

# fostering perspectives

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## Teaching children to take care of themselves

by Nancy Carter, ILR Associate Director, SaySo Executive Director

As a parent or caregiver of a child or young person, our primary goal is to raise children to be loving, confident, well-rounded, self-sufficient young adults. This is true for any child—adopted, foster, biological, or even those who visit our homes for short periods.

When children who have been abused or neglected enter our homes, it is natural to want to love and protect them. Unfortunately, often we do this by insulating them from opportunities to learn skills that help them take care of themselves. Our best way of loving the young people brought into our care is to teach them that by learning to take care of themselves, they will learn to also love themselves, enjoy their capacity to productively participate in the world, and begin to trust decisions they make as they grow older.

The future is uncertain for young people with foster care experience. So while they are with us, we need to engage them in daily teaching moments. Even the small decisions adults take for granted are important life skill opportunities. When we do this we will feel satisfaction knowing the young people in our homes have increased the number of “tools in their survival kit” to take care of themselves in the real world.

### When to Start?

Our responsibility to help young people become self-sufficient begins the moment they are born. Unfortunately, most independent living programs start at age 13 or 16, so there is a misconception that this is when to start teaching young people tools to live in the real world. Federal and state funds are earmarked for youths of this age due to the urgency of their impending transition.

Experienced parents, however, will agree that waiting until a child is a teenager to teach life skills means missing out on many

“golden moments” when youths are developmentally ready to “do it myself.” When children are developmentally ready, the parent can coach by modeling the skill, assisting the child with the skill, and then finally allowing the child to “do it him/herself,” practicing while the adult provides helpful feedback.

This **Model, Assist, Practice** method (Figure 1) may happen in one moment or over days/weeks/months, depending on the age and abilities of the child. Parents are cautioned not to assume that because a child is 10 years old, he or she should be capable of performing skills at the same level as most other 10 year olds. Each young person will be at different developmental stages based

The future is uncertain for young people in care. While they're with us, we must teach them every day.

on the traumas and setbacks they have experienced. This is in no way a reflection of the young person's ability to learn, so remember to be patient as you become acquainted with the inherent skills and strengths of the children in your home.

### Life Skills: A Developmental Approach

Developmentally, children of all ages can learn life skills. The challenge for the parent is to determine what the young person can manage and still be motivated to learn.

For instance, when faced with growing piles of laundry, parents should see this as an opportunity to engage their children in the process. Yes, it may be easier and faster to “do it yourself,” but in the long run, teaching skills like sorting, not

*continued page 2*

Figure 1 **The Model, Assist, and Practice Approach**

**STEP 1**  
**Model**

**Adult** demonstrates the skill  
**Youth** observes

**STEP 2**  
**Assist**

**Adult** helps youth do it, offering encouragement  
— *Do not do it for youth!* —  
**Youth** tries the skill

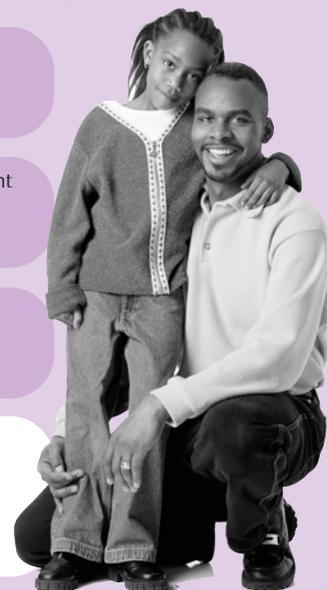
**STEP 3**  
**Practice**

**Adult** observes, offers positive reinforcement & creates opportunities for practice  
**Youth** demonstrates the skill and practices

**Adults should keep in mind:**

- Encouragement is necessary to motivate
- Choose times to teach carefully – do not teach when angry
- Give positive strokes
- Recruit others to create “teachable moments” with youths

Source: Helping Youths Reach Self-Sufficiency, ILR, 1999



# Teaching children to take care of themselves from page 1

overloading the washing machine, temperature of water, etc., will go a long way towards helping young people build increased capacity to do their laundry independently.

Consider “playtime” as an opportunity for a toddler to sort the colored clothes from the whites, the towels and bed sheets from the clothes, etc. Once the appropriate piles are made, toddlers can bring the items to your pre-teen to place them in the washing machine, who will then receive some instruction from you regarding amount of detergent, temperature of water, and so on. In some cases, an older youth in the home who has mastered doing their laundry can assist the younger ones.

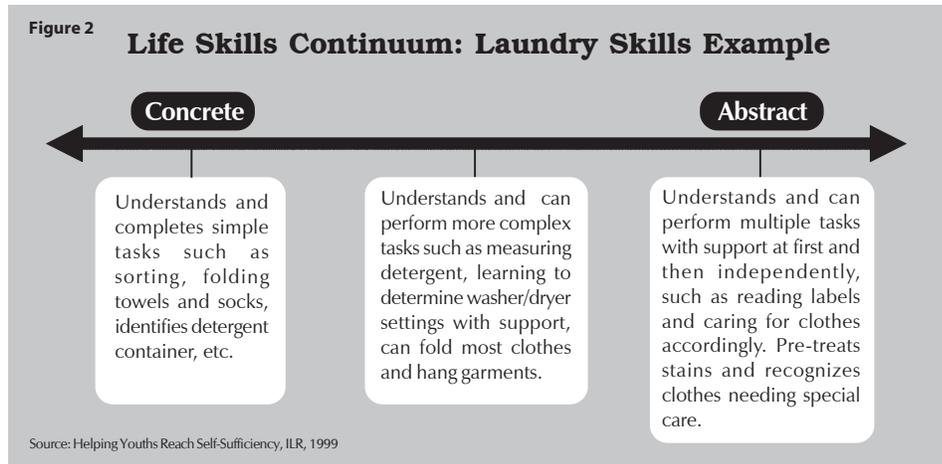
In the profession of life skills education, it is common knowledge that when youths teach skills they retain that skill at a higher level (*Project Stepping Out*, Baltimore County DSS, 1985.) Therefore, whenever possible, invite youths with demonstrated skills to teach those skills to other children in the home.

Pay particular attention to how the children respond to your direction. If they grasp the instructions quickly, proceed with the next step. If the young person seems confused, repeat and demonstrate the skill, breaking it into even smaller, concrete steps. Do not forget to **Model, Assist**, and allow youths to **Practice**. Parents often need to relinquish some control in order for youths to feel like they can control things in their life, even if it is just the laundry, cooking, hygiene, and so on.

This developmental approach to life skills is based on the idea that anyone at any age can learn something about the skill. The job of the parent or adult in charge is finding that place on the “concrete” to “abstract” continuum (Figure 2) where a young person has the ability to start learning.

Although every skill can be placed on this continuum, do not assume a young person with an abstract level of understanding in the area of cooking will have a similar understanding in the area of work experience. Often the young person’s level of understanding corresponds with the amount of exposure they have had related to the area.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of how the laundry skills continuum can be broken down into smaller, developmental steps. At one end of the continuum, a child is very concrete and smaller steps are needed for the child to understand what to do. This child may even need pictures on a poster to illustrate the appropriate steps to clean their bedroom. Statements such as “go clean your room” are too abstract and a child’s reac-



tion to not understanding the task may range from complete avoidance to anger.

At the other end of the continuum, abstract thinking is achieved. An example is a young person who knows (or has learned from experience) that if they wash their red clothes with white clothes, they will end up with a basket of pink clothes. They also can learn more advanced techniques such as determining dry cleaning needs, removing tough stains, understanding label instructions, etc. Most adults function at the abstract level, so it is natural for them to give verbal instructions to children at an abstract level.

Again, the challenge for the adult is to reduce their instruction/demonstration to more concrete tasks to enable the young person, who may be at any point of the continuum, to achieve some success in learning the skill. Parents and caregivers must always remember that even if the young person does not learn the entire continuum of a skill, consistent exposure and practice with the specific tasks will provide increased confidence.

Of course, parental feedback is also important; it accompanies the **Practice** step of our teaching model. Be as specific and positive as possible, but not phony. Global statements like “good job” can mean anything or nothing. If you can be specific, it adds credibility to your feedback. The following comments are specific to small tasks: “You added just the right amount of detergent for this load” and “Great job, you remembered the dryer sheet before I reminded you.”

## Skills to Focus on

Although laundry skills were used in the example, life skills include both tangible and intangible skills. **Tangible skills** include activities that are easily seen, touched, and measured such as cooking, laundry, and money management. **Intangible skills** in-

clude those that are more internalized and build over time, such as decision-making, time management, and socialization. Both types of skills are necessary to make a successful transition to the adult world. That’s why it is so important to start exposing youths to a range of skills at an early age and allow them to practice, practice, and practice even more.

According to the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), nine domains are considered important to achieve self-sufficiency. The ACLSA is an assessment approved in North Carolina to determine goals for young people to reach self-sufficiency. The ACLSA suggests beginning these assessments at age 8.

The domains and some examples of each include the following:

- **Career Planning:** what are youths’ interests and how do those connect to a career plan?
- **Communication:** emotional health, understands strengths and needs, respectful
- **Daily Living:** nutrition, meal preparation, leisure time, legal issues
- **Home Life:** clothing care, home safety
- **Housing and Money Management:** saving, credit, budgeting, housing, transportation
- **Self Care:** hygiene, health, sexuality, drugs and other substances
- **Social Relationships:** cultural, interpersonal, support systems, conflict management
- **Work Life:** employment search, applications, resume, maintain employment, etiquette
- **Work and Study Skills:** decision-making, study techniques, how to use the Internet

As Figure 3 shows, some domain goals overlap with other domains—self- cont. page 3

care/self-sufficiency skills are interrelated. It should also be noted that a young person will normally achieve varying levels of competency for each of the domains. Therefore, each domain should be evaluated independently. Assessments can be completed free online at [www.caseylifeskills.org](http://www.caseylifeskills.org).

Programs in every state are beginning to evaluate how well young people are being prepared to be self-sufficient. Through the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and North Carolina's LINKS program, young people in foster care in our state are now being evaluated through NYTD at age 17 and then again at ages 19 and 21. The areas being assessed include all the LINKS outcomes (listed below), which research has proven to be key for transitional youths (\*indicates an area identified by the NYTD):

1. Sufficient economic resources\*
2. Safe and stable housing\*
3. Attain academic and vocational goals\*
4. Sense of connectedness outside the social service system\*
5. Avoid illegal/high-risk behaviors\*
6. Postpone parenting
7. Access to physical and mental health\*

Visit <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/links/> for more information about the LINKS program and policies. Visit <http://www.saysoinc.org> to view a presentation about NYTD.

The home and community are the best settings for exposing youths to life skills and giving them a chance to learn and practice them. Parents, guardians, and caregivers (including respite foster parents) are in a perfect position to help expand the "tools in a young person's survival kit."

Try not to worry about mistakes they will make. Everyone has a "pink clothes" story. Mistakes are often the best way to learn what works most effectively.

Allowing young people to teach you some skills, such as how to program the remote control or your new cell phone, may help create a cooperative environment of teaching and sharing in your home. One of the best ways to see that you are helping youths reach self-sufficiency is to allow youths to practice those skills and watch them improve. Also, encourage other parents to support life skills learning and

practice in their homes as well.

As a community we can build a generation of young people who are better prepared to take care of themselves and care for our world.

For more about life skills education or to contact Nancy Carter, visit [www.ilrinc.com](http://www.ilrinc.com).

Figure 3 Life Skills Domains



## Foster parent training: "Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency"

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

Independent Living Resources, based in Durham, is recruiting foster parents interested in spending the weekend of October 14–16, 2011 in Burlington to learn what it takes to be a foster parent trainer on topics related to foster teens.

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

Foster parent participants will also learn to organize a two-hour training for other foster parents in their area. Participants will have an opportunity to practice training skills at the seminar. Upon returning home, the foster parent trainers will conduct trainings locally.

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

The seminar begins at 3 P.M. on Fri., October 14 and ends at 1 P.M. on Sun., October 16, 2011. To register, complete this registration form and return it to ILR, Inc., 411 Andrews Road, Suite 140, Durham, NC 27705 or fax to (919) 384-0338. **Registration Deadline: September 6, 2011.** For more information, contact Nancy Carter (800/820-0001; [nancy.carter@ilrinc.com](mailto:nancy.carter@ilrinc.com)).

### "Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency" Residency Training Registration Form

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

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

**Registration Deadline:** September 6, 2011

**Registrant Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Agency Address (if different than above): \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Interest:**

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

Do you have training experience?

When do you anticipate conducting your first foster parent training?

**Place and Time:** Country Inn & Suites, Burlington, NC.

- Friday, 10/14: 3:00 – 8:00 P.M.
- Saturday, 10/15: 9:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
- Sunday, 10/16: 9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

# 'I just didn't have anybody'

by Misty Stenslie, as told to *Represent Magazine*

## Foster Care Alumni of America's deputy director explains how she found her own supports

I was in foster care in eight different states growing up. I was in the middle of North Dakota when I actually aged out. I had finished high school early and gone to college when I was 16. So for my first year in college I stayed in a foster home, but then I was on my own.

My last foster parents were very good people and I learned a lot while I was there, but I wasn't their child. Once I aged out, I wasn't their responsibility anymore. I just didn't have anybody.

### 'I Need Help!'

I remember when I was 19, I was going to try to make Thanksgiving dinner for the first time, and I didn't know how. I went shopping at the last minute and all the stores were closed (I didn't know that stores close early on Thanksgiving).

I ended up going to a gas station convenience store to try to get supplies and I just broke down and started to cry. I was just feeling so sorry for myself, that I didn't have anybody who could help me, and I was wondering if life was always going to be like that, if I was always going to be alone.

Plus, I didn't know how to cook a turkey. Sitting in my tiny little apartment, I saw there was a tag on the turkey with a phone number on it to call for help, so I called Butterball. I said, "I'm an orphan, I need help!" They talked to me for a half hour, and the lady told me to call her back later to tell her how it turned out.

That's a small example of something I did throughout my life: finding other people and other resources that could stand in the place of a family.

### Finding Resources

Even now, I'm still really careful to keep things at my fingertips. For instance, I always have a membership to AAA, the auto club, so I have someone to call if my car breaks down.

The other thing is I've had this ongoing relationship with NPR (National Public Radio) and Time magazine. That's where I learned a lot of things that I think most people learn at home. I really do see Garrison Keillor and the Car Talk guys (radio hosts) as part of my extended family, even though they've never met me.

Having those things consistently there is a source of a lot of comfort for me. I think there's something to the ritual of it, too. I think rituals are really important to people, and so I've brought that to my own life.

### Accepting My Grief

Being resourceful has always been one of my strengths. And I think that has a lot to do with why my life has been as good as it has. I've taken advantage of every opportunity.

But I still went through times of deep, deep despair. I came to realize that if I took the time out to actually experience that despair for a while, rather than push it to the side, then I could go through it and be done with it.

In the old days I didn't know that I should do that. I'd be feeling increasingly sad and upset and I'd try to ignore it and it would just leak out anyway. Now I recognize that it makes sense that I would feel some lasting grief and sadness over these things, and there's no shame in that.

### Figuring Out Relationships

As far as developing supportive relationships, it was tough. I spent a lot of time feeling and being very much alone, because I didn't know how to go about having a truly reciprocal relationship.

I found that I was doing this thing where I'd have polite conversation with somebody and we'd start developing a friendship, and then when the first time came for a real conversation I'd end up telling my life story.

### Learning to Trust

When I got out of care, romance and all kinds of relationships seemed so scary! In care, I never stayed in one place long enough to trust anybody, so when I went out into the world I gave the people who were trying to get to know me a hard time. I was scared of having relationships with people who would be gone the next day.

I put people through little tests to see if they could be trusted. I wouldn't call them back to see if they would call me. Or I would tell them a little about my foster care and group home background to see if they saw me as an individual. A few people were fixated on my past, but most accepted me for me.

I wouldn't share my emotions with my boyfriend and wouldn't tell him I loved him. He'd just say, "You'll love me one day!"

He had a lot of walls to break down. For one date, I stood him up on purpose just to see if he would call me the next day... and he did! We just made plans to go out again.

When I realized that most people accepted me, I opened up. I have a really good support system of friends, and my relationships with my siblings are very strong. I've been with my boyfriend 12 years now. He wants to get married. I'm working on getting comfortable with that.

The other issue I had was working too much. My whole life was work because I didn't know how to relax. All I heard in care was, "Did you save your money?" and "Being on your own is expensive." No one ever told me how to balance my life, and it took me awhile to learn that working wasn't more important than love and connection.

I took my first vacation at the age of 25. I went with one of my sisters to Jamaica and it was beautiful and relaxing. Since then, I've been to the Bahamas, Mexico, Hawaii and Canada. I'm making up for lost time!

—Tiffany Johnson, age 29, Vallejo, CA

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Afterwards I'd feel vulnerable and exposed, and I'd have a hard time knowing how to relate to them now that they knew this stuff about me, and then I wouldn't follow through with the relationship.

It took a while to figure out it doesn't feel good to me to do that and I'm not going to do that anymore. I really got lucky to have a couple of friends who called me on it.

Once I learned to not get caught up in my only identity being as some kind of victim, then I had a lot more to offer in a friendship. It was easier because I didn't feel so vulnerable and the other person didn't feel so overwhelmed. But those things didn't come naturally. Therapy has been really helpful.

In early 2000 I got involved in what became Foster Care Alumni of America. For the first time, I was able to look around and realize there are a whole lot of other people like me. Finally finding some role models and some peers was a great relief and a great source of inspiration.

### Peer Support

I think it's part of the culture of foster care to always wonder if you're worth it. You feel like you were never good enough for your original family, or for any other family. I carried those things around in my own heart without even realizing it.

Then I looked at these other people who I thought were so worthy, and found out they had the same feelings of worthlessness that I did. I could recognize that regardless of how they felt about themselves, they were good, they were loveable. Then I could finally extend that to myself. Connecting to other alumni of foster care has been a new kind of freedom and love and belonging that I never found anywhere before.

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# Futures Ready: A free curriculum for emerging young adults

Young adults with severe emotional or behavioral disorders have higher drop-out rates than any other disability group. They are also less likely to attend post-secondary school than other disability groups. Their challenges are not only educational—they face daily difficulties exacerbated by inappropriate emotional and behavioral responses due to a lack of self-regulation.

**Caregivers** of these emerging young adults often ask: How can I best support a young adult struggling with severe emotional or behavioral disorders? What unique challenges do they face as they prepare for life as an adult?

**Young people** often ask, how is my life going to change when I turn 18? Will I be able to enroll in college, own the car of my dreams, and buy a house? How will I pay for it?

**Staff within child-serving agencies** ask, how can I get young people to be more involved in the planning process, care about their futures, and be actively engaged in the activities outlined in their plan?

Answers to these questions are addressed in a free workshop entitled: *Futures Ready! A Transition Curriculum Geared to Young Adult's Struggling with Severe Emotional or Behavioral Disorders and/or Substance Abuse Issues*. The curriculum was developed and is delivered by those impacted directly by the training—family, youth, and staff who use mental health services for their family or themselves.

## About the Workshop

The Futures Ready workshop is action-oriented. It actively engages participants in understanding how services and everyday life changes for emerging young adults who struggle with mental wellness issues. A central feature of the workshop is "Futures Planning," a youth-led mapping process that is guided by an adult in their life and supported by an individualized team that has been identified by the young adult. You may have heard these teams referred to as Child and Family Teams (CFTs).

Caregivers and child-serving agency staff learn Futures Planning as a ready-to-use skill during the first session of the workshop, where they are exposed to and practice motivational interviewing and graphic facilitation. Using these tools, adults can effectively assist the young person to develop a plan that reflects their personal experiences, articulates a positive vision of their future, problem solves around current issues, and identifies potential barriers. The emerging young adult takes ownership of their plan because it is developed *by them, not for them*.

By the end of the workshop participants will have:

- Gained a clearer understanding of transition-related issues as they relate to young adults with severe emotional disturbance and/or substance abuse issues;
- Examined the delivery of child and adult mental health services;
- Explored the laws, policies, and procedures that govern decisions made across multiple service sectors (education, employment, mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, public health, housing, etc.);
- Developed a *Futures Ready!* transition plan using a CFT approach that is youth-driven and family/caregiver-guided, with cross-systems agencies including school-staff involved.

## Want to Host the Workshop?

Thanks to a grant from the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, NC Families United, (National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health) is pleased to offer *Futures Ready* throughout the state as a free resource to youth, families, and cross-system agencies to improve transition outcomes.

For more information on hosting this workshop in your area contact: Damie Jackson-Diop, Youth Transition Program Director, North Carolina Families United, NFFCMH, Inc. (damiejack@gmail.com; phone: 919/675-1737), visit [www.ncfamiliesunited.org](http://www.ncfamiliesunited.org) or join NC Families United on Facebook.

## Workshop At-A-Glance

The *Futures Ready* workshop requires at least six participants representative of these three groups:

- **Young Adults** ages 14-26 with severe emotional disturbances and/or co-occurring disabilities or who struggle with mental wellness issues;
- **Families/Caregivers** or natural supports of transition-aged young adult who support them in transition preparedness activities;
- **Cross-System Agency Staff** (including school staff) who are involved in the health/education for young adults under and over the age of 18 who struggle with mental wellness, students receiving special education services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), or currently served under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

The workshop consists of three parts which can be delivered in 2-3 days over the course of 1-2 weeks. Parts one and two are delivered to each group separately. For part three, participants join together to enable each young adult participating in the training to leave with a transition plan in hand.

## Evalee

Young Adult Co-Trainer,  
*Futures Ready*

Age: 21

**Experience:** Aged out of therapeutic foster care, Advocate, and Youth M.O.V.E. (Motivating Others through Voices of Experience) Advisory Board Member

**Interests:** Art

**Goals:** I would like to open a shelter or a group home one day

*I transitioned from foster care to living independently and from high school to college. Transitioning was not easy but I made it due to the fact that I had a plan which is called a Futures Plan. The plan has helped me greatly. I had goals I set and dates to do them by and it kept me on track. During this transition I had a mentor to guide me. That was very helpful.*



## Jonathan

Young Adult Co-Trainer,  
*Futures Ready*

Age: 24

**Experience:** Advocate, Youth M.O.V.E. Advisory Board Member, and had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in school

**Interests:** Technology and Working on Cars

**Goals:** To get my GED and to obtain a job that's recession-proof!

*From my personal experience, it [Futures Planning] showed me a new way of seeing the future instead of my life in a gang. I thought I was going backwards to criminal actions, but a new perspective, in my own words, was put in front of me, giving me a new path. A new light came like a new path in dark woods. I would tell youth that the Futures Ready curriculum is helpful because they [young adults] learn how to find help and support. It shows adults how to help youth along their way!*



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

by Denise Goodman, PhD

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

## 1. Be comfortable with your own sexuality and theirs, too.

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

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

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

**DRESS:** Examples for dress are that every family member must be covered when coming out of the bathroom or bedroom, no

coming to breakfast in your underwear, and the youth can't see company without proper clothing. Encouragement during shopping trips can assist in more appropriate clothing selections.

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

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

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

**5. Educate the youth:** It is important to give teenagers accurate information about sex, sexuality, and human reproduction. This may be difficult for parents who may feel education will lead to sexual intercourse and experimentation. However, teens need information, not taboos. Sexually abused children need to learn about the emotional side of sex, as they have been prematurely exposed to the physical side of sex. Both boys and

girls need to learn about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents can seek help from community agencies such as Planned Parenthood and Family Planning.

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

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

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

**CORRECT:** Since a teen's behavior is purposeful, offer the youth a substitute behavior to use when the need arises. Suggest more acceptable and appropriate alternatives. When the youth uses the alternative behavior, give positive reinforcement.

**7. Advocate:** Parents must advocate for the needs of their children. Teens who have been sexually victimized may need a variety of services; therefore, the parent should advocate with the social worker, agency, or the mental health center until the services



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

are in place. This may mean that the parent calls every week or even every day and leaves messages. The parent may need to contact managers or administrators to obtain services for their teen. In other words, ask until you get what you need for your child.

## Conclusion

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

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

## New USDHHS Memo on LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

The federal Children's Bureau's new memorandum on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in foster care encourages child welfare agencies, foster and adoptive parents, and others to ensure that all children are protected and supported while they are in foster care. The memo includes information on workforce development; biological, relative legal guardian, foster and adoptive parent training, support and recruitment; and safety of young people in foster care who are LGBTQ. It also highlights resources from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections and AdoptUsKids. You can find it at: <http://tinyurl.com/3grtdlt>.

# Books for kids—and parents—about puberty by Becky and Joe Burmester

Help! I'm blushing!

OK, I'll be serious. In this issue we're going to consider books on puberty. It has been many long years since Joe and I survived puberty ourselves, and many years since we survived our oldest children's puberty. As veteran foster parents—including several years fostering teens and preteens—reading about this topic brought back many memories (only some of which were fond).

Why do young people in foster care need to read and to learn about the issues of puberty? Because knowledge is power, and kids in care need every bit of power they can grasp.

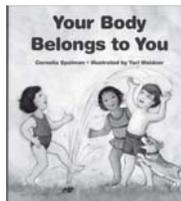
So I hit the library ready to read, read, and read some more. I used the following questions to help me measure the worth of each book:

Is it interesting to me? What age person is the book written for? Would the target audience actually read the book? Would they learn anything? Would parents have anything to talk about as a result of reading this book? Are the important topics covered (that is, is this more than a sex ed lesson?)? And, finally, how "white" is the book? Because Joe and I are raising children of a different race, I have become ever more conscious of diversity issues in illustrations and text.

Here are some books for you to consider.

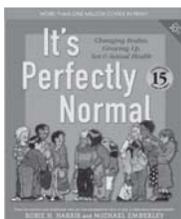
## Your Body Belongs to You

This book is suitable for children as young as three. You might have a difficult time engaging children older than nine or ten unless there were younger children present, since this is a picture book. The illustrations are racially diverse and the text is simple. The message of safe and appropriate touch is one that many children in care have not learned or experienced. Using this book as a frequent bed time story could be very empowering for children who've been abused. It would provide the opportunity to talk about being safe.



## It's Perfectly Normal

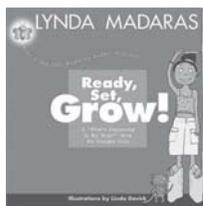
Updated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and marketed for ages 10 and up, this book looks like a picture book from the outside and a bit like a graphic novel on the inside. It is a comprehensive book



for boys and girls. A young person with reading issues might be overwhelmed by the amount of text, but then again is any topic more riveting than sex? The book is a favorite of children's experts and librarians, with endorsements from T. Berry Brazelton, Planned Parenthood, and the National Urban League. The illustrations are very ethnically diverse. Parents, you might even learn a thing or two if you read the book cover to cover.

## Ready, Set, Grow!

Targeted toward younger girls. My 8-year-old daughter, who is definitely entering puberty and who is a great reader, will tackle this book on her own and then we'll talk about it. The illustrations indicate the wide variations in how developing girls look and are ethnically diverse as well.



## The Care and Keeping of You

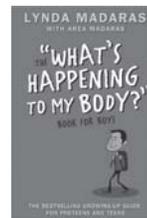
I was prepared to love this American Girl publication. If my daughter were white, I probably would love it. But, by page 16 when I was reading about the importance of clean hair and learning that I may need to wash my hair



several times a week, I concluded that this book was too "white" for my African American daughter. There are different ethnicities represented in the illustrations, but when push comes to shove I felt whites had the upper hand. The book might be diverse enough for a child of color being raised in a same-race family. My children's world is already too white.

## The What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys

First published in 1983 and regularly revised, this is the book we used to open the puberty conversation with our son, who is now 29. I personally wish there were more information/explanation of birth control and abstinence. However, the book does a good job addressing a lot of issues young males find hard to talk about.



These are the books on my nightstand. What are you reading that might help foster parents? Let me know! (919/870-9968; becky.burmester@mindspring.com).

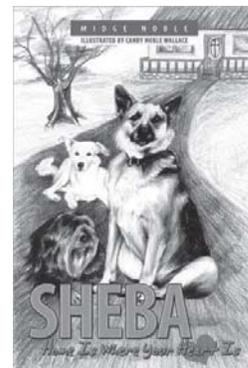
## North Carolina Foster Care Facts

Puberty is an issue for children in foster care. On March 31, 2011, 57% of young people in care in our state were between the ages of 6 and 17.

## Sheba: Home Is Where the Heart Is

Joe and I were rather slow at recognizing the struggles our Forever Children (by birth and adoption) had with being a foster family. We expected our children to share their home and their parents with others on a full time basis for as long as those children needed to be part of our family. The permanent members of our family sometimes struggled with why the temporary members behaved as they did. There have also been issues about understanding different life experiences.

If your family has some of these same issues, *Sheba: Home Is Where the Heart Is*, by Midge Noble, might be a story you would want to read as a family. My husband travels a lot for work, so he missed this story. It was evening reading for our son (age 10), our daughter (age 8) and a daughter of one of our former foster daughters, also age 8.



Told in eight chapters, this story is about Sheba, a young dog that survives abuse and neglect and is adopted by a young woman who understands her and accepts her fears and mistrust. The author is a therapist who works with children and families dealing with abuse, neglect, loss, foster care, and adoption.

My young audience was captivated by Sheba's story and very concerned for her well being. After finishing the story we talked about how Sheba had some of the same kinds of experiences that some of our foster children have had. This is a story that could be used to open a very helpful family dialogue.

# Turning our busy bees into worker bees

by Trishana Jones

Studies show that many youth who age out of foster care experience high unemployment and unstable employment patterns. The NC LINKS program strives to address this issue by providing services so that all youth leaving the foster care system have sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.

## Cultivating a Work Ethic

Caregivers are in a perfect position to teach young people what it means to work. In actuality, the notion of work is first introduced into the lives of children and youth as chores around the house.

Cleaning up one's personal space, washing dishes, sweeping, and mopping the floor are aspects of work done at home as well as at places of businesses such as banks, restaurants, etc. Caregivers, like workplace supervisors, will usually demonstrate how they want a chore completed and then ensure the child successfully finishes the task. Delegating age- and ability-appropriate chores is a good way to teach children about personal responsibility and basic cleanliness and to establish a work ethic.

A work ethic is a set of values a person applies to completing a job or range of duties. A work ethic can consist of values such as being dependable, punctual, taking initiative, and asking questions to get a job done correctly. Building up a child's work ethic can influence how they handle other interests, such as playing on a pee-pee football team or learning to ride a bicycle.

## Work Experience Resources

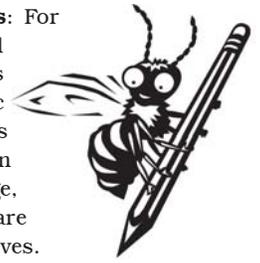
By the time children reach school-age, teachers revisit the concept of work by asking the probing question: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Children often respond with answers such as fireman, doctor, lawyer, nurse, teacher, or basketball player. However, the world's economy and technology have evolved and, in turn, diversified the types of careers available to today's youth.

All caregivers should introduce young people to good work skills and provide them with the information and experiences they need to select a possible career as they approach young adulthood. Resources that may prove helpful in this task include:

- **Volunteerism:** Foster and adoptive parents can volunteer with their children at an rescue animal shelter, senior living facilities, homeless shelters, or hospitals and use the experience as an opportunity to donate time to their community and simultaneously expose the children to different types of careers.

- **Job Shadowing:** Some public school systems participate in job shadowing, which immerses youth in the world of work and provides first-hand experience for certain job skills and careers. Call your local school system to find out if it offers a job shadowing program to its students. There are also online resources such as North Carolina's Futures for Kids ([www.f4k.org](http://www.f4k.org)) and Florida's Virtual Mentor ([www.virtual-mentor.net](http://www.virtual-mentor.net)) that allow youth to ask professionals questions about their careers. Junior Achievement ([www.ja.org](http://www.ja.org)), is a nationwide resource for job shadowing information for children of all school ages.
- **Page Programs:** North Carolina's high school students are able to observe the lawmaking process and gain job-readiness skills as an office assistant through page programs offered by the Governor (<http://www.volunteernc.org/programs/>), the NC State Senate (<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/senate/pages/>), and the House (<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/house/pages/home.html>). In addition to building work skills, the Page experience is held in high regard on college applications.
- **Summer Jobs:** The YMCA, YWCA, local governments, and nonprofits in your area may operate summer employment programs to help eligible teenagers and young adults acquire job skills and gain paid work experience. These programs are usually advertised each year in February or March.

- **Apprenticeships:** For youth interested in professions requiring specific hands-on skills not obtainable in a four-year college, apprenticeships are feasible alternatives. Some apprenticeship programs are housed in secondary (high school) and postsecondary settings. Cabinetmakers, automobile upholsterers, and alteration tailors are among the thousand-plus occupations available for apprenticeship under the NC Department of Labor Apprenticeship and Training Bureau ([www.nclabor.com/appren/students.htm](http://www.nclabor.com/appren/students.htm)).
- **Internships:** Internships present young adults the chance to perform in-depth, professional tasks in their career of interest. Career placement centers at colleges and universities are the standard clearinghouse for many listings of internships from numerous companies and organizations nationwide. A program coordinated by the NC Youth Advocacy & Involvement Office is the State Government Internship Program (<http://www.doa.state.nc.us/yaio/interns.htm>), which employs undergraduate, graduate, and law school students in a variety of departments of state government for 10 weeks in the summer.



Trishana Jones, MSW, is a child advocate with the NC Youth Advocacy & Involvement Office

## Preparing Youth in Foster Care for Employment

Child welfare professionals, employers, and foster parents can take the following steps to safeguard the futures of adolescents who age out of foster care:

- Ensure they have stable living arrangements.
- Ensure that no child leaves the system without a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult.
- Prior to emancipation, youths should understand their rights and the process by which the court can ensure maximum privacy of juvenile records. Youth also need training in how to handle past legal issues when completing job applications.
- Every youth, beginning at age 12 and no later than 14, needs to have a comprehensive transition plan that is updated annually. Team members must be accountable for achieving plan goals.
- A transition plan should include a workforce preparation package to prepare youth for employment. This package should include a progressive program of job tours, job shadowing and mentoring, vigorous outreach to engage youth in opportunities for internships and volunteer experiences, and opportunities and support for part-

time work beginning no later than age 16 and continuing through their emancipation from care.

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

Source: Lewis, L. (2004, Summer). *Getting the Job Done: Effectively Preparing Foster Youth for Employment*. Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth. Sacramento CA. <<http://tinyurl.com/69vnyr>>

# Kids' Page

Words and Pictures by and for Children in Foster Care

Vol. 15, No. 2 • May 2011

## How our caregivers can help us succeed as adults

In the last issue we asked young people in foster care “What can your caregivers do to help you succeed when it is time for you to live as an independent adult?” Here’s what they had to say.

—John McMahon, Editor



### How My Caregiver Can Help Me Succeed

In the seven years that I have been in foster care and all the homes I’ve been in, a foster parent said something that made me realize I can be anybody I want to be as long as I keep trying and don’t give up. That parent said, “You can’t change the past and erase the pain but you can change your future and prove to people that you can become more of a successful person than they said you would be.” She showed me the love I needed to keep moving, she helped me look for jobs, helped me manage my money, and took me to see different colleges. A person that cares about you will take their time to help you succeed—all you have to do is listen and apply the words of encouragement and wisdom that they offer to you because nobody that cares about you will tell you wrong. Just remember: never give up! —Arlene, age 17

My foster mom can help me with my work to be prepared for college. She can be there when I need something. She can teach me how to be responsible. . . . When I can’t understand my work, she helps me. She can cheer me up when I’m sad. And she can teach me the facts of life. She always makes sure I’m safe. When I grow up she can teach me how to be a responsible adult. —Luckeya, age 10

She can help me with my school work. . . . She can teach me how to count money, and cook, do chores in my house. She can teach me how to be cautious, and respectful, careful. . . . She can teach me the facts about the world. —Diamond, age 9

What can caregivers do to help me succeed? Help me get my anger out and all the stress I have about what I went through in my life with me seeing my mom, sister, and brother go through a whole lot. I just want to see my mom not going through all the pain without me there. I want to get help with my mood swings. . . . I want to get all the help I can. —Kianta

Give me support, knowledge, and help me accomplish the short-term goals. . . . Support doesn’t just mean saying “I’m here for you.” It means you take the time to listen to the child and his or her hopes and dreams and goals and figure out what you as an adult can do to help them move closer to that. —Porsha, age 18

*The young people above received \$15 for having their letters published*

### Lauren, age 17

1

I describe LIFE as Living, Independent, Fun, Everlasting. Yes, unfortunately we all are going to have struggles and days where we need a helping hand.

For one, my caregiver can help me with budgeting. Budgeting is a very important thing to look forward to and know about. You need to learn how to budget and pay your bills. Learning to spend your money wisely is good as well. And you should want your credit to look good when buying a house, car, etc.

For two, my caregiver can help me choose the right college for me and [help me understand] how a college program works. Something nice to do is go and tour a college that’s in your best interest. . . .

Third, teach us about making sure you go to your appointments. And learning how to set up your dentist appointment, eye appointment, etc. Missing your doctor appointments is not great at all because you want to be healthy. If you have insurance or Medicaid, don’t abuse it.

Fourth, teach us RESPECT and how to control our attitude, rude comments, negativity, etc. Because you will get nowhere in life if you have a negative personal-ity towards others. No one would want to hire you for a job if you are negative towards any and everyone.

Overall, basically, our caregivers can help us learn and achieve a lot until our independent adulthood. Our caregivers are a big help to us and we should appreciate their help. *Lauren received \$100 for winning first prize.*

Help me learn to budget and choose the right college.

### Leon, age 16

2

Remind the young adult to keep God in their daily walk. Next, the caregivers should always give that young adult all the support that they can. . . . The caregivers should remind them that things may not work out as planned but to hang in there through all the curve balls that this old tough world will throw at them. . . .

Teach the young adult about finances before the young adult leaves home: budgeting, saving, keeping good credit, managing money, etc.

One of the vital things for parents not to do is try to rule the young adult’s life. Life is all about trial and error, so the young adult will make mistakes sometimes, but that’s how we learn—on our own.

Just because we turn 18 doesn’t mean we’re gone out of parents’ lives forever. Remind them that college, marriage, and grandkids come after that.

Never, never abandon the young adult. The world starts with family and it’ll end with family. *Leon received \$50 for winning second prize.*

We make mistakes sometimes, but that’s how we learn.

### Christina, age 10

3

I will soon have to leave foster care and start my independent life as a mature adult. When that day comes I won’t ask much from my foster parents, but what I will ask of them is to support my future decisions and to share all the times we had together. . . .

They took me under their wing and taught me so many things. The most important thing was that: you’re only as tall as your heart will let you be, and you’ll be as small as the world will make you seem! I learned that you don’t have to be blood relatives to be a family. I’ll take their advice and use it to pursue my dreams and conquer my fears. *Christina received \$25 for winning third prize.*

I learned you don’t have to be blood relatives to be a family.



# NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

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

## From the Association's President

by Stacey Darbee

Greetings from NCFAPA! I would like to take an opportunity this issue to introduce the North Carolina Foster and Adoptive Parent Association to those who do not yet know us and to help everyone understand what NCFAPA is and does. NCFAPA is a 501 (c) 3 association (recognized by the federal government as a not-for-profit). Our mission is to promote quality foster and adoptive services through collaborative advocacy, education, resources, reunification efforts, and networking.



### Board and Staff Members

We are a volunteer led organization. The NCFAPA Board of Directors is a working board (rather than a governing or policy board). Board members do the organization's work, participating in program, fund-raising, and administrative activities. Our board is comprised entirely of foster (current or former) parents and adoptive parents. To serve its members, NCFAPA is divided into four regions, with four board members from each region. We also have several ex-officio (nonvoting) members on our board. At present NCFAPA has only one part-time staff person for a part of the year.

### Funding

Funding for NCFAPA comes through a grant from the NC Division of Social Services within the NC Department of Health and Human Resources, and from memberships, donations, and other small grants. We have a physical address in Raleigh but our actual offices are virtual (offices or kitchen tables in our homes). Phones ring in our homes and in our cars.

### The Future

This *Fostering Perspectives* issue focuses on preparing youth for the future. NCFAPA, too, is looking at transitioning to the next phase. We have primarily been known as the group that puts on a heckuva great conference every spring. Foster parents receive their entire year's worth of educational hours for re-licensing as well as

the opportunity to gain knowledge and support from parents all across our state.

The annual conference is a great event, yet NCFAPA does a lot of other things, too. We answer phone calls and emails in support of myriad questions/problems from our families. We advocate tirelessly on many fronts for North Carolina's foster and adoptive families.

In the future, NCFAPA's priority goal is to set up a mentor program and support team throughout the state. We believe that this is an essential aspect of service to our members, especially in today's climate.

So, next year the conference may not be quite as grand, but be assured that we are exploring other options to offer you resources, advocacy, and education through our mentor and support team. Although economic times are very tough, NCFAPA will remain true to our mission. As with any group or cause we are only as strong as our members *so please strongly consider joining us now!*

### 2011 Conference

We held our 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Education Conference in Charlotte in April: *Peace, Love & Family....Growing Groovy Families!* We had so much fun with this theme and our participants loved it. Gracias, merci, danke, thank you to all of our PRESENTERS!

Also, congratulations to award winners Alex and Sandra Wisnoski (Foster Parents of the Year) and Billy Maddalon & Brooks Shelley (Adoptive Parents of the Year).

### Legislative Awareness Day

Come and make a difference on May 19, 2011 as we facilitate Legislative Awareness Day at the General Assembly! Check out the website [www.ncfapa.org](http://www.ncfapa.org) for more details. Anyone can make a difference. We will have all the materials you will need. It's not hard at all and we will even be giving mini-advocacy training sessions at the building. Do not let the rule makers and financial decision makers forget or misunderstand our children and families!

Have a great spring! NCFAPA hopes to see you soon!

NCFAPA's priority goal will be setting up a statewide mentor program and support team.

## 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, 2609 ATLANTIC AVE., SUITE 105, RALEIGH, NC 27604. 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.: \_\_\_\_\_

- 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?

**The Family Support Network of North Carolina is made up of local affiliates and a University Office providing:**

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

800.852.0042, [www.fsnncc.org](http://www.fsnncc.org)

**Hablamos español**

**Family Support Network of North Carolina**  
*Serving families since 1985 through a network of affiliated local programs*

# Fostering a supportive community by Belinda Hogstrom

“Wow, you’re a foster parent?! I could never do that!” People say that to me all the time!

While it’s true that not everyone can become a foster parent, it is true that “It takes a village to raise a child.”

Foster families can’t do it by themselves. Everyone in the community can support children in care and their foster parents by opening their hearts, using their skills, and sharing their life.

Here are suggestions for things people who are not foster parents CAN do . . .

- 1. Welcome.** Help welcome a child in foster care into your circle of friends by hosting a welcome party or picnic. If it’s a baby, host a baby shower. Offer to bring meals, just as you would for the family of a newborn. These acts of love speak volumes to the child and foster parents!
- 2. Drive.** Many agencies need people to drive children to various appointments. Appointments could be visits with birth family or medical or dental visits. Call local agencies to see if this is a need in your area.  
You can also offer to drive children in care to activities your own children participate in (youth groups, sports teams, extracurricular activities, etc.).
- 3. Advocate.** Become a Guardian ad Litem. GALs are volunteers who work with the court to ensure children are not lost in the system and their needs are met and voices heard. To learn more visit [www.nccourts.org/Citizens/GAL/](http://www.nccourts.org/Citizens/GAL/).
- 4. Mentor.** Offer to teach a child in foster care a skill or hobby. Older youths may need to learn basic life skills like budgeting, cooking, opening a bank account, filling out a job application, etc. Become a Big Brother or Sister—either formally or informally. Spending time with a child makes a difference!
- 5. Hire.** Some youth have trouble finding work due to the stigma of being a “foster kid.” Reach out to these young people and provide them with work experience.
- 6. Shop.** Many children in care need school supplies, shoes, clothes, or even toys or art supplies. Suitcases are often needed. When I cared for newborn twins, my friend went grocery shopping for me. What a help that was!
- 7. Give.** Share some of your children’s extra toys, games, and stuffed animals. One of my son’s most prized possessions were donated books. My daughter treasured her second-hand bike.  
Skilled professionals, such as music instructors and hair stylists, can donate

services, letting children enjoy “extras” they might not otherwise experience.

Financial gifts can provide scholarships for extras that are difficult for foster parents to afford: sports teams, summer camps, music lessons, art and dance classes, club uniforms, school pictures, field trips, etc. My 12-year-old begged to go to camp with his church youth group (where he made some life-changing decisions!).

At Christmas time, consider providing a small amount of cash or a gift card to children in care so they can purchase gifts for their family.

- 8. Tutor.** For various reasons, children in foster care often struggle in school. A few hours of consistent tutoring can make a big difference in their academic success.
- 9. Include.** When planning family outings, parties, or game nights, invite children in care who are close in age to your own children to join in.  
It’s especially important for extended family members to help children in care feel included as part of the family. Treat them as you would your other grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. I love to hear children I foster calling my parents “grandma and grandpa”!
- 10. Recognize.** Children in foster care want and deserve to be recognized for their accomplishments. Attend their music recitals, sporting events, awards ceremonies, and graduations.
- 11. Celebrate.** Host a party and make a big deal of a child’s birthday. Some may have never had a birthday party before.
- 12. Share.** Give older children a chance to share their cultural heritage. Also, share your special cultural traditions and celebrations with children who share your ethnicity or religious background.
- 13. Scrapbook.** Help children create a “Life Book” with pictures of their birth families and relatives, foster families, and baby pictures. For children who move multiple times, this may be their only connection with their childhood. Amazingly, the pictures I took of my 15-year old foster son were the first childhood pictures he ever had.
- 14. Respite.** Get your foster care license and provide respite care to long-term foster families. Many children in care cannot leave the state, so foster families can’t take them on vacation. And sometimes foster families just need a short break to rest, reconnect with their spouse, and focus on their biological children.

## Getting Started

Some of these suggestions are things you can take action on right away. For others, such as providing transportation or donating gifts, it will be important to work closely with foster care agencies. Use the following links to contact agencies in your area:



- **NC County DSS Agencies**  
<[www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local/](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local/)>
- **NC Private Child-Placing Agencies**  
<[www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/licensing/docs/cपालistfostercare.pdf](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/licensing/docs/cपालistfostercare.pdf)>
- **NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association**  
<[www.ncfapa.org](http://www.ncfapa.org)>

For children with special needs or medical concerns, get training on how to care for them. When the foster parents need a break, want a date-night, or have a commitment with their other children, it is a huge help to have babysitting options.

- 15. Ask.** Feel free to ask children how they are doing, and if there is anything they need. Ask the foster parents as well. Even if there is nothing specific needed, sometimes it helps to know someone is interested and willing to listen.
- 16. Respect.** (I purposely listed this one following “ask.”) Respect the children’s privacy by not asking personal questions about their past. It is their story to tell if and when they want to share it. Respect them by treating them as normal kids.
- 17. Remember.** When a child you know is getting ready to move—either to another foster home or back to the biological family—have a special time of saying good-bye, write notes of blessing on their continued journey, or just let them know how thankful you are that you got to know them.
- 18. Love!** Some children in foster care have experienced things you wouldn’t believe. Demonstrating love to them through words and deeds is so important. Your love may be exactly what they need to heal and flourish.

The next time I hear someone say, “I could never be a foster parent,” I just might reply, “Maybe. But here are some things that you CAN do.”

*Belinda Hogstrom has been a foster parent since 1995 and is currently serving in Wake County, NC.*



## A reader asks ...

# Is it hard to find adoptive homes for teens?

I see many older children on the NC Kids website. Is it hard to find adoptive homes for teenagers?

Finding adoptive homes for older kids can be a challenge. Oftentimes, a worker or adoption committee might look for families with approved adoption home studies that are interested in adopting teens in general, but do not know the specific children involved. Many adoption specialists are now taking a closer look at people who already have a relationship with the teen and may be open to adopting that specific child.

### Family Finding

There are numerous places to explore when looking for someone who can make a lifelong commitment to a teenager. In North Carolina, several counties (Buncombe, Catawba, Gaston, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, and Wake) are involved with a pilot program called Family Finding. Family Finding consultants work diligently to identify and locate 30 or more extended family members for a specific child. The consultants evaluate each person's ability and willingness to support waiting children either through placement or in other ways. Child welfare agencies across the nation are having success achieving permanency through similar programs.

Even in counties without Family Finding consultants, it is worth the effort to reconsider maternal and paternal family members who may have previously been ruled out. Family members who were unable to care for a child at an earlier age may have had a change in their situation that would now allow them to be an appropriate parent to a teenager. The teenager may also be at a different developmental stage that might allow them to be a better match for a particular relative.

### Exploring the Possibilities

Foster parents make up a large percentage of adoptive families nationwide, and North Carolina is no exception. Each year, hundreds of foster parents adopt waiting children. While adoption isn't for everyone, current and former foster parents should always be considered for permanency.

Adoption workers can explore school personnel with whom the child is particularly close to. This could include

teachers and support staff such as teaching assistants, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, counselors or academic tutors. As some foster children move frequently, this search should include not only current school staff, but education professionals from previous schools or day care facilities the teen might use during school breaks.

Other resources to consider are people who know the young person from providing support services. While it is unlikely that a teenager's current therapist or service providers will be able to provide a permanent home, adoption professionals can consider former therapists, residential treatment workers, mentors, and volunteers who have worked with the teen and still have a supportive relationship with them. Church members are another option for some teens.

In the age of Facebook, texting, and instant messaging, it seems young people are constantly in touch with someone. One worker recently shared that she scrolls through her teenage clients' cell phones and talks with them about their friends, their friend's parents, and other adults with whom the kids have a close relationship and might be willing to consider providing permanency. According to Facebook statistics, the average user has 130 "friends" (and most teens probably have more), so it's another list of possible placements worth exploring. Even "AWOL resources"—the people teenagers run to when times get hard—should be explored. If it is a safe, appropriate environment and one that can be committed to a teenager over the long term, this may be an untapped resource for a waiting teen.

### What You Can Do

As part of the team of professionals involved in a child's life, how can foster parents help find permanency for the teens in their life? Because foster parents spend far more time with waiting children than other professionals, you have a unique insight into who teens spend their time

Everyone involved with waiting children must continue to help identify caring adults that can commit to these young people.

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

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

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

with and what type of support or influence different people provide. Foster parents are encouraged to suggest to workers any possible permanent placement options they see, and allow workers time to investigate these connections. Keep in mind that workers may have additional information about a particular person or something that happened in the past that would eliminate them as a possibility.

We know that the outcomes for teens aging out of foster care are not encouraging. Many of the children aging out of foster care don't complete high school and struggle with homelessness, unemployment, arrest/legal troubles, and unplanned pregnancy. To avoid these outcomes, foster parents, social workers, and those involved with waiting children must continue to help identify caring adults who can commit to these young people.

Response by Robyn Weiser, NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network. If you have a question about foster care or adoption in NC, send it to us using the contact information in the box above.



## SaySo Update

# We've got a lot to celebrate

by Lauren Zingraff, SaySo Program Coordinator

SaySo celebrated its 13<sup>th</sup> birthday at our annual "SaySo Saturday" conference. This event is held the first Saturday of March. This year we had 154 conference attendees who attended many workshops, including:

- "See What a Local Chapter Can Do," by the Forsyth County SaySo Chapter
- "Alumni Connections," by SaySo Alumni and SaySo Regional Assistants
- "NC Reach/ETV Overview" by Orphan Foundation of America and a SaySo Board Member who shared how the program is paying for her to attend college
- "Child and Family Team Meetings," facilitated by two SaySo Board Members
- "National Youth Transition Database," by a SaySo Board Member and Danielle McConaga, NC Div. of Social Services
- "GALs: Can You 'Court Speak'?" by a SaySo Board Member and Kelly Andrews, NC Administrative Office of the Courts
- "LINKS for You," presented by Guilford County LINKS Program
- An empowerment session facilitated by SaySo Board Members
- Two workshops exclusively for young men entitled "The Gentlemen's Club," presented by Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity.

### New Board Members

On SaySo Saturday regional elections are held for the SaySo Board of Directors. The 2011-2012 Board Members elected by their peers are as follows:

REGION 1: David R., Kelley T., Macey W.

REGION 2: Sarah F., Shaquanda, Zenobia  
REGION 3: Corae H., Patrick Y., Tressina J.  
REGION 4: Mandi K., Erica F., Damonique  
REGION 5: Shanita G., Megan H., Sarah H.  
REGION 6: Roman R., Kalyn D., Sammi C.

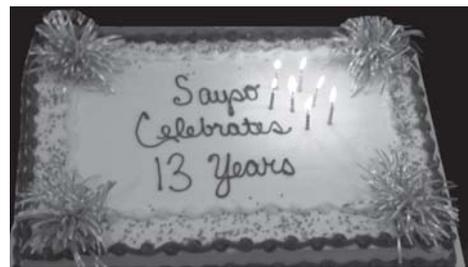
The above youth will be serving along with continuing officers Marcella M. and Titianna G., and will join outgoing members in the SaySo Board of Directors Orientation and Leadership Retreat on June 14-16, 2011 in Pinehurst, NC.

SaySo Saturday serves as both our annual birthday party and yearly family reunion. We were excited this year to have special guests from Project Life who made the trip from Virginia to participate in the conference. Project Life is a partnership with Virginia's Dept. of Social Services and United Methodist Family Services for youth transitioning out of foster care.

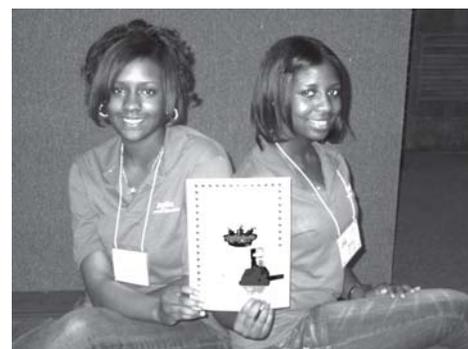
Birthday Cards were given and pictures taken with our local chapters. This year we also had thank you certificates and gift cards for our local chapters in attendance.

Youth (and several adults) enjoyed playing "Getting to Know All About You" BINGO in the morning and dancing to the "Cha-Cha Slide" at lunch. As SaySo Saturday continues to grow in size, we celebrated with TWO birthday cakes!

SaySo would like to thank all of the youth who came and celebrated our birthday with us. We would also like to thank all of the wonderful adult supporters who transported



SaySo Birthday Cake



SaySo Board Members (and sisters!) representing their local chapter

youth to the conference and helped us throughout the day. Special thanks to our workshop presenters and facilitators for their time, energy, and expertise.

We had a fun-filled and exciting day from start to finish and look forward to seeing many of you in March 2012 as we celebrate our 14<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

## On Their Way and OnYourWay.org

To succeed in the adult world, a young person needs marketable skills. Foster youths are no exception. In fact, statistics of youths who have aged out of foster care indicate these young people need marketable skills even more than those who have families as "back up" support. Statistically and financially, it makes sense to invest in building skills in young people today rather than pay for rehabilitating them later as adults.

Here are two resources that will help youths get on their way!

### On Their Way

*On Their Way* is an instructional DVD and guidebook that helps demonstrate to caregivers what they can do on a daily basis to help guide youths (of any age) to plan for their educational and career goals. *On Their Way* was created by Independent Living Resources with National Institutes for Health funding and foster parents' input.

The guidebook provides additional information not covered in the DVD such as discussion points for meals, family activities, and advanced understanding of adolescent development. The curriculum takes caregivers through eight topics: education, career interests, decision making, finances, getting help, staying healthy,

housing, and staying connected.

### On Your Way

These categories also correspond to a free, secure website <[www.OnYourWay.org](http://www.OnYourWay.org)> that offers youths age 13 and older a place to store valuable information and provides self-discovery activities to help youths determine a future path. By using their own password, youths will always be able to obtain their history and other critical documentation required in the adult world.

OnYourWay.org and *On Their Way* work in tandem, understanding the importance of caregivers' influence as young people move towards self-sufficiency. Adults are encouraged to help youths work the site and complete their profile before aging out of foster care. Foster parents set the price of *On Their Way* at \$19.95. For more information, call 800/820-0001 or visit [www.ilrinc.com](http://www.ilrinc.com). To find these products online at <[www.ilrinc.com](http://www.ilrinc.com)> search for "150B."





# Keep your eyes open for teachable moments

A teachable moment is an unplanned event that can be used as a learning opportunity for kids. They often happen when the young person wants, needs, or is curious about something. When this occurs, the parent can open conversations to find out what their kids are thinking and invite them to engage in learning (CTSC, 2007). Spotting and using teachable moments is a great way to guide a youth's life skill development.

The following examples of teachable moments are excerpted from *Ready, Set, Fly! A Parent's Guide To Teaching Life Skills* (Casey Family Programs, 2001).

## Daily Living Skills

- There are many things our children need to learn in order for their lives (and ours!) to run smoothly. Meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, dining etiquette, laundry, home safety: these and many other skills are essential. Make sure children know how a home functions and how to contribute to maintaining a household, so that one day they'll be able to run their own home.

## Meal Preparation

- When you're in the kitchen cooking and your children come in to see what smells so good, ask them to help you stir, mix, taste, measure, or help in some way. Use their natural interest to build skills!

## Kitchen Clean-Up and Food Storage

- When you clean out the fridge, have your children join you. They can "scientifically" examine food in the refrigerator and use their senses to see if food has gone bad. They can read the expiration dates, look at the food, smell the food, and then taste the food (unless it's unsafe).

## Transportation

- Unfortunately, we often see traffic accidents as we drive with our children. We can use these opportunities to talk about the importance of driving safety.
- Many youth enjoy helping with small aspects of automobile care. Whenever you're washing the car, filling the gas tank, checking the oil and tires, or cleaning the windshield, and your youth says, "Can I do that?" take the time to let them help!

## Saving Money

- Create incentives for savings. For example, if your child asks to buy a pet hamster, visit the pet store with your child to find out the cost of the hamster, cage, food, etc. Have your child add up these

costs and plan for how they will save at least half the money for the pet. If they can reach their goal, offer "matching funds" to cover the remaining cost.

## Self-care

- It's a well-known fact that kids can be unkind when it comes to labeling their peers or putting them down. The next time your child talks about a schoolmate who isn't liked because they "smell funny" or are dirty, use the chance to talk with your child about how poor hygiene can affect our relationships with others.

## Health

- When someone in your home becomes sick with a contagious illness like a cold or the flu, talk with everyone in the house about how it could spread to others (by sharing cups/utensils, sneezing, etc.). Challenge those who aren't sick to see if they can avoid catching the illness by taking precautions (handwashing, not sharing cups, etc.).
- When your youth is worried about something (school situation, peers, money, fears, etc.) invite them to problem-solve with you. Ask them to come up with at least three ideas for dealing with the problem they're worried about. Then evaluate each idea and what the likely outcome would be. Encourage the youth to choose a solution and try it out.

## Social Development

- Unfortunately, many youths in our society today do self-destructive things. When your youth comes home with a story about how someone in their school tried to commit suicide or overdosed on drugs, talk about the incident. Ask your

## Ready, Set, Fly!

In 2001 Casey Family Programs published **Ready, Set, Fly! A**



**Parent's Guide To Teaching Life Skills.** This free, accessible handbook describes practical steps foster parents, kinship care providers, and others can take to teach life skills in the following areas: Daily Living Skills, Housing, Transportation & Community Resources, Money Management, Self-Care, Social Development, and Work & Study Skills. What's more, the guide specifically describes skills for different age groups of children: ages 8-10, 11-14, 15-18, and 19 and older. You can find it online at <[www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/res/rsf%5CRSE.pdf](http://www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/res/rsf%5CRSE.pdf)>

youth what they think caused that person to act that way. Talk about the idea of self-esteem and how people with low self-esteem may sometimes do self-destructive things because they don't think they are worth much as a person. Talk with your youth about their self-esteem, and ask how they would get help if feeling alone, sad, overwhelmed, etc.

## Cultural Awareness

- If your youth does something that shows a racial prejudice, deal with it in a way that shows it is a serious matter. For example, if your youth calls another youth a racial slur, try to get together with your youth, the other youth, and the other youth's parents to discuss the incident. Help your youth see that it is unacceptable and hurts other people.

Source: Casey Family Programs, 2001

## Tips for Youth in Foster Care

Reprinted from *CB Express*, v. 11, n. 5 (June 2010)

The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center (FCARC) has produced a series of tip sheets for youth in foster care. The sheets are three to four pages in length in easy-to-print PDF format and include links to book, online, and other resources. Among the titles are:

- Seeing a Mental Health Therapist
- Bullying Hurts Everyone
- Coping with Anger
- You Are Not Alone: The Sad Truth about Having A Parent in Prison
- Keys to Independence: Finding Your First Apartment
- Your Voice Matters: Speaking Out by Speaking Up (Youth Advocacy)
- Sharing Your Story
- Is This Love? Teen Dating Violence
- How to Ace Your Job Interview
- Tips for Filling Out a Job Application Form
- Financial Aid Awareness Assistance and Resources
- Who Am I? Exploring Your Sexuality
- Life Books: A Creative and Fun Way to Express Yourself
- How Career Assessments Can Help You Make School and Career Choices
- Earning a GED or HSED

FCARC is a project of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin, Inc., Anu Family Services, and St. Aemilian-Lakeside, Inc., in partnership with the Wisconsin Department Children and Families. FCARC staff welcome suggestions for future tip sheets. Access their current list: [www.wifostercareandadoption.org/](http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/)



# Help us find families for these children

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)>. When you contact NC Kids, let them know if you heard about them through *Fostering Perspectives!*



### **Adron'** (age 11)

Adron' is funny, likes to play, and laughs easily. Affectionate and inquisitive, he is a capable student when focused on the task at hand. Adron' also likes being outside playing sports or fishing. He wants a family that goes to church and has other children that are older than him. It will be important for him to have ongoing visits with his sibling.



### **Brandyn** (age 11)

Brandyn is an active, curious, sensitive and full of life. He enjoys sports, especially football, and likes to play video games and have someone read to him. He gets extra help at school to help him meet his full potential. He wants to be a police officer when he grows up. Brandyn's forever family will need to be patient and caring, with a willingness to put in the time, energy, and effort to help him overcome his difficulty with trust. He will need to be the youngest child in his forever home.



### **Bryanna** (age 15)

Bryanna is a sweet, funny, and engaging girl. A sociable young lady eager to make friends, Bryanna attends regular classes at school where she performs at grade level. She has made tremendous progress since coming into foster care. With continued support and stability she has the ability to go very far in life. Bryanna needs the love, nurturing, encouragement, and attention that all children need. She has already proven how much it helps her shine.



### **Cesar** (age 10)

Cesar is a dynamic 5<sup>th</sup> grader who exhibits a mature personality. He is nice, inquisitive, smart, and athletic. He is very respectful to adults. Cesar speaks both English and Spanish. He enjoys a variety of activities including basketball, football, watching movies and playing board games. Cesar's favorite subject in school is math. His dream is to be an NFL football player when he grows up. Cesar's ideal family will provide him with lots of structure, stability, and positive reinforcement. Cesar will need to be the youngest child in his adoptive home.



### **Christina** (age 14)

Christina can be very helpful and is compassionate towards the elderly and physically disabled children. Christina is involved in church activities and enjoys dancing, swimming, and watching movies. She is in the 8th grade and receives extra assistance with her schoolwork. Christina needs a patient family that can provide close supervision and give lots of positive reinforcement. Christina has had many adults disappoint her, and needs a family where she can be the focal point for one-on-one attention.

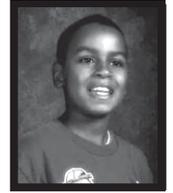


### **Keasia** (age 13)

Outgoing, creative, and intelligent, Keasia enjoys being a Girl Scout, playing basketball and shopping. Math is her favorite subject at school. She would like to be a hair stylist when she grows up. Keasia's biological family is very important to her and provides her with a great deal of support. Her forever family will need to be open to maintaining contact with her siblings and other important family members, including her grandmother and great-grandmother.

### **Martque'll** (age 13)

An active child who communicates well with adults, Martque'll can be very loving, charming and humorous. He likes to give letters and drawings to those he cares about and enjoys playing with remote control cars, riding his bike, fishing, and playing golf. Martque'll has a confident demeanor and feels best when he has some say in his life. He needs a positive male figure in his life to help guide him into a successful adulthood. Ongoing visits should be facilitated by Martque'll's new family so he can maintain an important relationship with his sibling.



### **Stephone** (age 12)

Stephone aspires to become a basketball player or a high school math teacher. Although he can be quiet and reserved in group settings, Stephone has many friends at school and is seen as a leader amongst his peers. His foster parents say he is a fine young man with lots of potential. Stephone dreams of having a mom and dad, older siblings, pets and a home in the city.



### **Tyler** (age 15)

A charming 9<sup>th</sup> grader, Tyler is extremely artistic and creative. His favorite activities include playing video games and listening to his MP3 player. He also enjoys skateboarding, camping, and outdoor activities. Tyler would like to be an architect when he grows up. He has frequent visits with his siblings and great-grandmother, so his forever family should be open to continuing those important connections. He will need a two-parent family. A family with therapeutic experience committed to seeking ongoing resources for Tyler would be ideal.



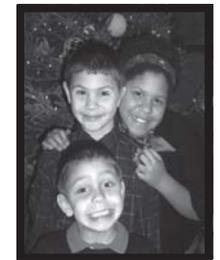
### **Wilnisha** (age 10)

Wilnisha is lovable, outgoing, and well-spoken. She expresses her needs and wants in a positive, direct way. Wilnisha enjoys riding her bicycle, playing video games, and drawing. Her favorite family outing is going to the beach. She likes to watch Nick Jr. Wilnisha does well academically and would like to pursue a career as a lawyer. Her adoption committee hopes to find a two-parent family that can provide a good balance of love, structure, and patience.



### **Makayla** (age 13), **Noah** (age 10) and **Thomas** (age 8)

Makayla, Noah, and Thomas desire a mom and dad to adopt and accept all three of them together. Older siblings in the home would be a plus! These siblings want a family that will love them and that they can love back. Each child enjoys and does well in school. Makayla is described by those that know her as engaging, confident, and assertive in her interactions; she is quiet and thoughtful. Noah is sensitive, friendly and somewhat shy. He does well when he has quiet time to reflect. Thomas is outgoing, loving, and affectionate. Those that know Thomas well describe him as playful and cooperative, a good student, and a pleasure to be around. A perfect family for this sibling group would be parents that are 'doers,' that are playful, outgoing, and will challenge and involve their children in everything. They need a family that will express their love and commitment every single day. Their adoption team is only considering families that have space available to provide both of the boys their own separate bedrooms.



# Writing Contest

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

**Did you ever act in a way that was really challenging for your foster parents? What's the best way for parents to handle this kind of behavior?**

**DEADLINE: AUGUST 2, 2011**

E-mail submissions to [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu) 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.

### Also Seeking Artwork and Other Writing

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.



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

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

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

### In-Service Quiz, FP v15#2

1. When is the best time to begin teaching young people the skills they need to be self-sufficient?
2. What happens in Raleigh on May 19?
3. It's room cleaning time at your house. How would you give instructions to a child who has only a concrete understanding of what it means to clean his or her room?
4. "Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency," a life skills-teaching training, will be offered free to North Carolina foster parents this October. List three ways you and the young people you care for would benefit if you attended this training.
5. Describe the process Misty Stenslie went through after she left foster care. What difficulties did she experience? Where did she find support?
6. What is *Futures Ready* and how does it benefit youth with severe emotional disturbances, mental wellness issues, and/or co-occurring disabilities?
7. Why is it important for young people in foster care to learn about the issues of puberty?
8. Name three resources foster parents can tap to provide young people the information and experiences they need to select a possible career.
9. Give three examples of a "teachable moment."
10. What is "family finding"?

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**Give a child a voice... contact a child advocate.**  
Child Advocates provide assistance to families by assessing the services they need in their communities; intervening with state and local agencies; and helping parents, family members and other concerned citizens become better advocates for their own children and children in their community.

919.807.4400  
[childadvocates@doa.nc.gov](mailto:childadvocates@doa.nc.gov)

N.C. Department of Administration  
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[www.ncyavio.com](http://www.ncyavio.com)