

fostering perspectives

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Celebrating the difference you make

We all have moments of doubt. We wonder: Is what I'm doing really worth it? Do I make a difference?

In fact, it is almost as if the harder your job is, the more you care, the more likely you are to have these questioning moments.

It's hard to say why this is. Maybe we get too close to the struggle, or get discouraged by the slow pace of change. Maybe we forget that every victory, no matter how small, is worth celebrating.

A Reminder

Well, if you've ever questioned the impact you have as a kinship caregiver or foster or adoptive parent, this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* is for you. In it you will find a host of clear reminders of the many ways you and your fellow resource parents make the world a better place.

In particular you'll find articles shining a spotlight on the countless everyday actions we too often discount or overlook: reaching out to support one another. Speaking up in court and in child and family team meetings. Advocating with schools and providers on behalf of children. Connecting with children's parents. Loving and nurturing vulnerable kids, even when they're struggling with their emotions, behavior, and ability to trust.

Thank You

Being a resource parent is a big job, and it isn't always easy. But as the words of the children at right and in other parts of this issue testify, what you do matters a great deal. Thank you for all you do to make life better for children, families, and communities.

Reminders from Young People

My foster parents care so much about me.... Now this is what I call my home. . . . Without them, I would have given up my dream to go to college and make something of myself. —Sierra, age 17

[My adoptive mother] is too sweet—I love her. I trust [her] the best. She helps me. She gives me kisses before I go to bed. —Byanca, age 8

The thing that they have given me the most of is love and compassion. Nothing can beat that, not even a trip across the world. —Austin, age 13

My foster mom and dad adopted me. I am so glad they did. With their guidance I feel . . . I can accomplish anything. —Sofia, age 12

Since she entered that door and became my foster parent—part of my family—my life changed. . . . For the better. —Ericka, age 16

Reprinted from past issues of Fostering Perspectives

How I helped my daughter turn it around at school by Toni Davis

It was about 95 degrees and all I could see were people, cars and trucks, luggage, long lines, bicycles, and signs pointing to different buildings. It was move-in day for freshman. My daughter was in college and it was the scariest time for us.

I felt a range of emotions. Of course I was extremely proud, but I was also very nervous. School hasn't always been easy for her.

"I hate school!"

I recall the night she was placed with me. She arrived with a book bag and an overnight bag. She did not talk at all. When you asked my daughter a question, she would just nod in response.

I knew education was going to be a big hurdle on the journey ahead when she shouted, "I HATE SCHOOL!"

But when I asked her about her school, she spoke up.

"I hate school!" she shouted.

I knew then education was going to be a big hurdle on this journey ahead of us.

What I Observed

For me the word "hate" is so strong I needed to step back and evaluate how to help her. I began to observe the interactions between her and her teachers when I would walk her to her classroom.

One of the things I quickly noticed was that other students seemed to be comfortable. They said my classroom, my school, and my teacher.

My daughter said the classroom, the school, and the teacher.

It didn't seem she belonged or took ownership at all in her school. At that point I made a decision to do what I do at home.

Getting Involved

At home, I involved her. She decorated her own room. She not only helped me make dinner but helped select the meals and went



to the store to help shop for our food.

I needed her to be involved at school so she could feel it belonged to her.

To figure out how to help her belong, I had to get involved. I began volunteering in her classrooms and chaperoning field

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How I helped my daughter turn it around

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trips. This helped my daughter open up and talk to students and teachers that she normally would not interact with.

While I was volunteering I noticed things my daughter was interested in knowing more about. I also became aware of areas she needed help.

In preparation for the End-of-Grade (EOG) testing the school offered tutoring. It was encouraged and free, but my daughter would never sign up for anything.

Being a Bridge

This is where I recognized that I was going to have to be a bridge between my daughter and the school. I spoke with the guidance counselors and informed them that they were missing a lot of students by just offering tutoring. Students like mine needed to be reached out to individually and sold on the benefits of tutoring. I also suggested that parents be notified and transportation offered for those students.

"Mom, when I saw how invested you were in my education, I just followed your lead. I'm glad I did."

I was so grateful the guidance counselor heard my concern and reached out. My daughter got tutoring and received a 4 (out of 4) on the EOG test that year.

Connecting to Clubs

The tutoring experience made me think there could be more outreach for other students like my daughter.

We went together to every club or organization at her school to gather information.

I just told her we needed to go because I was gathering information about her school. She would never have gone without me, or if she thought it was for her.

She became interested in a couple of clubs and stuck with them all the way through high school. My daughter also started a support group under the direction of her guidance counselor for students who were grieving.

Staying Involved

When my daughter got to middle school and high school, it wasn't as easy to volunteer

and be physically there with her. I had to find new ways to stay involved.

I reached out to every one of her teachers once a week. The guidance counselor and I communicated twice a month about classes and opportunities that may be a good fit for her.

I also served on the PTSA board and was Team Mom for her volleyball and rugby teams. I constantly looked for opportunities to engage and stay connected with her so she felt supported at school.

And it worked. My daughter graduated from high school with Honors and is now attending college.

When *Fostering Perspectives* approached me about writing this article I called my daughter and asked why she thought she was so successful in school.

"I always felt like you believed I could do it," she replied. "And when I saw how invested you were in my education, Mom, I just followed your lead. I'm glad I did."

Toni Davis is a foster parent in North Carolina.

Make a difference during National Foster Care Month

This May, the Children's Bureau celebrates National Foster Care Month, focusing on family reunification with the theme "Honoring, Uniting, and Celebrating Families." To children, youth, families, caregivers, and professionals involved in foster care, celebrating means taking action.

The National Foster Care Month website, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth>, provides materials showcasing best practices and information to help youth connect with biological parents, other family members, and their cultural heritage.

The website is the U.S. Children's Bureau's one-stop-shop for the foster care community to:

- Access free information and tools from the resource section
- Engage with each other through the National Foster Care Month Facebook Campaign Page to promote their events, make new contacts, and share stories
- Inspire others by sharing real-life stories, which are first-person accounts of making successful, permanent, connections

State-by-State foster care contact information, along with free outreach tools, are also available on the website for anyone interested in foster care.

Visit the National Foster Care Month website today and bookmark it for later at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth>

For more information, contact Child Welfare Information Gateway via email (NFCM@childwelfare.gov) or phone (800/394-3366).



What is National Foster Care Month?

May is National Foster Care Month—a time to acknowledge everyone who helps children and youth in foster care find permanent homes and connections. It is also a time to focus on ways to create a bright future for the more than 400,000 children and youth in foster care.

The materials on the National Foster Care Month site illustrate best practices in promoting a youth's connection with biological parents, other family members, and their cultural heritage. Best practices and strategies that support family reunification efforts in child welfare are also highlighted.

What resources will be available on the National Foster Care Month website?

This year, the website provides resources about supporting youth, parents, foster families, kinship caregivers, professionals, and the community by offering information that illustrates best practices and strategies that support family reunification. You can access these resources at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/resources/>.

What are Real-Life Stories?

Storytelling is a powerful way to connect real-life scenarios to important practice issues. Each year, the National Foster Care Month website features real-life stories of children, youth, and families that can help child welfare workers, managers, training staff, and others engage audiences in a variety of settings. From training to recruitment, these stories are great tools for gaining perspective and highlighting the role each of us has in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. View the stories at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/reallifestories/>.

How can I spread the word about National Foster Care Month?

There are a number of tools you can use to help promote National Foster Care Month. Check them out at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/spread/>.



What do youth appreciate about foster parents?

by Megan Holmes

What do young people in foster care in North Carolina appreciate about their foster parents? To find out, I spoke

with youth in care from different parts of the state at an event called SaySo Saturday. *(For more on SaySo Saturday, see box below.)*

The youth I spoke to were between age 15 and 19. None had ever been adopted, but some voiced a desire to be included in a family at some point in the future.

Preparing Myself

Before I talked to the youth, I mentally prepared myself for negative responses, because my own experiences with foster parents were not all pleasant. However, when I share with you what I heard I think you will be reassured about the impact you are making.

Life Skills and Bonding

One person I spoke to said she appreciated being taught how to cook by her foster parent. This young lady said the thing she appreciates most about those opportunities in the kitchen were that they offered her sacred moments of mother-daughter bonding—something she had eagerly sought but never received from her biological mother.

Discipline

Along with moments of bonding, youth also expressed their appreciation—and this was a surprise to me—for the discipline they received from their foster parents.

As 17-year-old KD put it, “I really appreciate how my foster mom lets me do what I want—to a certain degree. She lets me do fun things, like going to the movies, but she still gives me good discipline. And I didn’t have that at some of my other foster homes.”

KD says he feels this discipline has helped keep him out of trouble that he would normally be involved in.

Genuine Concern

Although it may seem as if your foster or adopted youth is easily angered, agitated, and frustrated with you, know that they greatly appreciate you for your genuine concern. This is something some youth have not yet experienced while in care.

Acceptance and Inclusion

Youth want to feel included and to be treated as if they are family, not as the “black sheep” of the family just because they are in foster care.

For example, 17-year-old Machi told me what he appreciated most about his

foster parents is that they call him “son.”

“I’ve never been called ‘son’ before” he says. “Everything except that . . . So I was kinda shocked when they first said it. But then they called me that so much that it became like a second name to me. They always make me feel a part of the family when they call me that.”

Most of the time, youth in care can relate to Machi’s experience and would like to be called “son” or “daughter.” However, be sure to ask their permission before you begin doing this; you don’t want to make them more uncomfortable than they may already be.

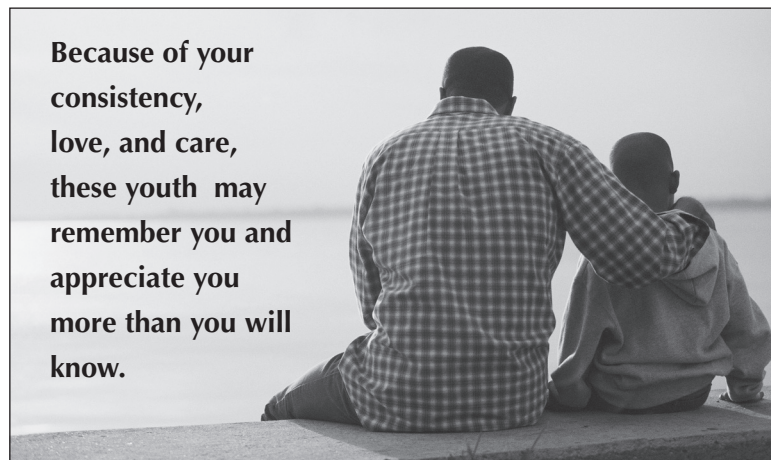
Building Trust

As you are aware, some youth find it difficult to open up or to trust due to their past experiences, which have caused them to form protective barriers.

Luis, a 16-year-old I spoke to, said it best: “It’s not that we don’t want to open up and trust [our foster parents]. It’s just hard because of what we’ve been through. And sometimes, the foster parents don’t make it easy to try to build a relationship with them because they try too hard.”

His advice? “Just be patient with us and really care about having a relationship with [us], and that’ll make it easier for us to come to you and build relationships with you.”

Because of your consistency, love, and care, these youth may remember you and appreciate you more than you will know.



To help resolve situations like this, offer support to your youth. Offer a listening ear if they would like it. Maintain an approachable but respectful demeanor so youth will know they can come to you when they are comfortable.

All this will showcase your care for the youth without being forceful, which makes it easier to establish a solid relationship that is built upon trust.

Take Comfort

Even if your youth seems to dislike your parenting style, take comfort in knowing that you offer them something they may have not yet experienced. Because of your consistency, love, and care, they will remember you and appreciate you more than you will know.

Megan Holmes is a foster care alumna; she attends North Carolina Central University, where she majors in Spanish and Social Work.

SaySo

SaySo, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, is a statewide, North Carolina-based association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

MISSION

“To work to improve the substitute care system by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes, and providing support to youth who are or have been in substitute care.”



SaySo, Inc.
Tel: 800/820-0001
(toll-free)
Email: sayso@ilrinc.com
Web: www.saysoinc.org

SaySo Saturday

SaySo Saturday is an annual youth conference that provides youth who are or have been in substitute care in North Carolina the opportunity to network with other youth in care and participate in essential life skill workshops. We also draw names for door prizes and elect SaySo’s next Youth Board of Directors. SaySo Saturday is held every year on the first Saturday of March.

Other Annual SaySo Events

It’s My Transition. This one-day seminar is for older youths (16+ years of age). Three are held annually. Each seminar focuses on two of the seven LINKS outcomes.

LINK-Up Youth Conference. This one-day life skills conference is for youths ages 13-16. Workshops and games are facilitated by SaySo’s Board of Directors and adult supporters. Conferences are usually held in January and August each year.

SaySo Survivor. This is a weekend leadership retreat that allows SaySo members to explore their resiliencies and move from surviving to thriving.

To learn more about these and other SaySo activities please contact SaySo using the info in the box at left.



Together in the trenches by Bob DeMarco

To give our best to our children, resource parents need support from each other

When children have experienced trauma, we sometimes need to parent them differently. This can make all the difference for our kids, but it can also lead us to isolate ourselves from those who can support us.

Whether our motivation is to protect, teach, or prevent, often our go-to solution includes limiting social interaction in some way. Left unchecked, this can lead to ineffective parenting and a generally unhappy home.

Really, social interaction is a lifeline for resource parents. Spending time with others who have also given of themselves through fostering and adoption can be a significant source of rejuvenation and fuel in your parenting “gas tank.”

Parenting a traumatized child is akin to running a marathon. We might be able to go the distance alone, but our chances of finishing well dramatically increase when there are people handing us water along the way and we are invigorated by the energy that comes from those cheering us on. Who knows? If we run with friends, it might even be fun!

Understanding the Problem

Why do we foster, adoptive, and kinship parents isolate ourselves?

Understanding the profound effect of early trauma helps us see the frightened child behind the sometimes maddening behaviors we experience. This understanding affects the way we respond to the child. But those who are less informed about these things are often not so understanding. Knowing this, to protect our kids we may pull back from family, friends, and neighbors.

Regulating their bodies, emotions, and behaviors is challenging for our kids. As a result, “normal” child’s play can often become chaotic and it is hard for our kids to settle down from play. Knowing we’re likely to pay a heavy price afterwards, we decline the invitation to that

sugar-saturated birthday party with the bounce houses. We pull back some more.

A child’s response to trauma can manifest in undesirable ways, including impulsivity, aggression, inappropriate talk, and poor judgment to name just a few. As a result, we need to be alert to prevent harm to our kids, their peers, property, and pets. Since we can’t control what happens when they aren’t with us and because other parents may not be looking out for these kinds of dangers, we tend to keep our kids close. And so we pull back still more.

Over time, without even realizing it, many small decisions like these can leave us isolated.

My Family’s Experience

My wife and I are working to dig ourselves out of the isolation pit right now. In an effort to protect our kids, ourselves, and/or others, we stopped hosting dinner parties, stopped attending social functions, and stopped trying to share our burdens with those who can’t relate to them.

And while our reasons for this can be easily understood, we’ve come to see that isolation is unhealthy for us individually, for our marriage, and for our interactions with people outside our home. Most ironically, it interferes with our ability to effectively parent our children.

Experiencing Connection

It wasn’t until we attended a weekend conference by Empowered to Connect (<http://empoweredtoconnect.org/>) that we realized just how much we had missed engaging other adults in an affirming way. This regional conference was attended by about 1,400 parents and caregivers all struggling to love their children in the face of the same difficult circumstances we were. It was such a relief to see we were not alone and to share our fears, failures, hopes, and successes with people who knew what was at stake.

We were infused with hope

when we heard the keynote speakers share their success stories and felt sadness and empathy when they shared their failures. We laughed and cried with the rest of the audience at some of the crazy stories we heard.

We were encouraged and our strength was renewed when we heard about effective new strategies we could put into practice in our own home.

Between the mix of emotions, the validation of our methods, and the new ideas we got, we left feeling energized and ready to stand tall beside our kids. We resolved we would never again allow ourselves to become an island, and that others needed to hear about the strength and healing we found in uniting with others who are working toward the same goals we are.

When we came home we reached out to acquaintances who were struggling. We began meeting monthly to support, pray for, share, and grow with one another. Coming out of that group we found some close friends who we still get together with regularly.

Friends Who “Get It” Matter

Last spring was pure chaos in our home. For some unknown reason, two of our kids lost their sense of safety and so they began to act out in an effort to gain control. They ran away, found and used matches, stole and hid kitchen knives, had tantrums, and hid from us.

We had the police visiting us, we had hospitalizations, and we missed work due to school suspensions and meetings.

My nerves were frayed, my fuse was short, my blood pressure was high, and I wasn’t sleeping well.

During that time we were hanging onto God, our friends, and each other for dear life.

Having close friends who “get it” provided a much needed

If we allow others to help carry the load, we’ll be in the best possible position to give our best to our children.

outlet to express our anger, frustrations, secret thoughts, fears, and plans. And, since our trauma-informed friends were not as close to our situation as we were, they brought an informed and more objective viewpoint as

we struggled for calmer waters at home.

The storm eventually subsided for us, but now our friends are in the storm, and we are able to support them as they struggle to stay afloat.

Our Kids Need Our “A” Game

Parenting the trauma-affected child can sometimes be hard and tiring work, but our kids need us to bring our parental “A” game, even when we’re tired. When we attempt to carry the load alone, at best we’ll not be as good as we could be and at worst we’ll burn out spectacularly. On the other hand, if we allow others to pour into us and help carry the load, we’ll be in the best possible position to give our best to our children.

If social media is your thing, you might find the “Parenting with Connection” Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/parentingwithconnection/>) helpful and interesting. It’s a closed group so you’ll have to request to join to see the posts, but I recommend you do it. I think you’ll find it a valuable resource.

However you choose to plug into an informed support system, do it today. You’ll be invigorated by the energy that comes from the crowd cheering you on as you run by. Who knows? It might even be fun!

Bob DeMarco is an adoptive parent in North Carolina.

To Find a Resource Parent Support Group Near You

Call NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network toll free at 1-877-NC KIDS-1.

How resource parents influence child and family outcomes in and out of court: One judge's perspective

by J. Stanley Carmical

As a parent myself, I am well aware that parents' worst nightmares often involve the fear that something terrible will happen to your children. While presiding over sessions of abuse, neglect, and dependency court during the past 26 years I have frequently thought that for the mothers and fathers appearing before me in juvenile court, the nightmares have indeed come to pass.

Families & Children I See in Court

These parents, caught up in the confusing world of the court system, are confronted with the very real possibility that they may lose custody of their children. Perhaps forever. As frightening as this seems to the parents, they can at least take some steps to improve the chances that their children will return home.

Their children are not so fortunate.

Children are creatures of habit and routine. Removing them from the care of their parents and from the places they know as home is a shocking and traumatic event over which the children have no control.

Imagine how it must feel to a child for a stranger to appear in your home and spirit you away to a strange place populated by unfamiliar people. Everything these children have relied on as normal daily life is taken away.

They must feel that everyone in their lives they trusted to keep them safe from harm has forsaken them.

Resource Parents Have a Big Impact

Into the world of chaos and despair inhabited by these children step foster parents, adoptive parents, and kinship parents. These resource parents offer a shelter in the storm for children removed from the care of their families. In part the shelter consists of a safe place to stay while parents work on the issues that led to the removal of the children.

But the good done for these children includes so much more than merely providing a safe room in which to sleep and a place to eat. Resource parents offer a sense of normalcy and predictability, a sense that adults can be depended on and perhaps even trusted and loved.

The ways these parents make a difference in the lives of children are truly too numerous to count, but I'd like to name a few:

- Many go out of their way week after week to accommodate birth parents' requests for visits with their children.
- Many go to incredible lengths to see that siblings are not isolated from brothers and sisters if they are in different placements.

- They frequently identify children's developmental delays that have gone unnoticed or unaddressed in the past.
- They actively engage with teachers and school staff to make sure children's educational needs are properly addressed.

Sometimes when reviewing cases in court I feel that the foster parents and kinship parents are working harder to achieve the children's return home than the children's own mothers and fathers.

They Provide Judges Valuable Evidence and Insights

One of the unintended benefits of the dedication of these women and men, these compassionate people willing to open their homes and hearts to children in need, is that judges like myself are afforded another perspective, another window, into the lives of these children and their natural parents.

In many instances the evidence on which a judge bases crucial decisions affecting children's lives more closely resembles a photographic snapshot than a feature-length film. Judges base decisions on slivers of the evidence potentially available to the court.

I have learned that foster parents, kinship parents, and adoptive parents can help a decision maker bridge the gap from a "snapshot" to "video quality" evidence. Consider:

- Who spends every day (and night) with the children whose cases come before my court?
- Who knows what anxiety the children experience before and after visitation? Who can describe the grief and sense of loss when parents skip a scheduled visit?
- Who can tell a judge about the possible conflict between family members that affects children in predictably negative ways?
- Who is keeping tabs on educators and other service providers and holding their feet to the fire to meet their obligations to these children?
- Who interacts with virtually every person and agency who has some interest in the outcome of the juvenile cases I am called to decide?

The answer to all these questions is: the foster parents. The kinship parents. The adoptive parents.

A judge willing to invest a little time and listen to resource parents can learn much about the children's experiences and the people who play significant roles in their young lives.

The evidence provided by resource parents is almost always motivated by a sincere



Resource parents have greatly impacted my decision making in hundreds of juvenile cases during my years as a judge.

desire to see that the court system meets the real needs of children instead of losing them in that same system. The work we do together concerns the lives of real people, not mere cases and court files. Our work is enhanced when it relies on more and higher quality evidence. Resource parents help fill in the gaps and have greatly impacted my decision making in hundreds of juvenile cases during my years as a judge.

Thank You for "Standing Tall"

Many people, including Abraham Lincoln, have been credited with saying, "A person never stands so tall as when he stoops to help a child." Our foster parents, kinship parents, and adoptive parents spend a great deal of their days and nights stooping to help the children entrusted to their care.

When I see them at the courthouse, they may be stooping to wipe away a tear or a runny nose, but in my mind's eye, they are standing tall.

J. Stanley Carmical is Chief District Court Judge in Robeson County, NC (District 16B).

You've Got a Right to Be Heard

All foster parents and pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers in the U.S. have the right to be notified of any court proceedings with respect to the children in their care, and the right to be heard in those proceedings. Foster parents are not a "party" in court, nor do they have "standing" in court, but if they choose, they can attend and their voice and their important, vital knowledge of the child will be heard by the judge.

Nervous about Speaking in Court?

Check out this article from a past issue: <http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/fpv13n2/court.htm>



Making a difference by maintaining connections

by Donna Gillespie Foster

When they're in foster care, one of the greatest gifts we can give young people is to help maintain—or strengthen—their connections to their families. To do this well, it really helps if we have good relationships with the birth families as well.

This isn't always easy. Working with birth parents and maintaining children's connections to them can be very challenging. In fact, maintaining connections often requires "out of the box" thinking and approaches.

Attitude Matters

Children come into the care of foster, kinship, and adoptive parents because the birth parents have great needs of their own that prevent them from raising their children in a safe environment. Co-parenting with angry and hurt birth parents can be extremely difficult.

For my 17 years as a foster parent, I remember having to constantly think "out of the box" to build relationships with birth parents. Proving I am not judging them and that I am no better than them took a lot of effort. When I was successful, it was because I cultivated an attitude of humility and acceptance.

I tried to ask myself, "I haven't had their life struggles and experiences, so who am I to judge?" I don't want others to judge me. I knew I couldn't help birth families if I put expectations on them to live a certain way.

Look for Signs of Success

Successful kinship, foster, and adoptive parents seem to have similar beliefs as to what their role is in helping children and their birth families. They also know success when they see it.

For example, you know you are successful when children can talk comfortably in front of you about their birth families without fear you will make hateful comments about them. Instead, they know they will hear you talk about the strengths of their parents.

Moments for Teaching

Another indicator of success is when birth parents want you to help them learn safer and more loving ways to raise their children. This is a good sign that reunification may eventually occur.

I've got a great example of this. I know a couple that could not conceive. They hoped, one day, they could adopt to complete their family. When a newborn baby girl was placed in their home, this new foster mother attached to her quickly.

Now the goal for this child was reunification with her young birth mother. The foster mother wanted to meet the birth mother, so she brought the baby to the first visit.

Right away, the foster mother noticed the birth mother held her baby awkwardly. She did not hold the infant close and seemed confused.

Instead of judging this young woman, the foster mother gently said, "Your baby misses your heartbeat. She heard it for nine months and is bonded to you. Can I help you to hold her so she can lay her head on your heart?"

The young mother cried and said yes. In a few minutes, the birth mother was cuddling her baby, speaking softly to her and rocking her.

When the foster mother told me about this exchange I asked about her emotions, since I knew she would love to adopt this child. She simply said, "She wasn't my child. She was her baby. My baby will come later."

This foster mother respectfully shared parenting ideas with the birth mother. In time, the baby returned home.

After Reunification

It's an even greater success when kinship and foster parents stay connected to the birth family after reunification. When birth parents have ongoing support, it lessens the chance of children re-entering care.

Even if reunification can't happen, building relationships with birth parents can lead to suc-

cess. When a parent realizes they love but cannot raise their child and relinquishes their parental rights to kinship, foster, or adoptive parents that, too, is success. And when relinquishment happens and there is a good relationship between the birth parent and adoptive parent, the child is more likely to stay connected to their birth family. This is good for the child.

Sibling Connections

Foster and adopted children struggle deeply when they are separated from their siblings. It is a great success when we can prevent this from happening.

I have seen foster and adoptive parents either have all of the siblings in their homes or, if that is not possible, take steps to ensure siblings have regular contact through life books and shared activities, celebrations, and playtimes. These families are really one huge family unit.

After Adoption

Even after adoption there can be real benefits to sustaining or recreating children's connections to their birth families. Consider this story of "out of the box" thinking.

A foster parent adopted a teen who had many placements over the course of six years. This teen had not seen her birth mother or siblings during all of those years. This adoptive mother saw how the youth anguished over

not knowing her birth family and constantly searched for them.

After the adoption, she and her daughter found her daughter's birth mother. After making contact they started visits in the adoptive home and progressed to day-long visits in her birth family's home. Today, overnight visits with birth mom and siblings continue.

Are there are struggles? Yes. From guilt, the birth mom tries to be a friend to her child, rather than a parent. But the adoptive parent has to set healthy boundaries and things are going reasonably well. She does not intend to change her mind about including the birth family in their lives. She believes that if she is to attach successfully with her adoptive child, the child needs her birth family connections as well.

Thank You!

Is any of this easy? No! But family ties are in "permanent ink." They can never can be erased. I salute you for sharing of photos, finding the birth parent strengths, creating life books so children won't forget, sharing parenting ideas, and being a continued support for children and their birth families. Thank you for the difference you make.

Donna Foster is a national trainer, consultant, and author of the series "Shelby and Me: Our Journey Through Life Books" (reviewed in Fostering Perspectives, vol. 20, no. 1).

Shared Parenting: Potential Benefits for Resource Parents

Creating supportive relationships with birth parents may:

- Enhance child development, learning, and well-being by encouraging the child to return to the child role;
- Decrease children's defiant behavior by reducing their desire/need to demonstrate loyalty to birth family;
- Provide information and insights that enable foster parents to meet children's needs earlier and in a more effective way, thus helping children and reducing foster parent frustration;
- Reduce conflict with birth parents over various issues (e.g., grooming);
- Increase birth parent support for foster parents by reassuring them their children are being well cared for and that foster parents do not seek to replace them; and
- Create a positive connection between the foster parents, the child, and the child's family that will not have to end, even if the placement does.

Source: Russell & McMahon, 2005



Making a difference at child and family team meetings

by Claudia Kearney

Foster parents and kinship caregivers sometimes find Child and Family Team meetings intimidating. It's easy to see why. At CFTs the biological parents and families are there, talking about what they want and need and what the agency needs the parents to do in order to reunify with the child. Given this, it's natural for resource parents to ask themselves, "What do I have to add?"

In my experience, the answer to this question is: "a lot!" As someone who has facilitated many CFT meetings, I have seen time and again that having resource parents involved in CFTs brings benefits to everyone.

To illustrate this, I'm going to describe the different phases of the CFT meeting process and give an example of how I have seen a resource parent make an important contribution during that phase.

MEETING PHASE: Introductions

Use the introductions at the start of the meeting to become a **person**, rather than just a title, to the people in the room. This is a chance to tell everyone how you would like to be addressed and how you view your relationship to the child.

Example: At one meeting a foster parent said, "My name is Kim and I have the privilege of sharing my home with TJ during this time and being a new member of Amanda and TJ's extended family." The way Kim introduced herself set the tone for the rest of the meeting; I saw others present trying to follow her positive lead.

MEETING PHASE: Review of Purpose

Before the CFT someone will contact you to let you know the purpose of the meeting. This conversation is also an opportunity for you to ask questions and identify any resources that may be needed to help the family reach its goals. So when you get to the "review of purpose" phase of the meeting there are no surprises for anyone, including you.

Example: At a meeting, after I reviewed the purpose, I asked if anyone had questions or comments. The foster parent leaned over to the mother and asked quietly, "Does that purpose sound right to you?"

The mother said, "No, but I wasn't going to say anything."

Together they asked me about this and then worked through some concerns with the social worker. Ultimately the purpose of the meeting was clarified and revised to something everyone agreed on.

I've seen time and again that having resource parents involved in CFTs brings benefits to everyone.

MEETING PHASE: Ground Rules

Ground rules help participants feel safe to speak at the meeting. Along with the agenda, ground rules also help the facilitator maintain the flow and order of the meeting. Foster parents help the meeting when they add to and/or agree to the ground rules.

Example: After I went over ground rules and asked if anyone wanted to add to them, a foster parent said, "I believe we are all here because we want what is best for Johnny and his family. That being said, those of us that are here for support and help do not need to be privileged to personal information." He then encouraged the agencies present to only share relevant and necessary information.

MEETING PHASE: Confidentiality

Some counties use a Confidentiality Sheet everyone attending a CFT must sign.

Example: At one meeting, I asked everyone to sign the confidentiality form, including the family. However, during this meeting we had some people coming in just to provide information during the "Options to Consider" portion of the meeting. When these community partners arrived, the foster parent raised her hand and said "I am sorry to interrupt, but they need to sign a Confidentiality Form. Although their role is to only share information, they should be asked not to say what information they shared or any questions they were asked about the information." The young person jumped up and hugged her foster mother and said "Thank you so much!"

MEETING PHASE: Information Sharing

This can be the best and the toughest part of a meeting, depending on how and what is shared. During this part of the meeting everyone is invited to share a strength and concern. Resource parents are in a unique place within the family structure, so what they say during this time is crucial.

Example: At one meeting it was extremely hard for people to name strengths of the family or child. Everyone—including the family—was concerned the mother would return to her unhealthy habits and not be able to do what she needed to do to meet her case goals.

When it was time for the foster parent to share a strength, she said "A strength is, despite all you've faced, you're still a family. Not every family facing the same problems would have made it this far."

Her concern for the family was that there were 20 people in the room that had been working with this family for six months and the agencies involved had not yet offered the right resources to the family. As a result of her



sharing this concern, the child-serving agencies present thought more deeply about how to offer something different and more relevant to this struggling family.

MEETING PHASE: Options to Consider

During this part of the meeting, all options are put on the table.

Example: At one meeting the foster parent offered options that were "outside of the box" and very supportive to the family. Because the foster parent was thoroughly prepared before the meeting, she had had a chance to research options and recommendations and came to the meeting with questions and requests for the agencies that attended the meeting.

MEETING PHASE: Making a Plan

In this part of the CFT we create a plan for the family. As a facilitator, I've noticed that often everyone but the social worker and biological family stops talking at this point. Yet I've also seen foster parent involvement in this part of the meeting make a huge difference.

Example: At a meeting the social worker and biological parents were making the plan. Because the plan was so intensive, the biological mother started to get overwhelmed.

I asked her if she needed to take a break, but she said "No, I'm going to do whatever it takes to get my children back."

The foster parent turned to the mother and asked, "What can I do to help you with this plan? I want to do everything I can to help."

In the end, the foster parent became a part of the plan and helped the whole family, not just the children. Eventually the family was reunified and today the foster parents are still active in their lives.

Conclusion

Foster parents and kinship caregivers can bring so much to Child and Family Team meetings. They can be partners to the parents and agencies. They can shine a positive light on a situation and bridge gaps that are otherwise left open.

We are lucky to have you in these meetings and in the lives of families everywhere.

Claudia Kearney is a trainer for the Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University.



Writing Contest

If I were a foster parent ...

In the last issue of we asked young people in foster care, "If you were a foster parent, what would you do to help the children living in your home?" Here's what they had to say.

Genesis, age 17

If I were a foster parent what I would tell the children living in my home they're not alone in life, that there is good in every child, and they have what it takes to succeed in life. I would cover their basic needs—food in their stomachs, clothes on their backs, and a place to live. Most importantly, I would tell them that they're loved very much and not to feel different or alone.

I want to see foster kids make it in life and find that one family who is out there waiting for that child. [I would] explain that being in a foster home doesn't make you a bad kid, or is something to be afraid of. It's not bad. It's just one step at time being taken down a tough road.

I want my own foster kid to be able to talk to me about anything . . . I want to be able to have something to say back and be able to help to the best of my ability. I want to fulfill so many foster kids' lives and see the best out of them and have them feel they're not alone. . . .

I want them to know that they're safe, that I can provide for them, and that I love them no matter what the situation is. I would have my child know that when they take that first step into my house I wouldn't treat them any different. . . .

I want to voice my opinion and stand up to be the first and say what I think and how I feel about foster care and the kids waiting or going in and out of it. I want to fight and see these kids be happy and succeed and have what every other kid has. They should feel no shame to be in a foster home. . . . If it were up to me I would take in every foster child out in the world who is begging for a family . . . I want to make a huge difference. . . .

God makes things happen and I believe that foster parents will reach out and help these amazing kids who want a home and loving family. . . .

So, I am saying to all those kids out in the world to stand by me, stay tough, have hope, and believe that something good will happen in life, that a family is out there waiting for you all. Your wishes will come true. . . . I'm standing with all of you kids in the world today and for the rest of life to know that every day there is a kid who is being brought in a home to start a new beginning and life.

All you foster kids, don't give up! There is a positive in life. Keep your heads up and voice your opinions. Speak up! Use your voice! Stand tall and walk with pride because I'm walking with you!

GENESIS RECEIVED \$100 FOR TAKING TOP PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

**Foster kids,
don't give up!
Stand tall and
walk with
pride because
I'm walking with you!**

1

Braxton, age 9

If I were a foster parent I would listen to [the kids in my care]. I would take care of them for the rest of my life.

I would put them to bed and read them a story and rub their back. I would love them and help them.

I would give them different experiences like plays, movies, sports, and trips.

I would give them healthy food.

I would buy them clothes.

If they didn't know how to tie their shoes, I would tie their shoes for them. I would love them. *(I was adopted to my forever home 1 year ago.)*

BRAXTON RECEIVED \$50 FOR TAKING SECOND PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

**If they didn't
know how to
tie their shoes,
I would tie
their shoes for them.
I would love them.**

2

Haley, age 14

If I were a foster parent, my first action would be to make a lasting first impression. I would present [the kids in my home] with a gift while also incorporating something unique about them. For example, if I had a young foster girl with red hair placed in my care, I would probably give her a Raggedy Ann doll or a beautiful dress. Also, I would definitely have some down time with the child and get to know them on a personal level, learn about their skills and achievements, or favorite food and TV show.

I think it would be important to celebrate their individuality and have a vacation picked out by each child. (Of course, these vacations would happen at different times). If I didn't have the funds, we would go to the park and explore or I would buy an animal.

If I were a foster parent, I would definitely try to be a role model or parent figure, but not cross their boundaries. I would not try to replace their mother.

Overall, as a foster parent, I would try to be fun and outgoing while also balancing family time. I would try to make sure everyone got along and was comfortable.

Also, I would show them that being unique is something to be proud of, and accept any child I got, no matter their beliefs, gender, ethnicity, or sexual preferences. I would be their safe haven.

HALEY RECEIVED \$25 FOR TAKING THIRD PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

**If I were a
foster parent,
I would not try
to replace their
mother. . . .
I would be their
safe haven.**

3

Julious, age 10

If I were a foster parent, I would first get to know (children) by finding out what their allergies are and when their birthday is. I would also ask if they were comfortable with our home and make some food they like.

Also, I would go on a vacation every month or so. I think doing something a kid wants to do is important, and the whole family can have some fun for a couple of days, which is not too bad.

JULIOUS RECEIVED \$20 FOR HAVING HIS ESSAY PUBLISHED.

**I would also
ask if they were
comfortable and
make some food
they like.**

Solutions to food and mealtime struggles

by Allison Gilliam

Food: it's a building block of good health. Our bodies' fuel. Eating is such an important act that we do it multiple times a day, every day.

Which leads us to the planning, preparation, and delivery of meals. As parents, this job falls to us. On the face of it, it's not too much to ask: just prepare meals that provide nutrition and a time to connect around the table.

Simple, right?

As any parent knows, in reality, meal time can be war time, complete with screaming and tantrums, silent refusals, and power struggles you wonder whether you can win.

For resource parents, food and meals can be even more complicated. We often find ourselves caring for young people whose understanding of and approach to eating is quite different from ours. Our own children may rebel as well, asking why they should have to eat their carrots when the "new kid" doesn't have to eat his. Double-teamed like this, the temptation to give in and go for fast food can be pretty strong.

To help, I'd like to offer some suggestions for understanding and navigating the struggles around food and nutrition that many resource parents face.

Our First Impulse

Because we know they've faced adversity, as resource parents we long to give the children in our homes our best for whatever time we have with them. Rich nutrition and a balanced diet are often on the top of the list of things we can tangibly do for a child. But there are many things that can get in the way.

Different Food Backgrounds

Before they are placed in our care, some children have not experienced consistency when it comes to meal times, healthy eating, or other messages about food.

For many, life before foster care was not full of healthy fruits and vegetables, well balanced meals, or home cooked dinners. Some were often hungry. Others have eaten more ramen noodles or McDonalds than we can imagine.

Sweets may have been a key

part of their diet. Sweets may have been used as a bargaining tool by tired parents who just wanted their children to behave.

Given all this, it's no surprise that when we try to meet children's needs at the dinner table the result can sometimes be frustration and struggle.

More Than Nutrition

Part of the reason for this is that food isn't nutrition alone. Eating can be about deep, personal issues such as:

Control: Children in foster care have little control in their lives. When, how, and what is eaten is a very tangible way to exert control and express feelings without using words. A need for control can set the stage for food battles.

Comfort: Sadness can spark an urge for sugar, carbohydrates, and overeating. Children in foster care often feel sad about their situation and don't always have the skills needed to cope effectively with these feelings. Food can be a tool children use to feel psychologically safe.

Home: Food represents home. Having mashed potatoes with lumps ("just like Nanny's") can soothe us and remind us of good times at home. Conversely, unfamiliar food on our plates can remind us of all we've lost.

Poverty: A balanced diet is not always a possibility for families in poverty. If you've been raised in poverty, food that is not fast food can seem foreign and strange.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive. Fresh meats require refrigeration and heat to prepare. Fast food is a cheap, easy solution if you work long hours and have little money in your pocket.

Solutions

Despite all this, we are still responsible for providing nourishment to the children in our homes. When the fight is real and mashed potatoes are flying, this responsibility can feel like quite a burden. The good news is, there are things we can do to cultivate a good diet over time and teach children what it means to eat healthy food. Here are some suggestions:

Exposure: Whether they eat it or not, make sure there is something green on the plate every day and at every meal. After a while, it will become familiar. Eventually, it may even become a "safe" food for them.

Reward: Reward children for trying new things, not for eating the entire serving. Try quality time or an extra book at story time, not food, as a reward.

Our own children: If you have different expectations about food and eating for your own children, talk to them privately. Make a rule that food is not discussed at the table/in front of others. Consider giving them incentives, such as a "free pass" on vegetables at din-

The good news? You can cultivate a good diet over time and teach children what it means to eat healthy food.

ner if they eat more veggies after school or in their lunch.

Obesity: Having too much weight on a body does not happen overnight. The same is true for creating healthy food habits.

Make small changes that are agreed upon by the doctor, the child, the child's parents, and yourself. Getting everyone on the same page will increase the chances of success/consistency and keep the child's self-esteem intact.

Education: Teach children what food really is—fuel for our bodies. Help build their understanding of the different food groups and the health benefits of a balanced diet. Explain why it's important to eat your greens!

Vitamins: Talk to the child's doctor about whether the child needs a supplement.

Patience: Since eating a balanced diet is important, getting to a place where foods are tried and food battles are won is important. However, it is also important to keep things in perspective: slow down and allow yourself and the children (your own and those placed with you) the time and space to develop good eating habits.

Allison Gilliam is Pediatric Team Lead for Community Care of Western North Carolina; she is also an adoptive parent and a former foster parent.

Teaching Healthy Behaviors to Children in Foster Care

Adapted from USDA, 2007

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.

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 low fat 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. 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.



Making a difference by being family by Rick Zechman

David and Rodney first met Blake when they provided respite for him in April 2015, just before they were licensed as foster par-

ents in North Carolina. A few months later, Blake came to live with them. Today Blake is a 16 year old junior in high school, where his grades have been stellar. After school he has a job at a local grocery store. He's very tech savvy and loves linking others to social media. He also enjoys baking but, as David admits with obvious fondness, Blake's still not perfect when it comes to cleaning up the kitchen afterwards. All in all, Blake is doing really well right now.

No one takes this for granted. Blake has been in and out of foster care since he was 8 years old. He's had multiple placements. Like many who've had these experiences, Blake has had some behavioral health challenges. Attempts had been made to help him with these challenges, but they weren't always consistent or successful.

Therapy Has Helped

David and Rodney believe the consistent therapy Blake has received since being placed in their home is a key to his improved well-being. Blake's participation in therapy calls for some effort on their part: they take him to a clinician for therapy every week as well as to a psychiatrist for medicine management every other month.

It's well worth it. The therapist has worked with them to develop a point system to assist with Blake's behaviors, which they've found very helpful. For example, in this system Blake gets a point if he says "please" when asking for something. If he refuses a reasonable request, he does not gain a point. Earned points can be used for things such as time with electronic devices or car rides to school (which Blake prefers to taking the bus).

The therapist has also helped David and Rodney understand they might need to ask Blake several times to do something or maybe even model behaviors they want to see, because kids facing Blake's challenges need extra help building "muscle memory for their brain." David and Rodney say it's clear these extra efforts are paying off for Blake.

Other Strategies

David says he and Rodney are also learning to "pick their battles" and allowing Blake to experience natural consequences (within reason). For example, though Blake is doing extremely well in school, if he chooses not to study for a test and gets a B in the class, the teacher may not allow him to opt out of the final exam. If Blake were to make choices that caused him to lose his job, the natural con-

sequence would be that he would have no money to spend. The hope is that disappointments like these will help Blake learn there are consequences for his choices.

When they're frustrated, Rodney and David try to walk away, although before they do they reassure Blake they aren't ignoring him but will instead be able to talk about whatever the issue is a little better at a later time. They've also learned that Blake responds better if they make a point of complimenting him when he does something well, rather than always focusing on the negative.

Though he's doing well, Blake still gets frustrated at times. A strategy that works well for him when this happens is to write out his feelings, since he sometimes finds it hard to verbalize. Blake will even write notes to David and Rodney if he's having a good day.

Being Family

David and Rodney believe they have worked through some initial big bumps of getting to know each other as a family, maintained some consistency and, in recent months, seen how their parenting efforts have led to success for the whole family.

Since Blake will be 17 soon, they are simultaneously encouraging him to be independent while reminding him it is okay to be a kid, too. They continue working with him to set limits so that he treats them as parents and not like "buddies." David and Rodney feel the consistent affection, structure, and involvement they strive to provide—which Blake may never have had before—allows

David and Rodney have made it clear to Blake that he has a permanent home with them if he wants it.

them to work through frustrations and challenges together.

Blake may be free for adoption soon, so David, Rodney, and Blake are planning to have a thorough discussion about what adoption means. In the meantime, David and Rodney have made it clear to Blake that he has a permanent home with

them if he wants it. They treat Blake like their child and introduce him to others as their son. They say they look forward to seeing him graduate from high school and achieving his goal of going to college.

Advice

When asked if they have advice for other foster parents, David and Rodney say it's important to never assume kids in foster care know how to do things you might consider common sense or commonplace. Not all kids coming into your home know when to brush their teeth, wash their hands before they eat, or what should or should not be flushed down the toilet.

"Also," David adds, "don't be afraid to use respite if you need it." He and Rodney had an experience where their social worker arranged respite for them even though they weren't sure they were interested. It was only after it was in place that they realized how much they needed respite. Rodney says in addition to needed rest, "one unexpected benefit of respite was that it showed us how connected we were to Blake."

Rick Zechman is an educational specialist with the UNC-CH School of Social Work

Teens in Foster Care in North Carolina

The Numbers. One in three young people in foster care is an adolescent. Of the 10,282 children in foster care in North Carolina on February 29, 2016, 28.79% (n=2,959) were between the ages of 13 and 21 (Duncan, et al., 2016).

Where They Live. Many do not live with a family, even though state policy says all children should be placed in the most family-like setting possible. So far, of the kids who entered DSS custody in 2014-15, half (50%) of youths age 13 to 17 have spent some time in a non-family placement setting, compared with 15% of children age 6 to 12 and 2% of children age birth to 5 (Duncan, et al., 2016).

Needs. Those who "age out" of foster care need our help. In 2014-15, 502 young adults aged out of foster care in North Carolina. Research shows that compared to the general population, these youth are at much higher risk for incarceration, homelessness, poor educational attainment, and poverty (NCDSS, 2008).

What You Can Do

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

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





Helping yourself IS helping others

by Deena M. Murphy

As people who care, so much of our time and energy is focused outwardly. How can I be of service? What more can I do? Can I help in some way?

This drive is what motivates us to be foster parents, to be social workers, to make a difference to those around us. But what about when this drive causes burn out, causes illness, and causes feelings of being overwhelmed or even resenting those who need our help?

We have all been on the airplane when the announcement says: “Please put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.”

Why? Shouldn't we be taking care of the children, the elderly, or others who are helpless in ways we are not?

The short answer is no; if you have no oxygen, if you literally cannot breathe, you cannot be of use to others. Similarly, if you are burnt out, sick, and feeling overwhelmed, are you really able to take care of others in the way that a healthy, relaxed, and energized version of you would?

Limited Resources

In an ideal world, we would have two clones, 36 hours in a day, and all the resources at hand to flourish. However, the reality is we are an army of one, have 24 hours, and finite resources to make magic happen in our world.

Most of us are not going to slow down until life or health concerns make us, so self-care needs to be something we can integrate into

our lives of service. We need some tools and tricks to help us flourish, to keep us healthy, and to ensure we can continue to make a difference to those around us.

A Tool to Help You Flourish

One tool that is akin to my “magic wand” is meditation. Not the kind of meditation that takes you to a mountain away from the world, but a way of coping with all that the world throws at you.

In essence, meditation helps you find inner peace regardless of what is going on around you. It helps you to find a way to connect, to feel at ease, to know that you can cope with anything that life throws your way.

Meditation may not change your environment, but I promise, it will change you. Meditation will help you reconnect with you. It will teach you to listen to yourself, to your body. It will improve your health and life in ways you cannot imagine.

Finding the Time and Other Myths

Aha, you say, but meditation is not for me. I already have zero time to myself.

Well, this is where the magic actually happens. In the time it takes you to read this article, you could have spent 5 minutes in meditation.

Five minutes?

Yes. One myth about meditation is that you must spend a lot of time doing it. The reality is that any time you set aside will work.

To make a difference you've got to take care of yourself. Meditation is a great way to do just that.

The magical part is that setting aside just five minutes to breathe, connect, and give your nervous system a break will improve your health and well-being.

If you can do more, great. But don't let time be another excuse for not taking care of you.

But won't meditation conflict with my religious beliefs?

The short answer is no. Meditation is for everyone, regardless of religious beliefs. You may even find it allows your faith to deepen. Many people have been life-long meditators **and** life-long Christians (or Jews, Muslims, atheists, and so on). Meditation is simply awareness.

Getting Started

So, where do you start? Start wherever you are! Below are three introductory meditations that you can do at your desk, in your living room, first thing when you wake up, or last thing at night. Just set a timer if you only have a few minutes. In short, make meditation work for your lifestyle and you will soon reap the benefits.

Make this a daily practice!

Deena M. Murphy, Ph.D. is a foster parent, a professor at N.C. State University, and runs a research and consulting business. Contact her at: murphydeenam@me.com.

Three Basic Meditations

Breathing Meditation

1. Choose a position where you feel most comfortable, with your spine as erect as possible. Close your eyes.
2. Take your focus to your breathing; breathe in and out through the nose. Feel the cool of your breath on your nostrils as you inhale; feel the slight heat as you exhale.
3. Imagine every exhalation taking tensions and toxins out of your body, feel the inhalation restoring every cell in your body. Let the breaths lengthen and become deeper without force of will or body. There is nothing for you to do, except be aware of your breath.
4. OPTIONAL. As you inhale, count 1, as you exhale, 2. All the way up to 10. If you lose track of the count, go back to 1 again. This can be helpful if your mind is very active.

Gratitude Meditation

1. Choose a position where you feel most comfortable, with your spine as erect as possible. Close your eyes.
2. Imagine the space around your heart; breathe slowly and deeply. Breathe into the belly, allowing the belly to soften. Invite your body to relax with each breath.
3. With every inhale, visualize something you could be grateful for right now. Start to bring to mind all the people that have evoked loving or happy feelings in you; people you love who may no longer be in your life, people who love you and whom you love; think about experiences, things you have seen, times you have laughed. Think of all the things in your life you could be grateful for right now (at least five), in this moment. Keep bringing them into your mind's eye, repeatedly. With each exhale, say thank you (internally).

Health Meditation

1. Choose a position where you feel most comfortable, with your spine as erect as possible. Close your eyes.
2. Bring your awareness to your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply, allowing the belly to soften, inviting the body to relax with each exhale. Just allow the breaths to lengthen and become deeper.
3. With every inhale, imagine a healing light entering your body, relaxing you more deeply, restoring your radiant health; with each exhale, imagine any tensions, toxins, or stress leaving your body as you release and let go. Feel each inhalation restoring every cell in your body; allow each exhalation to release anything from your body that is not serving you.
4. Breathe in through the nose and out from the mouth three times before you open your eyes.

Federal government finds room for improvement in NC's child welfare system

In February 2016 federal reviewers released a report assessing the performance of North Carolina's child welfare system, which includes programs involved in maltreatment investigations, foster care, and adoptions. Called the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), this report recognized our state's strengths in a number of important areas, including the pre-service training delivered to prospective foster parents.

On the whole, however, its conclusions were sobering. North Carolina did not meet federal standards for any of the 14 outcomes and systemic factors evaluated by reviewers.

Not Pass/Fail

The US Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau conducts a review of every state's child welfare system every seven to ten years. Since reviews began in 2001 there have been three "rounds" of reviews, with the federal government modifying review procedures with each new round. Since they began, no state has met federal standards in all areas assessed by the review.

While North Carolina Division of Social Services leaders take issue with some specific findings in the current federal report,

they acknowledge there is much room for improvement in our child protective services, foster care, and adoption programs.

Speaking to the Associated Press, Sherry Bradsher, Deputy Secretary for Human Services within NC DHHS, which oversees social services, stated "As painful as it might be, there's nothing new or shocking in the report in terms of something that we didn't know."

"The thing to remember about the CFSR," says Kevin Kelley, Section Chief for Child Welfare Services in the Division of Social Services, "is that it is not pass/fail. The CFSR standards are set so high because the federal government wants to see both excellence and continual improvement. That's something we agree with completely."

What's Next

Now that we have the CFSR findings, North Carolina must come up with a program improvement plan (PIP) to enhance our child welfare system. Workgroups of statewide stakeholders convened in March to help inform the development of this plan, which is sure to include strategies for reducing barriers to system performance and increasing positive outcomes for children and families.

Once it is approved by the Children's Bureau, North Carolina will have two years to meet the goals outlined in the PIP. This will be followed by a third year of oversight and monitoring. If we don't meet our goals in that time, North Carolina may face financial sanctions. In 2011 our state was penalized \$1.2 million for not meeting one goal of its previous federal program improvement plan.

Although the details of our new PIP are not yet known, it will likely focus on improvements related to practice within county DSS agencies and collaboration with the courts and outside service providers.

To Read NC's 2015 CFSR Report

Go to https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/stats/docs/child%20welfare%20docs/NC_ACF-CB_FinalReport_020216.pdf



Standards are so high because the federal government wants to see both excellence and continual improvement. That's something we agree with completely.

Book Review

Ever feel you *aren't* making a difference?

by Jeanne Preisler

There are a few times in life that have a distinct before and after: getting married, for instance. Becoming a parent. Becoming a grandparent.

I believe parenting a traumatized child is another example.

It's difficult to explain to others what parenting a traumatized child feels like. How much emotional and cognitive effort it demands. How draining that can be. How isolating.

Sometimes foster, adoptive and kinship families feel alone and overwhelmed, and as if they aren't making a difference.

They'd rather not admit, even to friends or loved ones, that they are questioning their decision to become foster/adoptive parents and may even be questioning their own competency as parents.

See Things in a New Light

If what I have said resonates for you at all, I've got a book to suggest. *Wounded Children, Healing Homes*, by Schooler, Keefer Smalley, and Callahan (NavPress, 2010) is one of my favorite books because it helps normalize all of the feelings I've described.

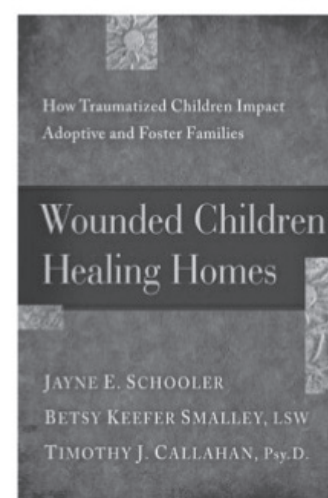
Subtitled "How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families," this book will help you understand the maze of frustration you are in is one others have successfully navigated before. This book will give every foster and adoptive parent hope because it helps us to see children's behavior in a new, meaningful light.

The other reason I love this book is that each chapter has discussion questions at the end and can be used independently. So, if you are fortunate enough to have a support group in your area, this book

would be a great investment of time and resources. If you do not have a support group in your area, please consider starting one—NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network can help you (*call them toll free at 1-877-NC KIDS-1*).

Wounded Children, Healing Homes will also help parents see how their own life experience may be interacting with the young person's, contributing to both positive and sometimes negative outcomes.

"Trauma leaves vulnerable spirits" Sharon Roszia says in the forward of the book. Indeed that is true. Vulnerable children and vulnerable families.



Children enter the foster care program for many reasons. My greatest hope is when they leave it, they are emotionally stronger than when they entered. This is more likely to happen if every adult in their life is well-informed about the impact of trauma

and knows how to respond in a way that strengthens that young person's sense of self and makes them feel loveable and capable.

This reflective, informative book can help.

Jeanne Preisler is a Program Consultant with the NC Division of Social Services and is leading an effort to help our child-serving system become more trauma-informed.

2015 legislative changes impacting foster parents and young people in foster care

by Erin Conner

Recent legislation on the federal and state levels has focused on improving the way the child welfare system meets the needs of young people in foster care. Last year North Carolina also passed new laws to protect foster parents. This article reviews these important changes so you understand how they affect you and the young people in your care.

Auto Insurance for Youth

A portion of North Carolina's Foster Care Family Act (Session Law 2015-135), which passed last year, makes it easier for young people in foster care to obtain auto insurance. It did this by amending state statute to allow young people age 16 or 17 years old who are in the legal custody of a county child welfare agency to contract for their own auto insurance, with the consent of the court. The young person is responsible for paying the premium and for any damages if they are in a car accident where they are at fault.

If a young person cannot afford their own insurance there are other options to finance the coverage. In some circumstances LINKS funds have been used to cover auto insurance costs. Decisions about the use of LINKS funds for this purpose are made on a case-by-case basis.

Driver's Licenses for Youth

North Carolina law now also makes it easier for young people in foster care to learn how to drive and obtain a driver's license. Per N.C.G.S. § 20-11(i), an application for a driver's permit or license must be signed by the young person applying for the permit or license and by another person. For young people in the custody of a county child welfare agency that other person can now be one of the following:

- A guardian ad litem or guardian ad litem attorney advocate for the young person;
- The director of the county child welfare agency or the director's designee;
- If a guardian ad litem, guard-

ian ad litem attorney advocate, agency director or director's designee is not available, the court with continuing jurisdiction over the young person's placement under G.S. 7B-1000(b).

Liability Insurance for Foster Parents

To protect foster parents from financial exposure, our state's Foster Care Family Act also ordered NC's Rate Bureau, which is responsible for establishing and administering rules and rates for insurance, to develop an optional liability insurance policy for licensed foster parents. Foster parents can use this optional insurance, if they choose to purchase it, to protect their assets against litigation in the event a child in their care is hurt. This optional new insurance will be available beginning in May 2016. If you are interested in learning more, talk to your insurance agent.

Foster Care to 21

In another important step, the North Carolina General Assembly has extended foster care to 21 years of age starting January 1, 2017.

Under a provision in the 2015 Appropriations Act, county child welfare agencies will be able to continue to provide benefits to an individual who has attained 18 years of age and chosen to continue receiving foster care services until age 21, if one or more of the following are true of the young person:

- Completing secondary education (i.e., high school) or a program leading to an equivalent credential;
- Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education;
- Participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment;
- Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- Is incapable of completing the educational or employment

requirements of this subsection due to a medical condition or disability.

Foster Care to 21 vs. CARS

Although Contractual Agreements for Residential Services (CARS) allows for young people to remain in a residential agreement with the county child welfare agency until age 21, there are some key differences between CARS and Foster Care to 21.

For example, it is up to each county child welfare agency to decide whether it will enter into CARS with a young person. Foster Care to 21 parameters are codified in law and administrative rule. Under Foster Care to 21, all youth are entitled to continued placement.

Young people who sign CARS must reside in a DHHS licensed child care facility, such as a foster home or group home, and attend school or participate in some type of vocational training that will lead to viable employment. Some counties allow young people who participate in CARS while living in college dormitory settings. In these cases, the licensed facility maintains a bed for the young person and actively provides support and care to the young person while in school.

Under the new law, young people placed through Foster Care to 21 may live in a CARS-like setting, but they may also reside outside a foster care facility in a college or university dormitory or other semi-supervised housing arrangement approved by the director of the child welfare agency. Note: "other semi-supervised living arrangement" is not defined in the law.

Another key difference between CARS and Foster Care to 21 is funding. Foster Care to 21 allows the state and county to draw down federal funds to support young people in foster care after they turn 18; with CARS only state and county dollars are used. Note, however, that counties may incur administrative costs associated with the Foster



Care to 21 program.

Foster Care to 21 is effective January 1, 2017. The state will honor existing CARS after that date until these agreements terminate or expire. After January 1, 2017 no new CARS will be made. Any young person who seeks voluntary placement on or after January 1, 2017 will be placed through the Foster Care to 21 program.

Other Changes

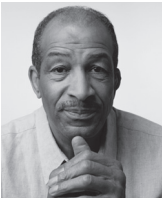
Additional information regarding 2015 legislative changes, specifically detailed information about the reasonable and prudent parent standard, can be found in the November 2015 *Fostering Perspectives* issue (Vol. 20, No.1) "Parenting Special Populations in Foster Care" and in an Administrative Letter issued by the Division of Social Services in October 2015 (CWS-AL-04-15).

Conclusion

Many of these changes provide opportunities for young people served by the foster care program to do "normal" things—which increases their sense of belonging and self-worth.

County child welfare agencies are moving forward with implementing these changes. Foster parents and young people who have questions related to driver's licenses or automobile insurance for young people in care, the Foster Care to 21 program, or the reasonable and prudent parent standard are encouraged to contact their social worker.

Erin Conner, MSW is a Social Services Program Consultant at the NC Division of Social Services.



A reader asks . . .

What should I say when someone tells me they “could never foster”?

When I tell people I’m a foster parent, they often respond by saying they could never foster because it would be too hard. I want to encourage people to foster, but I also want to be honest with them about its challenges. What are some good responses?

It is true that foster parenting is not for the faint of heart. It’s a challenging job, requiring great amounts of patience and resilience. Many people don’t think they have what it takes to be foster parents.

While foster parents are special, they are also regular people who have decided to positively impact the lives of children. Foster parents are proof that any committed and compassionate person can make a huge difference in the life of a child. As the popular ad campaign puts it, “you don’t have to be perfect to be the perfect parent.”

Current and former foster parents are in a unique position to talk with people in their communities about their experience fostering. Talking to friends, neighbors, and coworkers is a great way to draw attention to the needs of children in foster care. After all, hearing about the experiences of a trusted friend is much more meaningful than reading a pamphlet!

While it can be difficult to respond when people say that they could “never foster,” here are some suggestions to help you have a productive conversation.

Tell your story. How did you come to the decision to foster? It probably wasn’t a decision you made overnight! Were there times in the past where you thought you could “never foster?” Sharing your unique story and perspective can make the choice to foster seem a little less daunting.

Ask open-ended questions. Earnestly asking a person to explain their point of view is the best way for you to understand them. When someone says fostering would be too hard, you could ask, “Why do you say that?” Their answer to this question will help you understand their perspective; it may also help them understand their own thought processes.

Challenge assumptions. Many people’s ideas about children in foster care are based on myths and false assumptions. While all children in care have experienced some trauma, each child is unique and reacts differently to what they’ve experienced. Foster parents know this better than anyone. When you hear someone say that all kids in care are a certain way, respectfully challenge that assumption. You could say something as simple as, “Really? That’s not been my

experience at all.”

Be honest. While encouraging others to foster, it’s also important to be honest and realistic. Fostering is hard, and those who pursue it with unrealistic expectations are set up to fail.

If someone asks you, “Is fostering difficult?” most people would agree that the best answer is an unequivocal “Yes!”

While you talk about the challenges of fostering, you can simultaneously discuss the unique joys and rewards that come with being a foster parent. You make a difference on a daily basis for these children, and even the smallest successes have huge impacts. Pat yourself on the back and share these special moments! Note: It’s important to remember not to divulge any private information you’ve learned about children in your care, such as their diagnoses or their trauma histories.

It may also be helpful to emphasize that agencies provide training to help people decide whether to foster, as well as ongoing training to help them be successful at fostering after they are licensed.

Encourage involvement in any form. Fostering isn’t right for everyone, but there are other ways concerned citizens can help children in foster care. You might encourage them to become a volunteer guardian ad litem (GAL) to represent a child’s voice in court. Maybe they could choose to become a respite provider, or organize a backpack drive for children in care.

Dedicated foster parents are the most valuable resources we have, and there will always be a substantial need for more of these wonderful people. When you talk about your experiences, you make it seem a little less impossible for others to follow in your footsteps. In this way, you expand your influence and make a difference for even more children.

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 top right.

When you talk about your experiences, you make it seem a little less impossible for others to follow in your footsteps.

fostering perspectives (May 2016)

Sponsors. NC Division of Social Services, 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.

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Newsletter Staff. John McMahon (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.

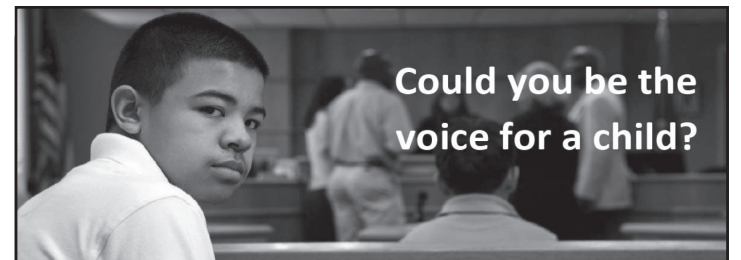
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References. See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.



Could you be the voice for a child?

Did you know that 2,000 abused and neglected children in North Carolina will go to court alone? You can help. Become a Guardian ad Litem.

Stand up today to say, “I am for the child.”

More than 2,000 abused and neglected children in NC go to court without someone to advocate just for them.

- Could you speak up for their best interests?
- Could you work side by side with an attorney?

If so, becoming a Guardian ad Litem advocate could be a great opportunity for you! To learn more, find us at any of the links below or call 1-800-982-4041.



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[facebook.com/ncGuardianAdLitem](https://www.facebook.com/ncGuardianAdLitem)
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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>



Christian (age 13)

Christian is a smart and funny young man who is everybody's friend. He is a very compassionate child who is always concerned about other people's feelings. He likes to draw and is always open to trying new creative activities. He also loves technology and playing video games. He's an accomplished soccer and baseball player. Christian is very intelligent and has great academic potential. He has expressed an interest in learning

Spanish, and his favorite subjects are math and science.

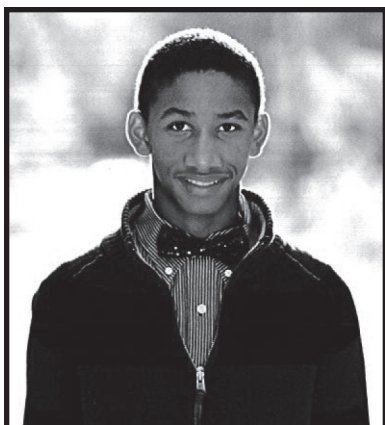
Christian needs a two-parent family that is calm, patient, and even-keeled. Christian would like to stay in North Carolina, as it is very important to him that he have continued contact with his siblings. Christian is especially close with his older brother. Christian has said he wants a family that doesn't yell and is patient. He deserves a family who understands how loss impacts behavior and who is willing to stick by him, through thick and thin.



Dakota (age 17)

Dakota is a creative, caring, and inquisitive young man with a great sense of humor. He enjoys playing basketball, football, and video games. Dakota is always ready to try new things, like different food or unique music. Dakota works hard in school and his favorite subject is science. When he grows up, Dakota would like to attend college to pursue a career as a video game developer.

Dakota longs for a sense of love and belonging. His desire is to become a part of a forever family that has pets and that attends church. Dakota would also like to be placed in a forever family with siblings, though he might compete with them for attention. Dakota needs an experienced two-parent family that is very patient and able to offer lots of one-on-one attention. The ideal family for Dakota should also have some experience with autism.

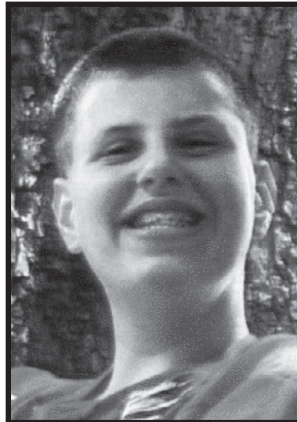


Jermaine (age 17)

Jermaine is an engaging and charismatic child who is eager to find a safe and loving home. He is positive and resilient, with a great sense of humor. In his free time, Jermaine enjoys participating in sports, listening to music, and socializing. Jermaine thrives when given adult attention, and he lights up when a respected adult takes the time to teach him something new. Jermaine also loves

to read. His favorite author is John C. Maxwell. Jermaine is excited to attend college after high school and plans to study business.

To reach his fullest potential, Jermaine would benefit from a nurturing adoptive family who is respectful, positive, and able to set appropriate boundaries. Jermaine needs patience and loving guidance from his family as he begins to navigate difficult choices on his own. It is also important that Jermaine's forever family is open and committed to allowing him to maintain birth family connections.



Jonathan (age 16)

Jonathan is an artistic, funny young man who is friendly and easy to talk to. He is always thinking about how he can help others. He likes to play basketball, football, and soccer, and loves to ride his bike or go for a swim. He also likes to play guitar and harmonica and sing gospel music. Church is big part of his life. In school, where he receives extra assistance to help him reach his full potential, Jonathan's favorite subject is science. When he grows up he would like to own a business that rescues animals.

Jonathan longs for a forever family that is patient and will take time to really listen to him. A family with experience with developmental delays would be ideal. Jonathan deserves a family who will support him into adulthood and be a positive, nurturing influence throughout his life. He would like a family who likes animals, lives in a big house, and has a loving mom and dad, with siblings in the home. Belonging to a family that enjoys attending church is also important to Jonathan.



Zach (age 13)

Zach is an outgoing young man who likes to meet new people. He enjoys playing team sports, especially football and basketball. Zach likes visiting amusement parks and playing outside. He's also a big fan of the TV show, "The Walking Dead." Zach's favorite subject in school is math and he aspires to be an engineer when he grows up. His dream is to design airplanes for the U.S. Army.

Zach is eager to join his forever family. He would prefer a Christian family with other children his age or older. It's also important to Zach that his family is nice and they are interested in outdoor activities, such as riding dirt bikes or four-wheelers. Zach needs a family who is consistent, structured, loving, and patient. He also needs a family who is open to maintaining regular contact with his siblings. An experienced family will be just what Zach needs to thrive.

Nick (age 16), TJ (age 13), and Hannah (age 11)

Nick, TJ, and Hannah are sweet, loving children who share a special sibling bond. **Nick** is an outgoing and caring young man with a deep love for his siblings. He's savvy with computers and video games and he would like to be a video game designer. When Nick applies himself in school it is clear he is highly capable and intelligent. **TJ** is a very respectful

and sweet boy who loves to talk and make people laugh. He loves animals and he likes to tinker with machines to see how they work. TJ works diligently in school and his teachers report he is always a pleasure to have in class. **Hannah** is an active little girl who is a great helper. Her favorite movie is "Toy Story" and she loves to play with any "Toy Story" toys or games. Hannah experiences some intellectual and developmental disabilities. With lots of structure and supervision in her current placement, she has made great progress. In her self-contained classroom, Hannah is an excellent helper and she's eager to learn new things.

Nick, TJ, and Hannah deserve an active, patient, and affectionate family that understands the losses they have experienced. These children are very close with their adult sister and it's important that this relationship be maintained. Though the first priority is to identify an adoptive home for all three children together, families who are interested in maintaining their sibling connection through significant and regular visits may be considered.



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:

What does being healthy mean to you?

DEADLINE: August 3, 2016

E-mail submissions to 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, 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.



Readers, Don't Lose Touch!

Fostering Perspectives will soon go all online—copies will no longer be printed and mailed out to readers.

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Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. 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 v20 n2

1. According to Judge Carmical, how do resource parents make a positive difference in court?
2. Allison Gilliam argues we can make a difference in children's lives by helping them understand what it means to eat healthy. What's been your experience in this area?
3. Describe one example from this issue of how resource parent participation helped during a CFT.
4. How did Toni Davis help her daughter "turn it around" at school?
5. What is *Wounded Children, Healing Homes* and how does Jeanne Preisler think it might help you?
6. Name three ways to respond if someone tells you they could never foster because it would be "too hard."
7. What are three potential benefits of shared parenting for resource parents?
8. Take five minutes and do one of the three "basic meditations" suggested by Deena Murphy, then briefly explain what it was like.
9. This issue describes important new NC laws relevant to foster care. Which of these interests you most, and why?
10. What did you find most striking in Megan Holmes' piece on what youth appreciate about foster parents?
11. If you haven't already, go to <http://eepurl.com/brPe9b> and sign up for the *Fostering Perspectives* email list!

Have You Heard about NC Reach?

Our state's NC Reach program provides college funding and support services to young people adopted from North Carolina DSS foster care after the age of 12 and those who age out of the system at 18. Benefits include:



- **Funding.** NC Reach provides last dollar funding after all federal, state, and private dollars have been applied, to ensure that students can meet the cost of attendance at community colleges or four-year public schools.
- **Mentoring.** Be matched with a volunteer online mentor based on your professional, academic, and personal interests and goals.
- **Workshops.** You must attend at least one workshop every semester. Topics relate to school, work, and home life.
- **Academic Support.** Participants are coached by NC Reach staff; if they fall below a 2.0 GPA they are enrolled in a program for intensive academic support.
- **Internships.** NC Reach coaches students on finding and successfully applying for internships in their communities and across North Carolina.

Eligibility Requirements

- Applicants must have aged out of North Carolina's DSS foster care system at age 18 or have been adopted from the system after the age of 12.
- Applicants must be considered residents of North Carolina for tuition purposes.
- Applicants must attend a North Carolina state university or community college. For a list of eligible schools, visit www.northcarolina.edu.
- Participants must maintain a 2.0 GPA on a four-point scale and be making "satisfactory progress" towards a degree.

For further information or to enroll, visit www.ncreach.org.