

# fostering perspectives

MAY 2009 • VOL. 13, NO. 2

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

## Moving ahead—and growing!—in uncertain times

*"In our hands lies the ability to shape our world for good or for ill." —President Barack Obama*

Times are tough. Our country faces a severe economic crisis. Our confidence in banks and other key institutions is shaken. Businesses and government agencies are making drastic cuts. Families worry about losing their jobs, their homes. Many feel afraid.

As a child welfare professional or a foster, adoptive, or kinship parent, you probably wonder what will happen to you, your agency, and your community. You are not wrong to wonder: the future **is** unsure.

Before you panic, however, please remember that uncertainty is not new to you. As someone committed to helping families and children in crisis, you already know a lot about living with risk. Chances are, you also know from personal experience that wonderful things can come out of turmoil.

There is a relationship between struggle and success, uncertainty and growth. This issue of *Fostering Perspectives* celebrates this fact. In its pages you will have an opportunity to hear from:

- A birth mother determined to break the negative patterns of her past.
- A couple who transformed their family through adoption.
- Foster parents who are glad they changed their minds about parenting teens.
- A social worker reflecting on what she has learned over the years.
- And much, much more.

Ultimately, we hope this issue will confirm for you that there is nothing more natural than moving ahead—and growing!—during uncertain times.

### Foster Care

by Brianna, age 13

Not really what you expect . . .  
Lots of help  
And family that love you more  
Than you love yourself  
They're there through the good  
And bad times.  
It's amazing to have so much  
Love surrounding you:  
There when you need it  
There when you don't.  
You have the parent  
Who cares more than you think.  
Foster care lets you know  
There's hope in getting the  
Mother you never had.  
And for people who say  
There isn't a God . . .  
Well, there is, because He  
Made it all happen!



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



## Foster parenting through the years

by Becky Burmester

A quarter of a century ago when Joe and I began our journey as foster parents, child welfare practices were very, very different.

### Then and Now

When we decided to give fostering a try in 1984, the minimal training we received was focused almost entirely on following the agency rules about paperwork. We received no information about the circumstances under which the infants we cared for had come into care. We never, ever met birth parents under any circumstances. Nor did we meet the adoptive families of the babies that were adopted. We were encouraged to take pictures of the

babies but only of the babies—no toys or people allowed!

Fast forward to 1998. At long last we participated in MAPP training. What great training. How great it would have been to always have had that training!

### A Seismic Change

A seismic change in the world of foster care has begun.

Now the stated position in North Carolina is that foster and birth parents will share in parenting children in foster care. Now it is more than OK to take photos of the children as they participate in the life of their foster family. Phone contact between birth parents, foster parents, and kids in care is encouraged.

The days of the "all or nothing" approach are falling by the wayside. Much more information about the child and the situation that led to removal is available to help foster parents meet the child's needs.

No longer do policies make contact with siblings difficult if not impossible. The importance of continued contact with extended birth family is recognized.

Children in care are encouraged to own their past experiences rather than pretending their lives became blank slates when they entered foster care.

Today, state law mandates ongoing training. While training opportunities vary greatly from county to county and among private agencies, the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association pro-

vides diverse learning opportunities led by excellent presenters.

When friends who know of our long history as foster parents learn that Joe and I are attending a training event they are often incredulous. However, our experience is the precise reason we take advantage of every training opportunity that comes our way. We know that training adds to our parenting bag of tricks, puts us in touch with others walking in our shoes, and rekindles our enthusiasm for the work that we do as foster parents.

We've lived through many changes in the system and plan to live through many more!

*Becky Burmester and her husband Joe live in Wake County, NC.*

# Breaking a painful pattern by Milagros Sanchez

## ***My children won't grow up silenced and afraid***

On August 4, 1997, I got my sons back after they'd been in foster care and I'd been out on the streets for many years. I felt that God had given me a second chance to be a best mom.

I was determined to be different toward my sons than my mother had been toward me. My mother resorted to violence whenever she was upset with me, and she didn't believe me when I told her I was being sexually abused. When I was a teenager, she put me in a group home, where I was sexually abused again. She never once came to visit.

I felt very alone, angry, and abandoned. I grew up, but the depression I'd felt since my childhood did not leave me.

### **Opening Up to Mom**

In my early 20s, I began using crack. Crack gave me a sense of security, a sense of time freezing so I didn't have to think, cry, and feel all alone. Slowly but surely I lost everything: first my children (who went to stay with my mom), then my job and my apartment. After that I lost my self-respect and self-esteem.

Finally, I went to rehab, and there started talking about my feelings, even to my mother.

My mom was very closed at the beginning. There was a lot of shouting and screaming, but one day she said to me, "I know I have not been the best person or mother to you. But I'm sorry for not being there for you. I love you." I know that was very difficult for her.

As we talked more, our relationship improved. I found out that this pattern of not speaking and physical abuse was passed



down from my great-grandmother to my grandmother to my mother and to my sisters and me.

I told myself, "I will make it my business to change that pattern when I get my life together." It wasn't easy, but I did.

### **Honest Answers**

In the months before they returned home I built a bond with my boys. We spent every other weekend together. We went to the movies, the beach, the pool, and to museums and the library.

Every Friday we had a family conference. That was a chance for them to let out their feelings and ask me any questions about my addiction and the time I was not with them.

My son JonPaul asked why I left him with grandma for so long. He said, "Didn't you love us? Was it something we did?"

Answering their questions, I would get very emotional, but it helped us get closer. It was a step toward breaking the silence and anger that had dominated my family's relationships for too long.

### **A Terrifying Moment**

It wasn't always easy to be a good mom. One afternoon I came home from work feeling very tired and found a message on my answering machine from JonPaul's teacher. She said JonPaul, who was 12, was not showing up to school. Plus, he had never turned in the \$75 I gave him for his cap and gown.

I asked JonPaul, "What was that all about?" He was giving me all kinds of excuses, but when he said, "I don't care and I can do what I want," I totally lost it and started hitting him. Almost without realizing what I was doing, I even grabbed him by his throat and started choking him.

He said, with tears in his eyes, "Mami, you're choking me." At that moment I saw myself in JonPaul and my mother in me. That scared the hell out of me. I panicked, let go and ran to the hallway where I sat on the steps and called my sister, sobbing.

When I calmed down, I hugged him, apologized and promised it would never happen again. After that, I recommitted myself to talking to my boys no matter what they do that upsets me.

### **Today I'm Blessed**

Today I have a good relationship with my boys. We share our thoughts and feelings, good and bad. We go out together and, every other weekend, we have family game night. We all sit around the table and play Parcheesi, Sorry, Charades, and Operation.

As with every teen and mom, at times things get hectic, but together we pull through.

When I look back on what I've been through and what I put my kids through, I often start crying. Then I look at where I am today and realize I'm blessed. Not everyone gets a second chance.

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### **Fostering Perspectives Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 2009)**

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**Sponsors.** NC Division of Social Services, the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), and the Jordan Institute for Families, part of the School of Social Work at UNC-Chapel Hill.

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**Printing Information.** 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. 11,900 copies printed at a cost of \$4,030.74 or \$0.34 per copy.

**Frequency and Distribution.** Issues appear every May and November. Printed copies are sent directly to all NC county DSS agencies and to all foster parents and child-placing agencies licensed through the NC Division of Social Services. If you think you should be receiving a printed copy but are not, please contact us at the address above.

**Online.** [www.fosteringperspectives.org](http://www.fosteringperspectives.org)

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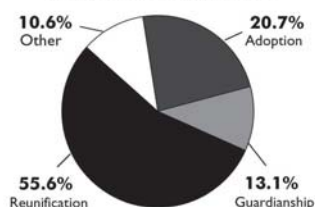
**References.** See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.

**Special Thanks** to the following people for their help with this issue: Jamie Hamlett, Joan McAllister, Tina Raheem, Kirk Randleman, and Regina Roberts.

### **Reunification in North Carolina**

Of the children in North Carolina who left foster care in 2005, 55.6% were reunified with their parents. (Source: USDHHS, 2008)

#### **Destination of NC Children Leaving Foster Care in 2005**



# I'm glad we changed our minds about fostering teens by Angie Clontz

When my husband and I became foster parents in July 2005, we told the agency we were willing to take in children ages 0-21. Deep down, however, we really wanted young children—infants to age six.

## Our Introduction to Fostering

Before long we were blessed with our first placement, a 5-year-old. Less than a month later we received an 11-month-old boy. Then our 5-year-old moved to another home, leaving us with the now 14-month-old.

Just before Christmas, we learned this child would be going to live with a family member. This was very hard—we had fallen in love with this little bundle of joy.

We became foster parents to help children in need, and we were told from the beginning that the children leaving would be very hard. But we did not understand how hard it would be to let them go until we had to.

After this child left, we told our social worker we didn't want another placement for a while. Our grieving period was very hard. It brought back memories of losing our child when I was only 6 to 8 weeks pregnant. We even thought about giving up foster parenting because it is so difficult when a child leaves.

## The Start of an Adventure

Two months later, we received a call from our social worker. They were looking for a placement for a 13-year-old girl. My husband and I told her we would talk about it and call her back. At first, we agreed to say "no." But we could not make the call.

We said to each other that since teenagers tend to keep you at arm's length, it might not hurt so much when they left. We called our social worker back, told her yes, and picked up our 13-year-old daughter on Valentine's Day. That was the start of an adventure for her and for us.

A month later, my husband received a call from our social worker stating that they took a 16-year-old girl into care the night before and placed her in a group home. The social worker said this girl was not adjusting well to being in the group home and asked if we would take her.

We said yes. In truth, we were a little mad at the agency. Why would they automatically place this girl in a group home instead of calling us first? Later on we learned from other foster parents that agencies do this because "no one wants teenagers."

## On the Right Path

When we picked up our new 16-year-old, our 13-year-old told her not to worry. She assured her, "Mom and Dad will make sure you get everything you need. They will give

you all the love you could want."

At that moment, my husband and I knew that no matter how young or old a child is, all they want is someone to love, care, and believe in them.

## A Different Kind of Parting

Eventually our 13-year-old went to live with family. On the day she left, we took her to her family's house because we thought it would be easier for us to drop her off. We were able to meet her Aunt and Uncle and their family. It was great, but our hearts were still breaking.

We said good-bye and told her we loved her. Walking to the car, we heard her calling our names. She was running, crying, and yelling that she loved us and wanted to keep in touch.

When I turned around, her biological mother was right in front of me, crying just like me. She said, "Thank you for caring so much for my daughter." We said her daughter was a blessing and that we would keep in touch. Later, she invited us to be her daughter's god parents and to come to her first communion. We did, of course.

## Graduation and Beyond

A few months after she turned 17, our remaining daughter told a judge she wanted to stay with her foster parents. That was a strong confirmation for us that we were doing the right thing in being foster parents.

At her high school graduation, our daughter told her birth family that if it were not for us she would not be graduating or be where she is now. That filled us with pride.

**"We have learned that teenagers will open their hearts to you if you open yours to them."**

After graduation our daughter joined the National Guard and was accepted into college. This filled us with pride, too!

While at National Guard boot camp, our daughter called every Sunday night to say she was

homesick and missed us. I would cry with her. One night I told her I was a little surprised she was homesick—I imagined that since she had been taken from one home, being away from us would not be that hard.

She replied, "Mom, you and Dad have shown me what a home is."

## What We've Learned

Through all this, my husband and I have learned that teenagers just need someone to love them unconditionally and be willing to give them a chance. We also learned that teenagers **do not** keep you at arm's length—they will open their hearts to you if you open your heart to them.

Being a foster parent to a teenager is very difficult, but very rewarding. We would not trade our experiences for anything. We love each of our daughters and are still in touch with them.

We are in the process of adopting our 18-year-old daughter. We pray the adoption will be complete before her 19th birthday.

Our girls have been a blessing to us and our family. We would encourage more people to open their homes to teenagers because they need people to love, care for, and believe in them just like younger children.

*Angie and her husband Floyd are foster parents in NC.*

## Teens in Foster Care in North Carolina

- **One in three young people in foster care is an adolescent.** Of the 9,771 children in foster care in North Carolina on February 28, 2009, 34.29% (n=3,350) were between the ages of 13 and 21 (Duncan, et al., 2009).
- **Many do not live with a family,** even though state policy says all children should be placed in the most family-like setting possible. In state fiscal year 2006-07, one in five (21%) of youths age 13 to 17 were placed in group homes when they first entered DSS custody, compared with 6% of children age 6 to 12 and 1% of children age birth to 5 (Duncan, et al., 2009).
- **Those who "age out" of foster care need our help.** In 2007-08, 611 young adults aged out of foster care in North Carolina. Research shows that compared to the general population, these youth are at much higher risk for incarceration, homelessness, poor educational attainment, and poverty (NCDSS, 2008).



## What You Can Do

The most important thing we can do for young people in foster care is assure they have a consistent personal support network of at least five caring adults, in addition to the professionals in their lives. If we can help youth identify and strengthen these relationships, we will literally help them survive the normal crises everyone experiences in the transition to adulthood. You can help youth build their personal support networks by:

- Being particularly mindful of relatives and siblings as possible resources/significant relationships
- Enabling youth to participate in activities that will, among other things, expose them to caring adults
- Accepting the young person's plans for their life and helping them develop those plans while they have the resources of the agency to help process what they are learning.



# Our journey from foster to adoptive parents by Clay and Tamara Parker

Our journey from fostering to adoption has turned us from a couple into a family.

It all began about four years ago when my wife Tamara and I became foster parents for Catawba County. We took this step so that we could care for Tamara's nephew, Evan.

Tamara and I have been a big part of Evan's life from early on. At some point, it became clear to us that Evan was not being raised the way a little boy deserved to be raised. His most basic needs were not being met, and we were fearful that his health and well-being would suffer tremendously if something wasn't done.

A report was filed with the child protective services, and Evan was placed, via relative placement, in our home. It was a smooth transition—Evan already knew and loved us and already had his own room and toys at our house.

In the beginning, we really wanted Evan's birth parents to pull their lives together and reunite with Evan. When it began to appear more and more evident this wasn't going to happen, we knew immediately that we were going to take the steps to become licensed foster parents and do everything we could to adopt Evan. We finished the MAPP classes, along the way meeting other prospective parents and many super people from our county's department of social services.

We became licensed foster parents and, not too long after that, Evan's adoption was

**"We are a family like any other. Ups and downs, good times and bad times, and always love."**

final. Evan has never looked back, and neither have we.

We were blessed with the opportunity to next adopt a baby girl named Daisy that we brought home from the hospital and then, about a year later, a 15-year-old named Steven.

We have also fostered a wide variety of kids from ages four to 17. Evan and Steven have been able to really help in our fostering, because they have both been in the same shoes that these kids are in.

Since our children have been adopted, they have all flourished as children and soon-to-be-adults. Evan is an A/B honor roll student and plays soccer, violin, and too much PlayStation. He is a very loving little boy, and is also very interested in sports statistics and sports in general. I don't have to watch "Sports Center" anymore because he always tells me about the latest happenings.

Daisy is a typical three-year-old little girl. She attends preschool at a local church and has made many little friends over the past two years. She also takes a computer class just for kids her age called "Cyber Kids" and attends a fitness class called "Jump Bunch." These are all offered through her school, which is nice, because everything is in one place.

Now 17, Steven is a senior in high school. He'll be joining the National Guard and going to college after he graduates. He is doing his basic training this summer and fall and starting classes in January. Steven is also



The Parkers (l to r): Daisy, Tamara, Steven, Clay, and Evan.

active in the LINKS and SaySo programs that DSS offers to teens as support for kids that are in the same age range, experiencing the same issues. He is also on a panel with other kids, social workers, and people from the community. The panel deals with improving the adoption process.

It has been an amazing journey the last five years. We have learned so much about ourselves from these three wonderful, beautiful children we have adopted, as well as from the children we have fostered over the years.

We are a family like any other. Ups and downs, good times and bad times, and always love. If you have the faith and love that everything is going to be all right, your journey will always end up at the right destination.

*Clay and Tamara Parker are foster parents in Catawba County, NC.*

## NC Adoption Q & A



### Supporting Adoption in North Carolina

Most families who adopt children from foster care in our state get some kind of financial assistance. Many children available for adoption are eligible for monthly maintenance payments, medical benefits, and other services.

**Adoption Assistance** is available for all children whose status and special needs meet certain criteria. Children who are considered special needs include those with physical, mental, developmental, and emotional disabilities as well as sibling groups, older children, and children of color. The child's county department of social services determines each child's eligibility based on specific criteria. The agency and adoptive parent then enter into an Adoption Assistance Agreement based on that child's needs. Typically this includes monthly cash payments, Medicaid, and vendor payments for therapeutic and remedial assistance. Legal expenses are reimbursed if the child has special needs.

The monthly adoption assistance payment in North Carolina is computed on a graduated level based on the child's age:

**\$475.00** for children age 0-5      **\$634.00** for children age 13-18  
**\$581.00** for children age 6-12

**Post-Adoption Support.** Adoption is a lifelong process and does not conclude with the final decree of adoption. Post-adoption support services play a critical role in maintaining strong adoptive families. To supplement the post-adoption support provided by every public agency, the NC Division of Social Services contracts with private agencies. Adoptive families and children referred for this supplemental service can receive the services at no cost to the family or the referring agency. If you have adopted a child from foster care and would like to learn more, contact your North Carolina county DSS agency.

### How many children await adoption in our state?

On April 30, 2008, 982 children in foster care in North Carolina were legally free for adoption.

### What ages are these children?

All ages: 24% were 0-5, 34% were 6-12, and 42% were 13 and over. Many are siblings and need to be placed together. Most have special needs because they have undergone the trauma of abuse, neglect, and separation from their families.

### How many children are adopted from foster care each year in North Carolina?

The annual number varies. In 2007, 1,482 children were adopted from foster care in our state.

### Who adopts children from foster care?

Most often it is the children's foster parents or kin. For example, of the children adopted from foster care in our state in 2005-06, 54.1% were adopted by their foster parents and 23.3% were adopted by a relative. This makes perfect sense: foster families and relatives know the children best and have cared for them day in and day out.

Sources: Duncan, et al., 2009; USDHHS, 2008

# After 41 years of social work, I still love what I do!

by Bonnie Ferrell

I became a social worker in the days of “welfare rights.” I struggled with the idea that with rights come responsibilities: each of us has not just a right, but a responsibility to develop to our full potential. So for me the question became, “How do we, as a nation and as a community, ensure that people have an equal playing field? How do we give everyone the chance to become the best that they can be?”

It was the theme of social justice that drove my work and the field at that time. And I still believe in that.

## At First I Was Pretty Naive . . .

Yet at the same time I was pretty naïve in my practice. I wanted to help fix things. I thought I was doing good work and being kind, but in actuality I was being very disrespectful. Now I know it’s disrespectful to impose a fix on someone else, even if you do it with good intentions. By prescribing what should happen, I was enabling parents to continue negative patterns of dependency. A parent doesn’t have to take responsibility if I step in and make all the decisions.

But it’s not just that parents SHOULD make decisions for themselves and their family. It’s that they do it BETTER than I ever could. They know their family better than I do. They come to their own idea of what’s wrong and what steps they need to take to bring about change.

It was like a smack in the face that came with experience. Again and again, parents would figure out a solution and I would think, “Wow! I would never have thought of that!”

## Gradually I Realized . . .

Over time I came to realize that my job is not to be the change agent for a family, but to be respectful of their ability to create change for themselves. I believe that people can change. If I didn’t, I could never do this work. The key is being able to establish a positive relationship, to articulate my belief in a parent, and to demonstrate my confidence in them to make life better for their children.

It sounds so simple, but relationship building is a powerful skill. That belief in the power of relationships serves as the foundation for nurturing, trust, discipline, and responsibility—essential elements in any parent-child relationship.

I try to convey the message, “There’s nothing you can do that will prevent me from walking this walk with you as you reorganize your family more effectively.” That doesn’t mean I have to accept all of their

**Social work is a journey. You have to be open to differences and ready to challenge your beliefs.**

behaviors. I work with some people who sexually molested their children, and I abhor what they have done. But I still find the humanity in that person and try to find something in them to connect with and believe in.

I’ve learned how to express my belief in parents without condoning negative behavior. I focus on empowering them to take charge of their own family. You can’t just be a Pollyanna, pretending that everything is or will be all right. It has to be real. Forming a positive relationship with parents is always my number one tool: once they feel your confidence and hope in them, amazing things can happen.

## Overcoming Fear

Early in our careers, social workers are often petrified. We are afraid that we won’t know what to do, afraid of differences, afraid of hurting children more by not knowing how to ask the right questions or asking the wrong questions. We are afraid of producing more hurt by our lack of skills or of being hurt ourselves in the field. But social work is really a journey. You have to be open to differences and ready to challenge your beliefs. I think in many ways it’s similar to being a good foster parent: you have to be ready to challenge what you may think about a birth family or a child. You sometimes have to hold back on the judgments and the advice, to allow families and children to make changes in their own way and their own time.

## Getting to Know Myself

What helped me over time was getting to know myself better. The more I recognized my own strengths and limitations, the more tolerance I had for other people’s limitations. It can be incredibly hard to be honest with yourself about what you bring to the table, or where you fall short. But once you are open about yourself, it leads you to a greater understanding and openness about others.

In my case, the more I learned about myself, the more confident I became in working with others. I became able to connect with the humanity of each person, and with our commonalities. Then I was able to celebrate our differences.

We all have problems. It is really only a fine line that separates me from an abusive parent. It’s a fine line of control and knowing appropriate boundaries—children do have a way of pushing our buttons.

Many parents we work with come from a background of chaos. I think of myself as a tuning fork: providing a soothing, steady pitch

that they can hear over the chaos and, over time, get in tune with.

My consistency also helps. I work very hard to be consistent, reliable, and disciplined. If we meet at 10:00 a.m. on Mondays, I’m going to be there every Monday at 10:00. I do what I say I’m going to do. I have a goal and a plan for each visit.

I try to stay out of power struggles and not get pulled into the day-to-day crises. I’ve also worked to develop competencies and skills—which has increased my confidence and comfort in what I do. I trust my skills now.

## Learning Is Central

It’s not that I won’t make mistakes, but I’ll learn from them. In fact, the more I learn, the more I want to learn! I can’t get enough information and training: I just want to soak it all in. Once I opened myself up to questioning myself and my work, it unlocked a whole world of learning. Once you have the curiosity and the competency, then really exciting things start to happen. You really can have fun. It becomes an art, not just a job.

Of course, this is what our best foster parents do all the time. They open up their homes, their families, and their hearts. They take a journey that involves questioning, learning, and finding connections. They become the steady, calming presence in the lives of children and birth parents. They don’t get pulled into the chaos or the provocations that families might create when they’re in pain. Instead, foster parents try to build on the commonalities, like love for a child and the desire for a better life.

Some birth parents may not initially know how to create that better life, and they may even resist trying. This can cause incredible frustration and resentment for social workers and foster parents, who are so eager for change. But with time, patience, and a steady, supportive presence in their life, parents will surprise you again and again at what they can accomplish.

## I Love My Work

It’s hard to believe I’ve been a social worker for 41 years. I’ve seen so many things change in the field, and in myself. Through it all, I still have fun. I love my work. I learn new things about myself and about the world every single day. I see parents take responsibility and, little by little, put their families back together.

In the end, what could be better than that?

*Bonnie Ferrell is a social worker with Orange County DSS.*





# NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

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

## We're working hard for you and your family!

by Stacey Darbee



### From the Association's President

#### Awakening the Aloha Spirit!

The NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association's 11th annual educational conference, *Awakening the Aloha Spirit...Changing Tides, Changing Lives*, was held at the Renaissance Charlotte Suites Hotel on May 1-3, 2009.

What a grand success! Those in attendance learned many ways to engage the Aloha spirit (humility, affection, perseverance, unity, modesty, harmony, patience) and contribute to their parenting skills and family. Along with 12 hours of intense training the participants had a great time playing NCFAPA Family Feud, vying for Tackiest Tourist Award, going on a Hawaiian Hunt, and celebrating at the Aloha Luau!

#### Special Recognition

During the conference the NCFAPA honored Karen McLeod, President and CEO of Child and Family Services Association-NC for her unmatched advocacy on behalf of children. Ms. McLeod has been the driving force behind legislative changes that have a huge, positive impact on children and on foster and adoptive families every day. Her strong support of NCFAPA helped inspire the legislature and the NC Division of Social Services to provide financial resources to our Association, which makes it possible for us

**Please join the NCFAPA. It's never been easier!**

to offer training, support, and advocacy statewide.

In recognition of these accomplishments, the Association has created the Karen McLeod Advocacy Award, which in future years it will bestow upon those who follow in Ms. McLeod's considerable footsteps.

#### Advocacy on Your Behalf

**Support of Youth in Transition.** The NCFAPA is pleased to support the Covenant with North Carolina's Children's call for a study on youth transitioning out of foster care. This bill (Senate Bill 948 and House Bill 783) would authorize the study of the challenges youth in transition face in the areas of education, housing, health care, employment, incarceration, substance abuse, victimization, pregnancy, and homelessness. A study needs to be completed before action will be taken to support transitioning teens programmatically and monetarily. Please support these bills if called upon to make phone calls or send e-mail.

**Legislative Awareness Day.** NCFAPA is helping organize another Legislative Awareness Day to be held at the General Assembly on May 27, 2009. Several other organizations will join us as we visit representatives' and senators' offices to promote awareness of foster and adoption issues.

#### Impact of Budget Cuts

The economic problems facing our state, nation, and world have not left NCFAPA unscathed. In 2008-09 the Association sent board members to different counties and communities to prepare them to help support or start support groups or local associations. Our grant from the NC Division of Social Services allowed us the means to do this. Unfortunately, NCFAPA has also been affected by budget cuts and local activity of this kind will be at a minimum this year.

Despite this constraint, please continue to call upon us and we will do our best to accommodate your needs. We will be actively pursuing other means to be able to support our mission and expand services to parents and families.

#### Please Join Us!

Our web site is constantly evolving. We completed all memberships, reservations, and registrations online for the conference. We are presently compiling an e-mail list we can use to send important news, updates and surveys. If you'd like to be included, go to [www.ncfapa.org](http://www.ncfapa.org) and fill out the very short application.

We'd love to have you become a member of NCFAPA. It's never been easier. Just go to our web site [www.ncfapa.org](http://www.ncfapa.org) and join online!

### Join the Association!

Membership is open to anyone interested in strengthening foster and adoptive services in North Carolina. Send this form, with payment (DO NOT send cash), to: NCFAPA at UNCG, 330 South Greene St., Suite 200, Greensboro, NC 27401. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Family Support Network of NC

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

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

#### Hablamos español

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

#### The Family Support Network of NC provides

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

Contact us at: **800.852.0042, [www.fsnn.org](http://www.fsnn.org)**





# Easing the transition to a new foster home

In an ideal world, birth, foster, and kinship parents would always receive the support they need to continue parenting their children. In such a world, children would never need to move from one home to another.

Yet despite our best efforts, here in the real world some children do have to move. When they do, they are often uncertain, afraid, and grieving.

## Sharing Information Is Key

To make these transitions as painless as possible, we need adequate information sharing. For the social worker, this means working with the child's parents to learn about the child's likes and dislikes, bedtimes, routines, favorite foods, and other things that will help the child feel more comfortable, and then passing this and other information on to the foster or kinship caregiver.

For foster parents and social workers, this means sharing information with the child as well. The child should know at all times what is happening to them and why.

Based on the responses we received to the most recent *Fostering Perspectives* writing contest (see p. 8 and 9), there are a lot

of things young people want to know before moving to a new foster home. Core questions may include:

**Will you respect me?** Respect means different things to different children. It can include treating their belongings well (even if they are worn or dirty), honoring their religious faith and supporting church attendance, treating every child in the home fairly, and never referring to them as a "foster child."

**Will you help me maintain connections?** This includes visits and other contact with family members and also connections with friends, former foster parents, etc.

**Will you accept me for who I am?** Children frequently blame themselves for moves. We must constantly make it clear to the children that what is happening is not their fault and that they are not being punished for something they did.

In the box at right you will find suggestions of strategies that foster parents and their agencies might try to answer children's questions, share important information, and make transitions easier for everyone.

## Transition Tools

Agencies can ask foster parents and young people currently in foster care to help them develop the following tools, which can then be incorporated into pre-service training and social work practice.



- **The "Getting to Know Us" form.** Filled out by foster families, this form can list whatever information children in care might be most interested in, such as: foods we like, TV shows we watch, who is in our family, or what we do on the weekends. Workers can give these sheets to the children before or, at a minimum, on the way to the new placement, so they have some information on where they're going.
- **The "Getting to Know Me" form.** Children can use these to share things such as their favorite foods or TV shows, something they're proud of, what they want to be when they grow up, or people who are important to them. This helps give some sense of control to the children and allows them to bring attention to their strengths.

## A foster parent asks ...

# What should we do if we aren't treated respectfully?

**My husband and I are foster parents supervised by a private agency. We have a good relationship with our private agency, but we have had several unfriendly interactions with the DSS that has custody of the child in our home. Most recently, the DSS social worker has said that we must be the ones to transport the child to the DSS agency for visits. The agency office is many miles away in another county and the visits conflict with our schedules. She said we had to do this "or else." We love this child and want to keep providing care for her, but we do not like the way we are being treated. What advice do you have for us?**



Unfortunately, when you are working with more than one agency, lapses in communication can occur. The good news is that there are steps that you can take to make sure that you understand exactly what is expected of you and how the custodial agency (county DSS) works before a child is placed in your home. I will get to those steps in a second.

For now, please contact your licensing social worker to discuss these issues. Let them know the difficulties you are having with the placing agency and their expectations of you. Many agencies have transportation workers that can assist, especially with intercounty transportation. If you would be willing to provide transportation if the visits are scheduled more conveniently, let the workers know that you are willing to cooperate. Remember, every agency has its own set of standards and expectations. The placing agency may have different expectations of their foster parents than your supervising agency. You may need to schedule a meeting with your licensing social worker and the child's social worker to obtain clarification of the expectations with this particular child.

Here are a few suggestions that may help you avoid difficult situations in the future:

- **Have a list of questions ready (and by your phone) when a social worker calls you with a potential placement.** The questions can be as simple as the child's age and grade at school or as detailed as the anticipated number of birth family visits and who is responsible for transportation. You may find that after each placement your list of questions will change and may become even more detailed.
- **Know the expectations of your supervising agency.** The more you know about your agency's expectations, the easier it will be to understand what other agencies may require. For example, find out what happens when your agency places a child across county lines. Who provides transportation to visits? Where is the child expected to get medical care?
- **Communicate with your supervising social worker.** When you are not in the middle of a crisis with a child or having difficulty with another agency, find out how your social worker would suggest that you handle these situations. Preparing before something happens can make new roadblocks less stressful.
- **Join your local foster/adoptive parent association or support group.** Many times other foster/adoptive parents have had similar experiences and can share with you how they overcame them.

Response by Kristin Stout, Outreach Coordinator, NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network. If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina, send it to us using the *Fostering Perspectives* contact information found on page 2.

## Things I'd like to know before I meet my new foster family . . .

In the last issue we asked young people in foster care to imagine that they were about to go to a new foster care placement, and then to tell us what they would like to know ahead of time about the home and the family they would be placed with. Here's what they had to say.



Photo Illustration

—John McMahon, Editor

Additional writing from young people about foster care can be found in the online version of this issue at <www.fosteringperspectives.org>

### Tabitha, age 15

. . . . Education is very crucial to me. I would like to have a big say in this area . . . . I would like to know if you would help me go to college eventually. I would really love to go to Dartmouth and then on to Harvard Law School. I want to be a lawyer or a forensic scientist.

I would want to know why you wanted to adopt my brother and me—to find out if you are sincere. If you have other kids, will you treat me just as you do them?

If you got tired of us, would you just give my brother and me back? That's already happened once and I don't want to go through all the emotions again.

The last thing I would want to know would be whether you would be able to accept me [for who I am]. I don't want to change unless it's to make me a better person.

I would pray that you would listen to me and help me become part of the family. If I were to say something about the way I might do things, you won't say, "Well, we don't do that here," but actually think about what I say.

Those are the things that I would need to know if I were at home—to feel like I am around people that are going to love me one day as if I were always a part of the family.

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



Photo Illustration

**If you got tired of us, would you just give my brother and me back? That's already happened once.**

### Victoria, age 13



**These are the things that mean the most to me. They help to make me the person I am today. I really could not live right without them.**

Tap! Tap! Is what I heard at my front door. When I opened it I found a DSS worker. My parents were in court and obviously something had happened.

The DSS worker told me I was going to a foster home. I just broke down in a waterfall of tears and had a million questions. Now, my most important questions are: Can I still have contact with my family? Can I still attend church, and continue my extracurricular activities?

**I value my relationship with my parents.** It is precious! Even though I am moving into foster care I really need to spend as much time with them as possible because I am going to be 18 soon. I would need to know how my foster parents would go about letting me have visits. I would need to know how frequently I would get to see my folks.

I also talk to my mother and father a lot, so I would need to know if they had a phone. It grounds me to hear my dad's last "I love you!" just before I go to sleep. "Good night! I love you!" My world is stable as I repeat these words.

I need to talk to someone about how often I can talk to my parents and how long the conversations can be. I need a definite outline for my calls and visits.

**I am a Christian** and believe strongly in God. I need to be informed about the religion of the couple and what doctrine they practice. I am non-denominational, so our beliefs may not match up. I go to church every Sunday. These new parents would need to take me to church or make arrangements for me to go.

I also go to youth group. It gets me around kids my own age. It helps me to stay involved in the church. . . . I would like for foster parents to take action for me to continue attending youth group. My beliefs must come first to best benefit me.

**Extracurriculars are important.** I am a very hyper and outgoing person. I love to play sports. I am involved in basketball and softball. I would like to know if the foster parents will let me play. Sports help me channel my energy in a positive way.

I also play the piano. It is really important for me to keep up my lessons. "Music builds a bridge. . ." Music is my outlet. It helps me be the person I want to be. I can express myself through music when I can't express myself any other way. I would like to know if they have a piano I can practice on and if the couple will keep taking me to my piano lessons. These are very important forms to channel my emotions and energy. I want to know if they will allow me to continue my activities.

These are the things that mean the most to me: my faith, my family, and extracurricular activities. They help to make me the person I am today. I really could not live right without them. The parents in a good foster home would try their best to incorporate these things into my life with them.

*Victoria's essay won first prize, for which she was awarded \$100.*



## Samantha, age 14

2

Dear Foster Parents,

I have a few questions before I make my final decision on coming to live with you. I hope you can convince me, because I really don't want to be placed in a foster home again. . . .

At my last foster home they discussed my past in a manner that made me feel uncomfortable. I must say, no matter what anyone says I will always honor my parents. . . . God made them my parents for a reason. So if I come to live with you, **I must see my parents—frequently!**

My second thing is that I must be me. You have to give me time and see my potential. I am very talented, but it will take a while for you to see. But **if you take the time to get to know me . . . you'll see.** I am a lover. When I get attached to someone, I don't let go. So, if you want me to live with you, be prepared to have me calling you even after I leave. I am a respectful person, but you have to respect me, too! I am an individual; I won't ever change.

So, tell me, do you . . . want me to be your temporary child? Let me know your answers to my questions. Thank you for your time. I won't let you down if you just give me a chance. Love always, Samantha

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

I am a respectful person, but you have to respect me, too! I am an individual; I won't ever change.

## Casey, age 14

3

Here's the first question I would probably ask: Does the family want me just for the money or because they really want me? I would hope it would be because they really wanted me.

I wouldn't want to be with someone who didn't want me. . . .

The second question I would ask would be: has the family ever had any other foster children? If they have, they would know not to call us "the foster kids" instead of our real names. They would know to watch what they talked about around us because if they were to ask us questions about [our birth] home it would make just about any foster child feel sad.

The third and final question I would ask is: does the family have any kids of their own and if so, how old are they?

I would also like to maybe have a room to myself. . . .

I would love to know the answer to these questions before I go to a new foster care placement.

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

Does the family want me just for the money or because they really want me?

## Christina, age 7



Photo Illustration

"I would want to know if the new family would let me talk to my mommy and daddy. . . .

I know how it feels to go into a new home. . . . Our foster parents adopted us. Now my sister and I are part of a family again."

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

## Angel, age 13

If I were getting ready to go to another foster home, then I would first want to know if they were Christian and if they would take me to church.

I would want to know if there were any children my age and if they were nice and loving.

I enjoy reading very much and would hope that they could provide me with good reading materials and my own quiet space where I could read.

I would also like to know their names and what the rules and chores would be. . . .

I would still want to remain in contact with my foster mom. She says the same thing.

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

I would want to remain in contact with my foster mom. She says the same thing.

## Anthony, age 14

These are the things I would like to know ahead of time: Whether the foster parents will be good to me [and] how they will treat me when I'm there. Will they support me and care for me?

I would like to know the school I will be attending. Will I get to keep any of my old friends? How far will I be behind in my schoolwork? How much work would I have to do to pass to the next grade?

I want to know if I'll be able to see my biological family. If so, how often and [for] how long? I would also like to know if I would be able to keep in contact with them. . . .

I would also like to know if there are other children in the home. . . . I would like to know the children's hobbies and interests. I like to play football, basketball, and draw.

The main thing I would want to know is if the parents smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, or do drugs and if so, would this hinder them from supporting and taking care of me?

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

Are there other children in the home? I would want to know their hobbies and interests.

# SaySo: 11 Years and Counting!

by Nancy Carter, SaySo Executive Director



On March 7, 2009 one hundred and thirty people gathered to attend SaySo Saturday at Alamance Community College. This annual membership conference included an array of concurrent workshops and SaySo celebrated its eleventh birthday. That's a double digit number! Soon SaySo will be the age of the young people who make up its membership of over 500.

**From an adult's point of view, SaySo has come a long way in a short time. But to a young person, 11 years is a lifetime.**

From an adult's point of view, SaySo has come a long way in a short time. But to a young person, 11 years is a lifetime. At SaySo Saturday, we are cultivating an alumni group—a place where young people can still find support and information.

Coordinated by Rhiannon Galen, SaySo's Program Coordinator, the conference included youth and adult presenters on such topics as gangs, expressing yourself through art, mental health, self-empowerment, and starting a local chapter.

After lunch and a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday," three new local chapters (Union, Robeson, and Alamance counties) were acknowledged and existing chapters received their birthday cards. All chapters can be found on our website at <http://www.saysoinc.org>.

Then Joan McAllister, the NC LINKS coordinator and longtime SaySo adult advisor, provided a farewell speech, as she will retire June 30, 2009.

In her remarks, Joan affirmed that both the LINKS program and SaySo are in good shape. She wished all the young people well and thanked everyone for their participation. Following Joan's speech and another session of workshops, each region met to elect their regional representatives. This year's board members are:

Region 1: Savannah H., Samantha H., and Amber S.

Region 2: Reneka RC. and Brittany W.

Region 3: Keyona R., Chad F., and James S.

Region 4: Nikki L., Marcella M., and Erica F.

Region 5: Shanita G., Titiannia G., and Casey H.

Returning Officers: Cherish (Co-Chair) and Jackie (Secretary)

The 2009-10 SaySo Youth Board of Directors will participate in a team-building leadership orientation retreat and commissioning ceremony in June.

Wherever they are, alumni know the first Saturday of every March is SaySo Saturday. An workshop track for alumni is provided at the conference so alumni can discuss aging out issues and receive support and new information. This year, Chaney, age 23, facilitated those workshops. She's found that eight years with SaySo have prepared her to accept her past and create her future. Next year, Chaney plans to be a SaySo Regional Assistant (SRA) for Region Six to help young people get involved.

As foster parents and concerned adults in the lives of foster youths, please encourage your young people to learn about SaySo, participate in local activities, join the organization (it's free), register to be an online participant (takes 15 seconds), and visit the website often ([www.saysoinc.org](http://www.saysoinc.org)).

## Additional Activities

- **SaySo Page Week** (March 23-27, Raleigh). Every year SaySo members spend one week working side-by-side with legislators and state administrators. This program has greatly helped our state officials to see foster youths as people rather than numbers.
- **SaySo Survivor 4** (May 15-17, Camp Chestnut Ridge). An annual leadership retreat for 40 youths building on their resiliencies and enhancing their call to share their resilience with other youths.
- **LINK Up Youth Conference** (July 2009, Hendersonville). One of two life skills conferences held annually in different locations around the state. Visit our website for exact dates and to register.



*Pictured above: SaySo's new Board of Directors at SaySo Saturday, 2009.*

## Advice to Foster Parents from an Adult Who Was Once in Foster Care

Today I am 31 years of age, but I was once in foster care. Here is my advice for foster parents and anyone else who works with children in foster care:

The foster parent needs to somehow let the children know that they are loved, and wants to understand what they are feeling. The kids have been hurt emotionally and need to know that it is OK to have those feelings of hurt.

The foster parent needs to listen to the children. Do not judge them or show pity, but show them you are genuine and are there for them no matter what.

It is weird. The kids have to give respect, but at this point their foster parents have to earn the kids' respect as well. Adults have let the children down, so the kids don't understand or know how to trust or whom to trust. —T.R.

**Listen to the children. Do not judge them or show pity, but show them you are genuine and are there for them no matter what.**



# Books on the nightstand

Book reviews by Becky Burmester

Change. Change. Change! I hate it so much. The anticipation of change is very difficult for me. Back in the day when my husband Joe's employment necessitated frequent relocations, I actually said on more than one occasion, "I don't care where or when we move. Just tell me the specifics and I will deal with it."

Our children—by foster care, adoption, and birth—face a lifetime of change. How they are equipped to deal with change will play a huge role in how much they enjoy life. As my friends and those who read this column know, books are some of my best friends. And there are books about change.

**Recognizing how others deal with change enables us to present change in more palatable ways and to anticipate resistance.**

potential usefulness to foster families. Before I had finished much of the book, I was thinking about using the story with kids in care. This book can speak to persons of almost any age.

The author, clever as he is, recognized this and published *Who Moved My Cheese for Teens* and

*Who Moved My Cheese for Kids*. Dr. Spencer's 12-year-old son was very much involved in the picture book version for kids. The teen version has the same fable as the adult version, but the introduction and concluding sections feature teens discussing change.

The kids' version includes discussion questions at the end of the book. My two permanent resident children, as well as my two children in temporary residence, willingly served as test subjects. They enjoyed the story and humored me by answering the discussion questions. They readily identified with aspects of Sniff, Scurry, Hem, and Haw. At ages 6, 8, 9, and 10 they recognized both their own attributes and each other's. They enjoyed figuring out if I was more like one character than another in my responses to change.

Recognizing how others deal with change enables us to present change in more palatable ways and to anticipate resistance/reluctance.

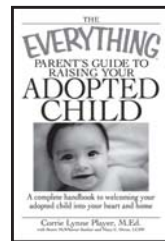
## The Present

*The Present*, also by Spencer Johnson, is written along the same pattern as *Who Moved My Cheese*. I read this immediately following a Permanency Planning Meeting at social services for children who have

been in care for nearly 5 months. As I read the book I realized that the children's mother is still living in the past and their dad is living in the future. The "present" is missing from the lives of both. Thankfully the children are living in the "present."

## Raising Your Adopted Child

A friend recommended *The Everything Parent's Guide to Raising Your Adopted Child* by Corrie Lynne Player, M.Ed. Subtitled "A complete handbook to welcoming your adopted child into your

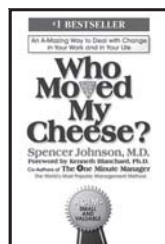


heart and home," this book could be a basic resource for persons at the beginning of the adoption process. It could also be a useful initial resource for foster parents beginning to think about adoption.

Because Joe and I have been in the trenches for so long as foster and adoptive parents, much of this book seemed too basic to me. However, when I tried to see things through the eyes of someone new to the whole system, I concluded that the book could be a useful reference tool. But please don't think this book truly covers "everything." No one book could possibly provide all the information you could benefit from having at your disposal as you parent someone else's kids.

Please know that as you attend workshops and read books and articles about parenting you will **CHANGE** into ever better parents.

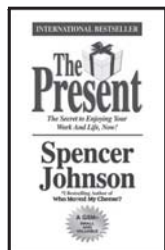
What's on your nightstand? I'd love to hear what you are reading. Contact me at [becky.burmester@mindspring.com](mailto:becky.burmester@mindspring.com) or 919/870-9968.



## Who Moved My Cheese?

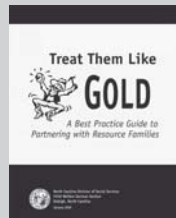
In thinking about how to use books to help adults and children deal with change, *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson, M.D., seemed like a good place to start. I first read this little gem of a book (a story, really) several years ago when the church where I worshipped and served on staff was preparing church leaders for the idea that our church was going to continue growing by leaps and bounds and the changes that would mean for leaders and worshippers alike. All staff read the book so that we could use the fable as a starting point for our discussions about change.

The book consists of an introduction, the fable, and a concluding section. There are only four characters: two mice named Sniff and Scurry and two "Little people" named Hem and Haw. As I was rereading the book for this article, I was thinking about its



## A Guide for Agencies on Partnering With Resource Families

In January 2009 the NC Division of Social Services, with assistance from the Jordan Institute for Families at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of



Social Work, published *Treat Them Like Gold: A Best Practice Guide to Partnering With Resource Families*. This detailed guidebook includes a full range of practical strategies for recruiting and retaining resource families. It also addresses broader considerations such as funding, diversity, community partnerships, and other systemic factors. The introduction to *Treat Them Like Gold* explains the title:

"Though this guide provides many specific strategies that have proven effective in North Carolina and elsewhere, at its heart is one basic rule: if you want to successfully recruit, retain, and partner with resource families, treat them like gold. This rule must be the foundation of your resource family recruitment and retention (R & R) efforts.

"Why should we treat foster, adoptive, and kinship families like gold? Because without them, life is harder for the families and children we serve, for individual workers, and for our agencies. Without them, we have a much more difficult time keeping siblings together and placing children in their communities. In truth, good foster, adoptive, and kinship families are worth more than gold—they're priceless."

You can find the guide at <http://www.ncdhs.gov/dss/publications>

## Ways Foster Parents Can Help with Recruitment & Retention

1. Sharing experiences and allowing newly-licensed foster parents to meet children in care before they have a placement
2. Helping prospective foster parents complete applications
3. Providing parts of pre-service and ongoing trainings
4. Following up with new contacts with an in-person visit or phone call
5. Founding and running support groups and foster parent associations
6. Organizing recognition/appreciation efforts and events
7. Providing individualized mentoring for new foster parents



# Preventing and responding to identity theft

Adapted from *Life in the Hood: Adulthood 101*, a manual written for recipients of Education Training Vouchers by Tina Raheem, Scholarship Director, Orphan Foundation of America. To order *Life in the Hood*, go to <[http://orphan.org/fileadmin/pdf/OFA\\_Life\\_In\\_Hood\\_Sell\\_Sheet.pdf](http://orphan.org/fileadmin/pdf/OFA_Life_In_Hood_Sell_Sheet.pdf)>

Identity theft happens when somebody else uses your credit card, social security number, name and address, or any other personal information to buy something without your knowledge or approval. Foster youth are particularly vulnerable. As they're bounced from placement to placement their private information bounces with them, from hand to hand to hand. It can be easy for someone else to put YOUR name on THEIR electric bill. If they don't pay the bill, years later when you want to rent an apartment you may find that your credit was in ruins before you ever had a charge card.

What can you do about identity theft? Well, if it happened when you were a child, you can't prevent it. But you can find out if it happened, and there are organizations that can help you fix it.

1. Check your credit at <[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)>. There are three main credit reporting agencies, and by law you can get your credit report from each of them, once a year, for FREE.
2. See if there is anything in your report that doesn't make sense. For example, it might say you have a charge card with an overdue balance or that you took out a car loan or didn't pay your utility bill in 1992, but you were three years old in 1992.
3. If you find something "fishy," call the credit reporting company RIGHT AWAY (Equifax 800/525-6285; Experian 888/397-3742; Trans Union 800/680-7289).
4. Call the Federal Trade Commission (877/438-4338) for advice.
5. If you need help doing any of this, call Victim's Assistance at the Identity Theft Resource Center (858/693-7935).

When you call about identity theft, TAKE NOTES. Write down the date, the telephone number and agency, the name of the person you spoke with, and an outline of the conversation, including any case or file numbers, outcomes, and next steps.

## Preventing Identity Fraud

If your credit report is clean, here are some things you can do to prevent identity fraud in the future. First, think **SCAM**:

- S** – **Shhhhhh**. Don't tell ANYONE your personal information (social security number, address, debit or credit card information, or your mother's maiden name) unless you are ABSOLUTELY sure it is for a legitimate reason, such as when YOU have called your bank or credit card with questions. Your bank or credit card will never call or e-mail YOU and ask for that information. If they do, hang up or delete the e-mail! And NEVER give anyone your pin numbers, student ID, or user names/passwords.
- C** – **Check** your financial information EVERY month, including your bank statement (to make sure you recognize every deposit and withdrawal) and your credit card statement (to make sure you recognize every charge).
- A** – **Ask** about your credit report at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) three times a year. Review it carefully!
- M** – **Maintain** careful records. Keep all of your bank statements, credit card statements, and other bills and receipts for at least one year, so you can go back to verify your financial history if you notice something wrong.

Other good policies to follow:

- If you move frequently, get a Post Office box so that your bank statements and bills always go to the same place.
- TEAR UP credit card offers you receive in the mail to ensure no one else completes them.



**Important information for foster care alumni, young people in care, social workers, and foster parents.**

- Photocopy the important papers you keep in your wallet—driver's license, debit/credit cards, insurance cards—so that if your wallet is stolen you know exactly what you lost and have the account numbers to report the theft.
- Make copies of any other important papers, such as your birth certificate, marriage license, passport, etc. and keep them in a file at home. You also can make PDF files and burn them onto a CD. The Identity Theft Resource Center (<http://www.idtheftcenter.org/>) has a lot more information. If you have any concern that you might be a victim of this kind of fraud, check them out.

## Credit Reports and Improving Your Credit

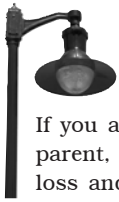
Good credit is determined by your credit report. Your credit report details whether you pay your bills on time, if you've ever filed for bankruptcy, and even whether you've ever been sued or arrested. It is the basis on which a company will offer you a line of credit such as a credit card, car, home or personal loan, or even a lease on an apartment. There are three nationwide credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) which sell information to creditors such as banks and loan companies, as well as to employers, landlords, and insurers. If you've been turned down for an apartment or denied a credit card, chances are your credit rating is less than satisfactory.

You can access your free credit report once a year from each of the three credit bureaus. In other words, you can get your credit report from Equifax once, Experian once, and TransUnion once. Go to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) for an immediate report online, or call 877-322-8228 to have your report mailed to you. You will need to give your name, address, social security number, and date of birth and may have to provide some personal information in order to verify your identity. It is a very good idea to get a free report once every four months to keep track of your credit.

If your credit record isn't good, don't despair. There are no quick and painless ways to correct a credit problem (information on late payments can stay on your record for seven years), but you can rebuild your credit. Here's how to start:

- Review your credit report. Check for errors! According to a study by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, 70% of credit reports have errors of some kind and 29% contain serious errors such as false delinquencies and judgments that don't belong to the consumer. Get these errors corrected immediately.
- Pay as much as you can on unpaid credit accounts. If you can't pay in full, paying something changes the account from delinquent to current. Make at least the minimum monthly payment or more if possible.
- Start to build up positive credit information. Consider a secured credit card (where you pay a certain amount up front in case you are delinquent on your payment).
- Close any old accounts which you still have open and are not using.

**Do NOT go to a company which promises to repair your debt for a fee – you are only paying for something which, with time and effort, you can do yourself.**



## 12 Skills Corner . . .

# Be loss and attachment specialists

by Jeanne Preisler

If you are a foster, adoptive, or kinship parent, one of your many jobs is to be a loss and attachment **expert**. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to be an “expert” means “having, involving, or displaying special skill or knowledge derived from training or experience.”

When you attended MAPP/GPS pre-service classes, one of the areas you were trained on was loss and attachment issues. Now that the children in your home have given you experience with what loss and attachment issues really look like, it might be helpful to review this critical skill we need to provide quality services to children in foster care.

During pre-service, you most likely did an exercise where you had to drop five pieces of paper that represented your important personal connections. This exercise evokes emotions such as anger, sadness, confusion, and often, defiance.

Have the children you worked with displayed any of these emotions? Probably. They may have even displayed all of these emotions at once! It is natural to each of us to experience these feelings during difficult times. It is one way we process grief. But without understanding *why* these emotions or behaviors exist, it is almost impossible to deal with them!

### Looking for Positive Intent

It is normal to attribute intent to the behavior of others—we all do it countless times each day without even knowing it. Often, we will never find out if we were right in those assumptions. For example, if someone cuts in front of me in line without saying “excuse

me,” I might conclude they are rude and inconsiderate, or I might think they have a sick child and are anxious to get home.

Most of us tend to think of the negative intent before we think of a positive one.

Have you ever wondered why your social worker hasn’t called you back? Is it because they do not want to talk with you, are avoiding you, or just don’t care about their job? Or is it because they just dealt with a case involving horrible abuse and they need some time to regain composure before going about their other duties?

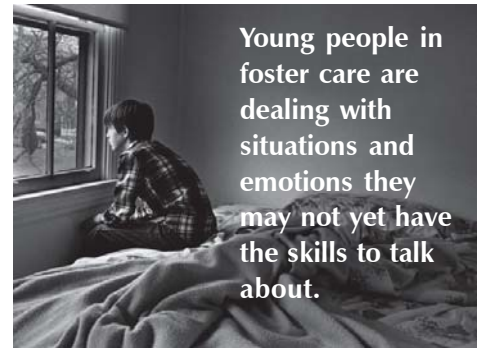
Similarly, young people do not wake up in the morning and think, “I’m going to drive my foster parents crazy today!” They are dealing with situations and emotions they may not yet have the skills to communicate about. While shopping, your daughter may smell cologne on a stranger that triggers a memory of her abuser, causing her to behave strangely in the store. Your son may be acting out at school because a classmate is calling him names his stepfather used to call him.

The challenge is to not automatically assume negative intent behind behaviors.

### Maintaining Connections

Feelings of loss are unpredictable and may never go away. They may surface sporadically, when you least expect it. Often the children in care may not have the communication skills to tell you what is really going on.

What can you do to help deal with or prevent this emotional rollercoaster? Try to remember how important it is to keep young people connected with their past as much as



possible. This can be done in many ways, including picking up one of their family traditions, cooking certain foods, taking them to cultural events, writing letters to families, or developing their life book. All of these things give you an opportunity to talk about past losses and can help children communicate about their feelings.

We know that opening conversations about birth families is often a challenge for foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. We also know from experience that having these conversations is crucial as children deal with the many losses they’ve experienced.

Recognizing the grief also allows the children to connect with us in a deeper way. Opening discussions about their feelings helps them understand their feelings as they go through the process of grieving.

So the next time you have a child with a behavior that seems impossible to explain, remember this skill. It could make all the difference.

*Jeanne Preisler is a former North Carolina foster parent.*



## Training resource: NC Clearinghouse on Family and Child Well-being

The North Carolina Clearinghouse on Family and Child Well-being website is dedicated to providing a central source of information about learning opportunities and training resources throughout North Carolina for those working to strengthen families and to prevent and respond to child maltreatment and family violence.

The Clearinghouse was established in 2008 at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Social Work with funding from the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission. Planning for the website began in 2006 with an initial grant from the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission. The Clearinghouse is housed within

the Family and Children’s Resource Program of the Jordan Institute for Families.

The Clearinghouse works with a diverse advisory group whose members include the following organizations:

- NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
- Children and Family Services Association-NC
- Children’s Advocacy Centers of NC
- NC Administrative Office of the Courts
- NC Guardian ad Litem Program (GAL)
- NC Division of Social Services
- NC Justice Academy
- Prevent Child Abuse-NC

To access the Clearinghouse, go to <<http://www.clearinghouseenc.org>>

The Clearinghouse has a searchable database of training opportunities in the following categories:

- child development
- child fatalities
- child maltreatment
- child well-being
- coordinated community response
- courts
- cultural competence
- early intervention
- education
- evidence-based practices
- family support/family preservation
- foster care
- grief/loss
- investigation
- juveniles
- legal
- medical
- mental health
- organizational development
- parenting
- prevention
- substance abuse
- system of care
- violence



# Advice for foster parents about going to court

When it comes to court, foster parents have a vital role to play. Although judges have the responsibility to make decisions about children, they can only make good decisions

if they receive good information. Foster parents can have a huge impact on the lives and welfare of children by attending court and sharing information about the children in their homes.

## Your Rights

Foster parents have a legal right to be notified of the following important court hearings for children in foster care. Foster parents also have a legal right to participate in these hearings.

- **Review Hearings.** Held every six months until the child is in a permanent home and the case is closed. Can be combined with Permanency hearings.
- **Permanency Hearings.** Must be held by the twelfth month the child is in care and every six months thereafter. Can be combined with Review hearings.
- **Post-TPR Review Hearings.** If termination of parental rights occurs, these hearings are held every six months until the child is in a permanent home and the case is closed.

## Other Important Hearings

Although they do not have a right to be notified or to participate in them, there are two other types of court hearings that foster parents are often involved in:

- **Termination of Parental Rights Hearings (TPR).** These occur only when necessary. Foster parents may be called as witnesses during Termination of Parental Rights hearings, especially if they have done shared parenting or are willing to adopt.
- **Adoption Finalization or Permanent Guardianship Hearings.** These complete the process of establishing a new, legal, permanent home for a child. (Note: Adoption hearings are totally separate from the juvenile court process in North Carolina and done before the clerk of court. Guardianship is granted during a review and/or permanency planning hearing.)

## Stay Informed and Know Your Role

It is very important for you to stay informed about court hearings and ensure that your voice is heard throughout the process. You can also play an important role in making sure that the children's voices are heard at every step along the way. If you have questions about the court proceedings or schedule of hearings, talk to your social worker.

## Participating in the Court Process

Remember, you are an important part of the professional team and your input at every decision point is essential to ensuring that the best interests of the child will be met. It is also understandable to feel nervous about participating in court. Being prepared will help you feel less nervous. Here are some tips to help you be an effective participant in the court process:

## Tips for Participating in Court

- Stay informed about court dates and times. Speak up and ask for information if you do not feel you are getting what you need.
- Ask the social worker and attorneys involved with the case to explain the purpose of each hearing to you and to help you understand your role.
- Always arrive at least 15-30 minutes early for court hearings to allow time to get through security and find the correct courtroom.
- Bring the child or children whose hearing you are attending, but make child care arrangements for other children in your care.
- Dress professionally.
- Bring records with you. This can include notes you have made about the child's progress while in your care, a log of doctor's appointments, school records, and notes related to visits with the birth family.
- Keep in mind that any written materials you bring may be requested by and copied by all attorneys for the official record.
- When you speak, speak slowly, clearly and using clear and professional language. Give all of your answers out loud, do not simply nod or shake your head. Refer to the judge as "Your Honor."
- Be as clear and complete as possible when responding to questions or offering information about the child so that the judge will have adequate information upon which to make a decision.
- Avoid appearing to be hostile to or against the birth family. The court often listens best to foster parents who have truly attempted to work with birth families and who are not focused on a personal objective/agenda (e.g., getting the child to stay permanently in their home).
- When you are asked to give sworn testimony, make sure you have discussed this with the attorney and you understand what this means.
- If your religious beliefs prevent you from taking an oath, inform the lawyers and social worker ahead of time so that an alternate pledge can be arranged.
- Prepare yourself by reviewing the list of common questions (see below).
- Talk to other foster parents about their experiences in court.
- Relax—remember, you are an important part of the team!

Adapted from New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, 2006 (<http://nysccc.org/>)

## Common Questions Foster Parents Are Asked in Court

- How long have you been a foster parent, and how many children have you cared for?
- How long have you known this particular child? Did you have a relationship with this child before you became her foster parent?
- Do you have any special training or experience related to caring for children?
- What was the physical and emotional condition of this child when she first came into your home?
- What changes have you noticed in the child's behavior, emotional state, or physical condition since being in your home?
- Describe the child's typical day.
- Describe your relationship with the child's birth parents.
- Have you observed the child interacting with her parents? Can you describe the interaction? You may be asked to give specific dates or details for these observations.
- Describe the nature of the child's contact with the birth parents—such as dates and length of visits, phone calls, gifts, etc.
- How does the child react and/or behave before and after contact with her birth parents?
- How is the child doing in school?
- How is the child's health? When was the last time the child went to the doctor?
- What other activities (such as sports, recreation, music, church, social) is the child involved in?
- What concerns do you have?
- If reunification does not happen for this child, are you interested in making a permanent commitment to the child through adoption or guardianship?

Adapted from New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, 2006 (<http://nysccc.org/>)

**Coming to court prepared to respond to these questions will help you to feel less nervous.**



# Help us find families for these children

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



Aaliyah



A.J.



Allen



Annabelle



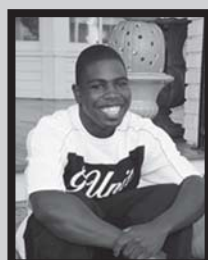
Antonio



Beth Ann



Breanna



Chiareek



Freddie



Maria

## **Aaliyah** (born: 6/30/95)

Aaliyah is a beautiful person, both inside and out. She can be very silly and has a smile that will warm your heart. Aaliyah has a wonderful sense of humor and wants everyone around her to be happy. She loves animals and during the summer volunteers with a pet adoption agency. She likes to listen to music, shop for accessories, and watch TV. Aaliyah's goal is to design the smallest cell phone for her own cell phone company. (NC #092-3016)

## **AJ** (born: 12/14/93)

AJ is a polite, talkative, and lovable boy who is wise beyond his years. He always kisses his foster parents good night and tells them he loves them. AJ enjoys playing cowboys, watching movies, and drawing. He likes attending church and thinks he'd like to join the Coast Guard someday or become an architect or forensic scientist. He enjoys participating in his school's Battle of the Books and Science Olympics. (NC #031-2453)

## **Allen** (birth: 9/17/93)

Allen is a handsome, charming, energetic, and friendly young man who is polite and respectful. When Allen is in a good mood the entire house revels in the positive atmosphere he creates. He believes in God and likes to take time to read the Bible. Allen enjoys playing paintball, sports, water skiing, fishing, and drawing. He is very competitive and likes to win. People who know him say that he has a wonderful way of making people laugh. (NC #092-2914)

## **Annabelle** (born: 8/19/97)

Annabelle is very friendly, with an enormously loving nature and quiet a sense of humor. She is energetic, charming, and extremely resilient. Considering her past experiences, Annabelle is still able to see the amazing things in the world with wonder and awe. She loves animals and hopes to work with them when she grows up. Annabelle also enjoys playing with her baby dolls and stuffed animals, coloring, reading, and visiting amusement parks. (NC #100-2948)

## **Antonio** (born: 8/1/00)

Antonio is open and affectionate, bright and friendly, eager to discover new things. He enjoyed finding gems on a school field trip. Antonio is a bit small for his age, but his coaches have already remarked on how athletic he is. Antonio loves to draw and would benefit from some structured lessons. He loves playing outdoors and taking photos. Antonio is terrific about chores such as watering the plants and helping with laundry. (NC #041-3044)

## **Beth Ann** (born: 7/1/93)

Beth Ann is a very kind and caring girl. She is friendly, easygoing, and fashionable. Beth Ann enjoys making arts and crafts projects and participating in community activities. She loves attending church on Sunday and has a strong and positive relationship with her pastor. Beth Ann also enjoys participating in bowling in the Special Olympics. She loves to be helpful to others and would like a career that enables her to do that. (NC #054-3150)

## **Breanna** (born: 9/28/96)

Breanna is outgoing, caring, beautiful, and has a terrific sense of humor. She has a very loving heart and dreams of being a veterinarian to help abused animals. Breanna is quite athletic and has played competitive soccer for several years. She loves being outside playing soccer, flag football, or roller skating. Breanna also enjoys reading the Harry Potter or Magic Treehouse books, as well as watching favorite Disney TV shows like Hannah Montana. (NC #025-3101)

## **Chiareek** (born: 3/26/91)

Chiareek has a terrific personality and interacts well in conversation. He has an athletic build and enjoyed wrestling and track in middle school, but now would like to try gymnastics or football. Chiareek likes action movies and rap music. He likes to dance and says he's very good at it. Chiareek is excited about driving and wants to be a policeman when he grows up. (NC #059-2758)

## **Freddie** (born: 12/11/96)

Compassionate, lovable, energetic, and playful are words used to describe Freddie. He loves to do chores, especially yard work. He has boundless energy and loves to play outdoors, riding his bike or scooter, swimming, or any other high level activity. About the only "indoor" activity he likes is Tae Kwon Do, for which he has a green belt. Freddie also enjoyed participating in the local Special Olympics where he received several awards, including first place for running. (NC #092-3040)

## **Maria** (born: 1/26/95)

Maria is active, happy, and seems to always be smiling or laughing. She can be shy, but quickly becomes talkative, friendly, and respectful. She is athletic and enjoys such sports as swimming, soccer, and softball. Maria is extremely talented at soccer and her skills are better than most. She hopes to make soccer a career and plans to make it to the Olympics. Maria is also musically inclined and would like to learn to play the guitar. (NC #029-2845)



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)>

# Writing Contest

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



Why are your siblings (brothers and/or sisters) important to you?

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

**Deadline: August 3, 2009**

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

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

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT 177  
CHAPEL HILL, NC

fostering perspectives

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

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

Enjoy reading *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of credit toward your training requirement. Questions about this method of gaining in-service credit? Contact the NC Division of Social Services at 919/334-1176.

### **In-Service Quiz, FP v13#2**

1. Name two changes Becky Burmester has noticed in the foster care system since she began fostering in 1984. What effect do you think these changes have had on children?
2. Of the North Carolina children who left foster care in 2005, what percentage were reunified with their parents?
3. In Angie Clontz's story, what were two moments that told her she did the right thing when she and her husband decided to begin fostering teens?
4. For families who adopt a child from foster care in North Carolina, how are adoption assistance payments computed?
5. Name three things Bonnie Ferrell has learned in her 41 years of social work. Describe how these three things apply to you and your work with families and children.
6. Where was the 2009 NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association Conference held? What was the theme for this event?
7. After reviewing the letters on pages 8 and 9, name 6 things young people in foster care might want to know before they go to a new foster care placement. What might you do as a social worker or substitute caregiver to provide this information to the children with whom you work?
8. How long has SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) been in existence? How much does it cost to join SaySo?
9. Name three things foster care alumni (and anyone else) can do to help prevent identity theft.
10. List five questions foster parents are often asked in court.

## Study: Siblings Placed Together Reunify Faster

*Reprinted from Children's Bureau Express, vol. 10, no. 1 (Feb. 2009)*

While the child welfare field has long recognized that most children in foster care fare better when placed with siblings, a recent study shows that siblings placed together in foster care actually reunify faster than siblings placed apart.

Researchers Vicky N. Albert and William C. King studied 602 children in foster care in Nevada who had at least one sibling in long-term foster care. The study differentiated among the 401 siblings placed completely together, the 99 placed apart, and the 102 placed "partially together" (i.e., some of the siblings in a family were placed together but at least one was placed separately). Researchers also compared relative and nonrelative placements and how these affected reunification patterns.

The findings confirmed that siblings placed together were more likely to reunify than siblings placed in different foster homes. This trend increased over time, especially after the first year. In addition, results suggest that prior to the eighth month and after the twelfth month in care, siblings placed together with relatives returned home faster than those placed completely apart. The rate of reunification for siblings placed partially together most resembled that of siblings placed completely together. Albert and King discuss implications for practice, including the need to recruit, train, and reimburse foster families willing to foster sibling groups in their article, which is available online.

"Survival Analyses of the Dynamics of Sibling Experiences in Foster Care" was published in *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, Vol. 89(4), and is available online: [www.familiesinsociety.org/ShowDOIAbstract.asp?docid=3819](http://www.familiesinsociety.org/ShowDOIAbstract.asp?docid=3819)

**The study found that siblings placed together were more likely to reunify than siblings placed in different foster homes.**