

# fostering perspectives

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## Focusing on child well-being

Bryan Samuels, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, says one of the most important things we can do to help children who receive child welfare services is to increase our focus on their well-being (USDHHS, 2012a).

In response to Samuels' leadership, child welfare professionals across the country are paying special attention to the social and emotional well-being of children in foster care. They're trying to help young people de-

velop the skills, capacities, and characteristics that will enable them to understand and navigate the world in healthy, positive ways. In particular, there's an interest in helping young people develop the ability to form attachments, make friends, and engage in positive relationships (USDHHS, 2012b).

If you are a foster or adoptive parent or kin caregiver, focusing intensely on child well-be-

Let's teach children to understand and navigate the world in healthy, positive ways.


ing is hardly a new idea. If you're like most resource parents, it's a guiding concern in your life. For you every day is an attempt to answer a simple but sometimes challenging question: what can I do to help children lead happy, successful lives?

We hope the information and suggestions you find in this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* will help you in your ongoing effort to answer this important question.

## Writing Contest

### How I know when someone cares about my well-being

In the last issue of *Fostering Perspectives* we asked children in foster care "How do you know when someone cares about your well-being? What does it look like? What does it feel like?" Here's what they told us.



**1st**

**Dee'Cember, age 16**

I know when someone cares about my well-being, when my caregiver makes sure that I am safe. They are considerate towards my thoughts and feelings, they make sure my needs are met, and maybe every now and then my wants.

**I feel loved, accepted, cared about. I don't feel like I'm invisible anymore.**

They keep me healthy, help me when I'm in a time of need, and respect me and my boundaries.

A person that cares about my well-being will do this: they check up on me in school to make sure I'm okay. When I'm in a crisis or when things seem to go wrong in my life, they are there to help me process and get through those tough times. When I need some advice and I'm struggling to fix a problem, they are there to give me advice. Also, when I've been hurt and troubled, they are there to love me, support me. They accept me for who I am.


They won't judge me for what has happened to me. . . .

It has been extremely hard for me to trust people that come into my life. When someone tries to show me that they care about my well-being, sometimes it is hard to believe that they really care about me.

But once I find that trust with them, it makes it easier for me to accept that they care about me. This makes me feel like nothing could ever break that bond that we have with each other.

I feel loved, accepted, cared about. I don't feel like I'm invisible anymore. I feel like I'm an important part of someone's life and I don't feel as though I'm an outcast. It's great to have someone in your life that cares about you.

*Dee'Cember received \$100 for winning first prize in the writing contest.*



**2nd**

**Sasha, age 17**

They will go out of their way for you and do what's best for you, or even sometimes do what you want to do. . . .


The person will push you to do better, even when you're about to give up. And the feeling is **amazing**.

**Around them you can always be yourself, and they won't care.**

It might not feel like it when they're pushing you to do better, and you want to give up, but in the long run, it's going to feel great!

You seem to always want to be around someone that cares for you. Around them you can always be yourself, and they won't care. The greatest two people like that are my parents. They have a never-ending love for me. And it feels great!

*Sasha received \$50 for winning second prize in the writing contest.*



**3rd**

**Nick, age 13**

When someone cares about your well-being they don't just keep you in their home. They **gladly** keep you in their home.

**They teach you life skills, values, and things you will use all your life.**

They show you love and care for you. They teach you good manners, life skills, values, and things you will use all your life.

They don't just act like you're some dirty secret. They actually introduce you to their friends and they become your friends, too.

When someone cares about your well-being it feels like you're wanted and loved. It looks like a good family.

*Nick received \$25 for winning third prize in the writing contest.*

# CONTEST: How I know when someone cares about my well-being?

The young people below all received \$15 for having their work published in *Fostering Perspectives*.

## The Accident by Miranda, age 14

It was a good day to ride my new bike. Before I could ride I had to let my mom check the bike so when I ride it I'm safe. So it took like 20 minutes and then she gave me the bike.

I was so happy!

I was going as fast as I can. Then all of a sudden my cat jumped in front of my bike. I did not want to hit my cat, so I was trying to use my breaks, but they were not working.

All of a sudden I flew across, hit the light pole, and then flipped and hit my neck. I was so scared!

My sister runs and gets my mom. She comes running out and tells me not to move.

My mom goes in the house and calls 911. I'm right in the middle of the road and I can hear the ambulance. They parked right by my mailbox. They carefully put me on the stretcher and rushed me to the hospital to the x-ray room. They moved my neck left and right and brought me back to my room.

My mom was there. The doctors told me I had a fracture and that I was lucky it was not a break. I was so relieved. I had to wear a neck brace for 7 weeks.

No matter what happens to me, my mom will help me and do her job to take me to the hospital or the family doctor. Plus, when I go to my doctor they tell me I'm good and healthy. . . . It makes me feel good.



## Christina, age 12

They care. It's not just saying, "It's gonna be OK" or a simple hug.

It's "We're walking this road together—hand in hand, worries behind us, future in front!"



### When someone cares about my well-being . . .

They teach me the things I should know. They teach me good habits. They check to see if my environment is safe for me. They also want me to have a bright future. . . . My foster parents care so much for me that they spend quality time with me. . . . They care about making me a part of the family. . . . It feels like a home. — Esmeralda, age 13

They take care of me. Like my mom does—she feeds me and makes sure that I am doing well in school and paying attention. She also makes sure I am clean and healthy. She cares about me and she never gives up on me.

When someone cares about your well-being you might notice that they ask you about your day. They make sure you have everything you need to have a successful life and future.

To have a person care about your well-being is a wonderful feeling. Sometimes it might feel as if they are being too hard on you, but they only want the best for you. Just give a person a chance to prove that they care about you. It might take a while, but if they really love you they will come around. —Taylor, age 13

They listen to me when I am upset. They understand how I feel. They protect me when I am scared. . . .

They praise me when I do the right thing or make a good grade. They encourage me when I feel like giving up! They show me positive reinforcement. They are really good role models for me. [I am in a place] where I will not get hurt. . . .

My DSS worker is trying to find me a forever family that I like and where I can be adopted! —Haley, age 14

My foster parents are the most loving people I know. They love me and they will always love me. They have a forgiving heart, just like Jesus. . . .

My foster parents have horses. They have three horses, cats, dogs, chickens, and a mule. It is like living on a farm. I love it. —Dalton

A chance to see my mom every month doesn't satisfy my lack of going home. I would like things the other way around. I also feel that a foster home has helped... me to maintain happiness and overcome problems. It has helped me know there is comfort. —Alanna, age 9

## Adoption and My Well-Being by Jazmyn

What I think it feels like to have someone truly love and care about your well-being is when some person you don't know at all flies halfway across the country just to come visit you. Even though you don't know this person, this person knows who you really are and really thinks you are special.

When you finally get to see this wonderful lady, you look into her eyes and you think: she's the one! For the next week, you stay at a hotel in the middle of your home town and do a lot of crazy-fun stuff you never got to do before, and you are happier than you've been in a long, long time. But the end of the week is coming near.

When it's finally time for her to go, you hug her goodbye. But inside you don't want her to leave. And you know she doesn't want to leave, either.

She gives you a necklace, her phone number, and her green sweater. Then she gives you a big, long hug and takes your picture.

For the next few weeks you have long talks on the phone with this lady, and you think about what she had said: "If you ever need me, just call." And I did.

She came back around Thanksgiving to pick me up to come meet her family. I rode in an airplane for the very first time. We then drove from Florida through North Carolina and then to Ohio, where her family lived. We were going to stay at her sister's house. It was huge. She invited the whole family and they were all there to meet me!!! I loved being the center of attention. After that she took me home to Idaho. I wanted to stay with her forever!

When she took me back [to North Carolina], I hugged her goodbye with tears in my eyes. I didn't want to lose the relationship she had made with me.

Two weeks later, a little bit before Christmas 2005, she came to come get me again, but this time, I was with her to stay! She took me home with her and took good care of me. In 2006, I was adopted by this very same lady.



You know someone cares when they fly halfway across the country just to visit you, and they've never even met you before!





# Lifebooks: Keeping it together

By Donna Foster

As a foster parent, one of your goals—a goal you share with your partners in the rest of the child welfare system—is to support

children and parents who are dealing with multiple traumas.

One way to do this is to help children understand and make new meaning of their traumatic history and current experiences. Foster parents can help children do this by encouraging them to share their life story, acknowledging their feelings, and reminding them that the bad things that have happened to them are not their fault.

Lifebooks are a great way to accomplish all these things.

## Lifebooks

A lifebook is a recording of a child's memories, past and present mementos, photos, drawings, and journals. These are preserved in a binder, photo album, or book.

The child uses his lifebook to record his history and the goals for his future. Written stories by the child and others are the heart of the lifebook.

Typically lifebooks are started when the child is moved from their birth parents' care. They're an ongoing process. While it's best to start a lifebook when the child is first placed in foster care, it's never too late to start.

The lifebook belongs to the child. The child decides who can look at it. If the child moves, the lifebook goes with him.

Because they spend so much time with the child and get to know the child so well, foster parents are in a great position to start the development of the lifebooks. However, be sure to check in with the child's social work-

er about your plans and what information to include before you start a lifebook.

## Benefits of Lifebooks

The process of creating a lifebook can:

- help the social worker, foster parent, birth parent, and child form an alliance.
- help children understand their life events.
- give kids a clearer sense of their life story.
- provide a vehicle for children to share their life histories with others.
- increase a child's self-esteem by recording the child's growth and development.
- help the child's birth family share in the time when they are living apart.
- contribute to an adoptive family's understanding of the child's past.

Source: North Dakota Department of Human Services

## Backups and Copies

It's OK for the birth parents and caretakers (foster parents, relatives, guardians, residential counselors or adoptive parents) to keep copies of photos and other lifebook items. In fact, keeping copies is a good idea because the child's lifebook could be lost or destroyed and the child may need help in recreating it. With permission, you can scan lifebook pages and store them in a file on the computer or on a CD.

## Conclusion

Lifebooks can be so valuable. They are tools that can help eliminate a child's confusion about his life, answer his questions, and fill in gaps in his life story. They permanently record for the child the fact that we care about them and their well-being.

Important documents, clear explanations of what happened, and reminders that the child is loved: all can live safely in a lifebook.

## Lifebooks: Samples and Sources

Here are just a few of the many books, websites, and other resources available to help you in creating a lifebook from both the adoption and foster care perspective.

*The Child's Own Story: Life Story Work with Traumatized Children* by Richard Rose and Terry Philpot (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005).



Strategies for conducting life story work and applying it to therapy for children affected by trauma. The techniques can be used by adoption and foster care workers, social workers, psychologists, foster parents, mental health professionals, and other people who work with children. Available from: [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com).

*Making History: A Social Worker's Guide to Lifebooks* by Joann Harrison, Elaine Campbell, Penny Chumbley (2010). A guide to making a record of the places children have lived, the people they've met, and the feelings they have experienced. Part one is a "how to" book. Part two focuses on critical issues to cover in working with children. Available from: <http://1.usa.gov/XUfB11>.

*Lifebook Pages* from the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association. Downloadable lifebook pages allow a child to pick the pages that fit his or her style. Available from: [www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa\\_lifebook\\_pages.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa_lifebook_pages.asp).

*My Foster Care Journey* by Beth O'Malley (2001). Workbook for children in foster care to provide a record of their birth family and significant life events. Some pages are to be completed by a social worker about the circumstances surrounding the child's placement in foster care and the dates of court actions. Available from: [www.adoptionlifebooks.com](http://www.adoptionlifebooks.com)

*My Awesome Life* by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. Provides a lifebook at cost to help celebrate a child's life and journey of adoption. Available from: <http://www.lssi.org/SUPPORT/MyAwesomeLife.aspx>.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov))

## Lifebooks Often Include Information about . . .

### Birth Information

- birth certificate
- weight, height, special medical information
- picture of the hospital

### Child's Family Information

- pictures of child's family
- names, birth dates of parents
- names, birth dates and location of siblings
- physical description of parents, especially pictures of parents and siblings
- birth parents' occupational/educational info
- information about extended family members

### Placement Information

- pictures of foster family/families
- list of foster homes (name, location)
- first names of other children in foster homes to whom child was close
- names of social workers; photos of social workers to whom the child was close

### Medical Information

- list of clinics, hospitals, etc., where child received care; and care given (surgery, etc.)
- immunization record
- medical information that might be needed by the child when growing up, or as an adult
- when walked, talked, etc.

### School Information

- names of schools and report cards
- pictures of schools, friends, and teachers

### Religious Information

- places of worship child attended
- confirmation, baptism, and other similar records
- papers and other materials from Sunday School

### Other Information

- pictures of child at different ages
- stories about the child from parents, foster parents, and social workers
- awards, special skills, likes and dislikes, etc.

Adapted from North Dakota Department of Human Services

## Questions Lifebooks Can Help Answer

- Why am I living in this foster/adoptive home?
- Where are my parents?
- Where are my brothers and sisters?
- Where is my birth family (grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, and cousins)?
- Why am I in foster care?
- Why did I leave my other foster homes?
- Where is my pet and who's taking care of it?
- Where is my stuff?
- What did I look like as a baby?
- Who in my family do I look like?



# Being safe vs. *feeling* safe

by Jeanne Preisler

Every human has emotions. We feel happy some times and mad at other times. We can feel angry, silly, and excited all in the same day!

One emotion we often feel without consciously knowing it is the feeling of safety. Feeling safe is not something we discuss often. For example, when a friend asks “How are you?” we rarely respond by telling them we feel safe.

Yet if you think about it, most of us can say that we feel safe on a fairly regular basis.

## A Universal Experience

*Safe* can be defined as free from harm or hurt. So, feeling safe means you do not anticipate either harm or hurt, emotionally or physically.

Can you remember a time when you didn't feel safe? Pause for a moment to really remember it.

Maybe you experienced a terrible thunderstorm and the wind was so loud you wondered if there was a tornado coming. Perhaps you witnessed a fight or were threatened in some way. Perhaps you were separated from your friends in a large crowd.

## When We Feel Unsafe

It's likely you're able to recall at least one time in your life when you didn't feel safe.

Do you remember what emotions you were experiencing when this happened? Several emotions often compete for attention during traumatic events like this.

When I was feeling unsafe, I was scared and anxious, and my body just froze in place. My heart pounded and my mind was racing to figure out what was going to happen next. Because I was not in control of my body's reaction, panic was closing in.

Even now, years later, if I am in situations that remind me of that time, I vividly remember the event.

## Psychological Safety Matters

You are reading this article because you touch the world of “child welfare” in some way. It is highly probable that you have heard the expression “safety, permanence, and well-being” before. We use these terms to compartmentalize the vision we have for children. We want them to be safe and free from harm. We want them to have a permanent family who will be there for them for the rest of their lives. We want them to be well —emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially, mentally, and economically. We have made a lot of progress on these goals over the last decade.

However, the concept of safety has evolved recently. We have historically thought of safe-

ty as simply being free from physical abuse, free from sexual abuse, free from emotional abuse, and free from neglect. This type of safety is a critical first step on the road to being well. But, we need to broaden our definition of safety to also include this concept of feeling safe; a concept that we call *psychological safety*.

What we are realizing now (and what the research is telling us) is that permanency and well-being can't fully happen if the child does not feel safe first. To have a childhood—to develop and grow and be well—children must first feel psychologically safe.

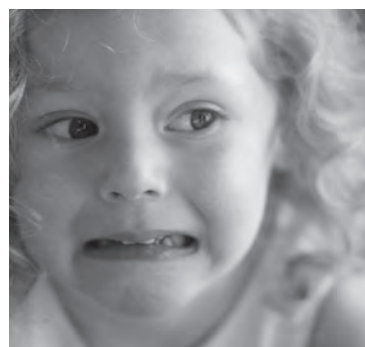
## What Helps?

So, how can we help children feel psychologically safe?

Think back to the time when you didn't feel safe. What helped you?

I bet if I polled 20 of you, I might find 20 different things that helped create the feeling of safety. That's because what works for one person may not work for another.

At every age there are things that help us feel safe. In the very young it might be a pacifier, a special blanket, sucking a thumb, a stuffed toy, a loving caregiver, a kind word, a smile, a hug, or the act of rocking back and forth.



**Sights, sounds, smells: exposure to anything associated with the trauma can bring up intense and terrifying feelings.**

As we get older, we seek the feeling of safety in such things as a friendly voice on the telephone, a comfy pillow, a special meal, friends, clubs, a special location, spiritual beliefs, or books. We also seek it through some not-so-healthy methods like an overabundance of food, alcohol, and/or drugs.

One important thing I would like you to remember is that children who have experienced trauma might get a sense of safety from things we hardly ever think about.

The fact that food is readily available to them at all times might help them feel safe. The temperature of a room might help them feel safe.

## Trauma Reminders

On the other hand, things we believe should create the feeling of safety—a comforting hug or a hot bath—may cause a child who has been abused to feel terribly unsafe.

Sights, sounds, smells, people, places, things, words, colors and even a child's own feelings can become linked to trauma. Afterward, exposure to anything associated with the trauma can bring up intense and terrifying feelings. Sometimes, the child may understand what is happening, but these connections will most likely be completely unconscious.

*continued next page*

## Angel, age 13

I know someone cares about my well-being by how inviting they are. When you first get to their home, everyone invites you in and makes you feel at home.

But the question is, do you feel invited? Do you feel in a safe environment?

Another way is by how they act and what they do to show they care.

Well-being is your happiness, so if you think about it, it's saying, “How do they make you happy?” By taking you on trips, having fun, and including you in everything!

Everyone makes mistakes, right? But after you made that mistake and got your punishment it's pretty much time to move on. But if your parents or foster parents go on and on about what happened a long time ago, that's kind of putting you down and not really making you happy.

Would you really want someone to make you remember a one-time mistake every day?

That's what I thought. No one does.

It feels great to know someone cares. When you've settled in and became a part of the family it's really not different from your real family. No matter if they are white and you're black, or they're black and you're white. You can still feel they care.

Even after this some people will still ask, but what does it feel like?

Well, I told you all you need to know. The rest is up to you. If you love or dislike the place you are at, that's how you know. No one can tell you what it feels like because they're not there. They can't answer questions that were meant for you.

At the end of the day it's up to you to decide whether that person or persons care about you.

**Everyone invites you in and tries to make you feel at home. But the question is, do you feel invited? Do you feel safe?**

*Angel received \$15 for having her work published in Fostering Perspectives.*



This makes it challenging for caregivers to help. To help we must become really good detectives and help children identify things that instill the feeling of safety and eliminate or minimize things that cause them to feel unsafe.

Just because an agency has deemed a foster/adoptive/kinship parent as “safe,” with the right locks on doors, no criminals living in the home, and pets up-to-date on rabies shots, does not mean that a child moving into this home will feel safe. In fact, I hope you can see from this article that a “safe home” has very little to do with the child *feeling* safe.

Angel’s essay on the previous page reinforces this idea. She talks about what she felt when she entered a home for the first time. She felt “at home” and “invited.” This would not have been possible if she did not first feel safe.

Psychological safety is an extensive topic, and we will continue to write about it in future issues of *Fostering Perspectives*.



**We need to put on our detective hats and begin to see children’s strengths, fears, and behaviors through the lens of psychological safety.**

## Be a Detective

For now, I invite you to put on your detective hat and begin to see your child’s strengths, fears, and behaviors through the lens of psychological safety.

When your child is thriving, what conditions are present? When your child is scared, what are all the factors that led to that feeling?

If there are certain behaviors causing problems, begin to notice what triggers (sights, sounds, smells, people, places, things, words, colors, etc.) were present prior to the behavior.

If the child is old enough, ask them questions such as:

- What scares you?
- What calms you down?
- What happens when you start to get upset?

Being a good “safety detective” can go a long way towards healing children who have experienced trauma.

## Reach Out

In addition to wearing your detective hat, I have one more request of you. Please share this article with at least one other person who touches the child welfare system and discuss it with them. This is an important topic for everyone involved in the system to know and think about. By sharing this information, you will play an active role in transforming our system for the better.

Jeanne Preisler works for the NC Division of Social Services on Project Broadcast, an effort to help the child welfare system become more trauma-informed. She used the National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s *Caring for a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma: A Resource Parent Curriculum* to inform this article.

Examples of people you might wish to share this article with include your child’s:

- Guardian ad litem (GAL)
- Court counselor
- Teacher
- Tutor
- Sports coach
- Any relatives who interact with the child.

**Pass It ON!**

## 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 4–6, 2013 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 and facilitate a two-hour session for other foster parents in their area. Participants will have an opportunity to practice facilitation and training skills at the seminar. Upon returning home, the foster parents are expected to conduct a training locally to help foster parent practice life skills in the home.

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 4 and ends at 1 p.m. on Sun., October 6, 2013. 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, 2013. For more information, contact Nancy Carter (800/820-0001; nancy.carter@ilrinc.com).

### “Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency” RESIDENCY TRAINING REGISTRATION FORM

Independent Living Resources, Inc.  
411 Andrews Road, Suite 140, 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, 2013

**Registrant Information:**

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

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

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

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_

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

Do you have training experience?  yes  no

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

\_\_\_\_\_

When do you anticipate conducting your first foster parent training?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** Country Inn & Suites, Burlington, NC

**Times:** Fri., 10/04: 3 p.m. – 8 p.m. • Sat., 10/05: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. • Sun., 10/06: 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.



# Trauma's impact: My family's journey by Mark Maxwell

Today I know how important it is to understand how trauma can affect children and to be able to see their behaviors through a “trauma lens.” I only wish I knew that six years ago, when I first met “Tyler.” (*Tyler isn't his real name; to protect privacy I've also changed some details in this story.*)

## How It Began

I got a call from Jill, our agency case manager, about Tyler, who was then 12 years old. She said he needed placement immediately because of a problem that occurred in his last foster home. I hesitated when I heard Tyler had had a dozen placements in recent years, but ultimately agreed to provide respite.

## Our Family

At that time, we were like many families. We were a two-income, middle class household. I was in graduate school, working on my master's degree. We wanted children.

Our older child, placed in our home from foster care, had challenges, but like many parents we weathered them. We believed we could make a difference in children's lives with “love and logic,” and that this would work with Tyler, too. Before we knew it he was in our home: a smiling, tiny little boy with a love for nature and camping.

## Tyler's File

At my request, Jill shared Tyler's file with us. It consisted of a hodge-podge of case notes, IEPs (Individualized Educational Plans), report cards, and lots of acronyms, including PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), ODD (oppositional-defiant disorder), and RAD (reactive attachment disorder).

Now, we were trained as therapeutic foster parents, so it wasn't the first time we'd seen those acronyms. Naturally, we were concerned.

Tyler's file explained that he had experienced an average of one move a year since the age of five. The state confirmed he was badly neglected by his biological family. The file stated that he was sexually abused by an uncle and exposed to marijuana. There were remarks within the reams of paper about Tyler “acting inappropriately with younger children” and having issues with boundaries. In addition, the files described his issues with stealing and “compulsive lying.”

After reading all this we were fearful, but wanted to help.

I asked Jill about the family Tyler was placed with for three years. She explained that they wanted to adopt Tyler but the mom returned to school, and his needs proved too much for them.

## No Honeymoon

As foster parents we are often told about the “honeymoon period” that occurs just after a child is placed in a foster home. We did not receive one from Tyler.

Shortly after his arrival, we noticed small items missing from our bedroom. Over time, we placed a lock on our bedroom door. Food would vanish only to be discovered hidden and moldy in Tyler's bedroom closet or under the bed. Items that required double AA batteries never seemed to have a working set. We would find batteries with teeth marks like the ones found in a discarded piece of gum.

Tyler's toys and personal items were often destroyed with no rationale. We learned over time that giving Tyler a consequence for his actions really meant **we** were on lockdown, because that meant we had to supervise him constantly.

At school Tyler would steal from fellow students and teachers. On three occasions he was captured on school surveillance cameras taking property. Each time he denied involvement until images were produced that showed him in action.

## A Permanent Home

Through school visits, court hearings, and case management meetings we were encouraged to provide Tyler with a permanent home. We agreed a year later. We believed providing him with a loving, stable home and psychiatric services would give him what he needed to heal from his past.

That's not quite how it worked out. Today we understand that the pain from his past trauma created a pattern of behaviors that Tyler found difficult to manage.

He excelled as a Boy Scout, yet was suspended from school for stealing and banned from community youth activities. When he received a consequence for an action, his response was not to accept it, but to get revenge. This included making false allegations to authorities about the adults around him, including members of the family and school staff.

The school psychologist said to me, “I know you love this child and want to help him, but because of his past trauma he is severely emotionally disturbed.” Those words were written into Tyler's IEP.

He met weekly with a therapist but refused to take “legal” psychotropic medications. By age 17 his behaviors had earned him time in youth detention facilities, a stay at a wilderness camp (which he ran away from six times during a 10-month period), and an adult criminal felony conviction.

## My Advice for Foster and Adoptive Parents

Though the journey with Tyler hasn't been easy, our experiences with our other children have been less extreme, more successful. My family remains engaged with the child welfare system. I'm an active member of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and I continue to want to give back.

To foster and adoptive parents caring for children who've experienced significant trauma I offer the following suggestions:

- **Be your child's number one advocate** when it comes to requesting and receiving mental health services. Engage in treatment. When it comes to treatment interventions, know there's not a single treatment that works for everyone. Keep looking until you find the one that works for your child.
- **Educate yourself about trauma.** Take classes, read, and ask questions. Work hard to develop coping skills that will allow you to help your child.
- **Take breaks and take care of yourself** to avoid burnout.
- **Communicate with the child's support system** (teachers, coaches, and others) about your child's needs. The child's community supporters will reassure and empower the child to move forward.

Mark Maxwell is Vice President of Region 2 for NCFAPA. He has four children, three adopted from foster care with his life partner. Mark is a PhD candidate at Walden University.

### Tips for Improving Outcomes for Children with Trauma-Related Behavior Problems

- **Explore evidence-based treatment.** Certain treatments have been shown to work well for children who've experienced trauma. Ask your child's therapist about their approach and experience with treating trauma. If your child is not in therapy, ask their social worker about trained therapists in your area by using the NC Child Treatment Program website at <http://bit.ly/XNEpwS>.
- **Build children's healthy attachments.** Making sure children maintain and strengthen bonds with important people in their lives can reduce the damage caused by trauma and improve the likelihood of a healthy outcome. Work with your child's team to determine ways to use visits, phone calls, or online contact safely to help keep children connected.
- **Identify “trauma triggers.”** Most children have certain situations or sensations that make them feel unsafe or remind them of past trauma. These triggers can cause especially difficult behavior. Work with your child's team to identify triggers that may be contributing to challenging patterns of behavior.
- **Value assessments.** Maltreatment can alter the chemistry and the formation of a child's brain. A comprehensive medical and mental health assessment can help identify problems your child may have developed as a result of his early history.
- **Get moving!** Regular physical activity benefits all of us, but it is especially important for children dealing with neurological or emotional challenges. Find ways to fit in time for kids to run, climb, and play—it will pay off for everyone!
- **Learn more.** Visit the following websites: National Child Traumatic Stress Network, National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, American Psychological Association, and the National Institute of Mental Health.



# Teaching healthy behaviors to children in foster care

Whether they show it or not, young people are always watching us and learning from what we do. Kids copy adults, so as parents and role models, it is vitally important that we eat healthy and be active every day!

Now being a role model doesn't mean being perfect or never indulging your sweet tooth. Rather, it means balancing what you eat with what you do.

## Make Balance a Habit!

- **If you sit all day at work...** Grab the kids and take a long walk; invite the neighbors. Put on some music and dance. Visit a park, museum, or zoo.
- **If you are at a fast food restaurant...** Try a grilled chicken sandwich with mustard. Add a side salad. Split an order of fries.
- **If you find it hard to be active...** Try walking up and down the stairs. Park farther away from stores. Walk your child to school or to the bus stop.
- **If you're going on a picnic...** Bring foods like crunchy veggies with lowfat dip, whole-grain bread, baked or grilled meats, or fruits for dessert. Don't forget to bring a ball or Frisbee to play with or music so everyone can dance. Get everyone moving after they eat.

## Eat Healthy and Be Active Every Day!

- **Set an example**—Keep a variety of healthy foods on hand. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole-grain, fat-free or lowfat dairy products, lean meats, and dry beans. Limit the amount of foods you buy that are high in saturated fats, trans fats, and added sugar.
- **Watch serving sizes**—Remember, younger kids need less food than teenagers and adults. Start with small servings and give extra if they want more.
- **Be active**—You need at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week. Your kids need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, or most every day. Add activities to your daily schedule, like walking, biking, working in the yard, or cleaning the house.

## Making Smart Food Choices and Being Active Every Day

- Helps everyone keep mentally and physically fit.
- Helps to maintain a healthy weight.
- Helps reduce risks of serious diseases like heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and some types of cancer.
- Helps kids to grow and develop and provides them with the energy they need to learn and play.

Adapted from USDA, 2007

## Free Health Tips and Kid-Friendly Health News

- **KidsHealth.org** is another great website for learning how to take care of your body, eat healthy and stay fit – at any age! Site includes healthy recipes, including fruit kabobs, and incredible edible veggie bowls. <http://www.kidshealth.org>



Give your children (and yourself) lots of praise for your physical activity time.

## NC's Health-Related Foster Care Policies

Following are some of North Carolina's health-related foster care policies that foster parents should know about.



### Sharing of Health Information with Foster Parents

According to North Carolina child welfare policy, DSS should share information about a child's medical needs, medication, any special conditions, and instructions for the child's care with the foster parent prior to or at the time of placement. The social worker is responsible for bringing any medications, glasses, hearing aids, etc. to the foster care placement with the child. Social workers should document in the record when these items are given to foster care placement providers.

In addition, the DSS form "Child Health Status Component" (dss-5243) must be completed within seven days of initial placement and a copy provided to the foster parents. Foster parents should be sure to take the Child Health Status Component, as well as any other medical or social history information relevant to the delivery of health care services, with them to the child's medical appointments.

Foster parents can find a blank copy of the Child Health Status Component online at <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/forms/dss/dss-5243.pdf>.

### Scheduling Examinations and Appointments

According to North Carolina child welfare policy, children placed in foster care must have a physical examination scheduled within seven days of the date of placement. If dental, developmental, psychological, or educational assessments are needed, social workers must schedule them within one week once the need for them is identified.

Source: NCDSS, 2010

## Physical Activity: Staying Motivated

Here are some of the most common reasons people give for not being active and some helpful suggestions on how to overcome them:

**Time:** Make time for physical activity by walking, jogging or swimming during your lunch hour or take fitness breaks instead of coffee breaks. Do activities like jumping rope, calisthenics, riding a stationary bike or other home gym equipment while the kids are busy playing, at school, or sleeping. Break up your activities in 10 minute slots to get your 30 minutes a day! Ten minutes in the morning, at lunch, and in the afternoon will get you your 30 minutes.

**Friends and Family:** Explain your interest in leading a healthier life to your friends and family. Ask them to support your efforts. Invite them to join you in your activities and plan social activities involving physical activities.

**Energy:** Schedule physical activity for times in the day or week when you feel energetic. Convince yourself that with a healthier lifestyle, you will have more energy, and then try it!

**Motivation:** Plan ahead. Make active time part of your daily or weekly routine and write it on your calendar! Invite a close friend or family member to join you in the activity. Sharing the experience with someone will make it more enjoyable and you can keep each other motivated.

**Injury:** Learn how to warm up and cool down to prevent injury. Choose activities involving minimal risk, such as walking or swimming.

**Skill:** Select activities that are easy and fun, such as walking, climbing stairs, or jogging. Engage in the activity with friends who are at the same skill level as you are. Find a friend who is willing to teach you new skills or take a class to develop new ones. If you are interested, try something new like skating or softball.

**Resources:** Select activities that are easy to do anywhere, such as walking, jogging, jumping rope, or aerobics. Your community parks and recreation programs offer low cost programs for the whole family. (Reprinted from USDA, 2010)





# SaySo announces new executive director

On the occasion of SaySo's 15th birthday, or *Quinceañera*, Nancy Carter announced that at the end of June she will step down as SaySo's Executive Director. At that point, SaySo's newly elected Board of Directors and current Program Coordinator, Lauren Zingraff, will lead the SaySo organization.



Nancy Carter

Nancy has been long associated with SaySo and stated that serving as SaySo's Executive Director has been an honor and inspiration during a tenure that included an uncertain path for SaySo. After 15 years, SaySo has developed a solid reputation both statewide and nationally with an impassioned future of enthusiastic young leaders.

In her remarks, Nancy reminded the members that SaySo "exists to empower young people to dream and achieve their goals through helping and supporting each other." She leaves SaySo as it began: "with hope and confidence in our young people...the heart of this organization."

Nancy challenged the alumni and members to allow their achievements to inspire other young adults while they reach out their hand to pull another up. She also thanked the membership for teaching and inspiring her to be a better social worker and person.

## SaySo's New Executive Director

Lauren Zingraff is well known to those who frequent SaySo and statewide LINKS events. She has been SaySo Program Coordinator since June 2009. Under her guidance the membership has grown stronger, the SaySo reputation more solid, and the alumni staff has grown to 10 positions.



Lauren Zingraff

Nancy said she could not be more proud of Lauren's dedication and how she has embraced the organization just as the founding members did years ago.

"Lauren is more than prepared to guide this organization, Nancy said. "She, the Board of Directors, and alumni staff work and support each other beautifully to achieve the goals and mission of SaySo."

In accepting the Executive Director position, Lauren recalled that in 1998, the year SaySo was started, Aaliyah's "Are You That Somebody?" was the number one song.

One of the most important things that happened in 1998, she noted, was the development of a youth-driven organization in North Carolina. Originally called COFFEE (Coalition of Friends and Family Educating Everyone), its name was changed to SaySo: Strong Able Youth Speaking Out.

Lauren commented that Nancy has been the greatest champion of SaySo for those 15 years (the equivalent of 131,487 hours) and as a result. SaySo is a big piece of her heart.

Together Lauren and SaySo Alumnus Chaney Stokes presented Nancy with a pictorial composite of the last 15 years (or, in their words, 782 weeks or 5,478 days).

Lauren promised to honor the tradition of SaySo in every way and uphold the mission and heart of the organization. Lauren Zingraff will be commissioned along with the newly elected board of directors on June 20, 2013 at the annual SaySo Orientation Retreat.

## Other SaySo News

On March 2, 2013, the SaySo organization proudly celebrated its 15th Anniversary at Guilford Technical Community College in Jamestown, NC. SaySo Saturday serves as our annual birthday party and family reunion.

This year we had much to celebrate, including having five members of the board of directors attending college and ten paid SaySo Alumni positions!

We had an all-time record breaking crowd of 194 birthday guests. All enjoyed good food, great fellowship, and lots of fun! Lunch was catered by Moe's Southwest Grill, and guests were able to have their pictures taken to remember our special day.

One of the highlights of the day was our keynote speaker, George Duvall, a nationally-known motivational speaker and comedian. George is also an alumnus of foster care. He was the keynote speaker at our 10-year anniversary and we are so happy that he was able to join us for our 15th party. George had birthday guests laughing until they were crying!

At the conference we also debuted our newest video, "iSaySo." It features youth and adult supporters talking about why they are involved with SaySo. It was very well received! Watch it on SaySo's website at <http://www.saysoinc.org/isayso/>.



We had festive birthday cupcakes!

## The New Board

As with every SaySo Saturday event, we acknowledged our wonderful local chapters and held regional elections for the 2013-14 SaySo Board of Directors. The following youth were elected to the board:

- REGION 1: David R.
- REGION 2: Isaiah R., Sarah F., Chris W.
- REGION 3: Ladajah H., Vivian S., Hope D.
- REGION 4: Damonique L., Erica F., Amanda S., Sam H.
- REGION 5: Brittany H., Sarah H., Eric G.
- REGION 6: Kristen B., Tiffany C., Sarah M.

The 2013-14 board will attend a three-day leadership training retreat in June which will include a ropes course. A commissioning ceremony will conclude the retreat as board members accept their one-year term to serve and represent all foster youths in North Carolina. During the year, board members will plan and facilitate a variety of youth conferences such as "LINK-Up" and "It's My Transition." They'll also participate in a variety of projects in collaboration with SaySo partners and the state LINKS program.



Introducing SaySo's 2013 Board of Directors

## Thanks for Supporting SaySo Saturday 2013

This year's event was a phenomenal success and made possible with the generous support of the following partners: Action for Children (Raise the Age), Adcentive Brown & Bigelow, Balloons and Tunes, Children's Home Society (Matt Anderson), The Eaton Corporation, The Fenwick Foundation, Foster Care to Success, George Duvall, Guilford Technical Community College, Harris Teeter (Adams Farm), Horizon Video Productions, Independent Living Resources, Inc., John & Mellicent Blythe, Melinda Medina & Marvin Terrell Dixie, Moe's Southwest Grill (High Point), NC LINKS, UNC-CH School of Social Work (Sara Cobb & Christy Bullins). Plus a Great Big Thank You to everyone who came and celebrated our Quinceañera with us!





## Maurita Miller elected president of NCFAPA

In February 2013 the Board of Directors of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association elected Maurita Miller as the association's new President.

To introduce you to Maurita we offer a brief biographical profile (see box at right) and the following interview. We believe that after reading this you will see why we are so excited that Maurita is leading the association.

### An Interview with Maurita Miller

#### Why do you think NCFAPA is necessary?

As foster parents we often run into hurdles. That's why the association is so needed: it helps provide a positive, supportive network to foster parents in our state.

#### Why are you a foster and adoptive parent?

I love kids and being able to give them hope for their future. I have never been married or been blessed with having my own (birth) children but have been overflowing with blessings from the children that have come through my home.

I had a 5-year-old boy tell me one time "Ms. Maurita, you make my heart feel good!"

That is what being a parent to these children is about.

#### What have children taught you?

More than words can even begin to say. I have had over 50 kids in my home over the last 10 years. These kids have amazing resilience and drive to get through the situations many of them face. I have cried many tears, tears of sorrow as well as joy. I wouldn't give up on these kids for anything.

#### What are the top three issues impacting North Carolina's foster parents today?

Obtaining services for children through Medicaid is one of our biggest challenges. With all of the changes being made to our system, our kids are sometimes being refused services.

A second, related challenge is the changes we're seeing in NC's mental health system. We need to support our parents by providing information. We need to better understand how changes affect us and our kids.

Lastly, I think foster parents face challenges around information sharing. Foster parents need information and training to help

them understand and respond effectively to the behaviors they see in their children.

#### Why do foster parents need training on trauma-informed parenting?

There is not one child that crosses our threshold that has not experienced trauma.

We need training that provides us, as parents, a perspective and opportunity to look back and understand what is driving the behaviors of our children. More often than not it is fear and anxiety caused by events from their past. Learning what causes behaviors in your children helps take pressure off yourself as well as the kids.

Speaking from experience, my children's behavior would often cause reactions in me that would be counter to what I was trying to achieve. The trauma-informed training I've received has helped me understand some of those things.

As foster parents, it often grieves our hearts and frustrates us when we have a child or children that can't seem to get it together and behave. There are triggers often causing this behavior. Taking the time to sit back, evaluate and understand the root of behavior enables you to provide the proper help for your child.

Doing this has made such a huge difference in the lives of me and my children. I promise that it has great potential to do the same for you and yours.

#### What do you want to achieve as NCFAPA's President?

We want to support foster parents and to see the quality of foster parenting increase. One way of doing this is educating the public about what being a foster parent really means and helping them

### PROFILE: Maurita Miller

- **NCFAPA Experience.** Has served as Vice President for Region 3 (Wake county area) for two years.
- **Experience as a Foster and Adoptive Parent.** Maurita has been a foster parent for 10 years; in that time she has cared for more than 50 children. She is also the adoptive mother of two teenagers.
- **Community Service.** Playing an active role in the community is important to Maurita and she has done so by:
  - providing housing for families and single mothers in transition;
  - serving on her employers' community support teams;
  - volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, Special Olympics, and her church.
- **Profession.** Maurita has worked as an accountant in the manufacturing, pharmaceutical, and telecommunications industries.
- **Education.** Bachelor's in accounting from Mansfield University of Pennsylvania (Mansfield, PA); she's currently completing a certification in non-profit management at Duke University.
- **Home.** Maurita has lived in the Raleigh area since 1996.



understand what these kids face. Children are not in the system because of their own actions, but they do face challenges.

We need to attract to foster care people that are willing to stand by, advocate for, and believe in the future of these kids, even after they leave our care.

#### Do you feel supported by the State of North Carolina?

Definitely. In February we had our quarterly board meeting and we welcomed Kevin Kelley, Chief of the NC Division of Social Services' Child Welfare Services Section, and Bob Hensley, Team Leader of Regulatory and Licensing Services, to our table. Our discussions were filled with ideas and suggestions about how NCFAPA can help and support the Division and how they can help and support us.

#### What is your vision for NCFAPA?

We need to change the face of the association. We're known for our annual conference and that's about it. We want to change that.

Our goal is to see NCFAPA become a fully functioning organization that supports all foster and adoptive parents throughout our state. We want to support our membership by holding

trainings in multiple ways, from online to conferences. We want to support our parents by being there for them to talk to when they are going through a difficult time. We want to support newly-licensed foster parents as they bring children into their homes. We want to advocate on behalf of our families in legislative and political matters related to foster care and adoption.

#### Describe your leadership style.

TEAM TEAM TEAM. We cannot move anything forward without working as a team. We need to recognize the strengths every person brings to the table and build upon them.

I don't expect every person to be involved in everything. But I do expect them to provide support and encouragement to our overall efforts. I expect people to follow through on commitments they make to the team.

I want to hear each and every person's perspective and opinion. I want the NCFAPA board and members to reach decisions together, recognizing that the most important thing in every decision we make is the foster parents we serve.



# Promoting child well-being by engaging fathers

Having their fathers involved in their lives can have a tremendous, positive impact on children's well-being. Research shows that kids whose dads are involved have:

- Better cognitive and intellectual development
- Higher self-esteem
- Better social competence
- Fewer signs of depression
- Deeper and better friendships, and
- Better self-control and emotional management.

Studies suggest that children with involved fathers have fewer behavior problems and are less likely to be delinquent or engage in criminal activity. Research has also shown that children of engaged fathers are less likely to be economically disadvantaged when they grow up (sources cited in Grayson, 2011).

## Children in Foster Care

Even as we are learning about the big difference fathers make, more and more children are growing up without their dads. In the last 50 years the percentage of American children living in a household without both parents has doubled, increasing from 18% in 1970 to 37% in 2010. Most of these children are being raised by single moms (Appelbaum, 2013).

This is even truer for children in foster care. Between 50% and 80% of children in foster care are removed from a single mother or unmarried couple (Malm, et al., 2006).

Understanding the important contribution that fathers—even those who have not been living with their children—can make to children's safety, permanence, and well-being, child welfare professionals in North Carolina and across the country are making a concerted effort to improve their ability to reach out to and engage fathers.

## A Role for Foster Parents

While child welfare professionals are the ones responsible for finding and connecting with the fathers of children in foster care, foster parents and kin caregivers also have a role to play. Following are some things to keep in mind and steps you can take to engage the fathers of children in foster care and help them make a positive difference in their children's lives.

**Take Your Cue from the Agency.** Don't reach out to children's parents without first consulting with your agency.

**Focus on the First Contact.** Your first conversation or meeting with a child's father is an opportunity to establish a basis for a positive, strengths-based relationship, free from judgments or assumptions. Remind dads

**"Fathers care – even if that caring is not shown in conventional ways."**

—Merkel-Holguin (2003)



how important they are to their children, and that there are some things only they can do for their kids. Phrases that can be helpful include:

- "We cannot redo what's in the past. But we can learn from our mistakes and do better in the future."
- "Your kids will carry what you do forever."
- "You can change things for them by changing your behavior" (NCDSS, 2012; Foster, 2011).

**Keep an Open Mind.** Don't assume a father is irresponsible or neglectful even if he has been absent (Schmid, 2006). Fear or other barriers may have kept him from being involved in his child's life. He may have been uninvolved because he was unaware of the child's status. "Especially if there is a conflicted relationship with the mother of the child, the father may have had little contact with his children" (Grayson, 2011).

Be open minded. If you withhold judgments, you may find he can be a strong support for his child. Cultivate and affirm his desire to play a role in his child's life (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

**Explain Your Role.** Even if they have not been living with their children, fathers are likely to feel the same anxieties and difficult emotions—anger, panic, helplessness—ex-

perienced by all parents when their children are placed in foster care. Knowing this can help you listen and respond with empathy.

It also helps if you make your role and goals clear. For example, you may wish to introduce yourself to a child's father by saying, "Bill, my name is John. My wife and I are taking care of your child until he can go home. He's told me about you, he misses you. I felt you wanted to know who was taking care of your son" (Foster, 2008).

**Don't Take Sides.** If there is conflict between the children's mother and father, stay neutral. If you have questions about how best to do this, consult the child's social worker and your licensing social worker.

**Gather and Share Information.** Donna Foster (2011) advises foster parents to ask fathers and other birth parents what questions they have for you. They may want to know: Do the children have a room by themselves? Who bathes them? What do you tell them about why they are in foster care? How do you let them know I love them? When can I talk to them? Are you going to change them so that they are more like your family? Do you want to keep my kids?

Ask fathers questions about their children, such as: How do you want us to take care of them? What do your children like to eat? What allergies do they have? Are they allergic to any medications, mold, animals, etc.? What fears do they have? What do you do to calm them? What do they need with them at bedtime? What are their school needs? Are they close to any teachers, bus drivers, or other family members? Who are they? What do you want the children to call us?

**Involve Dads in Decisions.** When questions are answered you can, in collaboration with the children's social worker, develop an action plan that might include *cont. next page*

## When Fathers Cannot or Should Not Have Contact

Although in most cases children benefit from contact with their fathers, there will be situations where contact will not be in the best interests of the child. Or, the father may be deceased, unwilling to be in touch with the child, or cannot be found. In these cases, it is still important for caseworkers and GALs to gather information about the father and his family and ensure it is included in the child's case file and shared with the child's caregivers and child as appropriate. Relevant information could include:

- Family medical history (so the child and her caregivers know of any conditions she may be at risk for);
- Information about benefits the father might be (or was) entitled to that could pass to the child (e.g., social security, worker's compensation, and inheritance of the father's assets), and any identifying information needed to claim those benefits;
- Father's contact information, which may include his address, phone number, cell phone number, workplace, and similar information for his relatives so the child or caretaker can reach him in the future;
- Picture of the father and information about his work, interests, hobbies, etc. (e.g., in the case of a deceased father whose child might one day want to know more about him).

Adapted from Kendall & Pilnik, 2010



# Fathers

*continued from previous page*

phone calls, visits at the agency, at parks, and in time, at the foster home. Fathers can join their children and the foster parents at medical appointments, school activities and meetings, church functions, community activities, birthdays, holidays, and summer activities.

When a dad attends these functions, foster parents should introduce him as the children's father and ask doctors and school personnel to discuss the child's needs with the dad. This helps the fathers practice parenting and allows foster parents to play a supportive role (Foster, 2011).

**Recognize Gender Differences.** Dads may be more comfortable engaging with foster fathers. Foster fathers can make dads comfortable by validating his involvement and experiences with the child.

Recognize the father may be influenced by traditional gender roles—for example, he may feel it is his duty is to protect and provide. Support these notions by helping him identify and implement approaches to support the child (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

**Focus on strengths.** It may take time to get a clear sense of a father's strengths. "Acknowledge efforts or progress he is making, from large accomplishments, like completing a substance abuse program, to smaller involvement, like attending doctor appointments or a basketball game with the child" (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

**Mentor.** Some men may lack positive role modeling for fathering and simply may not know how to be involved. For example, they may have the idea that being a good parent means buying things for children. The lack of skills and practice, coupled with low self-esteem, can be internal motivators to avoid engagement (sources cited in Grayson, 2011).

## **Fathers Matter**

Good dads are important! Who else can sit and applaud at graduation? Who else can walk you down the aisle? Who else can hold new grandbabies and promise to love them unconditionally? Dads should be there for the important events in their children's lives! — Casey, age 15

Every aspect of a dad is important. No matter what a man does as a father, good or bad, that impression will always stick with that child. It's time for fathers to step up and be the dads they should be. — Donisha, age 17

It hurts not to have a dad. . . . When I have kids I will never let them grow up without a father. — Jasmine, age 15

*Reprinted from Fostering Perspectives v. 14, n. 2 (May 2010)*

# Standing up for my son

by Carlos Boyet

## ***I had to fight to get my son out of the system***

### **"Your Son Is in Care"**

One cold October night my cell phone rang with alarming news. A caseworker said, "I am calling you to inform you that your child, Jeremy, will be placed in foster care."

I took a deep breath in disbelief. Then I asked for my son to be placed in my care. With an attitude, she replied, "You would have to go to family court to be recognized as the child's father."

When I hung up I was so upset that I took a long walk to calm down.

### **Not Getting Anywhere**

I was determined to get my son out of foster care, but I did not know my rights. For two years I did not have contact with my son. His caseworker kept changing, and I wasn't getting anywhere. I was caught up in a world I did not understand.

Finally, I went to court. Instead of being given credit for my persistence in finding my son, or being seen as a potential resource for him, I was investigated.

I submitted to drug tests even though I was not using. I took parenting classes that did nothing to educate me about the special needs of my son, who is developmentally disabled. I was compliant and polite.

All through this, I did not have an attorney, because the case was not against me.

### **Learning My Rights**

Finally, I enrolled in a six-month training at the Child Welfare Organizing Project, where I learned my rights. At CWOP, parents learn how to advocate for themselves and for changes in the child welfare system.

I also made progress by working with Jeremy's foster parent. She gave me her phone number to call her any time. Eventually, I asked if Jeremy could visit me on weekends, because visits at the agency were not helping us bond. It was very difficult to get Jeremy engaged in playing games with me.

He would just run around the whole place and pay me no mind.

### **Challenging Visits**

Without court approval, Jeremy began to stay with me each weekend. I'm not going to lie—at first, it was very difficult. Jeremy was bugged out. He would scratch himself, bite himself, scream at the top of his lungs. There was never a day that Jeremy was having a good day. If I got a peaceful couple of hours, I was grateful for it.

I tried taking Jeremy to the beach; he didn't like it. I tried Great Adventure; he didn't like it. I kept asking myself, "What would be nice for Jeremy?" I found out that Jeremy liked videogames, and we played together. He also liked to hang out on the block, listening to music. That's not my idea of fun, but I was good with it.

What got us through was my commitment. I said to myself, "This is my son. I care about him." And, "Carlos, this is your job. You have to do this, no matter what."

### **Twist of Fate**

Despite our growing bond—and the intrusive investigations and meaningless requirements imposed in court—I was no closer to getting my son home.

Then one summer day Jeremy's foster parent called to inform me that my son was in the hospital. Jeremy had taken Valium and was sick for a week. I was furious.

In court, I was told that the agency would conduct an investigation. I asked if Jeremy could come home with me. They said no, but five weeks later he was temporarily discharged to my care. I was relieved to have him home but felt like the system was saying, "Here, just take him and be quiet about this."

### **The Father He Needs**

Now I am a parent organizer at CWOP and I work in partnership with Children's Services to improve how the system treats parents in my community. However, I have to say that there was nothing good about my own experience.

I was stereotyped as a drug user, a deadbeat, a thug. I had to go through obstacles that had nothing to do with my skills as a parent. For instance, I was told to get a higher-paying job, but was not offered any kind of support in doing this. The caseworkers could have taken the time to understand me as an individual. They could have been more resourceful, worked with me and shown me some respect.

These days, Jeremy and I are doing well. At 11, Jeremy is still challenging and difficult. He has not had an easy life. He has behavior issues and learning problems. He struggles in school. But he's my son, and I'm committed to being the father he needs.

*Reprinted with permission from Rise, a magazine written by and for parents affected by the child welfare system: www.risemagazine.org*





# Child well-being and placement “fit” by John McMahon

The “fit” between a young person in foster care and the family they are placed with can have a profound impact on the child’s well-being. Placed with the right family, children can see reductions in unwanted symptoms and dramatic improvements in their relationships, behaviors, learning, and other areas.

Yet when the fit is poor, instead of helping the child recover from past traumas, the placement can become an additional trauma for the child, one that is often followed by the turmoil of another move.

Agencies go to great lengths to ensure children in foster care are placed with compatible families who can meet their needs. Whenever possible they carefully consider the child’s needs and the strengths and unique traits of foster families before making a placement call. They know fit matters.

## An Important Decision

Resource families have tremendous control over the fit of foster care placements. Once your agency calls to talk about placing a child in your home, only you can say whether the child is an appropriate match for you and your family.

Here are some suggestions to help you make the right decision when you get that call.

## Before the Call

On an ongoing basis, reflect on the 12 skills taught in MAPP/GPS. How would you assess where you and your family are right now? What child needs can you meet? Which will you not be able to meet?

Be clear in your mind about what you bring to the table as a foster parent. Take a strengths-based inventory of what you offer—what positive things will the child experience by being in your home?

## When the Phone Rings

Listen carefully. Ask as many questions of the social worker as you need to.

During the initial call it can be difficult to think of all the questions you should ask about a child. The questions in the box at right may be a helpful starting place for things to consider asking about.

## After the Call

Talk about the potential placement with your family members before making a decision. Key questions to consider include:

- Is your family under any unusual stress due to change in any major area, e.g., moving, death in the family, marital problems, financial or work difficulties?
- Would the addition of a child to your home threaten the stability of your family at this time?

## Pre-Placement Visits

When a child’s placement can be planned in advance, sometimes pre-placement visits can be arranged. This gives you and the child an opportunity to meet. Pre-placement visits can reduce everyone’s anxiety about the unknown and allow you to prepare for the child’s arrival.

Unfortunately, the child’s need for placement is often immediate and there isn’t an opportunity for a pre-placement visit (Massachusetts Dept. of Social Services, 2003).



## CFTs and Placement Fit by Billy Poindexter

Among the many issues a social worker and foster family must address in the early stages of a child’s entry into foster care is the connection between the child and this new family. How will this child relate to the family and its regimen? What will the child’s needs be and how will they impact the foster family?

Unfortunately, when placement is sudden, focus on “fit” isn’t foremost. However, almost immediately after placement it becomes a central concern, since we want the child to experience as few placements or moves as possible while we are trying to reunite the family.

The **child and family team meeting** (CFT) process can be a powerful way to build and strengthen connections among the foster family, child, and birth family while the child is in foster care. Here are some of the ways I have seen the CFT process strengthen important connections in foster care.

**1. CFTs help us focus on meeting the needs of the child.** Especially in the period right after the child is placed in foster care, birth families experience many strong emotions, including defensiveness and fear. It is natural for conversations at this stage to be contentious. By providing a neutral facilitator, CFTs create an environment where discussion centers around how best to minimize the emotional roller-coaster the child will experience in their new “family” situation.

**2. CFTs ensure the child’s voice is heard.** For example, an older teen placed with kin felt his voice was being drowned out by conflict within the extended family. The conflict was so serious that there was a risk of the placement disrupting or being changed by the court.

Arguing between family members during the CFT was so bad the child left the room and refused to return. Non-family members in the meeting pointed out to those arguing that whatever their issues were, THE issue was the impact their conflict was having on the child. This refocused the family, enabling them to do meaningful planning.

**3. CFTs can help find the supports needed to improve placement “fit.”** Sometimes after a placement is made we recognize that the family and child are not a great match and that the family is struggling to meet the child’s needs. An effective CFT process can help foster parents, birth family members, professionals, and others understand problem areas and identify resources for addressing them. In this way a placement can be stabilized and improved. It may never be a perfect fit, but it won’t become a broken placement.

The bottom line? The child and family team process can be an effective way to strengthen foster care placements, avoid the trauma of unnecessary moves, and enhance child well-being.

*Billy Poindexter is a CFT facilitator with Catawba County DSS and a trainer for the Center for Family & Community Engagement at NC State University.*

## Making a Good Match: Questions to Ask Before Placement

Suggested by a group of experienced foster parents, the following questions are intended to be a starting place as you consider providing care for children in DSS custody.

- What are the child’s interests or hobbies?
- Why is the child being placed? What has the child been told is the reason for this move?
- What is the plan for visits with family members or siblings?
- Does the child have ample clothing that’s the right size and seasonally appropriate?
- What important behaviors or fears does the child demonstrate?
- Does the child have any special needs?
- Is the child involved in extracurricular activities?
- Does the child have medical needs I should know about? Allergies?
- Do birth parents have any medical condition that directly impacts the child?
- Do birth parents have a history of violence? In what city or town do they live?
- How many prior placements has this child had? Name and phone number of previous foster parent.
- Who will provide transportation?
- Tell me about the child’s school. Does the child have an IEP?
- How does the child treat/react to animals?
- Does the child have issues with alcohol/drugs?
- Does the child have a history of fire setting? Reactive sexual or assaultive behavior? Stealing? Delinquent behavior?
- Does the child have problems related to toileting, encopresis, or enuresis?
- What about religious affiliation?
- If child is an infant, did he/she have a positive toxic screen?

*Adapted from Massachusetts Dept. of Social Services, 2003*



# Helping a child understand your family routine

Reprinted from the *New York State Foster Parent Manual* (2010) by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services

The everyday routine of your family goes on without much thought or discussion. All families have a pattern of behaving and living together that works for them. Your home may have a schedule that you regularly follow, or it may vary and be quite flexible. The kind of routine a foster child brings to your family will depend on where and with whom the child has been living. Some children may come from shelter care, other foster families, or group homes where there may have been many rules and a planned daily schedule. Other children may come to you from homes where there were few rules and no set schedule.

Most children will need some time alone to become comfortable with their new space. They will need time to observe your family's routine before they can be active participants. Think about some of your family's routines that might take a child some time to learn. For example:

- Who usually gets up first, and who usually goes to bed last?
- Where in the house are we allowed to eat?
- Does someone get to use the bathroom first?
- Is it OK to flush the toilet during the night, or would that wake someone up?
- Do people take telephone calls during dinner?
- Do children get a snack after school? Can they snack before bed?
- Can people help themselves to things in the refrigerator?

To help a child adjust to the routine of their home, many foster parents spend some fun time with the child. They may bake cookies; go for walks in favorite places (by the lake, along the creek, or in the park); go roller skating; play games such as Monopoly, checkers, or computer games; or go swimming. Doing things together helps the child settle into the family's routine.

Going to sleep and waking up can be very scary times for children just placed in foster care. Many foster parents have developed routines to help children go to sleep and wake up. There are good reasons for bedtime stories and night lights. It is also important to give children permission to get up and use the bathroom.

## How I Felt When I Was Placed in Foster Care

by Haley, age 11

I am currently a foster child. No, there is nothing wrong about being a foster child. There are some pros and cons, though. I've honestly wanted to just get a soft, soft touch of it. It's like being in a candy shop. You have peppermints, chocolate, butterscotch, and dum-dum pops. You have a huge variety. I just wanted a taste of everything, not a bite.

In an instant that gentle touch becomes a wild bull. It's a snatch. One moment you're hugging your parents, grandparents, and dog. The next it's just a family you've never met or animals watching you like a rattlesnake. You're just frozen. Time stops and you think, "Why did this happen? What did I do wrong?"

It's like you're sitting near a fire and it catches you.

The first night you're a wreck. You get a tour of your new home. Some children are sheepish. Others aren't bothered by it. After, before, or throughout the tour they introduce themselves. When you talk you're skittish and chewing your fingernails and stuttering out words in a mumble. Then they help you with your bags. Your roommate is known as a foster sibling.

After eating a big dinner and chatting a little you realize, "Hey, this ain't so bad. I'm surrounded by a family that wants to help me." Then your heart slows down into a sleepy beat. You say goodnight and go to bed. A tear or two escapes your eyes every once in a while. You want your dog to jump on your bed and lick you.

Now I am learning to bowl and go to a new school. Being a foster child isn't bad. It's like a vacation. Thank you, my foster family, I greatly appreciate you. *Haley received \$15 for having her work published in *Fostering Perspectives*.*



"In an instant that gentle touch becomes a wild bull. It's a snatch."



## You never know.... by Dan Comer

Yes, matching the strengths, weaknesses, desires and special circumstances of foster families with the strengths, needs, culture, desires, and special circumstances of foster youth—to the greatest degree we can in each case—makes perfect and logical sense. And we should do this each and every time we can. And analyze our successful matches, and our failures, carefully to learn from them to add to our knowledge—about both our foster families and our youth in care.

And... you never know.

### Jane

Jane was an upper middle-class, single woman new to her small southern town. She had a grown daughter back in New Jersey. Her stressful job as a bank executive was the impetus behind the move, and she had known no one in town before she came to town. Her hobbies were reading and ballroom dancing, and she found her large, exquisitely decorated brick home rather lonely after her long days at work. She later said this was why the newspaper ad looking for therapeutic foster parents caught her eye.

Of course, Jane knew exactly what to say to our typical questions about fostering our

very challenging children, she was very bright. Her daughter, while not particularly close as an adult to Jane, was successful, and they were in regular phone contact. She had plenty of room, and children would love her in ground swimming pool in her expansive back yard.

We were concerned with Jane's lack of support in her new locale, the stress of her job, and to be honest, she was lacking any evidence of the 'toughness' and resiliency that we saw and valued so highly in our best therapeutic foster homes.

We decided to license her (there was no legitimate reason not to) with the thought being she would be a good respite resource since children tended to behave well during respite weekends.

### Fast forward a few months. . .

Jane had a few uneventful respite weekends, and still expressed interest in full-time care for the right child. We received an urgent request for placement of a sibling group of three.

The oldest child was hospitalized due to mental health and behavioral concerns, the younger two were in separate foster homes, each of which were asking for their removal

No previous placement of the three siblings together had been successful.

due to behavioral problems.

No previous placement with all three together had been successful, and the referring agency wanted to try "one last time" to keep them together as they prepared for adoption.

We had no available home with space for three children....except for Jane.

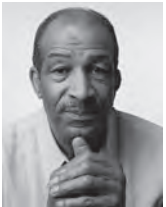
Matching would tell you these children needed: a two (or more!) parent family, with a great support system, experienced with severe behavioral problems. Jane had none of these, but we were willing for some reason to make the placement as a last resort, since no one else had an option to provide the children with their last chance at being together.

### Fast forward a few years. . .

Jane has adopted all three children. Her obviously successful "interventions" included teaching the children ballroom dancing and swimming, and never, ever giving up (and there were some very tough times during the years).

You truly never know.

Before he became a clinical instructor for the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work, Dan Comer worked for 26 years for an agency providing therapeutic foster care.



## A reader asks . . .

# Are foster parents automatically approved to adopt?

**I'm a foster parent in NC. Does that mean I'm approved to adopt a child from foster care? Can I inquire about children I see on AdoptUsKids or NC Kids websites?**

In North Carolina, being a licensed foster parent and being approved to adopt are different. While many of the policies and requirements are the same and the approval process is similar, being licensed as a foster parent does not automatically mean you are approved to adopt.

To adopt a child, North Carolina foster parents must go through the process for becoming an approved adoptive family.

If you are interested in adopting a child currently in your home, please speak with the child's agency and/or your licensing worker.

### Choosing an Adoption Agency

Your first step is to locate an agency to help you adopt a child or children from foster care. You may wish to contact your county department of social services first to determine if they offer adoption services. If you're already a licensed foster parent, contact your licensing agency to discuss with them whether they do adoptions. If they don't, you will need to find an agency that does.

NC agencies that complete adoptions from foster care include:

- Another Choice for Black Children
- Barium Springs Children's Home
- Boys and Girls Home
- Children's Home Society
- Community Services for Children
- Easter Seals UCP of NC & VA
- Ebenezer Christian Children's Home
- Lutheran Family Services
- Methodist Home for Children
- Omni Visions
- Seven Homes
- The Children's Home

Other private licensed adoption agencies can also complete pre-placements and assist with adoptions from foster care, but fees may be involved. Contact information for all licensed NC adoption agencies can be found at <http://bit.ly/YdNrOd>

### The Pre-Placement Assessment

Once you select an agency, you will be assigned a social worker. Your social worker will want to visit your home, get to know you and your family, and discuss their agency's policies and procedures.

To adopt in North Carolina, a family must have an approved *Pre-Placement Assessment* that contains specific recommendations as to the age range, number, and gender of children they are approved to adopt. This recommendation is based on a variety of factors including family dynamics, number of bedrooms in the home, the number of other children

or adults in the home, and parenting experience, to name a few.

You will be asked about your background, family history, current employment and employment history, income, your motivation to adopt, your parenting experience and other pertinent information. A criminal background check and other clearances will be completed.

### The Rest of the Process

When your Pre-Placement Assessment is done, you'll work with your social worker to find a child or sibling group that's a good match for your family. Once you do, your agency will submit your Pre-Placement Assessment to the child's agency. There may be other families interested in the child or sibling group. For this and other reasons, the process of finding the right match can take time.

When a child's agency thinks your family is a good match, arrangements will be made for you to visit with the child. If all goes well, the child will move in with you and after some time passes—usually six months—the process of legalizing the adoption in court begins. Finally that day will come when a Decree of Adoption makes the child legally one of the family.

### Adoption Is Worth the Wait

As this short summary suggests, even when it runs smoothly the adoption process requires patience. But it can make a lifetime of difference to a child or sibling group waiting for a forever family. Adoption: it's worth the wait!

Response by the NC Division of Social Services. If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina you'd like answered in "A Reader Asks," send it to us using the contact information in the box at right.

## fostering perspectives (May 2013)

**Sponsors.** NC Division of Social Services, the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work's Jordan Institute for Families.

**Contact Us.** *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Email: [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu).

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**Newsletter Staff.** John McMahon (Editor); Mellicent Blythe (Assistant Editor)

**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.

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

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

**Subscribe Online.** To be notified about online issues, e-mail [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu) with "FP subscribe" in the subject line.

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

**Correction.** The article on page 2 of the print edition of the November 2012 issue of *Fostering Perspectives* incorrectly described the attorney for the child. It should have stated that every child in the custody of DSS in North Carolina has an Attorney Advocate assigned through the Guardian ad Litem program and appointed by the judge.

## Interested in Adoption? Visit NC Kids

At NC Kids, a service of the NC Division of Social Services, we help connect waiting children with families through the following services:

- Registry of waiting children. NC Kids makes it easy for prospective adoptive parents to learn about available children by posting profiles on its own website and on the AdoptUsKids website.
- Registry of potential families. NC Kids maintains a registry of approved adoptive families who have a current pre-placement assessment. Families can participate in this registry, which NC Kids uses to match families with children awaiting adoption.
- Preliminary Matching. NC Kids pre-screens families with approved pre-placement assessments to help child-placing agencies match families with waiting children.

- Hotline. NC Kids operates a hotline (877-625-4371) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Families who call the hotline speak to NC Kids staff members who can answer questions about foster care and adoption and connect them with child-placing agencies. We follow up with each caller to ensure no family is lost while navigating the system.

NC Kids works with agencies, children, and families. We are not an adoption agency and do not make any decisions about child placement.

For more information, or to register with NC Kids, please call our hotline at 877-625-4371 or email us at [nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov).







# 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)>



## **Billy**, age 5

Billy is a bright, energetic, and caring boy. He loves sports including basketball, biking, football, soccer, swimming, and rock climbing. Billy also loves his younger twin half sibling and would like to stay in contact. He'll do best in an active North Carolina family that can shower him with individual attention. Billy needs a family that can work with his current foster family to help him transition and reduce his anxiety.

## **Jaquan and Kiana** (age 16)

Jaquan and Kiana are twins and have a strong bond with one another.

Jaquan is a charming, likable fellow that gets along well with peers and adults. Jaquan can be the class clown and a follower. Jaquan is currently in the eighth grade and will need a family that can help him stay on task to complete school assignments.



Kiana is a "girly girl" who is careful about her appearance and a real pro at styling her hair. She is described as funny, sensitive, and outgoing. Kiana is in the ninth grade and her teachers note her ability to take responsibility for her actions and to use positive relationships to avoid negative choices.

Jaquan and Kiana would benefit from a family that will enjoy the challenges of parenting teens, and can help them find their way to leading productive adult lives. Jaquan and Kiana can have other children in the home and would benefit from both male and female role models.



## **Cali** (age 7) and **Lexi** (age 4)

Sweet, very loving, and very smart, Cali is a cute "girly girl" with brown hair and brown eyes. Cali was born with a heart defect that was recently surgically corrected. Lexi is a bubbly little girl with black hair and brown eyes. She gives affection easily and likes to be cuddled. She likes to ride her bike, swing on the swing set, color and paint, and play house.

Cali and Lexi's forever family should be a North Carolina family willing to adopt both of them and have no other children so they can focus on Cali and Lexi's needs for a while. Stability, structure, consistency, willingness to learn, and dedication are a must!



## **Christian**, age 15

Friendly and talkative, Christian smiles often and likes to laugh and joke. She's gentle, kind, affectionate, and loves to give hugs. Her hobbies include drawing riding horses, riding bikes, and talking on the phone. Christian is bright and can make A's and B's in school when she applies herself. She wants to work with animals one day. This young lady will do best with a single female parent that can give her a lot of attention, structure, stability, and unconditional love. She needs to be the only child in her forever family.



## **Pamela**, age 14

Pamela is a beautiful, slender young lady with a lot of spunk! She enjoys scrap booking, journaling, and listening to hip-hop. Pamela has also participated in cheer leading and gymnastics. Something that makes her unique is her eye for a good bargain, which she has fun shopping for at local flea markets.

We are looking for an adoptive family in which Pamela would be either the only child, or the oldest child in the home. There is no preference on whether this is a two-parent or a single parent home. Pamela will have the most success in a North Carolina home where there is routine and structure. She needs to be reassured that she is loved unconditionally and will not be "sent away." Continued connections with her birth family are very important to Pamela, so a family that is open to that will be a positive. Pamela is a sweet young lady with a great personality who deserves to find her forever family.



## **David** (goes by "**Brian**"), age 11

Brian is a sweet-natured, energetic boy who is caring, loving, and wants to be loved. He is smart, headstrong, and persistent. Brian enjoys basketball and swimming, but his favorite sports are football and baseball. He is maintained in a regular classroom and takes honors math and science. The ideal family for Brian would be a two-parent family where he is the oldest child or only child. He interacts well with younger children.



## **Pete** (age 8), **Elijah** (age 4), and **Zachariah** (age 3)

This is a handsome sibling group of three boys. The boys enjoy school/daycare and are eager to learn.

Pete wants to be a doctor when he grows up and is very serious about his school work. Pete likes to play basketball, watch cartoons, and attend Boys and Girls Club after school. His favorite subjects are English, social studies, and art.

Elijah is 4 years old and is eager to go to daycare every day. Elijah likes to learn and is very observant.

Zachariah is 3 years old and likes to read and color. He follows directions in the daycare very well. He listens well and likes to play with his toys. Zachariah is trusting and reliable. He is very affectionate and will easily bond with a loving family.



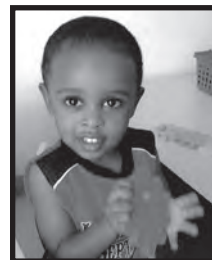
## **Dalton**, age 13

Don't let the photo fool you! This child has a lot of potential. Dalton is handsome, clever, engaging, and very witty. Dalton is bright and has a lot of potential to do very well in school. He would like to attend Duke University; his dream is to be a video game developer. Dalton would like a family that will treat him age-appropriately and with fairness. He needs a family that will show him unconditional love through words and actions. He will do best in a two-parent family, or with a single male parent.



## **Drexton**, age 13

Drexton is an animated young man with a great laugh and a good imagination. He responds well to a structured, calm environment where he can feel safe. Drexton enjoys football, basketball, cars, and coloring. He typically likes to eat anything except squash. He loves animals and would like a cat. Drexton works hard in school. He wants to be an art teacher when he grows up.



The ideal family for Drexton will have a parent who's at home when he comes home from school. He needs a family that will be there for him throughout his life. He needs to be the youngest or only child in his forever home. He is very eager to have a forever family.

# Writing Contest

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

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 question:



**Some children in foster care take medicines to help them manage difficult behaviors or feelings. How might this help kids? How might it cause problems for them?**

**DEADLINE: August 6, 2013**

E-mail submissions to [jdmcmaho@unc.edu](mailto:jdmcmaho@unc.edu) or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, CB#3550, UNC-CH School of Social Work, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. 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.

## Seeking Artwork and Other Writing Submissions

Submissions can be on any theme. There is no deadline for non-contest submissions: submit your work at any time. If sent via U.S. Mail, artwork should be sent flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.

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

Enjoy reading *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your rec licensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your licensing social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. If you have questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit, ask your worker.

### In-Service Quiz, FP v17n2

1. Name five benefits of lifebooks.
2. What is psychological safety?
3. What do you do to help the children placed in your home feel psychologically safe?
4. What does the process look like in North Carolina for foster parents who want to adopt?
5. Describe the course "Helping Youths Reach Self-Sufficiency." Do you know anyone who would benefit from attending this course?
6. Name three things resource parents can do to promote "fit" in foster care placements.
7. What are some of the steps suggested in this issue for helping newly-placed children understand your family's routines?
8. Name four things foster parents can do to engage the fathers of children placed in their homes.
9. According to the new president of the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, what are the top three issues impacting North Carolina's foster parents today?
10. Name three things you can do to teach healthy behaviors to children in foster care.

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## Nutrition Guide for Foster & Adoptive Parents

Malnutrition has a significant, unseen effect on brain development and lifelong cognitive functioning. A large number of adopted and foster children, especially those adopted internationally, have suffered from malnourishment. Research in this area shows that all adopted children should be evaluated early for existing nutritional deficiencies, so steps can be taken promptly to improve overall health.

A new easy-to-read guide, *Adoption Nutrition: A Starter Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents*, addresses this issue by compiling the necessary information for caregivers and professionals to help them effectively assess children's postadoption nutritional needs and nurse this population back to optimal health and well-being. The guide uses concise language, tables and lists, and interactive buttons to present information on the following topics:

- Common nutrient deficiencies, symptoms, and foods that boost nutrition
- Risk factors for malnourishment
- If deficiencies are suspected, recommended nutrition lab tests for children adopted domestically and internationally and children in foster care
- Tips for caregivers on transitioning a child's diet
- Understanding and responding to feeding challenges
- Fortifying and fun food ideas and "power" recipes to increase nutrition

This guide is the product of a collaboration between SPOON Foundation and Joint Council on International Children's Services, nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving the lives of orphaned and adopted children and children in foster care. The guide is available at <http://bit.ly/V5HG4P>

A related resource is the Adoption Nutrition website (<http://adoptionnutrition.org>), an extensive nutrition and feeding resource for adoptive and foster families. *Reprinted from the Children's Bureau Express*

