

Why? Because that is to me the safest way not to get hurt again. I even find it hard to love or care for "my" new family. I will reject their love to me because it is something I have not yet been able to take in. I don't care for family time or bonding time because I am very uncomfortable with it. Part of the time these feelings come because of something they had said to me either about me or my family. I

I write to say this: what you say and how you treat a foster child does affect them, whether they show you it or not.

do not have my family and I wish to see them all.

I am proud of all my accomplishments that I have made so far in my life. Most of all, I am glad that I did not give up on life even

through the hard times when I would've rather have been dead.

One of my wishes in life is to be able to be the little girl I once was, when I did not worry how the day would end or if I could ever trust or depend on anyone again. It was a time when I was happy.

I do not write to you to tell you of all my problems that very few know about. I write to say this: what you say and how you treat a foster child does affect them, whether they show you it or not. I cry every night because my heart aches from not being able to be with my family, wondering if they were even



alive, wondering what it is like to be held by my real mother. I cry because I feel alone and I feel like something is missing.

Every foster child cries because they are in pain. We want to be held and cared for, we reject it because we are afraid of getting too close to anyone. Please keep this in mind when you have a foster child of any kind in your home because what you do and how you react to a child does make an impact on their lives forever.

Heather is 16. She received \$15 for having her letter published.

## The well-being of children in foster care

Two recent surveys found that many children in foster care are more vulnerable to poor health and developmental outcomes than other children. This is due not only to the difficulties children in foster care face prior to removal from the home (e.g., abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse), but also to difficulties they face upon entering the system (e.g., separation from parents, adjustment to new caregivers, or multiple placements).

Child Trends analyzed data from the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) and the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) and reported findings in a brief, *Children in Foster Homes: How Are They Faring?* Results show:

- More than 50 percent of infants and toddlers in foster care are at high risk for neurological and cognitive development impairments.
- Nearly one-third of foster children under the age of 15 have a disability.
- Nearly half of foster children have behavioral or emotional problems.

Despite these problems, foster children also have a number of protective factors in their favor. For example:

- 95 percent have some form of health insurance.
- 90 percent of foster children under age 5 have received required immunizations.

- 76 percent of 11- to 14-year-olds report feeling close to their caregivers.
- 97 percent of 11- to 14-year-olds have an adult they can rely on for help with a serious problem.

The brief offers a number of implications for policy and practice, including the need to:

- Increase the economic resources of foster parents.
- Improve the coordination of health care across service providers.
- Design managed care systems that take into account the special needs of foster children.
- Offer more resources to foster parents and kinship caregivers, including training, child care, and respite care services.

A copy of this brief can be obtained from Child Trends at <[www.childtrends.org/PDF/FosterHomesRB.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/FosterHomesRB.pdf)>. Additional information on NSCAW can be obtained at the Administration on Children and Families website at <[www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/core/ongoing\\_research/afc/wellbeing\\_intro.html](http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/core/ongoing_research/afc/wellbeing_intro.html)>. Additional information on NSAF can be found on the Urban Institute website at <[www.urban.org/Content/Research/NewFederalism/NSAF/Overview/NSAFOverview.htm](http://www.urban.org/Content/Research/NewFederalism/NSAF/Overview/NSAFOverview.htm)>.

Reprinted from the Children's Bureau Express, March 2004 <[cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov](http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov)>

# Parents: Don't make food a battle by Elizabeth Cassedy



Elizabeth Cassedy

It is common for parents of all kinds—birth, foster, adoptive, and kin—to use food as a reinforcer for positive behavior (“Eat your dinner so you can have dessert”) and as a means of control (“stop fighting or you won’t get ice cream”). I know my parents did. Yours may have, too.

Yet in my years as a social worker, I have come to question this use of food. I have talked with foster parents about the fact that:

- Many kids in foster care have been neglected. Some of these have been food-deprived. When these kids enter your family they worry a lot about where their next meal is coming from. Many repeatedly ask, “What will we eat tonight?” until they believe that dinner will be there for them every night.
- Our culture is obsessed with food. One consequence of this is that many people—both inside and outside of foster care—struggle with weight problems, eating disorders, and dubious connections between food and being “good.”

In our discussions I would ask foster parents: What does it mean to use a sweet dessert as a reward for good behavior? What if a child thinks, “I was good when I was with my mom and food was very unpredictable.” What if a child who has been sexually victimized was always given candy

**Kids who have been deprived of food shouldn't have food used as a control.**

or ice cream for being “good”? In the end, I tried to persuade foster parents to use other methods to discipline and control their children. Some agreed with me, some did not.

Last year, after my husband and I became foster parents, we decided to practice what I had been preaching.

We began by clearly saying to ourselves and our children: “Food is not going to be a battle!” Then we laid down the rules: the kids could eat pretty much what they liked, when they liked. There would be no conditions placed on sweets and desserts, other than that they could have no more than two.

During the past year we never said, “Eat all the food on your plate or you won’t get dessert.” We did say, “Try this.” For the most part, our kids ate what we cooked. When they didn’t, we offered cereal. We made sure they had healthy options for snacks.

And yes, they still got dessert. We make cookies, we eat ice cream, and there is always as much fruit as you want to eat.

When they heard what we were doing some people were concerned that, with unrestricted access to food, our two foster children would gain weight, but they haven’t. They both grew in height, and their weight curve remained the same.

Discipline was not a problem because we made the rules and boundaries really

clear. Instead of using food as a consequence, we’d take away TV and computer time in a heartbeat.

So here we are, one year later. In my role as a social worker, I still try to persuade foster parents not to use food as a means of discipline. Some agree with me, some do not.

In my home, though, food is no longer a battle. Yes, we still have our struggles—abandoning the use of food as a means of discipline is not an instant fix. Still, I have some hope that our efforts have reduced the “power of food” so that—maybe—our children will have a greater chance of living healthier, happier lives.

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

## Childhood Obesity in NC

- In North Carolina, 13.5% of children ages 2–4 and 21.1% of children ages 5–11 are overweight
- These numbers represent a 35% increase in overweight children in just five years!
- Obesity increases children’s risk of heart disease, sleep apnea, joint problems, depression, and Type II diabetes
- It is estimated that obesity cost North Carolina \$2.14 billion in 2003

*Source: NC Child Health Report Card 2003.  
<[www.ncchild.org/health.htm](http://www.ncchild.org/health.htm)>*

## Help for hard-to-raise kids . . . and their parents, too

by Jane Hersey, Director of the Feingold Association of the US

- Eight-month-old Justin is a fussy baby and still hasn’t slept through the night.
- Severe asthmatic bouts bring three-year-old Tiffany to the emergency room.
- Daniel, age five, has just been expelled from the latest day care center as a result of his aggressive behavior.
- Maggie’s second grade teacher simply can’t “get through” to this distracted little girl and suspects she has ADD (attention deficit disorder).
- Her older brother is on his third set of ear tubes because of chronic infections, and their mom suffers from hives.

As different as all these people are, they share something in common—a group of substances are triggering their various behavior, learning, and health problems.

The medical literature shows that many of the synthetic additives in food are powerful chemicals that can trigger problems in sensitive people. Little Justin’s fussiness and sleep problems are linked to the additives in his baby vitamins. Tiffany’s asthma comes from the yellow dye in her favorite macaroni and cheese mix. Daniel is a calm, well behaved child when he doesn’t consume multicolored breakfast cereal, blue drinks, and so-called “fruit” snacks, but the pantry is generally well-stocked, so his good days are rare.

Maggie has the most problems after eating lunch in the school cafeteria, but the strong smelling markers designed for white boards also make it hard for her to pay attention. (They are also responsible for her teacher’s frequent headaches.) As for Maggie’s brother, his ear infections are being triggered by the artificial dyes and

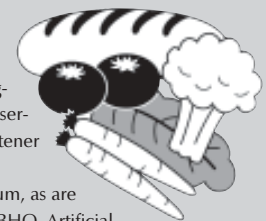
flavorings in his favorite candies while the biggest culprits for their mom are the synthetic preservatives hidden in her low-fat milk and the sweetener in her diet soda.

Synthetic food dyes are made from petroleum, as are three common preservatives: BHA, BHT and TBHQ. Artificial flavorings can be made from anything (literally, anything!) and a manufacturer need not disclose this information to anyone, including the Food and Drug Administration. Aspartame, the synthetic sweetener in Mom’s diet soda, is responsible for more reports of harmful effects than any other additive in history.

The good news is that consumers don’t have to eat this chemical stew, parents don’t have to be faced with out-of-control children, and all of us don’t need to be harmed by the very thing that is supposed to nourish us—our food.

The Feingold Association is a nonprofit organization with 28 years of experience teaching people how to find the food they love without the chemicals they hate. Named in honor of the doctor who helped so many hyperactive, learning disabled children (now called ADHD), most of the volunteers are parents who have found help for their children and themselves. To learn more visit <[www.feingold.org](http://www.feingold.org)>.

*Jane Hersey is Director of the Feingold Association of the US and the author of Why Can’t My Child Behave? and Healthier Food for Busy People.*



## What are *you* proud of?

In our daily lives many of us devote a great deal of attention to problems, to what's **wrong**. It's not surprising: our schools and businesses spend a great deal of time teaching people to identify problems, and they shower rewards on those who do it well.



But if we pay too much attention to the negative and the broken, it is easy for us to start to think that's all there is. If we fixate on a child's negative behaviors, or a social worker's or foster parent's mistakes, we run the risk of overlooking the good that person does. Or the good that person **is**.

That's something we can't afford to do. We need to see the strengths in ourselves, in others, and in our world. Why? Because our strengths and past successes hold the key to solving the challenges that lie ahead of us.

With these thoughts in mind, the writing contest in the last issue of *Fostering Perspectives* posed the following question to current and former foster youth: "What's something about yourself that you are proud of, and why?"

We hoped that by asking this we could help the kids who wrote in—and the adults who ultimately read their responses—shine a little light on what is right in their lives.

We were not disappointed. In the many responses we received—we regret we couldn't publish them all—young people told us in a clear way that they had lots of reasons to celebrate.

Some were proud of things that make kids everywhere proud: the ability to play a sport, do a flip, draw a picture, get good grades. Others were proud of victories in their struggles with substance abuse and anger. Still others were proud of overcoming experiences—abuse, neglect, multiple placements—that once made them doubt their worth as people.

They expressed their pride in different voices. Some voices were tentative—almost whispers—as if they were not sure they'd be believed. Others rang with confidence and conviction, like trumpets.

Viewed together, these essays create a portrait of foster children as people who recognize something of value in themselves. Now that is something of which **we** should be proud.

Yet it is also our task at hand. As parents, social workers, and as a society, we must continue to help children shine a light on their successes and to nurture their pride in who they are today and who they will be tomorrow. —*John McMahon, Editor*

### Joy Elizabeth, age 12, First Prize

1

I'm proud of all my unique looks. I have gorgeous brown hair that shines in the sun. My eyes twinkle when I look around.

I'm proud of my talents because not many people can do some of them. My thumbs are double-jointed—I can stick them behind my fists. My friends think it is so cool that I can hang upside down on monkey bars.

I like the fact that I make good grades in school. My teachers like me a whole lot. They keep my scores up by making sure I understand everything they teach us in class.

I'm happy that I have a loving family who cares for me by giving me shelter, clothes on my back, food, and water.

My birthday is the first day of spring, March 20. I think that is special but some other holidays are much better than spring.

There is something about myself that I am really proud of—it is that I try to be myself. I do not go looking through magazines to see what they look like to improve myself. I try to stay one of a kind, not some duplicate of some girl I saw in a magazine that used a certain kind of makeup and knows she has two boyfriends and a million others who like her. I would just rather stick with the one that I already have.

The one thing I have that I'm proud of is my friends, because if I feel that I'm useless they would cheer me up because that is what friends are for. If you are mean to your friends you will not have anyone to cheer you up so you would live your life in misery and sorrow. I have a lot of friends and plan to keep it that way.

These are some things about myself I'm proud of.

*Joy Elizabeth received \$100 for her first place essay*

I try to stay one of a kind, not some duplicate of some girl I saw in a magazine.

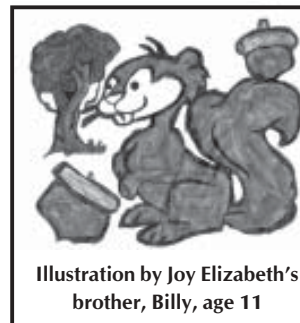


Illustration by Joy Elizabeth's brother, Billy, age 11

### CJ, age 11

I am proud of myself because I use to be not able to control my anger. After being placed in therapeutic foster care and seeing my therapist I have learned to control my anger. My foster family and I go on therapeutic walks and sit down and talk about my feelings. My foster family clipped an old article out of *Fostering Perspectives* about things you can say to yourself to keep a lid on your anger. This helps me a lot in remembering how to control my anger.

*CJ received \$15 for having his essay published*



## Sofia, age 12, Second Prize



My name is Sofia and I am 12 years old. I have been in foster care since I was eight. My foster mom and dad have adopted me and I am so glad they did. With their guidance I feel like my life is back on track.

The one thing I am proud of is making good grades. When I was with my birth mom I missed 48 days of school because she was always sleeping from the pills and alcohol and she could not get me off to school. I am proud of achieving the accomplishments that I have. Like winning the Noon Optimist Character Award, which the teachers at Bethel Elementary voted for me, and winning the DARE Essay award, and being part of the safety patrol last year at my school.

I feel like I have proven myself with the right guidance in my life now, that I can accomplish anything, and become anything I want later in life. I am glad I have a new family that cares enough about me to get me in the right direction for what life has to offer.

There are still caring people out there in this world who love children and I can thank DSS and my new family for that.

*Sofia received \$50 for having her essay published*

## Daniel, age 13, Third Prize



One thing I am proud of is my artwork. I like to draw all the time. I am in an art class at school where I learn about artists and other styles of art. I also have earned the art merit badge for Boy Scouts.

At school we were seeing who could draw the best eagle to go in our yearbook for the school mascot. I drew a good one but I didn't get it published in the school yearbook. When I took it home, my foster mother Darlene liked it so much that she put it in a picture frame.

I also like to paint. I just painted a lighthouse that I saw on an eighth grade field trip to the Outer Banks in North Carolina. I painted the lighthouse because I was working on the art merit badge and I needed to paint a picture in acrylic. To accomplish the art merit badge I needed to do a pencil sketch so I used the eagle that I drew at school. I did an ink sketch of our house for the merit badge. I also had to do an acrylic. I did a picture of Jesus in a manger, which turned out to look pretty good.

I am really proud of how my artwork can look. I also got the art merit badge. One day my art may become known around the world.

*Daniel received \$25 for having his essay published and \$15 for having his drawing, "Leaping Tiger," published*



## Andrea, age 15

I've been working really hard to accomplish things that I can be proud of. I'm proud that I can actually do homework

**I can do homework without getting frustrated.**

without getting frustrated. I used to get mad and quit. I'm proud that I've made friends. I'm proud that I've learned to snowboard. I don't snowboard a lot, but I'm pretty good at it, though. I'm really good at skiing because I can grind on skis.

My favorite thing to do is cheerlead. I can do a back handspring, and I'm a flyer. . .

Now that I found out that people aren't perfect, I'm proud to be who I am.

*Andrea received \$15 for having her essay published*



*Heather received \$15 for having her drawing published*

## Jamar, age 16

My adoptive mother, Elizabeth, helped me discover my talent for writing. I was placed in foster care when I was three and a half years old. I was a behavior problem. I went through four different homes in only a year's time span. Nobody took time with me until Elizabeth. I know I was bad and cost her a lot, but she still gave me a chance. . . .

**My adoptive mother helped me discover my talent for writing.**

Even though I still get in trouble, I think that with her help I could turn my talent into something worthwhile. So I can then make what makes me proud, make her proud too!

*Jamar received \$15 for having his essay published*

## 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 licensed foster parent. I didn't think I wanted to adopt, but now I do and my agency doesn't do adoptions. What are my options?

Some child-placing agencies are not licensed to complete adoptions. Talk to your licensing social worker to see if your agency has a relationship with an agency that does adoptions.

Otherwise, you will have to identify an agency on your own. A list of all child-placing adoption agencies in North Carolina can be found at <[www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrensservices/licensing/licensing.htm](http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrensservices/licensing/licensing.htm)>. You will want to select one agency and submit an application. Your current agency may be agreeable to sharing your foster care licensing file with your new agency, which may speed up the process. Your new agency may require you to attend their training meetings, since they will be the agency to approve you to adopt and provide you with post-placement services.

The state of North Carolina has a contract with four private child-placing adoption agencies. These agencies—Adoptions Plus, Another Choice for Black Children, Children's Home Society of North Carolina, and Methodist Home for Children—provide services free of charge to families willing to adopt waiting foster children.

The NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network is here to help you connect with a new agency. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us Monday through Saturday, 7:00 A.M. - 7:00 P.M. Thank you for your willingness to provide a permanent family for our children!

*Response by Jeanne Preisler, Director, NC Kids*

**Question:** If I adopt my current foster child, will she continue to get Medicaid and will her daycare expenses still be covered?

We cannot give a definitive answer to your questions since this is a matter that must be determined by the agency that has custody of the child. The continuation of Medicaid will depend on whether the child has income of her own. If the child has no income, then Medicaid will continue until the child's 18th birthday. Daycare expenses will depend on the child's psychological and/or medical needs prior to the adoption. These matters should be discussed with the child's social worker prior to the finalization of the adoption.

*Response by Esther High, NC Division of Social Services*



If I adopt my current foster child, will she continue to get Medicaid and will her daycare expenses still be covered?

## May is Foster Care Month!

Here are ten ways you can mark the occasion with your family.

1. Thank your foster children for the opportunity to be parents to them.
2. Give an appreciation card to your caseworker.
3. Tell five friends about the rewards of fostering.
4. Make copies of your favorite *Fostering Perspectives* articles to pass along.
5. Send an encouragement card to another foster parent having a tough time.
6. Make plans with another foster family to trade an afternoon watching the other's kids. Take the time to refresh yourself doing something *you* like.
7. Establish May as the month for an annual outdoor family photo.
8. Browse the Internet for foster care sites to see what is new in other areas of the country.
9. Join a foster parent association or support group.
10. Plan a celebration party with your foster parent association.

*Adapted from  
Fostering Illinois newsletter, May 2001*

## Why I am in foster care by Jawilla, age 12

I have been in foster care for about three years now because my mom couldn't take care of me. My mom couldn't take care of me because she did drugs when she had kids. I am the only one out of four of us who is still in foster care. One of my brothers is at my grandmother's house. The other two are adopted. I decided not to get adopted because I still have my hopes up for going back home even though I know that I am not.

If my mom took care of us like she was supposed to, we would not be in foster care. I feel like my mom knew that she wasn't supposed to do drugs, she was supposed to take care of us. Sometimes I feel like my mom just doesn't care where we're at or how we are. I think that my mom likes drugs better than she likes her own kids. Sometimes I wish my mom would know how it feels to be in foster care and not with the family.

I pray every night that my mom would stop doing drugs and do something better with her life. I still love my mom. . .

I hope that I won't do the things that my mom did. I hope to make it to college and make it to the WNBA and be successful and respected in life. I also hope one day to support my whole family.

*Jawilla received \$15 for having her writing published*



"I pray every night that my mom would stop doing drugs and do something better with her life."

The NC Department of Health and Human Services does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services. 10,900 copies printed at a cost of \$1,967.45, or \$0.18 per copy.

# What do you do to keep your emotional well from running dry?

Being a foster parent is hard work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. It is wonderful and awful — sometimes at the same time. Friends who are not foster parents cannot understand why we keep on keepin' on.

Yet without the support of those who understand, we either cannot continue to be foster parents or we begin to provide less than the best care possible. This lessening in the quality of the care we provide is unintentional—we simply have a dry emotional well. But it has profound effects on the lives of the children in our care.

After 19 years as foster parents, we recently considered surrendering our license. This was the first time that our well had gone very nearly dry. There had been occasions when we talked about taking a break between placements, but never a time when we felt we just could not do this any longer.

So what was happening that led to our dry well?

We were in the process (still are) of adopting two children and it was not going smoothly. Foster parents sure are emotionally out there once they have decided to adopt! The role becomes totally different emotionally (or at least it has for us).

Add to the situation, a child previously placed with us needed to come back into care. Suddenly we found ourselves caring for three preschoolers! Our licensing

Recently, after 19 years as foster parents, my husband and I seriously considered surrendering our license . . .

agency was undergoing a major reorganization so we were no longer working with the people we'd worked with for ten years. My husband's employer was in the midst of a fight for survival in this strange new economy. We were looking for a new church home (predominantly African-American) to reflect the experience of the children we hope to adopt. It is no wonder our well was nearly dry.

Refilling the well happened slowly. We took a week's vacation with all three kids, flying several hundred miles to spend a week at a ski lodge near where our first son is stationed with the Navy. There were no phones and very few distractions. We played and we read and we slept. We shared our stresses with our friends in our Racial Reconciliation Group and in our Covenant Group.

*Orphans of the Living*, by Jennifer Toth, was one of the books I read that helped fill the well. In its case study format, the reader is drawn into the lives of four children in the social services system. This nonfiction book is one that might be dismissed as far fetched by non-foster parents, but we know better.

Another is *The Lost Children of Wilder*, by Nina Bernstein. This book is a multi-generational recounting of one family's experience with foster care. Through three generations, the reader follows the effects of the child welfare system on one family.

*Swings Hanging from Every Tree*, edited by Ramona Cunningham, is a book of daily inspirations for foster and adoptive parents that I highly recommend.

Each entry is only a single page, yet flipping through to read the entry for a specific date or stopping to read because the title caught my eye invariably strengthens my resolve to be a good foster parent.

*The Privilege of Youth*, by Dave Pelzer, is the latest in the series that began with *A Child Called It*. In my view much of this book is a bit "over the top," but parts are certain to touch any foster parent's heart. We really can make a lasting difference in the life of a child, even if we share in their life for only a short while. Dave was not an easy child to foster, yet foster families made a real difference in his life.

As we continue as foster parents, my husband and I will continue to read and participate in training opportunities like the ones offered by the NC Foster Parents Association. We know now—more than ever—that our emotional well needs to be replenished constantly if we are to do our best for the children in our care.

As always, I welcome your suggestions for this column. You can contact me at <Becky.Burmester@mindspring.com> or 919/870-9968.



Becky Burmester

## Leadership: Lessons from geese

Observers of geese say that the lessons they have learned by watching these birds are useful for foster parents and others who work with and rely on others. For example:

### Fact 1

As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

**Lesson:** People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of each other.

### Fact 2

When a goose falls out of formation, it

suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.

### Fact 3

When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it.

**Lesson:** It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each others' skills, capabilities, and unique ar-

rangements of gifts, talents, or resources.

### Fact 4

The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

**Lesson:** We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement (to stand by one's heart or core values and to encourage the heart and core values of others) is the quality of honking we seek.

### Fact 5

When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it.



They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

**Lesson:** If we have as much sense of geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we're strong.

*Adapted from Dr. Robert McNeish of Baltimore (1972)*

# SaySo Saturday celebrates six years!

by Peaches Sanders and Nancy Carter

On March 6, over 150 young people and their adult supporters came together at Guilford Technical Community College to celebrate youth leadership and SaySo's sixth birthday. Both youth and adults enjoyed workshops on LINKS programs, public speaking, the expectations of SaySo Board members, and how to foster youth leadership. Names were drawn for "birthday gifts" (door prizes) and announcements were made to introduce some exciting SaySo advancements and projects for the coming year:

- SaySo commissioned its seventh local chapter! Onslow County DSS became seventh agency to establish a local SaySo chapter during the last three years. The others are Moore, Mecklenburg, Caldwell, Wake, Cumberland, and Guilford.
- SaySo retired its first board member, Steaphon James, as he turns 24. Steaphon is a strong voice for foster youths and will undoubtedly continue to promote SaySo while in retirement.
- Going "national" has become a common occurrence for SaySo members. Makeisha is the Senior Youth representative to the National Independent Living Association (NILA). Melinda is on the planning committee for the National Alumni Network (NAN) sponsored by Casey Family Programs. This is the first attempt to pull together foster/alumni groups, so SaySo is pleased to be represented. SaySo won the "Everyday Hero" award in *Fostering Families* magazine for helping change the profile of foster youth. And of course, for the past two years, SaySo has had youth members win the National Youth of the Year award.
- SaySo elected 18 new members (three representatives from each of the six regions) to its 2004-05 board. They will be commissioned at SaySo Orientation June 11-13. They are:
  - Region 1** Peaches S. (co-chair) and Brian M. (treasurer)
  - Region 1** James P., Julia S., Jessica W.
  - Region 2** Suzanne J., Melinda M., Darnell W.
  - Region 3** Frank L., Dayshawn M., Lisa W.
  - Region 4** Megan B., Vivian J., Curtina K.
  - Region 5** Amanda B., Antwan B., Makeisha W.
  - Region 6** Jesica B., Daniel S., Lakisha T.

As you can see, SaySo is doing a lot this year - won't you join us? It's free and easy. Just fill out the form at right.

## Make a Difference Day Project

The 14<sup>th</sup> "Make a Difference Day" is Saturday, Oct. 23, 2004. Make a Difference Day, the largest national day of helping others, is sponsored by USA WEEKEND Magazine in partnership with the Points of Light Foundation. SaySo's contribution to this event will be a project called "Giving a Child a Smile."

**Giving a Child a Smile.** Did you know that many children coming into foster care often have to place their treasured possessions into TRASH BAGS because social services cannot provide a suitcase for every child? Can you imagine what it feels like to put the things closest to you into a trash bag while leaving the only home you have ever known? Well, it has happened to plenty of us, and we can tell you, IT DOES NOT FEEL GOOD! SaySo plans to change this by sponsoring a suitcase



SaySo forms foundation for retiring member. The Steaphon James Foundation helps to support the medical costs involved with Steaphon's Marfan Syndrome (a potentially fatal disease) while Medicaid is being appealed. For more information about the foundation, Marfan Syndrome, or to make a donation, contact SaySo.

collection project for Make a Difference Day. We are asking all members, local chapters, and partner organizations to support this project by helping us collect donated new or like new suitcases and duffel bags. We want every foster youth in our state to be treated with dignity during their moves (which are so hard to begin with). You can help by donating a suitcase or money for so we can purchase new bags. Contact the SaySo office (see below) to request a Project Planning Packet.

## SaySo Goes to the State Capital!

Between June 28 and July 2, 2004, nine SaySo members will serve as legislative pages for the Senate, House, and Governor's, Page Programs. These programs will give SaySo youth the opportunity to see firsthand how laws are made, and to participate in the process.

Three SaySo-involved youths will participate in each program. For the Senate and House Page programs, all youths will be sponsored by a House representative.

We are so excited by this opportunity to help legislators see that foster care has a real, human face! We also hope our participation in this program will open a door so that future SaySo members will be able to work with legislators and explain to them that foster youths have the same needs as their own children. We hope our pages have fun and pave a path for SaySo straight to the Capital!

*Peaches Sanders is co-chair of the SaySo Board of Directors. Nancy Carter is the Executive Director of Independent Living Resources, Inc.*

## Foster teens: Join SAY SO!

SAY SO 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. SAY SO'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 SAY SO 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, fill out and mail in the form the below. For more information, contact

Fill out this form and mail it to SAY SO, c/o ILR, Inc., 411 Andrews Rd., Ste. 230, Durham, NC 27705, or e-mail it to us at <sayso@ilrinc.com>.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of out-of-home-placement: \_\_\_\_\_

North Carolina County I live in now: \_\_\_\_\_

# Awaiting adoption in North Carolina

Right now there are hundreds of children in foster care in North Carolina who are free for adoption. These children long for parents who can give them a forever family. Here's a chance to learn about a few of these great kids.



Ann



Heather



Caroline



Robert



Tarasha



Larry



Princess



Dustin



Jasper



Chavida



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](http://www.adoptnckids.org)>

## Ann (d.o.b. 3/29/91)

Her foster mother says Ann is delightful and bright. She enjoys board games, short trips, and music. Ann's love of music extends to singing and she hopes to be a singer when she grows up. She has wonderful manners and a good sense of humor. Adults who have worked closely with her are very impressed with the positive changes Ann has made. (NC #034-1263)

## Caroline (d.o.b. 12/1/86)

Caroline is a serious and caring young woman with a strong sense of right and wrong. She enjoys gardening, cooking and creative decorating. She is also very involved with the youth group at her church. Caroline is an intelligent girl on the A/B honor roll at school. Counseling has significantly improved her relationships with others. (NC #004-805)

## Tarasha (d.o.b. 12/12/93)

Tarasha can be a very sweet and funny child. She is playful, creative, and likes to color, play dress ups, and visit the park. Tarasha loves other children and enjoys helping others, especially in school. She is a talented dancer and would love to take dancing lessons. She is a bright child with excellent grades and has made the school's A/B honor roll. (NC #051-1933)

## Princess (d.o.b. 4/8/89)

Princess is an energetic girl with a beautiful smile. She loves to make others laugh with jokes and imitations. Princess is an articulate writer and loves to create poetry and stories. She attends special education classes to help her adjust her behavior and deal with frustration more easily. She is an intelligent girl who makes average grades, but she is capable of doing better. (NC #041-854)

## Jasper (d.o.b. 7/15/90)

Jasper's caseworker says he is extremely charming and has a wonderful sense of humor, which makes him a lot of fun to be around. He loves to watch wrestling and Spiderman. Jasper is a trivia hound and thrives on games involving knowledge of any kind. Although he's not sure what he wants to be when he grows up, he's certain he wants to go to college. (NC #098-012)

## Heather (d.o.b. 7/23/87)

Heather is a very attractive girl with a compassionate heart. She has a sweet disposition and is very caring toward others. She is an active girl and enjoys running track. Heather loves to read anything about the Air Force and would like to work for them in a civilian capacity. Heather recently changed schools and has made outstanding progress. (NC #050-1825)

## Robert (d.o.b. 10/5/88)

Robert is a polite, charming young man who is a great help to his foster mom. He enjoys yard work and planting the garden. Robert likes being involved in family activities and spending time with his extended foster family. Robert has gone from being difficult in class to working hard and being a favorite of his classmates. (NC #092-504)

## Larry (d.o.b. 10/17/90)

Larry is a good-natured, engaging boy with a bright outlook on life. He is affectionate and has a fantastic sense of humor. He makes every opportunity a personal growth experience. Larry attends regular classes at school where he is on the honor roll. His conduct and attitude have improved tremendously in school and his aide's hours are gradually being reduced. (NC #080-620)

## Dustin (d.o.b. 10/25/91)

Dustin is an outgoing young man who loves attention. According to the adults who work with him, you can't help but fall in love with Dustin. He enjoys remote controlled cars and anything that has to do with Spiderman. Dustin wants to be a cartoon character when he grows up. He likes to eat hamburgers and play football. (NC #012-898)

## Chavida (d.o.b. 10/21/86)

An outgoing and active young lady with a variety of interests, Chavida's favorite place to be is church, whether she is singing or worshipping. She has a beautiful voice and enjoys performing with the choirs at church. Chavida is very expressive and is able to communicate her feelings well. She is creative and enjoys being challenged. (NC #092-1926)

# Parenting the hormonally challenged: Foster and adopted teens and sexuality

by Denise Goodman, PhD

Many parents feel overwhelmed or tentative about the prospect of dealing with their teenager's emerging sexuality. For many foster, relative, and adoptive parents, this task is complicated by the fact that the youth may have been sexually abused as a younger child. The following points provide a good foundation for parenting teens around sexuality issues:

**1. Be comfortable with your own sexuality and theirs, too.** Too often, adults are paralyzed when it comes to discussing sexuality with teens. Teens are sexual beings and since birth have been growing sexually as well as cognitively, physically, socially, morally, and emotionally. However, the influx of hormones and the onset of puberty put sexual growth in the forefront of the youth's developmental processes. While there are many "normal" behaviors during this stage, promiscuity, sexual aggression, and gender identity issues may be signals that the youth is dealing with past abuse issues.

**2. Build trust:** Teens who have been sexually abused often lack basic trust in adults. They may be scared of the dark, the bathroom, the basement, or a medical examination. It is critical that parents be supportive by accompanying the teen to the doctor's office or by installing night lights (without drawing attention to the teen's fear). Teenagers need to know that they can count on consistency, honesty and support from their parents to make them feel safe and secure.

**3. Set clear boundaries:** Sexually abused youth have had their basic physical boundaries violated. Foster, relative, and adoptive parents must work to restore them. Clear boundaries that apply to all family members must be set for dress, privacy, and physical touch:

**DRESS:** Examples for dress

are that every family member must be covered when coming out of the bathroom or bedroom, no coming to breakfast in your underwear, and the youth can't see company without proper clothing. Support and encouragement during shopping trips can assist in more appropriate clothing selections.

**PRIVACY:** Examples for re-establishing a sense of privacy are knocking or warning before entering bedrooms and bathrooms and making rules about when it's okay to close doors. Another rule of privacy is that no one listens to another's phone conversations or opens another's mail.

**PHYSICAL TOUCH:** Parents must approach physical touch with caution, and caregivers should avoid any contact that could be misconstrued as abuse. The parent should gain the teen's permission to hug or touch him or her. Rules for touch should generally be that "ok" touches are above the shoulder and below the knee, and the youth should have the power to decline any physical affection or touch.

**4. Learn to talk with teens about sex:** To assist youth in dealing with their victimization or to support their normal sexual growth and development, parents must use the correct language and not slang names or euphemisms. Parents who avoid conversations about sexuality force teens to learn from unreliable and inaccurate sources such as their peers, siblings, or the media. Parents can think about the five toughest questions they could be asked and prepare answers so that if the opportunity presents itself, they will be prepared.

**5. Educate the youth:** It is important to give teenagers accurate information about sex, sexuality, and human reproduction. This may be difficult for

parents who may feel education will lead to sexual intercourse and experimentation. However, teens need information, not taboos. Sexually abused children need to learn about the emotional side of sex, as they have been prematurely exposed to the physical side of sex. Both boys and girls need to learn about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents can seek help from community agencies such as Planned Parenthood and Family Planning.

**6. Use the "3 C'S" in an emergency:** It is not uncommon for a parent to encounter a "sexual situation" that involves their teen. Consequently, all parents must be prepared to handle these incidents as therapeutically as possible.

**CALM:** The parent must remain calm while confronting the situation, even if it requires getting calm or faking calm. When parents are in control of themselves, they are able to use more effective strategies to handle the situation.

**CONFRONT:** The parent must confront any behaviors that are unacceptable. This information should be given specifically and gently without threatening or shaming. Too many times parents say, "Don't do that" or "Stop it" without being specific. Teens can become confused or ashamed if they are not confronted directly and supportively.

**CORRECT:** Since a teen's behavior is purposeful, the parent must offer the youth a substitute behavior to use when the need arises. The parent should suggest alternatives that are more acceptable and appropriate given the situation. When the youth uses the alternative behavior, the parent should give positive reinforcement.

**7. Advocate:** Parents must advocate for the needs of their



All teens struggle to figure out who they are as sexual beings. Foster and adoptive parents must be ready to guide and support them.

children. Teens who have been sexually victimized may need a variety of services; therefore, the foster, adoptive, or kin parent should advocate with the social worker, agency, or the mental health center until the services are in place. This may mean that the parent calls every week or even every day and leaves messages. The parent may need to contact managers or administrators to obtain services for their teen. In other words, keep asking until you get what you need for your child.

## Conclusion

Sexuality is a normal part of human growth and development. Every teen, including you and me, struggled to figure out who we were as sexual beings. Today's teens are bombarded with sexual stimuli in music, on TV, in the movies, and on the radio. Coupled with a past history of sexual abuse, it can be a daunting task for a teen to come to terms with who they are sexually. Be supportive and understanding...and remember, a sense of humor goes a long way.

*Denise Goodman, PhD is an adoption consultant and trainer with 25 years experience in child welfare, protective services, and foster parenting. She currently conducts workshops and consultations throughout the U.S. on topics related to foster care and adoption. Address: 1824 Snouffer Road, Worthington, OH, 43085. E-mail: dagphd@aol.com*

# Program offers college scholarships to foster youth

College has a lot to offer adolescents aging out of foster care. Specifically, it can:

- Help them make the transition from family life to independence
- Enhance their earning potential, and
- Give them a chance to learn skills and experiences that will make their lives as adults richer and more rewarding (McClain, 2004).

Given these benefits, foster parents and social workers are doing everything they can to encourage foster teens to prepare for and attend higher education.

The cost of college, however, can be shocking. According to National Public Radio (2004), for the past 25 years, university tuition costs have risen faster than family incomes. In 2003, the average tuition for a four-year public college jumped 14%. Clearly, when it comes to paying for college, most foster families need all the help they can get.

Luckily, we now have the North Carolina Education and Training Voucher (NC ETV) Program. This program, which offers funds to foster youth and former foster youth to enable them to attend colleges, universities, and vocational train-

ing institutions, is now accepting applications for funding for the 2003-2004 school year. Program details include:

- Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year for college or job training.
- The funds may be used for tuition, books, or qualified living expenses.
- The funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis to students out of the North Carolina foster care system.

## Eligibility Requirements

1. If the young person is eligible for the NC LINKS program they are eligible for the ETV Program - they must have been in foster care as a teenager and must be a citizen or qualified noncitizen. They may not have personal assets of more than \$10,000.
2. They aged out of the foster care system at age 18 or were adopted from foster care with adoption finalization after their 16th birthday.
3. They must be 18, 19, or 20 years of age to enter the ETV program.
4. They have been accepted into or are enrolled in a degree, certificate, or other accredited program at a college, university, technical or vocational school

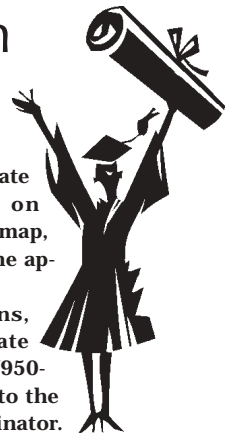
and show progress towards that degree or certificate.

To apply, go to <[www.statevoucher.org](http://www.statevoucher.org)>, click on North Carolina on the map, and follow the link to the application.

If you have questions, send e-mail to [etv@statevoucher.org](mailto:etv@statevoucher.org) or call 800/950-4673 and ask to speak to the NC ETV Program Coordinator.

## Sources

McClain, L. (2004). Preparing foster teens for college. *Fostering Families Today* (Jan./Feb. 2004), 48-48.  
National Public Radio. (2004). College tuition hikes outpacing incomes. Morning Edition, March 25. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)



## Federal Tax for Next Year

It's not too early to think about preparing your taxes, so make a note of this: every year Casey Family Programs produces a booklet explaining rules and offering tips on ways foster, adoptive, and kinship families can legally claim the maximum tax benefits available to them. You can find this handy resource at <<http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/>>

# 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 15-17, 2004 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," covers 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 15 and ends at 1 P.M. on Sun., October 17, 2004. 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 6, 2004.** For more information, contact Nancy Carter (800/820-0001; [nancy.carter@ilrinc.com](mailto: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 6, 2004

### 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?

**Place and Time:** Ramada Inn, Burlington, NC.

- Friday, 10/15: 3:00 – 8:00 P.M.
- Saturday, 10/16: 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
- Sunday, 10/17: 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

# Writing Contest

FIRST PRIZE: \$100

SECOND PRIZE: \$50

THIRD PRIZE: \$25

Send us a letter or short essay answering this question:

**Did you ever have a social worker you really liked? What made that person special?**

**Deadline: August 11, 2004**

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, 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**

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.

**NEW**

Submissions that do not appear in the print edition of *Fostering Perspectives* may be published in a new newsletter, *Carolina Originals*. Authors and artists published in *Carolina Originals* will receive a free copy of the issue in which their work appears.

## 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 v8#2**

1. How old is Kay Gillis' goddaughter?
2. What is the purpose of the ten-day camp Passage to Adoption?
3. Name four things social workers can do to support foster parents when placements end.
4. The majority of children who are adopted from foster care are eligible for adoption assistance. What things are usually covered under adoption assistance?
5. What are Elizabeth Cassidy's concerns about using food as leverage in parenting foster children?
6. What is "Undy Sunday" and when is it?
7. Name three things that Caroline likes to do.
8. What did the NC Foster Parents Association do last year that proved its advocacy efforts have a real and positive impact on North Carolina's foster parents?
9. What project is SaySo undertaking as its contribution to Make A Difference Day?
10. What are some of the ways foster, relative, and adoptive parents can help restore physical boundaries for youths who have been sexually abused?

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**fostering perspectives**  
Views on Foster Care and Adoption in North Carolina