

# fostering perspectives

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

## Pages tell their own story: In the General Assembly, foster children find a voice

by Amy Gardner, Raleigh News and Observer

Feb. 24, 2005, RALEIGH—Chris Shaw would like to think he had something to do with a \$25 raise state lawmakers approved last June for families who take in foster children.

Shaw, 18, is a foster child who was first removed from an abusive home when he was 2. But this week, Shaw is far from that world. For the second year in a row, he is serving as a page at the General Assembly, delivering bills, ferrying messages and learning how government works.

Shaw and eight other foster children also hope to teach lawmakers a thing or two. They are putting a human face to the 10,000 foster children in North Carolina whose welfare depends largely on government. And they want lawmakers to know that they are good kids with bright futures who are worth the investment.

Shaw is a polite, soft-spoken junior at E.E. Smith High School in Fayetteville whose every utterance seems to feature a "yes, ma'am" or a "no, ma'am." He sits straight and quiet at the side of the Senate chamber as lawmakers make their way through the daily calendar. He keeps his small frame tidy in a three-button black suit and shiny shoes.

Teenage pages for the House and Senate often earn their spots through family connections. That was intimidating to Shaw at first.

"When I first got here, I did feel like, since we were foster children, they were going to get on us and look for us to make a mistake," Shaw said. "But it turned out they treated us just like regular kids. Actually, the foster children behaved better."

Shaw is a member of SaySo, a statewide organization providing support and teaching life skills to teenage foster children. SaySo, which receives state funding, helped arrange for the foster children to serve as pages. The group's acronym stands for Strong Able Youth Speaking Out.

"The voices of foster youth tend to be silent voices, and we wanted to make a difference in that," said SaySo executive director Nancy Carter. "We told the foster children: 'We don't want them to create policy about you without you.'"

That approach may have made an impact last year, when lawmakers raised the monthly payment made to families who host foster children. The proposal nearly died in the state Senate, but Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue urged lawmakers to reconsider it after meeting Shaw.

The issue of payments for foster families has been championed for several years by state Rep. Jeff Barnhart, a Republican from Cabarrus County and a persistent advocate for foster care and adoption issues.



Chris Shaw, a Senate page, talks with Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue. Shaw is one of nine foster children who are pages. Photo courtesy of the News & Observer.

But monthly payments are just one concern for foster families and children, Barnhart said. He would like to see more money for training, support groups and life-skills education for foster families. He hopes to push the monthly rate up another \$25 — total cost: \$1.6 million — but he's not optimistic in a year when deep cuts and tax increases are being considered to balance another tight budget.

"In my area it's hard to find foster parents," Barnhart said. "We need to have good homes, training, some kind of support network. But of course there's a cost."

Barnhart didn't even know that foster children are working at the legislature this week. That's just fine with Shaw, who wanted to blend right in.

"They would never be able to look at me and say, 'Oh, that's a foster child,'" he said.

Shaw is pleased to have learned how the legislature works — if only to rule it out as a career.

"It's interesting, but it's not interesting enough to do," he said with a confident grin. "If I ever do politics, I want to be the first black president."

There isn't anything, he added, that a foster kid can't do.

Amy Gardner writes for the Raleigh News and Observer. She can be reached at 919/829-8902 or [agardner@newsobserver.com](mailto:agardner@newsobserver.com)

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# A new resource for post-adoption support in North Carolina

by John McMahon

When it comes to finding adoptive families for children in foster care, North Carolina has a lot to celebrate. In 1990, there were just 126 foster care adoptions in our state. In 2000, there were more than 1,500. Thanks to this trend, there are now almost as many children receiving adoption assistance payments in North Carolina as there are in foster care.

Our achievement is echoed on a national level, where the annual number of adoptions from foster care increased from 25,644 in 1995 to 53,000 in 2002. What's more, researchers project that nationally the number of children adopted from foster care will continue to grow faster than the foster care population for at least the next 20 years.

We should be proud. Our society is beginning to embrace the notion that there is a family for every child. More importantly, we are expressing this belief in new laws, policies, funding, and ways of working.

Of course, "our" success depends entirely on the willingness of families to open their homes and hearts to children in foster care. "These families really are miracle workers," says Sandy Cook, executive director of Children's Home Society of North Carolina. A lot of what they accomplish with their children, she says, "is simply through common sense and love."

Foster parents, specifically, deserve a lot of credit. They make up at least 64% of those who adopt children from foster care.

But Cook and others familiar with adoption also know that for some adoptive families, love and common sense are not enough. To succeed with children adopted from foster care, the majority of whom have special needs and many of whom are older, families need ongoing support in various forms. Indeed, there seems to be a strong relationship between supportive services and the health, well-being, and stability of adoptive families.

The importance of post-adoption services is reflected in North Carolina policy, which says after the adoption agencies continue to have "a moral obligation and a social responsibility for the welfare" of the children they helped become adopted.

## A New Resource

In July 2004 the NC Division of Social Services took an important step toward developing the infrastructure North Carolina needs to support its adoptive families. At that time it awarded a total of \$1 million to four private providers to create a range of services that will make it easier for county departments of social services and others to support families in the years that follow the finalization of their adoptions. The money for this effort comes from federal Title IV-B funding, subpart 2.



There's a new source of support open to North Carolina's

Grant recipients were Another Choice for Black Children, Children's Home Society of NC, Martin County Community Action, and Mountain Youth Resources.

The overall goal of this program is to help adoptive families find parenting solutions and quality services in their communities. These agencies are committed to providing families and children the best support services possible in order to ensure happy and successful adoptions.

When this project is fully implemented, adoption professionals and parents who have adopted children from foster care in

North Carolina will have access to:

- A toll-free "warm line" they can call for information and referrals
- A post-adoption support group in their region
- A variety of services customized to meet the needs of adoptive families in their region, including crisis intervention and preventive services

Presently these four providers are working to build strong partnerships with all professionals in the areas of the state they serve.

If you have adopted a child from foster care in North Carolina and believe your family could benefit from post-adoptive support, refer to the box below and contact the agency responsible for your county.

## Additional Resources

To learn about the other forms of support North Carolina offers to adoptive families, read the article "Post-Adoption Support Efforts in North Carolina: An Overview," which can be found online at <[www.practicenotes.org/vol10\\_n1/NC\\_effort.htm](http://www.practicenotes.org/vol10_n1/NC_effort.htm)>.

## NEW POST-ADOPTION SUPPORT RESOURCES

### Mountain Youth Resources, Tel: 828/586-8958

Serving Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, and Yancey counties and the Qualla Boundary

### Children's Home Society, Tel: 800/632-1400

Serving Alamance, Anson, Cabarrus, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Granville, Guilford, Montgomery, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rockingham, Rowan, Stanly, Stokes, Surry, Union, and Vance counties

### Another Choice for Black Children, Tel: 800/774-3534

Serving Bladen, Brunswick, Chatham, Columbus, Cumberland, Duplin, Durham, Edgecombe, Franklin, Greene, Halifax, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Nash, New Hanover, Pender, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wake, Warren, Wayne, and Wilson counties

### Martin County Community Action, Tel: 866/803-0134

Serving Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Northampton, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, and Washington counties

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### Mission

*Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the skill development among North Carolina's child welfare workers, foster parents, and adoptive parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system can exchange ideas.

### Disclaimer

The opinions 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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### Online Edition

<[www.fosteringperspectives.org](http://www.fosteringperspectives.org)>  
To be notified via e-mail when new issues of *Fostering Perspectives* are available online, send a message to [johnmcmahon@mindspring.com](mailto:johnmcmahon@mindspring.com) with "FP subscribe" in the subject line.

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# NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Visit Our Web Site at <<http://www.ncfapa.org>>

## New look, new vision

by Sheryl Ewing, President of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Our association has changed its name to the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NCFAPA). We have been serving adoptive parents for years, but now everyone will know that! The name change comes with a new logo, new mission and new vision.



Sheryl Ewing

after you adopt. Many adoptive families have expressed that they feel alone once the adoption papers are finalized. We are working to fix that.

Many of you have joined or renewed your membership with NCFAPA and many were able to join our annual conference in April 2005. We thank you for your support.

Together, we are making a difference in the lives of children and parents.

But we still have lots more work to do, and we need your help. Please consider working with our Board of Directors on one of the standing committees. We need year-round help with our Conference and Training Committee. Do you have great ideas about legislative improvements? Sign up for our Advocacy Committee. We also need people with financial skills, grant writing, and fundraising—please consider joining our Finance Committee. These committees meet several times a year and your input would be invaluable.

Finally, as your outgoing President, I thank



you for your support. Serving five years on the Board has been an incredible experience and one I will always cherish. I have had so many great opportunities and have met so many wonderful, dedicated people working to improve lives for children. I invite you to get more intimately involved. I promise it will be time well spent. I really feel like we have made a big difference in these five years and I am glad to have been a part of that.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

### Our Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association is to promote quality foster and adoptive services through collaborative advocacy, education, resources, reunification, and networking.

### Our Vision

- Foster, adoptive, and kinship parents and children are valued and supported by professionals and the community at large.
- Foster, adoptive, and kinship parents participate as fully integrated professional partners at all levels of the North Carolina child welfare system.
- NCFAPA is a resource for foster, adoptive and kinship parents for information, training, support, and networking.
- NCFAPA is a highly effective and responsive organization able to carry out its mission and goals.
- NCFAPA is part of a national movement of collaborative partners that promotes system change for quality foster, reunification, and adoptive services and support.
- NCFAPA effectively advocates for the needs of foster, adoptive, and kinship children and parents.

As you can see, our Board of Directors has developed a family-centered vision. We want all foster, adoptive, and kinship parents to be valued, integrated partners of the child welfare system. We want to be an organization that meets your needs and provides a voice for you at the state level. We are here to help you as you do the incredibly important work of helping the children in our state.

We are also involved with the NC Division of Social Services and the four contract agencies providing post-adoption services across the state. We want you to continue to feel supported and have training opportunities even

## Support Us So We Can Support You!

**The goal of the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent 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: NCFAPA at UNCG, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION.

**Regular membership** is open to any foster or adoptive parent in good standing with NCDSS and is \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a couple. **Associate membership** is \$25 per person and is for other persons, in good standing with NCDSS, but 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.: \_\_\_\_\_

# What foster parents need to know about meth by John McMahon

If you have been paying attention to the news you may know that abuse of the drug methamphetamine, or "meth," is having a growing impact on North Carolina. If you are a foster parent, you already know that many of the families involved with child welfare struggle with substance abuse, and so you may be asking yourself: are there things I need to know to support children and families involved with meth?

The short answer is, yes and no. On the one hand, child welfare agencies in North Carolina are working with meth-using parents in the same way they work with parents who abuse other drugs: by ensuring the safety of their children, connecting parents with treatment resources, and monitoring their progress. Child welfare agencies are using strategies such as shared parenting and child and family team meetings with meth-involved families only when they can ensure the safety of children, foster parents, and everyone else involved.

What makes meth different from other drugs is that some users have learned to make the drug in dangerous home "labs." Because children are present in about one in every three meth labs, foster parents need to know about labs and the threat they pose to children who have been exposed to them.

## Meth Lab Basics

Meth users have discovered a way to make the drug in small batches in homemade "labs," using readily-available ingredients. These ingredients include cold medicine, matches,

drain cleaner, and paint thinner. Although it is extremely dangerous, making meth does not require a chemistry background or special equipment.

In North Carolina meth labs have been found in homes, apartments, hotel rooms, vehicles, and close to schools. Meth labs can be highly mobile; some fit into a duffle bag or the trunk of a car.

Statistics from California indicate that most cooks make meth 48 to 72 times a year. It takes between four and six hours to cook the drug. For every pound of methamphetamine they make, these labs generate five to seven pounds of toxic waste.

## Effects on Children

Threats faced by children exposed to meth labs include the following.

**Chemical contamination.** A recent study of meth labs found that "chemicals spread throughout the house. The methamphetamine is deposited everywhere, from walls and carpets to microwaves, tabletops and clothing. Children living in those labs might as well be taking the drug directly."

Indeed, approximately 35% of children found in meth labs test positive for toxic levels of chemicals in their bodies, including meth. Children in meth labs most commonly come into contact with chemicals through inhalation and absorption through the skin. Long-term exposure to meth lab toxins can damage the nerves, lungs, kidneys, liver, eyes, and skin.

It is not uncommon for children removed



**10 Years of Meth:** A meth user at age 31 (L) and age 41 (R). Images courtesy of the NC State Bureau of Investigation.

from meth labs to have chemically-induced asthma or pneumonia that clears up after the children are out of the lab.

**Fires and explosions.** Experts report that approximately one in every six meth labs seized by authorities is discovered because of a fire or an explosion caused by careless handling and overheating of volatile, hazardous chemicals and waste and unsafe manufacturing methods.

**Neglect.** When parents use or make meth, their children often lack necessities such as food, water, and shelter, and they frequently lack adequate medical care, including proper immunizations and dental care. In addition, the cycle of meth abuse has a built-in phase when parents "crash" and are unable to look after their children. Children in meth-using families may also face hazards such as used hypodermic needles and razor blades.

**Abuse.** Exposure to parents intoxicated by meth may compromise child safety: when high, users often exhibit poor judgment, confusion, irritability, paranoia, and increased violence. Because meth increases the sexual appetites of users, children of meth users may be at greater risk for sexual abuse, either by parents themselves or by other adults coming in and out of the home.

**Other risks.** Loaded firearms are found in easy-to-reach locations in the vast majority of meth labs. Dangerous animals and booby traps designed to protect meth labs pose added physical hazards. Children may even be involved in the manufacturing process, but receive no protective gear.

## Effects on Communities

Meth labs have a tremendous impact on communities. In North Carolina typical cleanup costs for a meth lab are between \$4,000 and \$10,000. These costs must be absorbed by property owners and local and state government. Unlike other drugs, meth creates little revenue for law enforcement. Instead of seizing homes and valuables that can offset interdiction costs, officials are left with costly cleanup and ruined properties.

cont. p. 5

## Meth and Meth Labs in North Carolina

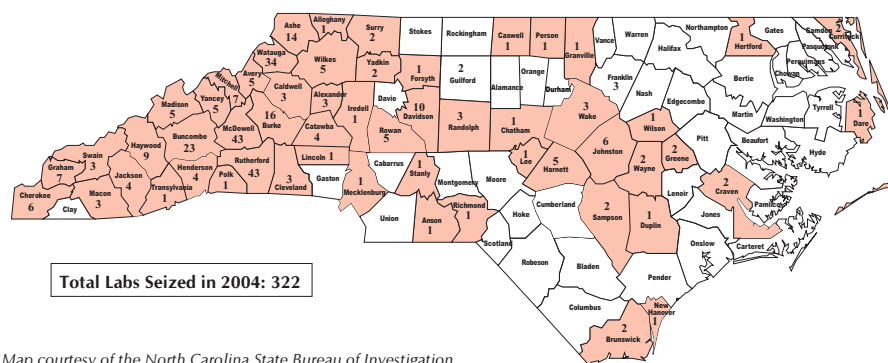
Meth lab seizures in North Carolina increased twenty-fold in the last four years. In 2001, 34 meth labs were found; in 2002 there were 98; in 2003 there were 177; in 2004 there were 322. North Carolina is doing what it can to combat this trend because it can get much worse: some states seize more than 2,000 meth labs a year.

Rural communities are particularly at risk. Teens aged 12 to 14 who live in smaller towns are 104% more likely to

use meth than those who live in larger cities. Meth "cooks" often site their labs in rural areas to hide the odors produced during manufacture.

The trend is for labs to spread from rural to suburban to urban areas. Relatively few labs have been found in larger cities such as Charlotte and Raleigh, but they are becoming more common in small towns in western and eastern North Carolina.

## Meth Labs Seized in North Carolina Counties, 2004



Map courtesy of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation.

## Meth Labs Have Implications for Foster Parents

Meth labs also pose a threat to the general public and the environment. Because clothing and other articles are so easily contaminated by meth production, toxins can quickly spread from one place to another, requiring involved cleanup. Meth cooks often dispose of lab waste by burning it, dumping it in streams, fields, and down toilets, or by simply leaving it behind in hotels, on roadsides, and in other public areas.

### North Carolina's Response

Our state has responded by:

**Obtaining Federal Funds.** North Carolina received a grant through the federal Drug Endangered Child program; Watauga, Johnston, Ashe, and Harnett counties received a total of \$312,000 to fund meth-response efforts.

**Meth Summit.** Attorney General Roy Cooper convened a group of experts in October 2003 to develop a comprehensive strategy to fight meth. The summit's final report is available at <http://www.ncdoj.com>.

**New Laws and Funding.** Several new laws to fight meth were passed in 2004:

- Penalties for making meth increased greatly, from likely probation to a mandatory five to 17 years behind bars.
- There are additional penalties for making meth in the presence of children, or if someone is injured while seizing the lab.
- If someone consumes meth you made and dies of overdose, you can now be charged with murder.
- Possessing ingredients in quantities sufficient to make meth can be punished with up to five years in prison, if prosecutors prove intent to make meth.
- Funding for additional SBI mobile clandestine lab response units.
- Funding for child protective services policy development and child welfare training. The new policy is online at <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-65/man/CSs1000.htm>.

**Limiting Precursors.** California found that legally restricting the sale of chemical key ingredients needed to make meth is one of the most effective ways of combating the drug's spread. After that state enacted laws restricting the sale of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, lab busts were cut in half, from 2,090 in 1999 to 1,130 in 2002. In North Carolina, Attorney General Cooper hopes we can achieve the same results by asking retailers to apply restrictions voluntarily. Currently many retail chains voluntarily restrict sales of products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine.

Cooper told the *Charlotte Observer* in 2004

When a child has been recently exposed to a methamphetamine lab (within the past 72 hours) the risk to foster parents and other placement providers is minimal; the child has been fully assessed by qualified professionals and, if necessary, decontaminated. However, to protect yourself and others in your home and for the welfare of the child, be prepared to take the following actions:

**Decontamination Precautions.** Place any clothes worn by the child into a plastic bag until they can be washed. The clothes should be washed separately on the hottest setting.

Rewash a second time and air dry outside the home, not in the dryer. Run the washer once empty to clean it thoroughly. Shoes should be washed with the clothes if possible or wiped off with soap and hot water.

The child should bathe in very warm, but not hot water. Use lots of soap. Wash the child completely including hair, face, between toes, and other hard to reach places. Drain the tub and give the child a second bath to remove any residual chemicals. Drain and clean the tub thoroughly afterwards.

Unfortunately, because of concerns about possible chemical contamination, children exposed to meth labs must leave behind all their personal belongings when they enter foster care. Foster parents should anticipate this and continue working collaboratively with agency social workers to ensure children have what they need in terms of clothes, stuffed animals, toys, shoes, etc.

**Seek Information.** Be sure that the placing social worker provides you with:

- As much information as possible about the extent of the child's exposure to chemicals and/or toxins
- A description of medical treatment the child has received
- Information about any follow-up medical appointments the child may require

**Family-Centered Strategies.** Child welfare agencies are using strategies such as shared parenting and child and family team meetings with meth-involved families only when they can ensure the safety of children, foster

parents, and everyone else involved. Even when face-to-face meetings with parents are not possible, it will still be helpful to the parents and child to have ongoing communication through an exchange of letters, photos, etc.

**Monitor Child Well-Being.** Because some effects of chemical exposure can develop slowly, foster parents should seek immediate medical attention if they notice the child experiencing:

- Headache
- Drowsiness
- Unusual movements such as tremors, shaking, jumpiness, agitation, or seizures
- Trouble breathing, coughing, or poor color
- Fever
- Hallucinations or mental confusion
- Any other unusual symptom that seems severe

**Anticipate Emotional Trauma/Stress.** It is likely that the circumstances of the discovery of the illegal methamphetamine laboratory and removal have been traumatic for the child. Often labs are seized in SWAT-style police raids and analyzed by people in Hazmat "moon suits." One or more parents may have been arrested. In addition, the child may have been subjected to neglect or physical or sexual abuse. Foster parents should ensure the child has a warm, stable environment and be prepared for emotional reactions from the child that may follow placement.

**For More Information.** To learn more about meth, visit *Training Matters*, vol. 6, no. 2 ([www.trainingmatters-nc.org](http://www.trainingmatters-nc.org)) and *Children's Services Practice Notes*, vol. 10, no. 2 ([www.practicenotes.org](http://www.practicenotes.org)).

that we will know soon enough whether this voluntary approach works. If it doesn't, the state could seek a legislative solution.

### Recognizing a Meth Lab

Although not in and of themselves conclusive evidence, the following could signal the presence of a meth lab.

- Unusual, strong odors (like cat urine, ether, ammonia, or acetone) coming from sheds, outbuildings, other structures, fields, orchards, campsites, or especially vehicles (older model cars, vans) etc.
- Possession of large amounts of over-the-counter cold/allergy medications containing ephedrine or pseudo-ephedrine, or large quantities of solvents such as Acetone, Coleman Fuel, Toluene, etc.
- Discarded cold medicine/ephedrine bottles, coffee filters with oddly-colored stains, lithium batteries, antifreeze containers, lantern fuel cans, propane tanks.
- The mixing of unusual chemicals in a house, garage, or barn, or the possession of chemical glassware by persons not involved in the chemical industry.

- Heavy traffic during late night hours.
- Residences with fans in windows in cold weather, or blacked-out windows.
- Renters who pay their landlords in cash.

### If You Suspect a Meth Lab

Seventy-five percent of meth labs found in North Carolina have been "stumbled upon." If you suspect a meth lab take these steps:

- Remain calm. Give yourself time to think.
- Do NOT approach suspects. They are often armed and may be dangerous.
- Do NOT enter the lab area. Do not try to clean up the area. Evidence should remain undisturbed for investigation by law enforcement.
- If you are in the lab already, find an excuse to leave immediately. Never try to identify unknown substances by smelling or touching them.
- Keep a safe distance. Hazardous materials may ignite or the fumes may overcome you.
- Promptly notify local law enforcement.

For references, see the online version of this article at [www.fosteringperspectives.org](http://www.fosteringperspectives.org)

# 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've been a foster parent for five years. During that time I've had more than 20 children come and go. Recently, our six-year-old foster son was placed with a relative in another state after being in our home for two years. This loss is particularly hard, and I am not handling it well. I'm not sleeping and I'm on the verge of tears every day. I'm not sure I can continue doing this. Can you help me?

First, let me tell you that you are not alone in your struggles. After forming strong relationships with the foster children who come into your heart and home, saying good-bye is never easy. Even though you know the relationship is temporary, the knowledge does not take away the pain you feel. As a foster parent, I hope you realize that you will forever be in this child's heart. Every act of love and sacrifice that you made for him will always be with him. The memory of the time you shared together will help him feel valued and loved throughout his life. You have had a wonderful and amazing impact in his life.

In trying to get through the days to come, I hope you find peace in knowing how powerful your relationship was and will always be to him. It is okay to need the support of your family and friends during this time. You may also want to consider joining a local support group where you can talk with other foster parents who understand what you are going through. Also, give yourself time to heal. You do not have to make a decision today as to whether or not you want to continue to be a foster parent. If you decide that you want to take a break from fostering, there are other ways to help children. You can make a positive difference in a child's life by being a mentor, tutor, or respite parent. Regardless of what you do in the future, always remember that you have made a positive difference in this child's life.

**Question:** I am not sure there is a support group in my area. Where can I find out if there is one? If there isn't one in my area, how would I go about starting one?

I am glad you are seeking a support group. There are times on our journey when we need to network with other parents more so than other times. Studies have shown that parents who have a support network are more likely to continue fostering. So, even if you do not need a support group right now, there may be a family attending one in your area that needs some advice from you. I encourage everyone to seek out a parent support group.

NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network and the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association work together to collect information on the foster and adoptive parent support groups across our state. You can contact either organization toll-free (1-866-623-7248 or 1-877-625-4371) and we can let you know if there is one in your area.

NCFAPA also has materials available that guide you through the steps of starting and sustaining a support group. This has proven to be a valuable tool. We can also match you up with a Board member in your region who will help you in this very important mission.

*Responses by Jeanne Preisler, Director, NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network*



**Undie Sunday!**  
May is Foster Care Awareness Month

Throughout the month of May, the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association is sponsoring Undie Sunday. North Carolina has over 10,000 youth in foster care. We will be collecting new socks and underwear to be distributed to these children and teenagers. We need your help! Please join us in this effort. Host a collection site in your faith community or civic group, and/or help us distribute to local county departments of social services and foster parent support groups. Complete the form at right to get started.

## Undie Sunday Volunteer Sign-Up

- I want to organize a collection effort in my community.
- I want to help distribute collected items in my community.

### Volunteer Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Tel: \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### Collection Site Information

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# Governor proclaims May “Foster Care Month”

RALEIGH—Governor Easley has proclaimed May 2005 to be Foster Care Month in North Carolina. His proclamation reads:



Gov. Easley

WHEREAS, there are approximately 10,112 children of all ages in the North Carolina foster care system right now; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to provide these children with safe, stable, and nurturing family environments; and

WHEREAS, every day, citizens choose to become foster parents and open their homes, hearts, and lives to these children; and

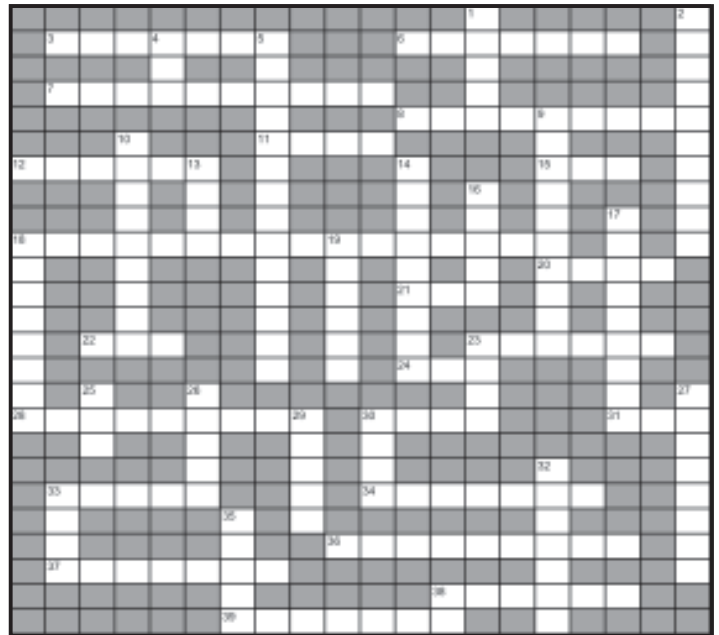
WHEREAS, there were 1,371 children adopted from foster care last fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, foster parents frequently adopt their foster children, which results in a continual need for more foster families; and

WHEREAS, numerous individuals, communities, and public and private organizations are committed to efforts to ensure children’s safety, well-being, and permanence;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MICHAEL F. EASLEY, Governor of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim May 2005, as “**FOSTER CARE MONTH**” in North Carolina. I commend this observance to our citizens as an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of foster parents and child welfare professionals and to urge all citizens to volunteer their time, energy, and talents on behalf of children in foster care. I further encourage the community, businesses, faith-based organizations, and families to participate in efforts to recruit and support foster families in North Carolina.

# Crossword Puzzle Theme: “18 & Beyond”



### Across

3. You should schedule an appt. with this person twice a year
6. People you enjoy hanging out with
7. If you arrive on time everyday, your boss will think you are \_\_\_\_\_
8. You need this if you have a car
11. You may wear this to a job interview
12. You may want to continue with this after 12th grade
15. Happy 3-letter word, rhymes with 31 across
18. If you don't go to a 4 year school, you may attend this
20. If your friends do not live far away, they are
21. At restaurants, it is customary to leave at least a 15% \_\_\_\_\_
22. Abbreviate for public agency that helps people find job
23. You will need this when you are looking for a job
24. You go to the eye doctor to help you do this
28. Many people get these several times a month
30. Try to avoid getting into too much financial
31. In college, you may still have a \_\_\_\_\_ of homework
33. Have you contacted your \_\_\_\_\_ Coordinator to help you plan
34. \_\_\_\_\_ insurance is handy if you have to go to a doctor
36. What you have to do to get a job
37. Your boss will like that you can be \_\_\_\_\_ with an important task
38. Everyone should spend money according to their \_\_\_\_\_
39. You may choose to go into a branch of the Armed \_\_\_\_\_

### Down

1. Cable, Telephone, Insurance, etc.
2. Where you might go to school after you graduate
4. Men typically wear a suit and \_\_\_\_\_ to an interview
5. Car, Bus, Taxi, etc.
9. You typically need three of these to get a job
10. People who help pay the bills
13. If you go to college, you may need this to help pay for it
14. Electric, Water, etc.
16. College kids usually don't get enough
17. Your first place to live may be this
18. You will probably need this type of account
19. Be careful how many of these cards you get
23. You will pay this monthly to your landlord
25. This may help you pay the bills
26. Just say no to them
27. Join SAYSO. Get \_\_\_\_\_ in your future
29. NC Youth Organization
30. If you go to college, you may live here
32. You should consider opening this type of bank account
33. If you get good grades, you could be on the Dean's
35. Many companies pay you every two \_\_\_\_\_
38. \_\_\_\_\_ All You Can Be

Answers are on SaySo's website at <[www.saysoinc.org](http://www.saysoinc.org)>

## A word from the wise

Wisdom is a funny thing. We may have suffered through trials and learned countless lessons, but few of us will readily admit to being wise. Somehow it is much easier for us to talk about what we *don't* know than to share our insights.



And yet we all know something about what it takes to make it through this life. Wisdom is there inside each of us, waiting to be tapped.

That's what we were trying to get at with the writing contest in the fall 2004 issue of *Fostering Perspectives*, which asked current and former foster children to write a letter, based on what they know now, giving advice to an imaginary boy or girl about to enter foster care for the first time.

As you can see from this and the following pages, the response we received was remarkable. The advice these young writers chose to share with other children ranged from the personal ("I know you can do it because I believe in you") to the universal ("everybody makes mistakes"), from the worldly ("don't steal or lie") to the spiritual ("know God is always with you"). They generously share the simple but vitally important things they have learned: *Keep your head up. You can't run away from yourself. Don't give up. Be patient. If I can make it, so can you.*

We hope you will let these letters touch you and inspire you to look for—and make use of—the wisdom in yourself and those around you.

—John McMahon, Editor

Additional essays from kids in care on this theme can be found in the online version of this issue at <[www.fosteringperspectives.org](http://www.fosteringperspectives.org)>.

### Rasheen, age 13

#### Poem

Dear child,  
 When things don't go your way  
 (*Keep your head up*)  
 When you are in and out of foster home  
 after foster home  
 (*Keep your head up*)  
 Because one day you will have a family  
 and a place to call home  
 (*Keep your head up*)

Just when you think there are no more bright and good days in your life, and when you look around and think no one is there, look up into the sky, because my God is there. If you keep Him in your life at all times He will always look over you, and make sure you are doing fine.

*Rasheen received \$15 for having his work published.*

### Gabby, age 12, First Prize

1

Being a foster child is difficult, but learning to deal with your feelings will help you to get through it.

I had just turned seven when DSS took me away from my mom. During the two and a half years that I was in the foster care system I lived with two different families. I learned that being a foster child feels different from living with your biological family. I constantly had to deal with negative feelings, visits with my mom, answering personal questions from others, and dealing with grief. . . .

The hardest situation for me was the weekly visits with my mom. The visits were so hard because I had to leave her over and over again. Saying "goodbye" wasn't the easiest thing to do, so after the visits I would get angry. Sometimes I would get angry at the littlest things . . . . Before I learned how to deal with anger, I would tear things up, tantrum for hours on end, take things that weren't mine, and last but not least, I would refuse to do anything that my foster parents asked me to do.

Since that time I have come a very long way. I have adapted to other, positive ways to deal with angry feelings. I would:

- Kick a tree
- Go outside and scream
- Write letters to people I was mad at (*I normally didn't send them!*)
- Throw a pillow in the air, and then punch it
- Draw a tornado (I drew a tornado by scribbling exceedingly hard, in a tornado shape, letting the anger flow through my pencil onto the paper)
- Make a list of things I was mad at, and then rip it up

Try these the next time you get angry. They really help!

Another difficult issue that popped up is people asking me personal questions. Some nosy, ignorant person would ask, "Did your parents die?" or, "Why didn't your real family want you?" I felt insulted by this and ashamed because they reminded me of my past. I felt my past was my fault, so that brought up a sudden pang of guilt. That guilt caused me to do some things without thinking. . . .

If I could relive that two and one half years, I would have handled my sadness over the loss of my family differently. I would:

- Write a diary to relieve grief
- Cry instead of keeping the grief inside
- Draw pictures of the sad moments
- Share my feelings with a caring adult or friend

The grieving process takes a long time and is stressful. I often felt I would never get over the loss, but time makes it easier.

Being a foster child is difficult, but learning to deal with your feelings will help you to get through it. I am still working on how to deal with leaving my biological family. Every day I have to remind myself of the positive ways to handle my emotions.

*Gabby received \$100 for winning the writing contest.*



## Keyona, age 12, Second Prize

2

I have been in foster care for a year and a couple of months. I have been in four different foster homes, Act Together Crisis Care three times, and now I am in a group home. I remember the first time I was placed in DSS custody. I was very confused because I didn't know how to respond to it. Here is some advice on how to survive in foster care.

The first suggestion is to try not to worry about your past. Try to focus on school work, sports, and your career plans for the future. I understand that you might be pretty upset, but don't let anger keep you from doing what you are capable of doing no matter what happens. Just keep faith and you will make it thought, I promise!

The second recommendation is try not to be mad at your parents or guardians because of the choices and decisions they made. Just try to put that behind you and keep your head held high. Do not be ashamed of your parents' mistakes: they are only human. Everybody makes mistakes. Don't feel like it is your fault and blame yourself because that is not your problem. Try not to stop loving your parents. Just don't make the same mistakes that they did.

Another thing I must tell you—if it's the only thing you remember—**DO NOT RUN AWAY!**

Also, people are going to talk, no matter what. So try not to let that bother you because that's the way it is in this life. These are the four main things you should remember through your foster care journey.

*Keyona's letter won second prize, for which she was awarded \$50.*

## Angelique, age 12, Third Prize

3

I was put in foster care at the age of four years old with my brother and sister. When my social worker came I was scared, mad, and sad. My brother was ten years old and he was mad, so mad that he ran behind the door and tried to hide. My sister was just a baby. . . .

When the caseworker rung the doorbell I cried and got madder. She told us to get in the car. . . . We drove for hours. We finally got to a house. My caseworker said that we are here. When you go to your first home you may feel scared.

When we went into the house the caseworker was talking to the foster parent. She told the foster mom that she is going to take the two girls. I was mad, because I thought my brother Alton was going to stay with us too. I was very upset. I did not talk to anyone. I did not play with anything. I threw toys. Do not do that because you are just going to make things worse.

The caseworker left about 30 minutes later. I felt like yelling from the top of my lungs. We did not stay in our first placement for a long time. My sister did not really like that home either because she was acting out also, don't do that either.

Our second placement was with a foster parent that was a teacher. We stayed with her about two years. We left there because I had some problems stealing, lying, and acting up in school. I guess I did those things because I did not want to stay there. Don't steal or lie because it is not the right thing to do—it will be on your record. If you have a problem like me stop it at a young age. I have been in five homes. Acting out makes it hard to get a family.

My sixth placement was my final placement. When I went to visit them they said that I could go ahead and call them mommy and daddy. I was so happy because my sister and I finally had a family. I hope you do not have to go through six homes to get one family that loves you. I have two sisters, one brother, and the **best parents ever**.

*Angelique's letter won third prize, for which she was awarded \$25.*

## AJ, age 10

**Talk about how you feel with your foster parents and your social worker.**

Just know God is always with you. If you keep on praying, God will sooner or later answer. Just know you will be alright. I am writing this letter to you because I want you to know that even

though you're a foster child, a lot of people still love you. Trust me, I know because I'm a foster child, too. So I know how you feel. I felt very uncomfortable, sad, and afraid.

I first went to an emergency home for just a weekend, then my placement home. Here is some advice I'd like to give to you that will help you feel better. Talk about how you feel with your social worker: she's/he's there to help you. Next, get to know the foster family, ask them the rules, and try to follow them. You might want to ask what are the daily routine, or responsibilities. Just know you're in a safe place and the people are there to help you. If you have any concerns, talk to them. Try not to be shy: introduce yourself to kids in your new neighborhood. Remember, to get a friend, you have to be a friend. Good luck.

*AJ received \$15 for having his letter published.*

## Courtney, age 18

**My advice to you is, don't leave the system.**

I was in the system for 18 and a half years and then I decided to leave the system because I got tired of it. That was a bad choice I made. My advice to you is, don't leave the system . . . because once you are out, you're out. No more coming back to it! It's gone.

*Courtney received \$15 for having her letter published.*

## Kim, age 16

For the people like me that cannot go home—I am really sorry about that. But listen, if you can't go home, it's not your fault, okay? But if it helps, I know that you can do it because I believe in you. Also, a lot of people love and care for you, even if you don't know them. Your friend, Kim

*Kim received \$15 for having her letter published.*

# Kids' Pages

Words and Pictures by and for Children in Foster Care

Vol. 9, No. 2 • May 2005

## ...emo kid...

A poem by Devon, age 15

this is a story of...  
a kid that was emo...  
and in every direction...  
his heart would just let go...

he had a few friends...  
he thought that he knew...  
but ever he need them...  
they never came through...

he once had a family...  
but now they're long lost...  
and being himself...  
is the price that it cost...

his mother betrayed him...  
his father the same...  
the only thing they feel for him...  
is a feeling of shame...

he was so many things...  
all wrapped into one...  
that when he let his feelings show...  
the world began to shun...

and what the world started...  
the kid now knew...  
that it would be impossible...  
for him to pull through...

what did this kid do???...  
to deserve such a fate...  
a life filled with sorrow...  
sadness and hate...

the kid did his best...  
and tried not to frown...  
but all of the hatred...  
slowly brought him down...

his teachers did nothing...  
his friends did the same...  
and now his heart was...  
consumed by the pain...

he thought, "I should die...  
that will fix my life"...  
so he sulked to the kitchen...  
looking for a knife...

he made a quick slit...  
he realized right away...  
that this was not his time to go...  
at least not this day...

so he put the knife down...  
and wiped the blood away...  
and saw that what I just did...  
would be there every day...

this kid goes on in life...  
the way it was before...  
but he doesn't care...  
it makes him hate life more...

if you want the truth...  
that's what you should see...  
that emo kid lived on...  
that emo kid was me...

*Devon received \$20 for having his poem published.*

### Depressed

A poem by Amanda, age 15

Someone, something has to  
let you down.

Why do you allow it?

If you cry, you want to fly.

If you shed tears,

God won't let you fear.

If you can hear them cry,  
you can help

If you just try. If you can't talk,

Or take a walk, let

your feelings out:

That's what it's all about.

*Amanda received \$15 for having  
her poem published.*



Joy Elizabeth, age 13

*Joy Elizabeth received \$15 for having  
her work published.*

## Writing contest *continued from page 9*

### "Old School," age 11

I was three years old when I came into foster care . . . If you are new, you have to go with the flow until you are old enough to understand. As you get older, it is kind of your choice whether you want to go to a foster placement or not.

Give people a try and don't judge them before you get to know them. It feels strange when you first come because you don't know the people and it is a new surrounding. It's been really important to me to be able to continue to visit my brothers and sisters. Right now, I'm learning how to tell good from bad. I hope that I can become an NFL football star. In order to do that I need to get a good education and have a back-up plan if I get hurt.

I am also waiting and hoping to be adopted. The wait may be long but you have to hang on.

The best advice I can give you is to do well in school so that you can impress people. Also, do your best to get along with other people in your surroundings.

*"Old School" received \$15 for having his letter published.*

**The best advice I can give you is to do well in school.**

### Cody, age 14

I have been a foster child for over a year. Through all this time I have been in six foster homes and one group home and one hospital. Some days I have woke up feeling like I couldn't take the foster child life anymore. . . . I have been in homes where I felt like I was a stranger living in someone else's home.

Through all the places I have been in I have tried to run away. After about the third time I ran away I realized no matter how much I try I can't run away from myself. I have tried to work hard in therapy and do all I can to make me a better me. When I realized that when I make myself deal with my problems and not try to put the blame on someone else I have been able to live a happier life. . . .

If you are ever in a home and you don't feel comfortable, talk to your social worker about moving you to another home.

This process is almost guaranteed to take time but just work with the system and don't run away, because you can't run away from yourself. Your friend, Cody

*Cody received \$15 for having his letter published.*

**Don't run away, because you can't run away from yourself.**

# SaySo Saturday celebrates seven years by Melinda Medina

On Saturday March 5, 2005 over 135 young people and their adult supporters came together at Guilford Technical Community College to celebrate youth leadership, discuss issues relevant to foster teens, and celebrate SaySo's seventh birthday.

A special guest, Senator Larry Shaw from Cumberland County, visited SaySo members. Senator Shaw spoke with the youth about the impact the SaySo Pages had on the General Assembly, particularly the Senate. Senator Shaw encouraged all the youth to continue to do good things, stay in school, and attend college.

Senator Shaw commented that given all the positive things members were doing, "You deserve our (General Assembly and citizens of North Carolina) help." His comments evoked a standing ovation.

Both youths and adults attended workshops on influencing public policy, SaySo Page Week, public speaking, the expectations of being a SaySo Board member, and Make a Difference Day. SaySo will again sponsor "Give a Child a Smile" for Make a Difference Day 2005 in October. Be sure to look for more information and ways to help.

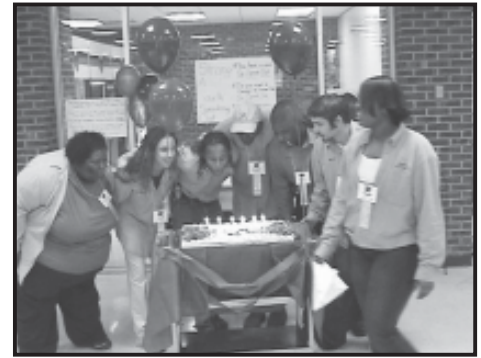
At this event SaySo also celebrated the birthdays of its eight local chapters:

- Moore County: 4 years
- Caldwell County: 3 ½ years
- Mecklenburg County: 3 ½ years
- Cumberland County: 3 years
- Wake County: 3 years
- Guilford County: 2 ½ years
- Onslow County: 1 Year
- Catawba County: 6 months

We would like to wish all our local chapters a Happy Birthday and are eager to see more local chapters get started. If you are interested in starting your own local chapter please contact us.

SaySo also elected 15 new members to its 2005-2006 board. They will be commissioned at SaySo Orientation Weekend June 10-12, 2005. The following members will join Julia S. from Region 1 who will complete her term as secretary:

- Region 1:** Chi-Rese N., Cherish C., and Britney M.  
**Region 2:** Melissa R.  
**Region 3:** Hollyanne N., Laura S., and Shannon C.  
**Region 4:** Curtina K., Vivian J., and Peaches S.  
**Region 5:** Dionna B., Antwan B., and Ashley W.  
**Region 6:** Kandus S. and Daniel S.



SaySo's birthday celebration at Guilford Tech.

SaySo is also coordinating an alumni mentoring program especially for youth as they transition out of care toward adult life. We are looking for youth who are getting ready for that BIG STEP and would like the support of someone who was also in foster care and made the same transition. We are ready and eager to connect youth and alumni in the same community.

Contact us at SaySo, c/o ILR, Inc., 411 Andrews Rd., Ste. 230, Durham, NC 27705; t: 800/820-0001; e: sayso@ilrinc.com. You can also visit our updated website at <[www.saysoinc.org](http://www.saysoinc.org)>.

## Understanding "hidden rules" may enhance success of foster parents and foster children

In America we like to think that social class does not exist. We are taught that our nation is founded on egalitarian ideals, and many of us agree that pretty much *anybody* can become president.

Yet few would deny that in our society the amount of money you have has a big influence on the way you look at the world and what happens to you. One of the most vivid illustrations of this is the 1996 study that found that children living in families earning less than \$15,000 a year are 22 times more likely to experience maltreatment than children whose families earn at least \$30,000 (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Educator and author Ruby Payne believes that when children from backgrounds of poverty are placed into the homes of middle class or wealthy foster parents, sometimes there is a friction and a disconnect that may have little to do with the children's history of maltreatment and everything to do with money. Payne believes that socioeconomic divisions in society have created three different classes—poverty, middle class, and wealth—that live according to three different sets of unwritten rules. According to Payne, no matter what class we belong to, these hidden rules affect how we think about possessions, money, food, time, education, and many other things.

These ideas may be controversial to some people. Yet even if you reject her ideas about class, Payne makes suggestions that may be useful if you are fostering children from a socioeconomic background different from your own.

For example, Payne says that when someone crosses them in some way, many children from poverty will respond either by telling that

person off or by getting into a physical fight. Payne believes they respond this way not because they are troublemakers but because they are following the hidden rules that everyone follows in their homes and neighborhoods.

Of course, this does not mean that foster parents should condone fighting in their homes. But instead of telling children that the hidden rules they know (rules that have helped them survive) have no value, Payne says that foster parents should simply tell them:

These are the rules here. Explain that their rules have value, but in this setting they don't help. Use an analogy to playing a game. Do you use the same rules in football that you do in basketball? Well, no. Why not? You would lose—or get kicked out of the game. . . . Different games, different rules (Stressman, 2004).

The secret that children from poverty don't know, Payne argues, is that the hidden rules that dominate some of the most important domains in our society—including school and the workplace—are middle class rules. By teaching children from poverty what those rules are and how and when to follow them, we can greatly improve their chances of success in school and in life.

If these ideas interest you at all, you can learn more by reading Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* and Ann Stressman's *Parenting Someone Else's Child, The Foster Parents' 'How-To' Manual*, both from aha! Process, Inc. <[www.ahaprocess.com](http://www.ahaprocess.com)>

For references, see the online version of this article at <[www.fosteringperspectives.org](http://www.fosteringperspectives.org)>

# When your child engages in difficult behavior . . .

## A note to parents by David Pitonyak

Several years ago I was asked to speak to a group of parents in Vermont. The title of the presentation was “Supporting Children With Special Needs.” Five minutes into my talk, a parent stood up and interrupted me. She insisted that I stop referring to her daughter as someone with “special needs” (I had been using the term a lot).

**Ten things to remember if your child, because of difficult behaviors, is at**

“My daughter does not have special needs” she said. “My daughter has the *same* needs as anyone else. She has a need to live at home with her family. She has the need for a good education, friends, fun, and a supportive family. Sometimes you professionals — in your efforts to provide special services to people — forget the ordinary, everyday things that people need.”

As awkward as I felt about the evening, I felt grateful too. I learned one of the most important lessons I have ever learned as a professional: sometimes, in our efforts to provide “special” services to people, we often forget the ordinary things people need everyday—friends, family, interesting and fun things to do, safety and security, and a chance to make a contribution to the larger community (in short, a chance to belong).

What follows are ten things to remember if your child, because he or she exhibits difficult behaviors, is at risk of *not belonging*. If you don’t have the time or energy to read one more word, remember these two ideas:

*Taking care of yourself is one of the most important things you can do. If you don't, it will be very difficult to take care of anyone else.*

*Remember that your child's problem behaviors have meaning. Finding out what your child needs is the first step in supporting your child, and the people who love your child, to change.*

**1. Be mom and dad first.** Your love is the most powerful treatment any of us can imagine. If all the other stuff you have to do first interferes with being a parent, stop. Someone else can do some of the other necessary stuff, but nobody else can be Mom and Dad.

**2. Think of challenging behaviors as “messages.”** Difficult behaviors result from unmet needs. Through his or her behavior your child might be trying to say *I'm lonely, I'm bored, I have no power, I don't feel safe, You don't value me, I don't know how to tell you what I need, or even My ears hurt.*

A single behavior can “mean” many things. The important point is that difficult behaviors do not occur by accident, or because someone has a disability. Difficult behaviors are expressions of real and legitimate needs. All behavior, even if it is self-destructive, is “meaning-full.”

**3. Learn about person-centered planning.** Unlike traditional approaches to planning, which ask questions like, “What’s wrong with you?” and “How can we *fix* you?”, person-centered planning focuses on questions like “What are your capacities and gifts and what supports do you need to express them?” and “What works well for you and what does not?” and “What are your visions and dreams of a brighter future and who will help you move toward that future?”

**4. Don't assume anything.** Don't underestimate your child's potential because of his labels or because he has failed to acquire certain skills. You can speak volumes to your child about his self-worth by always including your child in conversations and explaining things as clearly as you can. Even if you doubt your child's ability to understand your words, know that at the very least your child will understand the tone of your voice; make sure it reflects dignity and respect as often as you can. Never speak about your child as if he was not in the room.

**5. Remember that relationships can make all the difference.** Loneliness may be the most significant disability your child will ever face. Many people with disabilities, young and old, live lives of extraordinary isolation. Friends are often absent altogether. Encourage, guide, and support your child to make friends, be a friend, and become a part of the community.

**6. Help your child to have more fun.** Fun is a powerful antidote to problem behaviors. Count the number of things your child enjoys, the number of places she likes to go. Compare this to the number of things other children enjoy, the number of places other children go. Ask yourself, “Is my child having fun? Is she experiencing enough joy? Is this an interesting life?” Help your child add to her list of interesting (and really fun) things to do. Spend time in regular community places where people hang out. Make fun a goal.

**7. Take care of yourself, take care of your partner, and join with other parents to support each other.** Before you became a parent—or a foster parent—many of you were a partner in a relationship that had enough love, nurturing, and respect to want children in your home. Don't lose sight of that relationship. Before you were in that relationship, you were a person that someone found attractive, vital, and loving. Don't lose sight of that person. Get connected with parents of children with and without disabilities. Speak up whenever your child's future is at stake.

**8. Help your child to make a contribution to others.** We all need to be needed. Help your child find a way to make a contribution to others. Help your child to learn how to support

friends (e.g., an invitation to a sleep over, learning to ask “How are you doing?” or “What’s new?”). Things as simple as helping with household chores or helping out at church can teach your child that she *can* make a contribution.



David Pitonyak

**9. Instead of ultimatums, give choices.** If your child's behavior challenges you, help him or her to find more desirable ways to express the needs underlying his or her behaviors. Instead of ultimatums, give choices.

Don't assume that helping your child to have more choices means letting him do whatever he wishes. Limit-setting is an important and fair part of any relationship. The real question is who is setting the limits and why. If limits are imposed upon children without their input, and if the limits are part and parcel of a life in which your child is powerless, even your best advice may be interpreted as one more statement of “do it my way or else.” Expect a general disregard for advice when the person receiving the advice is never heard.

**10. Establish a working relationship with a good primary health care professional.** When we are sick, we are not ourselves. Many people who exhibit difficult behaviors do so because they don't feel well. The sudden appearance of behavior problems may be a signal that your child does not feel well. Illnesses as common as a cold or ear ache can result in behaviors as inconsequential as grumpiness or as serious as head banging. It is important to establish a working relationship with a good primary health care physician. Don't be afraid of telling your child's doctor that you don't understand a recommendation or finding. It is important to get a clear and straightforward answer to all of your questions. Remember too that it is important to go beyond a concept of health as the absence of a disease or illness. “Feeling well” and “being healthy” involves everything from a balanced diet to a good night's sleep. Help your child to learn about “wellness.”

*Adapted from the essay entitled “Notes for Parents.” To read the complete essay, visit [www.commcoal.org](http://www.commcoal.org).*

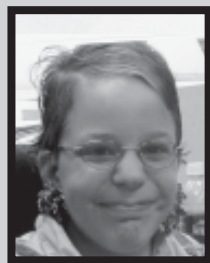
*David Pitonyak, Ph.D., lives in Blacksburg, Virginia with his wife and two children. To contact him, e-mail [Dimaine@aol.com](mailto:Dimaine@aol.com) or write to Imagine, 3694 Mt. Tabor Rd., Blacksburg, VA 24060.*

# Awaiting adoption in North Carolina

Hundreds of children are free for adoption in North Carolina. Each of them longs for a forever family. Here's a chance to learn about a few of these great kids.



Andy



Heather



Brandon



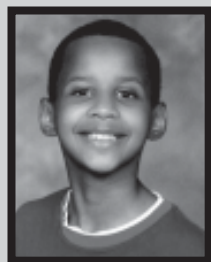
Jalisa



Chi-rese



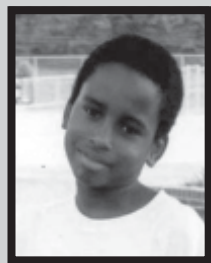
Justin



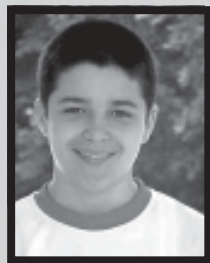
DaQuan



Sherika



Darell



Tim



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)>

## Andy (DOB: 1/31/88)

Andy is a cheerful, sweet young woman with a warm, friendly smile. Her delightful personality shines through her beautiful hazel eyes and you can't help but be charmed by her. Andy genuinely loves people and animals. She loves to sing and dance and is extremely proud that she performed in the plays *Guys and Dolls* and *Grease*. Andy is working on better understanding the concept of time and money. With a loving, supportive and nurturing family, Andy can go far in life. (NC #023-1265)

## Brandon (DOB: 5/14/91)

Impressed by his endearing and affectionate nature, people fall in love with Brandon the moment they meet him. He is fascinated with history and the civil war. His teacher says Brandon works very hard at his schoolwork and is a joy to have in their specialized classroom. Brandon has worked hard to improve his actions and has made tremendous progress, such as being able to walk away when he is upset. He needs a very structured home that is balanced with love and patience. (NC #025-1870)

## Chi-rese (DOB: 5/3/90)

This young woman with the bubbly personality hopes to go to college to become a brain surgeon. Chi-rese is inquisitive, talkative, friendly, and fun. She has a flair for writing poetry and drawing and would love to participate in after school activities. Chi-rese is an excellent student and is succeeding both academically and socially. She has made tremendous gains in all areas since moving into her current foster home and is proud to be on the "A" honor roll. (NC #018-1041)

## DaQuan (DOB: 1/17/94)

DaQuan is kind, considerate, helpful, and protective of others, particularly those with limitations. He has even learned some sign language so he can communicate with one of the other children in his foster home. He has a positive outlook on life. DaQuan attends special classes at school where his individual learning plan allows him to work at his own level and pace for maximum success. He is affectionate and responsive to those around him and is appropriate in social gatherings. (NC #026-216)

## Darell (DOB: 8/27/92)

Darell is pleasant, loving, polite, helpful, and tries to please the adults in his life. He enjoys riding his bike, playing basketball, skating, or playing almost any outside sport. Darell's grades and attitude in school have improved tremendously since moving into his current foster home. He would likely benefit from adoptive parents that will give him plenty of time and attention, a structured environment, praise when he is successful, and plenty of love and support. (NC #013-2199)

## Heather (DOB: 7/6/90)

Anyone who encounters Heather says she is the most polite teenager you will ever meet. This lovely girl enjoys camping, going to the beach and just being outdoors. She loves playing sports and is very good at art. When asked what she'd like to be when she grows up, Heather answers that she is "focused on the here and now and on becoming a better person." She hopes her adoptive family will allow her to participate in sports and enjoy watching and supporting her. (NC #029-1755)

## Jalisa (DOB: 3/7/91)

Jalisa is a fascinating girl with a terrific sense of humor. Outgoing and vibrant, she can be a leader in many social situations. Jalisa enjoys arts and crafts, knitting, drawing, and playing on the computer. She is an intelligent girl with the ability to do very well academically. Since moving into her current home with a foster mom that listens to her and encourages her to get out and experience new things, Jalisa's conduct and attitude have improved dramatically. (NC #092-1977)

## Justin (DOB: 3/6/93)

This freckle-faced boy with the winning smile is always up for a new adventure! Justin likes to be active playing any kind of sport or just playing outside. He is likable, sociable and affectionate and usually gets along well with the other children in his home. He attends church with his foster family and enjoys going to Sunday School. Justin has made an impressive transition to mainstream classes at school where he gets average grades. (NC #018-2157)

## Sherika (DOB: 4/27/92)

This is a sweet, loving, and observant young woman who studies new people and situations until she is comfortable with them. Sherika loves going to church, the beach, and amusement parks. She also likes to swim and is looking forward to attending a summer sports camp. Since moving into her current foster home, Sherika has made a good deal of progress in making friends and getting along with others. She has learned how important it is to live in a nurturing, caring family. (NC #060-1787)

## Tim (DOB: 6/20/89)

Tim may be quite shy when meeting new people, but his smile is dazzling, whether he is happy or nervous. He enjoys playing football, basketball, and baseball, and proudly displays the sports trophies he has won. Tim wants his adoptive family to know that he is nice and has a good personality. He dreams of an active family that will play backyard sports with him, support his participation in organized sports, and go to the mall and out to eat with him. (NC #029-2128)

# Project identifies changes needed to achieve timely adoption for children with developmental disabilities

by Kathryn D. Kramer, Irene Nathan Zipper, and Barbara Leach

Many children enter foster care with unidentified and/or unaddressed developmental disabilities. These children may not have received adequate health care, mental health, or substance abuse services, but after being in foster care, they often show improvements in physical, emotional, and intellectual development.

Still, services for these children can be inaccessible, limited, fragmented, or overlapping, and children who remain in foster care into adolescence are vulnerable to a host of health and social problems that include drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and high school drop-out.

In North Carolina in 2002, approximately 38% of children whose biological parents had their parental rights terminated had to wait longer than one year before being adopted. For the significant number of children who cannot return home safely, finding a permanent placement as quickly as possible is critical. The need for timely adoptive placements is particularly keen for children with special needs.

In 2004, supported by a grant from the the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Family Support Network of NC initiated a project to address this need. Called *From Foster Care to Adoption*, this project sought to:

- Identify the primary system-level challenges that slow the process of adoption for children with developmental disabilities in the foster care system;
- Develop recommendations for system-level changes, so that the identified challenges can be overcome; and
- Disseminate findings to organizations involved in promoting the adoption of children with developmental disabilities.

Several activities were undertaken to achieve these objectives. First, information was gathered from key stakeholders, including foster and adoptive families. Several focus groups were conducted with foster and adoptive parents during last year's NC Foster Parents Association Conference. A focus group was also conducted with systems-level representatives, including the Guardian ad Litem program, private and public adoption agencies, and the legal system.

Following the focus groups, a working conference was held with additional stakeholders. This event generated targeted, feasible recommendations for system changes that could facilitate more timely adoptions for children with developmental disabilities. Finally, a forum was held in March 2005 where stakeholders from around the state created an action plan for addressing the recommended changes.

Findings from the focus groups indicated that several key issues affect the pace of the adoption process, including:

1. The appeal process in North Carolina;
2. The Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) process;
3. Variation from county to county in policy and practice;
4. Multiple numbers of social workers and lawyers involved in placement; and
5. Values that affect the choice of permanent placements.

The project recommended change in three primary areas:

- Improving the adoption process;
- Improved communication; and
- Increased training and education.

Each of these areas was discussed during the March forum.

It is hoped that these activities and the project as a whole will promote practices and reforms that will ensure children in the foster care system who have developmental disabilities and who need adoptive families will find permanent, loving homes in a timely fashion.

*Additional information is available from the authors, who can be reached at the Family Support Network at 800/852-0042 and through the FSN web page at [www.fsnnnc.org](http://www.fsnnnc.org)*



**In 2002, 38% of the kids who were legally free for adoption in NC had to wait longer than a year before they were adopted.**

## Small study may have implications for foster parent trainers

Randi Wolfe, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at Northern Illinois University, believes that foster parent training is often drier—and less effective—than it needs to be.

Instead of simply lecturing about child development or agency procedures, Wolfe believes trainers could benefit foster parents—and foster children—more if they also used the classroom to (1) create a safe setting in which foster parents can network and support each other, (2) encourage foster parents to examine how their own childhood experiences impact their parenting, and (3) offer concrete tools to increase foster parents' ability to develop trusting relationships with foster children.

Wolfe's ideas arise in part from her work

**Wolfe believes trainers can apply elements of LTC to any course for foster parents.**

with 13 African-American foster mothers from inner-city Chicago. Over the course of many sessions, Wolfe led the women using an adapted version of the parent training program *Listening to Children*.

Based on interviews she conducted after this course, Wolfe concluded that foster parent training improves when:

- The group setting provides critical social support and time for networking.
- Course content encourages the acquisition of parenting skills in areas such as handling misbehavior, setting limits, and developing listening skills.
- Facilitators help foster parents understand the role parents play in encouraging children's healthy development.
- Group leaders establish group safety,

encourage open and honest discussion, and mediate respect among group members.

- Training is participatory, interactive, and reflects a sincere concern about the participants and their families.

Wolfe believes foster parent trainers can incorporate the unique elements emphasized by *Listening to Children* into any training curriculum they teach.

For more information about the *Listening to Children* program, contact Dr. Wolfe (tel: 815/753-9337; [rwolfe@niu.edu](mailto:rwolfe@niu.edu)).

To learn how to become a foster parent trainer co-training MAPP in your county, contact the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (toll-free: 866/623-7248; e: [ncfpa@uncg.edu](mailto:ncfpa@uncg.edu)).

# Finding employment for youth who age out of foster care

Research shows that employment is an area of difficulty for a great many of the teens who "age out" of foster care. A 1991 study found that only 49% of youth discharged from foster care were employed, compared to 65% of other youth aged 16 to 24 (Freundlich & Barbell, 2001).

Another study found that two to four years after they left the system, only 38% of former foster youth had stayed employed and only 48% had held a full-time job. Of those who had held a full-time job, the median weekly salary was only \$205 (Wertheimer, 2002). Earnings at this level make independent living very difficult.

In her report *Getting the Job Done: Effectively Preparing Foster Youth for Employment*, Linda Lewis urges child welfare professionals, employers, and foster parents to do the following to safeguard the futures of adolescents who age out of foster care:

- Ensuring stable living arrangements for older foster youth is one of the best ways to improve their educational and employment success.
- Ensure that no child leaves the foster system without a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult.
- Prior to emancipation, every foster youth

should understand his or her rights and the process by which the court can ensure maximum privacy of juvenile records. Foster youth also need training in how to handle past legal issues when completing job applications.

- Every youth, beginning at age 12 and no later than 14, needs to have a comprehensive transition plan that is updated annually. There must be accountability from team members for achieving plan goals and linking the youth to services that support their achievement.
- A transition plan should include a workforce preparation package to prepare youth for employment. This package should include a progressive program of job tours, job shadowing and mentoring, aggressive outreach to engage youth in opportunities for internships and volunteer experiences, and opportunities and support for part-time work beginning no later than age 16 and continuing through their emancipation from care.
- Provide information to employers, particularly small businesses, on potential tax credits as an incentive for hiring foster youth.

- Engage employers as partners with foster youth in such roles as mentor, tutor, and job coach.
- Provide bus passes for foster youth who are in school and/or employed. Determine requirements for school, training, and work attendance associated with receiving the bus pass.
- Develop support networks for emancipated youth through age 24.
- Establish reasonable, flexible guidelines and a simplified "exception" process for safety and supervision of youth participating in age-appropriate independent activities (e.g. cooking, laundry, work experience, after-school sports, clubs).

In some states 51% of former foster youth are unemployed within 2 to 4 years of emancipation.

## References

- Freundlich, M. & Barbell, K. (2001). *Foster care today*. Washington, DC: Casey Family Programs.
- Lewis, L. (2004, Summer). *Getting the Job Done: Effectively Preparing Foster Youth for Employment*. Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth. Sacramento CA. <www.foundationconsortium.org>
- Wertheimer, R. (2002, December). *Youth who "Age Out" of Foster Care: Troubled Lives, Troubling Prospects*. ChildTrends Research Brief [Publication #2002-59]. Washington, DC: ChildTrends. <www.childtrends.org>

## 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 7-9, 2005 in Burlington to learn what it takes to be a foster parent trainer on topics related to foster teens.

The course, "Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency," covers the basics of independent living, including assessing youth, 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 7 and ends at 1 P.M. on Sun., October 9, 2005. 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 15, 2005.** 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 15, 2005

#### 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: Country Suites, Burlington, NC.

- Friday, Oct. 7.....3:00 – 8:00 P.M.
- Saturday, Oct. 8.....9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
- Sunday, Oct. 9.....9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

# Writing Contest

**Kids in foster care, please send us a letter or short essay in response to the following:**

**If you were a foster parent, what would you do to help the children living in your home?**

**Deadline: August 4, 2005**

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

Fostering Perspectives  
NC Division of Social Services  
1459 Sand Hill Rd., No. 6  
Candler, NC 28715

Include your name, age, address, social security number (used to process awards only, confidentiality will be protected) and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards specified above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published in print or online editions of *Fostering Perspectives*.

### **We're Also Seeking Artwork**

Submissions can be on any theme. Submissions of artwork should be mailed flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.



FIRST PRIZE: \$100

SECOND PRIZE: \$50

THIRD PRIZE: \$25

## Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

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

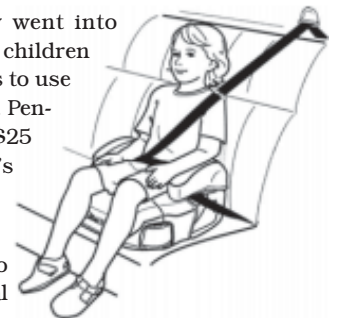
### **In-Service Quiz, FP v9#2**

1. Of the children who are adopted from foster care, what percentage are adopted by foster parents?
2. Who can you call to find a foster or adoptive parent support group in your community?
3. What are five of the strategies Gabby says are useful for dealing with angry feelings?
4. Where did Chris Shaw work in February 2005?
5. What are two ways you can become involved in "Undie Sunday"?
6. What is the new name of the statewide foster parent association?
7. According to David Pitonyak, what are the two most important ideas in his article on page 12?
8. Name three of the dangers meth labs pose to children and families.
9. What is the Alumni Mentoring program?
10. As described in this issue, what resources are available to adoptive families in North Carolina?

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## North Carolina Passes New "Booster Seat" Law

On January 1, 2005, a new law went into effect in North Carolina requiring children under eight years old or 80 pounds to use either a child seat or a booster seat. Penalties for violating the law include a \$25 fine and two points on the driver's license.



### **Why Was a New Law Needed?**

North Carolina's old law failed to meet recommendations by national experts. These recommendations are based on research that shows children between the ages of four and eight who are not restrained in booster seats are at great risk for injury in car crashes. These children are not large enough to be protected properly by an adult seatbelt. Typically, a seatbelt will ride across these children's necks or come up over their stomach. Many of these children tuck seatbelts behind their back or under their arm because of the poor fit. These behaviors place kids at increased risk for abdominal or spinal cord injuries.

By increasing the requirements, legislators have helped provide parents with a standard designed to protect children. For more on the new law, go to <http://www.buckleupnc.org/>. For information about choosing appropriate booster seats, go to [http://www.buckleupnc.org/using\\_selection.cfm#largerchild](http://www.buckleupnc.org/using_selection.cfm#largerchild)

fostering perspectives

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