

fostering perspectives

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Helping children and youth in foster care succeed in school

Though there are stellar students among them, on the whole children and youth in foster care struggle in school more than their peers. They experience higher rates of placement in special education, more absences, more suspensions and expulsions, and lower achievement.

They also experience more school instability, which can hurt academic progress. One study found 75% of students in foster care made an unscheduled school change in one school year, compared to less than 40% of students not in foster care (Frerer, et al., 2013).

Students in foster care are also less likely than their peers to graduate high school.

While the average dropout rate in the U.S. in 2014 was 6.5%, a study of youth in foster care in the Midwest found 45% had not earned a high school diploma or GED by age 19 (NYTD, 2014). Another study found only 8% of youth who aged out of care graduated from college by age 26, compared with 46% of a nationally representative sample of 26-year-olds (Courtney, et al., 2011).

In North Carolina, we're trying to change this story by helping students in foster care succeed in school. Resource parents have a key role to play in this urgent, life-changing effort. That's what this issue is all about.

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Advocating with schools for kids in care by Bob DeMarco

I feel strongly that school is an area resource parents can help make huge strides in their kids' healing and give them the greatest opportunities for success.

As we think about and talk about school for kids who have experienced trauma we must understand two things. First, if your child or youth is separated from their birth family, for whatever reason and however early, they have experienced some level of trauma. Second, no two kids handle trauma in the same way or suffer its effects to the same degree.

If you've read my past offerings in *Fostering Perspectives*, you will be aware that the situation in our family has been extreme and it's from this place that I share my thoughts; it's what I know. Your family may not experience the same things we have or to the same degree, but it's safe to say that your traumatized child will at some point along the way encounter challenges with school. When that storm comes you'll want to have some gear to assist you. I hope that the storm will be minor and all you'll need is an umbrella and some boots, but you should also be educated (*pun intended*) and prepared for a hurricane

so that you, your child, and the school staff stand the best chance of surviving.

So, let me just put this out there from the start: you need to know that for a child dealing with the effects of trauma, getting a good education according to "normal standards" is not their priority. No, they won't care about math, reading, or why the sky is blue.

For these kids, survival is the name of the game, so instead they'll be interested in snack time, lunch, the location of the nearest exit, how long until they can see their biological mother, whether their sister has what she needs, how they can be sure the bathroom isn't harboring a hidden attacker, and what they'll do if that scary uncle pays them a visit. In the mind of this child, *Green Eggs and Ham*, sitting quietly, sharing, and singing songs have little value. Should the untrusted adults around get pushy about these things, they better be ready for the storm!

It should come as no surprise to any of us that a brain under extreme stress will not perform optimally. As my wife will no doubt

Before you can be an effective advocate, you need to know your child's rights when it comes to their education.

attest, my own brain turns to mush when the stresses of the job and home collide, and my emotional backlash is neither warranted nor rational.

Before you can be an effective advocate for your child, you need to know your child's rights

when it comes to their education. Your child has the right to an education in the least restrictive environment possible and there are formalized processes in place to protect at-risk kids. I won't go into too much on that here, but suffice it to say that you and your child do have rights and you need to learn what those rights are. (*For more on this, see page 3.*) Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related diagnoses, including ADHD, may be considered qualifying disabilities that, when leveraged, open up many educational opportunities for your child. There are nonprofit groups such as the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) whose sole focus is helping children with disabilities and their families navigate these waters at school. Make yourself aware of your options.

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Advocating with schools for kids in care

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Being a good advocate for your child means you must speak on the child's behalf to ensure they get what they need. This means you must talk with key people at the school, and one of the best things you can do is to talk them proactively.

Before little Johnny's first day, ask for a meeting. Doing so lets the school know you are engaged and interested in creating a team. Request that your child's teachers, principals, school counselors, and resource officers be present. Invite anyone else you feel will be of help in the meeting. We've brought our child's therapist and a school specialist with us to meetings.

At the meeting, carry the attitude that you are all a team working together for the good of your child and to help him or her be successful at school. Tell them as much about your child's situation as you and the child are comfortable with, but be mindful of confidentiality. The school doesn't need to know everything. It's OK to be vague and it's OK to say you'd prefer not to get into the details of your child's past. It's perfectly fine to simply say that "my son should not be allowed to go to the bathroom alone because it frightens him." They don't need to know why.

The more you can tell the team what sorts of behaviors they are likely to see, the better. Spend time talking about what interventions might or might not work and what they might do to prevent an issue before it starts. If your child has been physically harmed, let the school know putting hands on her may be a trigger that could make things worse. A better approach when she's being loud might be to let her get a drink of cold water and allow

her to sit in the back of the class for five minutes to collect her thoughts and settle.

One of the most important things you can do is help the team at school see your child for who they really are. Your child cannot tell the school what they need or why they are acting out. That's your job. Talk to them about trauma and its effects on your child and help them look beyond the behaviors to see the real child. It's very likely that you will be the best person to do this.

Offer resources to teachers to help them better understand what makes your child tick. The author of the *Connected Child* encourages parents to photocopy the chapter "Disarming the Fear Response with Felt Safety" from her book to give to teachers. If you feel that might be too much, the National Childhood Traumatic Network (<https://www.nctsn.org/>) has a free educator kit you can download. There is also a pamphlet and a one-page reference sheet directed at teachers.

Remember that the school team not only considers the needs of the individual child but also those of the classroom in general. It's a big challenge, and some might be inclined to make snap judgements about your child based on the first day's behaviors.

You want to avoid your child being misjudged, so tell the school about the good you see in him and about his strengths. Bring them along on your child's journey. Make them see that he acts out for a reason and that what looks like disobedience usually masks anxiety, fear, and emotional dysregulation. Help them understand their best response

Don't forget to express your gratitude: teachers have a tough job!

is to create felt safety by removing the root of fear and anxiety as best they can. If your son is not such a good reader and he acts out when he's stressed, ask the teacher not to have him read aloud in front of the class. If the teacher agrees to this, let your child know. This will remove the fear that he might be called upon, making him more relaxed and giving him the best chance of avoiding disruptive behaviors that may have worked for him in the past.

Stay in regular contact with the school regarding your child. Reach out to the teachers and build a relationship with them. Give them your cell phone number and make them feel comfortable to contact you when issues arise, preferably before they get out of hand.

Don't forget to express your gratitude to them; teachers have a tough job! Let them know you appreciate them taking the extra time and energy your child needs. Offer them as much support as you can.

School can be overwhelming for any child, but for a child who has been traumatized, it is all the more so. They might be in a strange environment and they are probably pretty sure that all the other kids can tell that they are in foster care or have been adopted. This makes them feel they stand out. They've learned some strategies that have made them feel safe in the past, but some of these are counterproductive in the classroom. With a good plan and good communication, you and the rest of the team can help your child succeed in school.

Bob DeMarco is an adoptive parent in North Carolina.

Educational Advocacy Resources by Bob DeMarco

There are several organizations out there that have published materials my family have found useful in working with schools. I'd like to share some of them with you.

If you need assistance navigating the waters of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the **Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC)** is an excellent resource. They offer many training opportunities, tools you can use to facilitate the conversation with your child's school, individualized coaching, and topic-specific assistance. <https://www.ecac-parent-center.org/>



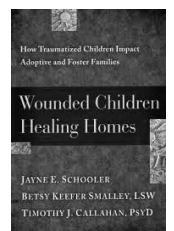
The **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)** is an excellent resource for parents and anyone touching the life of a child who has been traumatized. The general website is here: <https://www.nctsn.org/>. Don't miss their educator toolkit (<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/child-trauma-toolkit-educators>) and one-page educator fact sheet (<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/trauma-facts-educators>). You can download these resources for free, print them, and give them to your child's teachers. I recommend you spend some time looking through the wide array of wonderful information available here.



One of our favorite books for parenting children who have experienced trauma is *The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family* by Karyn B. Purvis. Dr. Purvis recommends parents copy chapter four of her book to give to their children's teachers. That chapter is titled "Disarming the Fear Response with Felt Safety." The basic premise is that your child will be best poised to learn if they feel safe in the classroom. That chapter provides real world help. The rest of the book is great, too!



Another book we recommend is called *Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families* by Jane Schooler. Chapters nine and ten deal specifically with maltreated children in school and interventions for teachers that work. The book provides good education as to why one might see a particular behavior. It also emphasizes the importance of the teacher/child relationship, something we have found to be essential to any kind of success for our kids.



Education for young people in foster care: NC resource parent rights and responsibilities

by Jonathan Rockoff

Your license has been approved! You spent the past few months going through the licensing process and learning as much as you could about a child welfare system with many moving parts. Yet if your child is school-aged, you still have more to learn.

School Districts & Enrollment

Even before your license is approved, one of your first responsibilities is to determine which school district you live in and share this information with your agency. Depending on the district, school enrollment will be either your responsibility or the legal guardian's (i.e., DSS). If you are unsure, ask your school district's foster care point of contact.

If enrollment will fall to you, call and explain to the school that you are a foster parent who anticipates enrolling a student in the near future. The school will explain the process so you can be ready to enroll the student in a timely way. The child welfare agency should provide you with the paperwork needed for enrollment. Also, don't forget to ask about before- and after-school programs, which vary from school to school.

Accepting a Placement

When accepting a placement, be aware of your rights. According to North Carolina child welfare policy, you should always have access to the child/youth's placement information, social/behavioral information, medical history, and educational history. You should receive the Educational Component of the Family Services Agreement and be given educational information up to the point of placement and while the child/youth is in your care.

Within the first 14 days of placement, there will be a shared parenting meeting. This is a great place to learn from the birth family about the child/youth's strengths and needs related to school and learning.

Youth Rights

Know the child/youth's rights. In 2013, North Carolina passed a Foster Care Bill of Rights. (Visit <https://bit.ly/2xDj51T> to read this bill). The fourth right in this bill is "Allowing the child to remain enrolled in the school the child attended before being placed in foster care, if at all possible."

When making a placement, if it is in their best interest, the child/youth has a right to remain in their current school. This decision is made during a Best Interest Determination meeting, where the child/youth's team decides if remaining in the "school of origin" would be in the child/youth's best interest. If the decision is made to change schools, this meeting can facilitate seamless transfer of information from the old school to the new

one. During this meeting a decision will also be made regarding school transportation arrangements.

The sixth right from NC's Foster Care Bill of Rights is "Participation in school extracurricular activities, community events, and religious practices." I have seen children/youth shine when given the opportunity to socialize with others who share common interests in a positive and uplifting environment—for example, through sports or dance teams or music lessons.

Take the time to get to know the child/youth and their interests. If they have to change schools, try hard to continue any extracurricular activities they were previously engaged in.

Learn about and use the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, which gives resource parents the authority to grant or withhold permission for certain extracurricular and "normal" activities. (*Note: for some activities, the agency or the birth parents must be the decision makers.*)

Parent Rights and IEPs

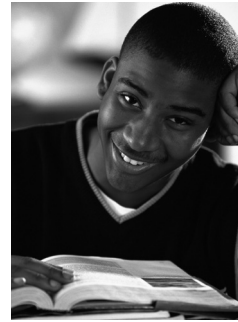
Know that when children/youth are in foster care, under federal law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) birth parents retain their parental educational rights unless they are specifically taken away by the court (NC DPI, 2008). As the resource parent, you and the birth parent will be part of the team that makes educational decisions. Work with the birth parent to advocate for the youth.

Parents are expected to participate as equal partners in the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process; they must be invited to attend meetings and an IEP must be shown to parents before it can be implemented. For a handbook outlining parent rights related to the IEP process, go to <https://bit.ly/2ukgUN5>. Ideally, the social worker should attend this meeting and can arrange for the birth parent and foster parent to attend as well. Both sets of parents need to hear the same information and have a chance to ask questions.

Family foster care parents, guardians, and relatives (e.g., kinship caregivers) who live with the child/youth are legally allowed to fill the parental role in the IEP process. However, a therapeutic foster parent, group home worker, or the DSS worker cannot fill the role of a parent in an IEP meeting (NC DPI, 2014). Guardians ad Litem (GALs) can also serve as a parent in the IEP process if they are appointed to do so by the court (NC DPI, 2008).

Communication Is Key

Communication between all parties is critical. Take the time to reach out to teachers, school nurses, counselors, or anyone who



is part of the child/youth's support system. Create an open line of communication and be present in the school.

Students in foster care benefit from a united support system working towards common goals. I worked with a set of resource parents that exchanged a quick email

with their son's teacher every day. The teacher would report on the child's behavior that day, and the parents would issue a reward or a consequence at home based on the school behavior. The child quickly learned his parents and teacher were united and his behavior at school AND at home quickly changed for the better.

Be mindful of confidentiality when sharing information. Generally speaking, the school is on a "need to know" basis when it comes to specifics of the child/youth's past.

Make School a Safe Haven

Caring for a child/youth in school is often much more than helping with homework. It can be IEPs, teacher conferences, phone calls, emails, extracurriculars, field trips, and more. For children/youth who have experienced trauma, school can be challenging. But when we know our rights, the child/youth's rights, and our responsibilities, we can make the experience one of personal growth, discovery, and empowerment. Resource families strive to make their homes a safe haven. Let's try to do the same with school.

Supporting the Education of Children in Foster Care

Foster Parent Rights

- Receive information prior to agreeing to the placement of the child/youth, including educational information (e.g., where they will attend school)
- Use the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to grant or withhold permission for certain extracurricular and "normal" activities (*Note: for some activities, the agency or the birth parents must be the decision makers*)
- If the child/youth has an IEP:
 - Attend IEP meetings and be shown the IEP before it is implemented
 - Fill the parent role in IEP meetings (*Note: does not apply to TFC parents*)

Foster Parent Responsibilities

- Advocate for the child/youth and support their learning and success in school
- Partner with birth parents, teachers, and agency to support the child/youth's success
- Enroll the child/youth in school (*Note: in some locales this is the child welfare agency's role*)
- Make sure the child/youth attends school



Here's what I learned navigating IEPs

by Lisa DeMarco

IEP meetings can be incredibly intimidating if advocacy doesn't come easily to you. I have learned a great deal in the past six and a half years and have been transformed from a "I-never-want-to-rock-the-boat-or-make-anyone-feel-uncomfortable" person to a mom who can speak up for the best interest of her child even when everyone else doesn't agree. When I leave an IEP meeting, I leave with a plan I am confident in.

The need to be well informed on the IEP process and the law goes without saying, and I encourage you to do your research and enter all meetings prepared in that way. (See box below for information about IEPs.)

In this article, I want to approach the IEP from a more interpersonal angle. IEP meetings involve people who are each looking at your child from a unique perspective, each with their own area of expertise, and each with their own personality and communication style. The goal is to formulate a plan that is specific to your child, that will best meet his or her educational needs. This task will go smoothly at times, but it is unrealistic to expect there won't be challenges, frustrations, or personality clashes along the way.

Before I continue I want you to know that I have participated in more IEP meetings than I want to count as a parent, but also that I am a team member in over 35 IEP meetings per year professionally in the public school system. My desire is to share some insight into approaches that contribute to identifying and implementing the best educational plan for the children you are advocating for.

Be Honest

Assuming you are already very familiar with the language and the process of IEPs, the first recommendation I have for you is to **be honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to communicating in a group**, especially if you have a tendency to feel intimidated or to be intimidating. Remember, the goal is to function as a team, where all members contribute in their area of expertise. You are the expert on your child, even if your child is new to your home. You see the big picture. You have a holistic approach. You understand the effects of trauma and loss. Acknowledge your unique contribution and don't underestimate it.

Next, acknowledge that each person in the meeting has valuable information to contribute. While you may not agree with all that is stated, **listen with interest** and then **respond with respect**, even if you disagree. In my experience, intimidating people are not well received and harshness rarely motivates a person to willingly comply and put forth their best effort.

Be Proactive

You can take steps that can contribute to smoother IEP meetings from the first day of school. Get to know your child's teacher. Communicate regularly.

I love the idea of writing up a short introduction of your child that you can provide to the teacher(s) the first week of school. Make it a concise summary of what strengths and needs your child has and a few suggestions for how the teacher can help her through tough times.

Have a way of checking in with the teacher if you expect your child to struggle more than usual on a particular day (e.g., due to a parent visit, a nightmare, a medication change, etc.). By doing so you are building a good relationship and establishing yourself as a parent who is involved. (You would be surprised how many parents do not even attend IEP meetings!)

Express appreciation for what is going right. A short note and a small gift (e.g., a candy bar, a travel size lotion) is not necessary, but reminds the recipient there is partnership between school staff and parents/caregivers.

Don't badmouth the school or teacher in earshot of your child. They are likely to repeat your statements, which could interfere with your child's felt safety at school.

Ultimately, you want a good relationship with the professionals who are with your child at school, so address and resolve concerns respectfully and without undermining your child's need to trust those he or she is with each day. If your child has therapies or sees the resource teacher, make sure you have their names and contact information and stay informed and involved with them as well.

On IEP Meeting Days

On the day of IEP meetings, if you are feeling stressed, practice some of the many coping strategies we often remind our children to use. (Yes, moms and dads need those too, and practice makes perfect.)

And just as we should always consider if our children are hungry, thirsty, tired, or need a bathroom break, make sure you don't forget your own physiological needs as you rush around prior to the meeting. This way you can ensure your full attention will be on your child and not on your discomfort.

Arrive a few minutes early so you are not walking into a room full of people, with no choice of where to sit. Arriving early allows you more flexibility regarding who you sit next to or across from. I generally like to sit next to a person I have a good rapport with, and I avoid sitting across from (and being forced to directly look into the eyes of) team members I clash with.

Remember, you can bring someone to the meeting with you (e.g., a therapist, a friend,

an advocate, a specialist); just let the IEP team lead know beforehand.

Sometimes meetings can become heated and stressful. Do your best to remain objective and not overly emotional. In meetings where my emotions got the better of me, I felt others did not consider my input as seriously as when I was able to be objective, factual, and educationally relevant.

There are times when a meeting needs to be continued at a later time (e.g., if no resolution can be met or if there is an unresolved personality clash). Don't be afraid to recommend that the team adjourn and come together later.

During my first several IEP meetings, I was so nervous and felt intimidated by several people. Having our social worker or therapist attend the meeting gave me confidence to speak up.

In subsequent meetings, I brought printed information on trauma-informed classrooms and handed those out. Eventually I had my children assessed by a psychologist with a focus on childhood trauma and loss, and I made sure the school had an "Educational" copy (i.e., minus information the school did not need to know) of this assessment. I read plenty of resources on foster care, adoption, trauma, and how those affect child development. By doing all this, I became more confident, able to speak up and advocate for my children, and able to be a significant contributor at IEP meetings.

In closing, I would suggest that being informed, prepared, confident in your role as the expert on your child, and respectful at IEP meetings will help you better meet your child's educational needs. I also have learned that IEP meetings do not need to be painful. In fact, some have actually been enjoyable!

Lisa DeMarco is an adoptive parent in NC.

Parent Involvement Is Key

Parents are expected to participate as equal partners in the IEP process; they must be invited to attend meetings and an IEP must be shown to parents before it can be implemented. For a handbook outlining parent rights related to the IEP process, go to <https://bit.ly/2ukgUN5>.

In addition to birth parents who retain their educational rights, in North Carolina family foster care parents, guardians, and relatives (e.g., kinship caregivers) who live with the child/youth are legally allowed to fill the parental role in the IEP process. However, a therapeutic foster parent, group home worker, or the DSS worker cannot fill the role of a parent in an IEP meeting (NC DPI, 2014). Guardians ad Litem (GALs) can also serve as a parent in the IEP process if they are appointed to do so by the court (NC DPI, 2008).



Improving North Carolina's Child Welfare System: Update on Rylan's Law – The Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act

House Bill 630 (S.L. 2017-41), the Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act, is strengthening North Carolina's social services and child welfare systems.

Known as Rylan's Law, the bill calls for the reformation of North Carolina's child welfare and social services systems to improve child safety and increase transparency and accountability. Major changes include North Carolina Division of Social Services (DSS) shifting from centrally located offices mainly in Raleigh, NC, and expanding supervision to regionally-based locations across the state to better support and monitor County Departments of Social Services. Rylan's Law provides a blueprint to create statewide capacity to protect children and promote safe and stable families, while incorporating evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally competent practices.

Key Components of Rylan's Law

Recent federal and statewide reviews have identified troubling gaps and flaws in North Carolina's child welfare system that place children's safety at risk. Transforming the child welfare system is necessary to better ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families. The child welfare system evaluations concluded that counties require improvement in areas such as providing services to families to prevent child removals, increasing efforts to achieve permanency, and supporting the child welfare workforce.

Rylan's Law changes how DSS supervises all 100 North Carolina County Departments of Social Services. At present, approximately 125 DSS employees are focused on the child welfare system. Some specialize in training or policy, and others focus on improving service delivery through quality assurance and program monitoring. While a portion of these employees cover specific regions, not all do. By March 1, 2020, Rylan's Law will create regional offices that provide regional supervision and support to County Departments of Social Services. Each County Department of Social Services will be part of a region of counties, and DSS staff will monitor and support these regions.

There are five key components of Rylan's Law that drive this transformational work. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) oversees DSS and is leading the charge. The key components include the following.

1. System Reform Plans

The most important component of Rylan's Law is the requirement of an independent assessment by a third-party organization to evaluate our current system. The resulting

recommendations will provide a new vision and strategic direction for social services, including child welfare.

The Center for the Support of Families (CSF) was selected to perform the independent assessment. Since beginning work in March 2018, CSF has collected extensive data, administered surveys, and met with state, county, and community stakeholders across North Carolina to develop preliminary recommendations for child welfare and social services programs. In September 2018, CSF concluded phase one of their work by releasing two preliminary reform plans: one for child welfare and one for social services. DHHS will use the preliminary recommendations as a roadmap to improve support and oversight of social services programs, enhance child safety, and protect children from harm. The preliminary reform plans can be reviewed at <https://bit.ly/2DsdIZl>.

Phase two of CSF's work will include further development of the preliminary reform plans, including additional engagement with state and county leaders and community stakeholders. The final recommendations will be released at the conclusion of phase two in February 2019. Phase three provides for continued oversight and monitoring of the implementation activities.

2. Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group

In 2017, as part of Rylan's Law, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG). Its purpose is to develop recommendations for improving state supervision of the county-administered social services system via a system of regional state offices.

The work of the SSWG has two stages. During stage one, the group developed recommendations regarding the size, number, and location of regional state offices and identified responsibilities of central, regional, and local officials in supervising and administering social services programs. The SSWG concluded stage one in March 2018; its recommendations can be found at <https://unc.live/2xCZaRi>. In stage two, which is currently underway, the SSWG will build on concepts developed in the first stage. The primary focus is to develop recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes that improve collaboration. A report containing stage two recommendations will be released in February 2019. You can keep up with the activities and recommendations of the SSWG at <https://unc.live/2xD19Fe>.

3. Corrective Action – Memoranda of Understanding

Effective July 1, 2018, Rylan's Law requires all 100 County Departments of Social Services to enter into an annual performance agreement with DHHS for all social services programs, excluding Medicaid. The agreement contains performance requirements and administrative responsibilities related to child welfare and other social services programs. Ultimately, a data dashboard will be available to the public so counties and citizens can easily access program data and performance.

4. Child Well-being Transformation Council

There are several public and private agencies and organizations across the state involved with promoting the welfare of children and protecting them from harm. These stakeholders include community partners from child care, education, health care, social services, and juvenile justice. Though these agencies and organizations provide important services, there is also lack of coordination and communication between those services. To promote a more coordinated approach to services that will help improve outcomes for children, the General Assembly created the Child Well-being and Transformation Council. The council will serve as a multidisciplinary group that will work collaboratively in providing public services to children. The council will consist of 17 members appointed by the Governor and General Assembly.

5. Regional Departments of Social Services

To promote accountability and increased supervision, Rylan's Law gives counties the option to create Regional Departments of Social Services. This gives counties the flexibility to combine resources and improve the provision of social services among more than one county.

Summary

Rylan's Law provides North Carolina with a blueprint for how we can collectively transform our child welfare system. Since Rylan's Law was passed in 2017, DHHS and other stakeholders have begun the foundational work of shifting to a regionally-supervised social services system that better protects children and increases transparency and accountability.

As DHHS and other stakeholders engage in this transformative process, updates will be provided to keep readers informed about major developments in this important work.

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Helping the kids in your care succeed in school

Insights and advice from a teacher who is also a foster parent by Anna Morrison

I am an elementary school teacher. I know what it is to have a classroom full of first graders who come from all sorts of backgrounds and have different needs and gifts, and to be responsible for their learning for a whole school year.

I'm also an experienced foster parent. My family and I have cared for eight kids ranging in age from 4 weeks to 7 years old. We also have four biological children of our own that are now ages 12, 14, 16, and 18. So I know parenting, including the indispensable work of helping my children succeed in school.

Based on both these experiences, as teacher and foster parent, I would like to share some advice to support and encourage you in your role as a foster parent.

* * * * *

First, I encourage you to **be an advocate for your child**. It is your responsibility to speak up when they have needs and to find ways to build up their interests and strengths. Before a placement, ask your child's social worker for as much information as possible about the child's history and experiences. Then, set up a meeting with the child's counselor, teacher, and the school social worker. Go into this meeting with a list of your questions. These might include: *Have you worked with children in foster care before? Do you have support services available for students with academic and social and emotional needs? What is the best way to communicate with you during the day?*

Tell them all you can share about the child so you can become a team. Make sure the counselor, teacher, and social worker know you want to know how the child is doing, that you support their work, and that you will do whatever the child needs at home. Clear communication is essential.

Once we had a child placed with us right before he started kindergarten. I already had a great relationship with his teacher, who was in the classroom next to mine. But what started out as a pleasant exchange each day about his progress quickly turned into negative reports about his behavior.

My relationship with my child's teacher became strained. I had to speak up for the child and continuously comment on the good I was seeing. (Even when I had to work hard to find it myself.) Maintaining optimism and hope in the face of difficulty is important for the child and for you as the foster parent.

That experience leads me to this: **expect school to be hard for your child**. For a child who has experienced trauma, even everyday tasks can be difficult. Focusing can be chal-

lenging. You will have to work alongside your child and the teacher to help them develop strategies to manage the hard times and work toward success. Ask your child what they need and how you can help. Ask your child's teacher how you can support them.

As hard as they both may try, not every day will be positive. For this reason, it is important that you talk to them daily about all the positives you see. We all need to hear the good, especially the teacher and the child.

Pay attention to the child's "school story." What narrative are they hearing? Are they only hearing negative comments about their behavior or academic ability? This can be spirit crushing and does not help them learn the skills they need to succeed. To counteract this, be sure to talk to your child and their teacher about the good within them.

When needed, share with the teacher the fears and anxieties your child is dealing with. For example, one child we cared for was sexually abused in a bathroom. As a result, this child feared most bathrooms and often had accidents. It was incredibly helpful for his teacher to know that bathrooms were a trauma trigger and an area of struggle for this child.

Challenging though school may be, as foster parents we need to **model responsible behavior and a growth mindset**. Sometimes I can already tell the night before how my next day is likely to go based on my planning and choices. If you are prepping your lunch before bed, getting your clothes out, and making sure your papers and items are where they need to be, you are setting a good example for your child. You are their role model!

If you use a planner or a calendar to organize your week of appointments and activities, let your child see this. It is important that your child sees not only that you are organized, but that they are on that calendar and an important part of your life. They want to feel a part of a family. This is a small way to communicate this.

As you are going about your week, make sure your child hears positivity from you. Your words and actions should reflect an attitude and belief that growth is attainable. Deliberately say things like, *I'm tired, but I'm going to work hard at washing our dishes tonight*, or *I am so thankful for you*.

Positive messages that emphasize optimism go a long way with any child, especially children that have been through trauma and are trying to feel a sense of security and hope.

Maintaining optimism and hope in the face of difficulty is important!

One of the hardest lessons I had to learn as a foster parent was to **get support and take time for yourself**. The desire to do good can only get you so far before you run out—out of energy, patience, hope, and even compassion. (Compassion fatigue is real!)

I can remember curling up in the shower and just crying during a challenging placement. I did this multiple times. Yes, it sounds dreadful. It was. I was tired, emotional, and depleted. Depression crept in before I knew it. I had neglected to reach out to my social worker, my friends, my church community, my coworkers, and even my own family for emotional support.

Fostering is messy and often unappreciated. We cannot do it alone. Join a foster parent association or start one in your area. Read authors like John DeGarmo, who has a book I recommend called *Helping Foster Children in School: A Guide for Foster Parents, Teachers, and Social Workers*. Connect with foster parents through social media or blogs. Join or start a support group for foster parents at your church. Journal your thoughts, feelings, dreams, and plans. Prioritize date nights with your partner to have fun with each other and speak openly about where you both are with the placement experience.

Please find time for yourself, too. Within the last year, I have learned about mindfulness, which I have found so effective. Whether it is a nature walk, a hot shower, or going to bed an hour earlier, take time to care for yourself. If you are like me, you want to do for everyone else. Sometimes it doesn't come naturally to give to yourself, but you must if you want to do this important work of parenting a hurt child.

I would like to leave with this last bit of encouragement: **please celebrate**. Celebrate the mundane and the big accomplishments. Celebrate when they make it through their first day of school, get through a hard test, work out a problem at school, choose an outfit for the day, or are ready on time. Celebrate how nice it is to sit at the dinner table and share a meal. Celebrate alongside your child's teacher, too. If your situation allows, celebrate with your child's biological family.

Life is worth celebrating! Your child is worth celebrating! Make them feel like they matter. They do.

Anna Morrison is an elementary school teacher and foster parent in Durham, NC.

SaySo joins Children's Home Society of NC

On July 1, 2018, Children's Home Society of North Carolina welcomed SaySo to its family of programs.

SaySo, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are, or have been, in the out-of-home care system in North Carolina, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements. Its mission is 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 out-of-home care.

SaySo began in 1998 and today the organization boasts 27 chapters across North Carolina and a membership of over 500 young adults in foster care and alumni. SaySo works with youth in foster care, foster care alumni, social workers, foster parents, and foster care advocates. Through a series of yearly conferences, events, and opportunities for youth in foster care, they help youth with their lives within the system of care, as well as transitioning out of foster care, by informing them of services and resources available to them and teaching them essential life skills. SaySo also advocates for foster care at the local and state government levels, informing legislators of the challenges and opportunities facing youth in foster care. SaySo has a track record of supporting improvements to the system, such as extending critical support services from age 18 to 21 for youth exiting foster care.

A SaySo youth shared, "I love the idea of SaySo becoming a program of Children's Home Society because I feel like it will give SaySo a stronger voice. After listening to their ideas and how it will affect SaySo positively, I think it will be a great idea. We now have another stable organization backing us up in the work that we do with the same goal, ambition, and love for youth in foster care. I think it's going to be a great experience and I personally can't wait to see how much they learn from us with having youth voice at the table."

"SaySo joining CHS feels like a natural fit, and our values, programming, and focus on the central role of independent youth voice will remain the same. SaySo has a proven track record of engaged, passionate, and loyal youth and alumni who are drivers of systemic improvement. We believe that becoming a program of CHS will help us make an even bigger impact," said Carmelita Coleman, Director of SaySo.

SaySo receives funding from the NC Department of Health and Human Services.

"North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services, relies on SaySo to elevate youth voice and advocate for changes in the child welfare system that directly impact the quality of living for youth in foster care," said Lisa Cauley, Child Welfare Director, NC Division of Social Services. "Contributions of this very capable group include the development of a bill of rights for youth in foster care and shaping policy that provides youth greater access to driving and extracurricular activities. As a part of the Children's Home Society team, we believe that the valuable work of this group will continue."

"The Division of Social Services, relies on SaySo to elevate youth voice and advocate for changes in the child welfare system that directly impact the quality of living for youth in foster care."

– Lisa Cauley, Child Welfare Director
NC Division of Social Services



For more information on SaySo, please contact Carmelita Coleman, SaySo Director, at 1-800-632-1400 or via email at sayso@chsnc.org, or visit www.saysoinc.org.



Schooling and Education for Youth in Substitute Care by Megan Holmes

The life of a young person in care is full of change, which sometimes is the only constant. The young person changes homes, friends, families, and schools. With change comes the unnerving task of "going with the flow." However, going with the flow can present a great challenge when your only outlet is snatched from you. For some youth, that outlet is school.

Despite difficulties such as bullying, school is the only safe haven some youth know. When a young person is moved from placement to placement, it may result in them transferring schools. If a transfer occurs, various factors can prevent the young person from immediately beginning at the new school. This may result in the young person falling behind and being held back academically.

ESSA

ESSA (the Every Student Succeeds Act, P.L.114-95) was passed in 2015. Under this law, if a young person in foster care is moved from one placement to another, the young person must continue attending their same school unless a determination is made that this is not in their best interest. If it is in the child's best interest to change schools, the child must be immediately enrolled in the new school even if they don't have the required documentation. ESSA actively supports academic stability for youth in substitute care, which contributes to their overall future successes in life. (*For more on efforts to prevent school moves, see the article on page 9.*)

CFTs and School Meetings

In pursuit of providing academic success for the young person in care, the involvement of all community partners in the young person's life is required. It can be a bit intimidating for a foster parent to get involved in this crucial aspect of the young person's life due to the many needs that may arise, but it is imperative that the foster parent and other community partners join together to see their young person succeed despite any barriers.

Many young people in substitute care have an individual educational plan (IEP), which is a plan implemented to help the young person excel with the maximum support from the school and their teachers. This plan has parallels with a child and family team meeting (CFT), which is a place to discuss the strengths, needs, and problems influencing the young person's success.

The most opportune time for community partners and foster parents to join forces is during a CFT. This meeting should also discuss the young person's IEP, if the student has one, to ensure all areas of the young person's life are covered, and to ensure that all possible solutions are mentioned and a plan is established to provide extra academic support. If they touch on education and school, plans created during CFTs should be shared with teachers. Sharing the plan ensures everyone has a clear understanding of the young person's circumstances and provides all parties with an area of responsibility to promote the young person's success inside and outside the classroom.

Resources

- [The Parent Toolkit](https://www.parenttoolkit.com/about/about-parent-toolkit) by NBC News Education Nation offers information about how to provide support around homework, social and emotional health, and many other topics that affect academic success. <https://www.parenttoolkit.com/about/about-parent-toolkit>
- [NC's chapter of NAMI](https://naminc.org/useful-links/) (National Alliance on Mental Illness) offers information and resources related to mental health, which can certainly impact academic performance. <https://naminc.org/useful-links/>
- [NC Reach](https://www.ncreach.org/) (<https://www.ncreach.org/>) and the [Educational Training Voucher](https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/) (<https://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/>) are sources of support some youth may qualify for to help them pursue higher education.

Megan Holmes, a foster care alumna, is Lead Special Projects Coordinator for SaySo.



Shared parenting and school success

Kids win when resource parents, birth parents, and schools work together

by Donna Foster

If you know me, you know I'm a big fan of shared parenting. I cherish any chance I get to explain why I think this practice is good for children, birth families, and foster families.

In North Carolina, shared parenting usually starts with a face-to-face meeting between birth and foster parents within the first two weeks of placement. After that, though, it takes place in all sorts of ways, including letters, calls, visits, and joint trips to medical appointments. I think some of the best and most important opportunities for shared parenting occur around school.

Shared Parenting Around School

School is a natural place for birth and foster parents to come together. They both care about the development, learning, and well-being of the child, and that's what school and teachers are all about, too. When things go very well, birth parents, foster parents, and the child's teachers are on the same page and use the same language to teach the child academics and social skills and to give them a sense of safety and belonging. This can really improve the child's development and growth!

That's not to say shared parenting around school is always easy. For some people the word "school" conjures up past accomplishments and friendships. But for others it can be intimidating or trigger stressful memories. Add to this the fact that in some cases parents know or suspect they are involved with the child welfare system thanks to a CPS report that came from a teacher, school nurse, or principal. In this situation, it can be a struggle for a parent to turn around and work with the school system, even if it is on their child's behalf.

Even so, school is a prime place for shared parenting. Teachers welcome any parent who wants to learn how to support their child's learning. Now, our job as foster parents, birth parents, and social workers is to get the same excitement from school staff and other resource people in supporting us as we work together for the child.

One Approach to Try

Here is one approach to doing shared parenting around schools I would like to offer. I hope this is a helpful starting point.

STEP 1. Meet Before Approaching the School. Start with a meeting involving foster parents, birth parents, and the child's social worker to plan how to work together to support the child's educational success. Birth parents can share the child's educational history and anything important to the child's learning such as fears, learning needs, medi-

cations, and relevant diagnoses. If needed (e.g., a birth parent has learning disabilities), create a plan for assisting the birth parents in the school setting so they can participate on the team at their child's school.

STEP 2. Social worker meets with school personnel. At this meeting the social worker explains shared parenting to the child's teacher, principal, assistant principal, and school counselor. Based on this meeting, the social worker could develop a written agreement about what the plan will be and who is involved. For example, the plan could state that DSS encourages the foster parents to advocate for the student and to include the birth parent in meetings, lunchtime visits, and other school events. It could also state the teacher will update the social worker about any successes or concerns related to the student, birth family, or foster family. Copies should be provided to the birth parent, foster parent, principal, and assistant principal.

STEP 3. Parent-teacher meeting. Next, foster and birth parents meet with the child's teacher to learn about the child's needs and how to meet them. Before this meeting the foster and birth parents should write down their questions and concerns to share with each other and the teacher.

Ideally, the birth parent will take the lead in this meeting while the foster parent takes notes. If appropriate, the foster parent may need to coach the birth parent prior to the meeting on how to be the lead person. This meeting is a learning opportunity for the birth parent. Encouragement will heighten the birth parent's self-esteem and confidence.

If necessary, the foster parent should remind the teacher to speak directly to the birth parent during the meeting.

STEP 4. Continue to involve birth parents in their child's schooling. Be creative! Birth

parents can encourage their child, assist in homework, and attend school activities and lunches. They can attend school plays, team sports, and other school functions their child participates in. Make sure they get the message that their involvement is needed and appreciated. Believe me, this will reduce family stress because you are including the birth parents and not excluding them.

STEP 5. Keep everyone updated. Birth parents and foster parents should share with each other any new information they have about how the child is doing in school. This information should also be given in writing to the social worker.

Other Tips

Get to know others from school the child may have a positive relationship with. This might include teachers, school counselors, secretaries, the school psychologist, the school nurse, principals and assistant principals, custodians, cafeteria staff, librarians, and bus drivers. Listen carefully when the child speaks about people at school and share important information with the social worker.

As reunification approaches, birth parents should be even more deeply involved so they can continue to support the child's learning once the child returns home.

Conclusion

Let's get pumped up! As the box below shows, we have a ton of educational resources in our schools and communities to help our children! And if foster parents, birth parents, and social workers come together with the school program, children will meet their educational potential.

Donna Foster is a national trainer, consultant, and author of the series "Shelby and Me: Our Journey Through Life Books."

Educational Resources for Children and Families

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I, Part A (Title I). Provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure all children meet challenging state academic standards.
<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/>

Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC). A nonprofit dedicated to empowering families and improving lives, particularly for NC families raising children ages 0 to 26 with disabilities. Staffed primarily with parents of children with disabilities, ECAC understands the needs of families as they navigate the special education process.
<http://ecac-parentcenter.org/>

NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). NCDPI's vision is "every public school student will graduate ready for post-secondary education and work, prepared to be a globally engaged and productive citizen." <http://www.ncpublicschools.org>

Parent Teacher Association (PTA). PTAs are a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and strong advocates for the education and well-being of children.
<http://ncpta.org/>

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD). Nonprofit providing education, advocacy, and support for individuals with ADHD. <http://www.chadd.org>

Reducing school moves

I was tired. This would be my fourth high school in four years. I'd already moved twice the previous year, which meant having to go to two different schools during my junior year.

The principal didn't make it easy. She looked over my transcripts, and decided that I should be placed in the 11th grade again. My heart sank as tears welled up in my eyes and the walls of my esophagus got tighter, making it impossible for me to swallow. There was no way in the world I was going to repeat 11th grade.

I began to cry right then and there as I pleaded for her not to do that. I told her I'd been in foster care since birth and moved around a lot. —A.L.

SOURCE: REPRESENT MAGAZINE, 2009

* * * * *

Foster care placement moves are tied to **school mobility**, which is defined as moving from one school to another when this is not dictated by a typical transition point, such as the normal move from elementary to middle school.

School mobility is a real challenge for kids in foster care. Research has shown that between 56% and 75% of students change schools when they enter foster care (Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014).

And that's just one move. According to one study, 34% of 18-year-olds in foster care have experienced five or more school changes (Pears, et al., 2016).

School Moves Are a Problem

School mobility is hard on kids. It can lead to incomplete records and delays in enrollment. As A.L. illustrates in the opening of this article, high school students in foster care can have trouble transferring course credit. Research shows that mobile students—not just those in foster care—are about 4 months behind their peers in reading and math achievement (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004 cited in Pears, et al., 2016).

Because of these challenges, kids in care tend to score 15-20 percentile points lower than their peers on standardized tests (sources cited in McKellar & Cowan, 2011).

For many young people in foster care, school moves affect more than just academic progress. Moves can cause them to lose natural educational supports such as siblings, peers, and trusted adults like teachers, counselors, and coaches. They sometimes also lose formal supports such as special education instruction, supportive services, and language services. These losses likely contribute to the fact that kids in care are more likely to be held back, suspended or expelled, drop out, and to be referred for special education services.

A Focus on Educational Stability

Because school moves can interfere with learn-

ing and even long-term well-being, North Carolina child welfare policy emphasizes the importance of educational stability. Policy states that a child or youth must remain in their school of origin upon entering foster care or experiencing a foster care placement change. If it appears they cannot remain in their school of origin, a Best Interest Determination (BID) meeting must occur before a student changes schools.

BID Meetings

These meetings must be held within 7 days of the child or youth's initial placement and any subsequent placements (within 5 school days).

When determining whether it is in the student's best interest to remain in his or her school of origin, the county child welfare agency and local education agency/agencies must consider all factors relating to a child/youth's best interest, including the student's preferences, the preferences of parents or education decision makers, any previous school transfers and how they impacted the child, and how the length of the commute to school would impact the child, based on the child's developmental stage.

The child welfare agency must invite the school's point of contact to BID meetings. This person is responsible for inviting other relevant educational personnel.

BID meetings ensure all options are explored before a decision is made about where the child goes to school. For more on BID meetings, visit <https://bit.ly/2wbOA2c> and download the "Best Interest Determination" form (DSS-5137), and the instructions for this form.

How Can We Reduce School Moves?

Reducing school moves is a complex challenge that can only be addressed through collaboration. Child welfare agencies and schools must communicate about the child and keep each other up-to-date. If they wait until a move is imminent, it's too late.

One thing agencies and workers can do to



minimize school moves is to prevent foster care placement disruptions. Careful matching of foster parent strengths and child needs before placement, adequate training of foster parents (especially on the topic of behavior management), the delivery of appropriate services to the child and family, and supporting foster parents all contribute to placement stability.

Schools should make sure students in foster care, birth and foster parents, and social workers all know their rights, so they don't assume a placement change automatically means a change in schools. (*For more on resource parent rights and responsibilities around children's education, see page 3.*)

Resource parents, too, can promote the educational stability for children in their care. They should take an active role in their children's schooling. For example, contact children's current and former teachers to obtain insights about the child's strengths and needs as a student and to get ideas for how best to support the child in school. Building the teacher/foster parent relationship can also make foster parents a more effective member of the school team determining the educational plan for the child (Noble, 2003).

For more tips and specific steps to take, see Anna Morrison's article on page 6.

General Resources

There are many resources available to help schools and child welfare agencies work together to reduce school moves, including the following:

- *The Youth in Foster Care Education Toolkit* by the U.S. Department of Education, which has examples of tools to improve collaboration. <https://bit.ly/2tTf46E>
- *Joint Guidance* from the NC Division of Social Services and NC Department of Public Instruction. <https://bit.ly/2MpROVe>
- NC Foster Care Education Program Resources. <https://bit.ly/2CxGyGH>

NC REACH and ETV

NC Reach is a state-funded scholarship offered to qualified applicants for up to 4 years of undergraduate study at NC public colleges and universities. Funding is awarded after other public funds and scholarships have been applied. NC Reach provides comprehensive student support, including mentors, care packages, and internships. For eligibility and other information about NC Reach, visit <http://www.ncreach.org>

ETV. The North Carolina Education & Training Voucher Program (ETV) is a federally-funded, state-administered program for youth who were in U.S. foster care. Students may receive up to \$5,000 a year for qualified school related expenses. Funding is limited and available on a first-come, first-serve basis to eligible students. Applicants must complete the ETV application, which includes confirmation from the school each semester of the student's enrollment, the cost of attendance, and their unmet need. For eligibility and other information about ETV in North Carolina, visit <http://www.fc2sprograms.org/north-carolina/>.



Writing Contest

Learning outside the classroom

We asked young people in foster care, "Some great parts of school happen outside class. Tell us about a school play or performance, club, team, or field trip you've been part of since you've been in foster care. What did you like about it? What did you learn?" Here's what they had to say.

Dionna, age 17



I created a club at my high school. I have been body shamed and bullied all my life in school. I made up in my mind I was going to help young ladies who have experienced body shaming. A girl named Miranda agreed with me so I went home and created the club. Unfortunately, Miranda died before the club started. I decided to name the club "The Miranda Project" after her. She was a kind, soft-hearted girl. That is the type of attitude we need in our schools nationwide.

I created a club at my high school to help young ladies who have experienced body shaming.

I like that I created a club to better our girls and let them heal. The club was not only to help other girls but it was also to help me, too.

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

Tiffany, age 15



I won \$50 for writing a 20-page paper on discipline. I also had to take care of a fake baby and make a baby book for the baby. I named my discipline paper, "Discipline and How the Mind Works." In my paper I talked about what happens when someone is not disciplined in their life. I compared my life to discipline. I put facts in my paper about discipline. For example: self-discipline is like a muscle because the more you train it, the stronger it gets. The less you train it, the weaker you get. When I had the baby it cried. I had to feed it, I had to rock it, and I had to change it. In my baby book I had to name it, give it a gender, birth date, and other things.

Self-discipline is like a muscle: the more you train it, the stronger it gets.

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

Aqawdalis, age 13



In 7th grade, my class went to see the movie "Wonder," which is about a kid being bullied because of his looks. Because I have been bullied myself, this movie really spoke to me. When I was being bullied I felt really bad. So when I was watching the movie, it reminded me of what it felt like being in the same situation, being in the same shoes. Bullying is everywhere, whether it's online or face-to-face. The majority of kids at my school bully. Some don't even know they're doing it. Nowadays kids do trash-talking, which is commonly known as "roasting," as a type of bullying. The field trip to see "Wonder" is so important to me because it not only changed my mind set, it changed my world.

The field trip to see the movie "Wonder" not only changed my mind set, it changed my world.

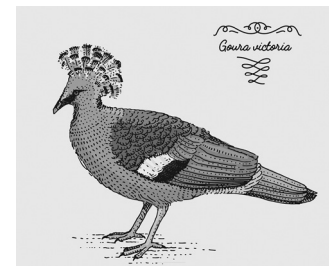
AQAWDALIS RECEIVED \$25 FOR TAKING THIRD PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

Influential Extracurriculars

I was adopted out of foster care when I was nine. Unfortunately, my previous foster family didn't allow me to go on that many field trips, so I don't have that much experience.

The trip I would like to tell you about is when I went to Washington, D.C. I went on this trip when I was in fifth grade with my new family. My favorite part was walking through the Capitol and listening to the tour guide tell us about the paintings. I learned about our government and about the value of respect. . . . My parents were so proud that they were able to allow me to go into public and act normal. Since then I have gone on many trips. My family is able to let me walk around and hang with my friends. Thanks for this opportunity to tell you about my journey. — Justin, age 14

My favorite field trip was to Sylvan Heights bird park in Scotland Neck, NC. The reason it was my favorite was because I saw my favorite bird, the crowned pigeon. I learned the crowned pigeon is a genus in the family *Columbidae*, which contains four large species of pigeon on the island of New Guinea. — Marjorie, age 13



The crowned pigeon

In April my class went to the Special Olympics for a field trip. My class cheered for our school. I liked this trip because I enjoy watching and playing sports. I learned that special needs children can play sports, too. — Chance, age 8

THESE YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED \$20 FOR HAVING THEIR ESSAYS PUBLISHED.

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 do you want to do for a living? What are you doing—or what do you plan to do—to reach this goal? (Responses should be 200 words or less.)

DEADLINE: Feb. 5, 2019

E-mail submissions to jdmcmaho@unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, CB#3550, UNC School of Social Work, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.



Participating in extracurriculars can make a big difference for kids in foster care

by Claudia Kearney

We all remember the moment that special extracurricular activity caught our attention. The moment we knew we wanted to do it forever. That we would do it for free.

Even if we did not start out loving this extracurricular, it became our first love. Maybe it was that piano lesson the adult in your life made you take. Or the sport your parent loved but you thought you hated.

Although it did not seem so important to us at the time, when we stopped doing the activity, we really missed it. Even as adults, whenever someone starts to talk about it we go back in our minds to that softball field or that band room or library and reminisce.

Today we may not play that instrument or that sport as well as we used to, but we remember how it made it us feel.

Children in foster care are no different from us. They want and need to find an activity they can feel connected to. They have experienced trauma and loss. Extracurricular activities can help them create, maintain, or restore the sense of connection and normalcy every young person deserves.

What Students Tell Us

Recently I asked 200 students what value they learned or what they gained from taking part in extracurricular activities. Here are their top 10 responses:

1. Confidence
2. Leadership skills
3. Gave me security—I had a friend somewhere at school all the time
4. Learned more about people I would not normally hang out with
5. Learned other people's perspectives
6. Respect
7. Teamwork
8. How to not give up when you lose, how to try harder next time
9. Travel opportunities—I got to go places I'd never been before
10. Learned to solve problems with my peers

What Can We Do?

How can foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers help the children and youth in their care experience the benefits and joys of extracurricular activities? Here are a few ideas.

For a start, look for opportunities to expose them to new or unfamiliar activities. For instance, you might take them to a play or concert and then talk about it afterwards. Ask if they ever thought about what it would be like to be part of the team that brings mag-

ical performances into the world.

And of course, talk with your children about what they are interested in. Encourage them to expand their knowledge and develop their skills about their interest.

There are lots of ways for you to support them in this. There are camps that specialize in development of skills. For example, if a child shows interest in baseball, there are camps and skill sessions offered all the time. Most schools offer sports as an extracurricular activity. In addition, your community organizations—parks and recreation departments, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.—offer sports that are free or at a reduced rate.

What about those children for whom sports is just not an interest? Look for clubs focused on the arts, music, gaming (board games, card games, etc.), aviation, books. There are so many options.

Some children can be withdrawn and quiet to the point where they may appear not to be interested in anything at all. Helping them figure it out may take more inquiring and exposure, but it can be done. Perhaps that shy child would be willing to explore golf,

Extracurriculars can help create, maintain, or restore a sense of connection.

dance, or another activity that does not require a lot of talking. There is value in being involved in something, even if that something doesn't require them to be verbally social.

Don't hesitate to reach out to any community agency that may be helpful to your child. If transportation is a concern, ask the school, area churches, before and after school programs, or even public transportation agencies to see if they can help in any way.

Don't give up if you hit a barrier. The child's parent-teacher association or school social worker may have funds to help with program fees or anything needed for the activity. We want our children not only to participate, but to have what they need to be successful.

Extracurricular activities can bring a sense of connection, belonging, unity, and togetherness to any child. For youth in foster care, who may have lost some of these feelings already, participating in extracurriculars can make a tremendous difference.

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

Extracurriculars and the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

For years, many young people in foster care were prevented from participating in everyday activities essential for their development and for a successful transition to adulthood. Because of real and perceived legal and policy constraints, many missed out on the chance to engage in simple, commonplace activities such as playing a team sport, field trips, working a job after school, joining a club, dating, and prom (Pokempner, et al., 2015).

To address this problem, North Carolina introduced the **reasonable and prudent parent standard**. Now, NCGA Session Law 2015-135 explicitly states children and youth in foster care are to be allowed to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities *as long as* those activities are appropriate to the child's age, development, and maturity level. The child's cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities must also be taken into consideration to identify suitable activities for them.

To be clear: the standard does not mean every child or youth in foster care can automatically participate in anything. It means that foster parents and social workers must use all the tools at their disposal—including shared parenting, child and family team meetings, and monthly visits—to ensure they

have a good grasp of the child's strengths, needs, and skills. They must also engage the birth family (if appropriate) so the birth family can express their desires for their children.

To help foster parents, social workers, child-placing agencies, residential child care facilities, and other institutions in their decision making about which activities youth and children in foster care participate in, the NC Division of Social Services has developed several resources:

- [Two written tools](http://bit.ly/1GAsaEL) are available online: the one-page "Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard" (<http://bit.ly/1GAsaEL>) and the longer "Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Activities Guide" (<http://bit.ly/1RxWiad>); and
- [A free online course](https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/), "Promoting Normalcy: Supporting the Social and Emotional Development of Young People in Foster Care." This 1-hour course on fosteringnc.org, North Carolina's learning site for foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers, explains the standard and illustrates how to implement it successfully. Available at <https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/>

Compassionate Schools

Profile of Buncombe County Schools' trauma-informed initiative by John McMahon

Trauma is a common experience for American children. According to one study, by age 16, two-thirds of children in the U.S. have experienced a traumatic event (Copeland, et al., 2007).

This is a challenge for schools, because trauma and traumatic stress reactions can disrupt learning not only for the child who experiences the event, but also for peers, teachers, and the school community (NCTSN, 2018).

Realizing this, some schools are striving to be more trauma-informed. An example in North Carolina is Buncombe County Schools, which has developed and is implementing "Compassionate Schools." This district-wide initiative seeks to keep all students engaged and learning by creating and supporting a healthy climate and culture in each school. To achieve this goal, Compassionate Schools offers strategies schools can choose from to create compassionate classrooms and foster compassionate attitudes among school staff. The idea is to benefit all students, especially those exposed to chronic stress and trauma.

Implementation with elementary and intermediate schools is underway. Buncombe County Schools plans to expand the initiative to middle and high schools starting in 2018-19.

To learn more about this initiative we spoke with David Thompson, a leader behind Compassionate Schools and Director of Student Services for Buncombe County Schools.

* * * * *

Compassionate Schools seems like a shift from the traditional approach schools have taken.

It is. For adults working in the schools, the question becomes different. It becomes not, "What's wrong with the child?" but "What happened, and how do we help?" It becomes the job of the adult to figure out "How can we make this better?"

We know kids' brains can heal, that the brain is able to find different pathways to get to a different behavior. We have to help our students get to that point.

What does Compassionate Schools look like in action?

The beauty of this framework is it will not look the same at every school. But there are certain things every school must do, some non-negotiables.

One of these is teaching social-emotional skills. We have to teach kids how to be empathetic and how to regulate their emotions. We have to teach them problem-solving skills. And we have to teach them skills for learning or "executive function" skills—the paying attention, sustaining their attention on things, deciding what's relevant information at the time, and being able to respond to the right cues. Those things are the core of the social-emotional learning curriculum, and they're non-negotiable.

What does Compassionate Schools offer on top of those non-negotiables?

We support a lot of evidence-based practices that are really shown to have good outcomes. These get very much integrated into a school's Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and all that they are doing. It becomes part of their culture.

For example, we use a "mindful schools" model that was created for schools. Mindfulschools.org is a great resource. We actually have two master trainers who finished their training through Mindfulschools this summer so they can mentor other counselors. We try to use models where we train trainers, so we can be sustainable over time.

We also use Community Resiliency Model (CRM) skills that work on self-regulation and help us be present in the moment so that we are able to solve our problems.

Is there overlap between CRM and mindfulness?

There is. You don't have to do both. That's what we're saying to schools. You can do one or the other, or you could do both.



David Thompson

We also use something called Zones of Regulation, which is an evidence-based model teachers find really easy to use in the classroom. It uses a color-coding system where you can say to students, "Where are you in the zone?" and the student's response helps the teacher know how to respond and helps the student know how to respond because they have skills that are associated with those colors.

So rather than saying, "What's wrong with you, what's going on?" you can say, "What are you feeling? Which zone would you put yourself in right now?" and then give them a few minutes before they talk about what's going on with them. It's about giving our students the tools they need to be able to get back engaged in learning. It impacts their ability to stay in class and learn.

What results are you seeing?

We have measured our K-5 social and emotional learning skills. We do screening at the beginning of the year and then we do some assessment at the end of the year. We are showing growth in social-emotional skills from the beginning to the end of the year. We're also seeing that growth carry over to the next school year, when we look at the same kids the next year. So they are not losing it during the summer. They're able to start at a higher level and then build on those skills the following year, which is what you want to see.

We're also seeing that in many cases schools that had the highest growth in social-emotional skills also had the highest growth academically. Not that I can say it is cause and effect, because there are many other things that are

happening around curriculum and other things that impact growth. But it's always good to see that when you have that strong implementation of social-emotional skills that you are also seeing growth academically.

We're also seeing some decreases in out-of-school suspensions.

What would you say to resource parents, who often care for children who've experienced trauma?

I'd say educate. Don't assume that the teacher understands the child's behavior. Work with them, connect them to resources where they can also get that training and knowledge and understanding about trauma and its impact.

Another thing I would say is, let the school know what we need to do. Let us know how we need to support kids. What works? Help us know what to put in place.

Don't come in and just tell us everything that happened to the child. Because teachers can sometimes get really scared when they hear about all the negative experiences students have had. We might need to know they've experienced trauma, but we don't need to know all the details.

What we need to know is what works. How do we put a plan in place? What has school looked like for the student in the past? How can we make it better?

It's important to try to have that plan in place up front as much as you can. Just showing up on the day they're going to start may not be the best plan. Although that often is what happens.

If the foster parent and the agency ask how they can support the school and tell the school how it can support the child, if we start the conversation there, the other things will come. I think you'll find schools really open to the conversation.

John McMahon is editor of Fostering Perspectives.

NC's statewide foster parent association has restarted

Hello foster families and everyone who passionately serves our kids. We are proud to announce that we have started back up our statewide organization that provides training and support to each and every one of you. For those of you who have been involved for a while, we were formerly known as the NC Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NCFAPA). Now we are called the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina (FFA-NC). We have been working for almost two years to reform the organization. Based on meetings with the NC Division of Social Services as well as listening to what is going on throughout North Carolina, we have put together a business model in order to serve you.



Currently we employ an Executive Director and have a board that is eight members strong. This summer we have been going to different locations in the state and holding Community Café events to hear what your concerns are. Based on this we have set our objectives for the 2018-19 year and want to share them with you now.

Our 2018-19 Objectives

- 1. Business Development.** FFA-NC will develop a business model and plan to create a sustainable organization. Goals this year are to develop our board and identify other funding opportunities to better serve our families.
- 2. Foster Parent Contact Information.** FFA-NC will develop a comprehensive list of contact information of all foster parents in the state. The list will be used to help foster parents communicate with FFA-NC, each other, and the NC Division of Social Services.
- 3. Build Networks/Partnerships.** FFA-NC will hold regional meetings across the state for the purpose of gathering together people/agencies providing resources to youth in foster care. During these meetings, networking will be facilitated by FFA-NC. A description of services offered by agencies will be accumulated and made available to foster families. FFA-NC's goal is to connect agencies and resources to foster parents so as to build partnerships in serving youth in foster care.
- 4. Communication.** FFA-NC will develop a communication plan to build its membership base and inform foster families of available resources and trainings.
- 5. Needs Assessment.** FFA-NC will work with NC State University to conduct an ongoing needs assessment to determine how FFA-NC can expand across the state and provide targeted supports to foster families and existing support groups. Action items will be determined for the next fiscal year based on the needs identified.

We are very excited about the opportunities ahead of us and look forward to serving you. For more information, please see our website at FFA-NC.org and follow us on Facebook.

FFA-NC's Steering Committee

This group has been working for more than two years to reinstate NC's statewide association. We are excited to serve each and every one of you. You may contact us at 800/578-7770 or via the email addresses below.



Maurita McCorkle, *Executive Director*, has been an NC foster parent for over 17 years. She has had over 70 youth in her home over the years. She adopted two teens in 2012 and she and her husband are in the process of adopting two young adults. They also provide housing for young adults, helping them transition to independent living. Maurita has been an accountant in corporate America for over 30 years. She has also helped multiple non-profits set up, clean up, and standardize their accounting processes. Maurita has a great passion for foster care not only in our state, but in our nation as well. maurita.mccorkle@ffa-nc.org



Dana Gracie, *Board President*, has 20 years' experience in foster care, including positions in the areas of direct care, education, supervision, leadership, and staff development. Dana has provided training in the areas of behavioral management, crisis intervention, trauma's effects on behavior, self-care, and the importance of building attachments. Dana is an adoptive mother to a sibling group of older boys from the child welfare system. She is passionate about her work with children and families and dedicated to the fulfillment of the Foster Family Alliance of NC. dana.gracie@ffa-nc.org



Kate Norwalk, *Board Secretary*, has worked for over 10 years with children and youth, from infancy to adolescence, in a variety of settings including group homes, inpatient mental health facilities, and the public school system. Kate is a professor in the Psychology Department at NC State University and also partners with NC State's Center for Family and Community Engagement to develop training resources for foster parents of children and youth with developmental disabilities. kate.norwalk@ffa-nc.org



Jim Barbee, *Board Member*, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker specializing in adoption, anxiety disorders, ADHD, mood disorders, parenting issues, PTSD, behavioral problems, anger management, family issues, marital/couples issues, trauma, child welfare, and military families. jim.barbee@ffa-nc.org



Joanne Scaturro, *Board Member*, is an MSW currently serving as a trainer with NC State University's Center for Family and Community Engagement. Previously she was a trainer for the NC Department of Health and Human Services; a supervisor of the Parent/Family Involvement Unit of the Florida Department of Education; Senior Trainer with the Children and Families Professional Development Centre in Quincy, FL; Community Social Worker with the Severely Emotionally Disturbed Network; and Parent Specialist for Leon County (Florida) Schools. joanne.scaturro@ffa-nc.org

FFA-NC Local Spotlight



Charlotte, NC

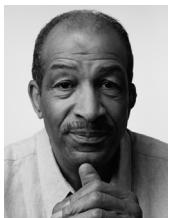
Foster Village Charlotte, which was established by four area foster parents, knows how important it is to connect to other foster families who understand the ups and downs of the foster care system. They believe one of the best ways to help children is to support, stabilize, and strengthen the foster home they reside in.

Foster Village Charlotte's areas of focus are advocate, equip, and connect. Building a village of support includes representing the needs and challenges of the current system and how it affects the foster families and children, delivering "welcome packs" consisting of brand new necessity items for emergency placements, and intentional connection both virtually and in-person with other foster families across all agencies serving Mecklenburg County long after the welcome packs have been delivered.

Foster Village Charlotte also believes in creating a bridge of hope between the community that desires to support foster care through volunteer opportunities, organization partnerships, and local business support. Learn more by visiting <https://fostervillagecharlotte.org>



The Triangle Foster Parent Association's mission is to recruit new foster parents and nurture a community that retains our foster families in Durham, Wake, and Orange County. Sign up for the TFPA email newsletter at www.trianglefpa.wixsite.com/tfpa to learn more about monthly events and socials! Past monthly events have included presentations from a Guardian ad Litem, a social worker panel, and Duke Foster Care Clinic. Socials are often potlucks hosted at local foster families' homes. It's a great way to learn about the foster care system and meet other foster families!



A reader asks ...

Are there resources to help me promote learning for the preschoolers in my care?

What a great question—the early years are critical! Experiences during early childhood shape the structure of the brain in important ways. This means that while children are in your care, you have many golden opportunities to maximize their learning and development.

Resources

But your success will depend at least in part on how well you make use of the outside resources available to help your child. For this reason, it is important to understand the roles of the professionals working to support the child. These can include social workers, health care professionals, mental health providers, Guardians ad Litem (GALs), and child care workers. If you have concerns about the child, be sure to share them with the child's social worker and professional providers so any necessary recommendations and approvals for assessments and services can be provided. Timely evaluations and interventions can be key.

One resource to keep in mind is the **NC Infant-Toddler Program**. Part of the NC Division of Public Health, this program helps families and children birth to three who have special needs. Assistance available includes physical, occupational, and speech-language therapies; family support; and service coordination. Local Children's Developmental Services Agencies (CDSAs) facilitate the delivery of these services. Visit <https://bearly.nc.gov/> to find a CDSA near you or to learn more about the NC Infant-Toddler Program.

You should also know about **Smart Start**, a public/private partnership that brings together families, teachers, doctors, caregivers, social workers, and others to better meet children's needs. Smart Start works to improve the quality of child care, strengthen families, and support healthy child development. This program invests in early education, literacy, health, and family support so children are ready to succeed and lead productive lives. To learn more about Smart Start, visit <http://www.smartstart.org/>.

Because they encourage development of social skills and adjustment to classroom settings, preschool programs are another fabulous resource. High-quality prekindergarten programs can help stabilize children who have experienced trauma and encourage developmental and social growth for school. For more information,

visit the website of the **NC Prekindergarten Program** (<https://bit.ly/2CM3hzK>).

Pathways.org is yet another resource. This nonprofit offers free child development information to empower parents and health professionals. Their milestones are supported by American Academy of Pediatrics findings and their games and activities are validated by pediatric physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists. Available at <https://pathways.org/>.

Other resources and ways to stay informed can be found at your county department of social services, local health department, and your county schools.

Your Role Is Key

Because caregivers spend so much time with the child, you have a central role to play. You set the tone and example in your home, and there are specific things you can do to cultivate young children's love of learning. For example, Becton Loveless (2018) encourages parents to:

- *Make your enthusiasm for learning clear.* When your child sees the joy and excitement learning brings to your life, it is sure to rub off.
- *Fill your child's world with reading.* Read to your child often. Have your child read aloud. Set up a daily "family reading time" where everyone in the household reads for 20 minutes. Let children choose what they read, help them read, and create activities for them that make reading fun.
- *Focus on your child's interests.* If your child likes sharks, help them find engaging and interesting books and stories about sharks. Then challenge them to identify their five favorite sharks and explain why they chose each one.
- *Make every day a learning day.* Seize every opportunity to encourage your child to explore the world, ask questions, and make connections. This will help children develop the internal motivation to learn throughout their lives, wherever they may be.

Response by the NC Division of Social Services. Have a question about foster care or adoption you'd like answered in "A Reader Asks"? Send it to us using the contact information in the box above.

Your success depends in part on how well you make use of the resources available to help your child.

fostering perspectives (Nov. 2018)

Sponsors. NC Division of Social Services, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the UNC School of Social Work's Jordan Institute for Families.

Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, 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 School of Social Work.

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

Free Online Courses for Resource Parents on Child Development and the Effects of Trauma

North Carolina's learning site for foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers, fosteringnc.org, offers a series of free courses about supporting healthy development from infancy through adolescence. This series also explores ways caregivers can support children and youth whose development has been disrupted by trauma. Courses available include:

- Foundations of Development (1 hr.)
- Normal Development in Infancy and Early Childhood: Part 1 (1 hr.)
- Normal Development in Infancy and Early Childhood: Part 2 (1 hr.)
- Normal Development in School Age (1 hr.)
- Normal Development in Adolescence (1 hr.)
- Trauma and Brain Development (1 hr.)

To take these free, self-paced online courses go to <https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/>

These courses are brought to you by the NC Division of Social Services and its training partners.



Help us find families for these young people

For more information on these children/youth or adoption in general, call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 <www.adoptnckids.org>



Anthony (age 12)

Anthony is a loving, affectionate, funny, resilient young man. He likes reading, music, basketball, playing with Legos, and video games. Anthony loves school. His favorite subjects are geometry and reading. Teachers say he is well-liked and gets along well with others. Anthony deserves a family that provides consistency and structure and that is willing to give him the loving support he desires. Anthony would like the opportunity to participate in sports and family activities and to learn new things.

consistency and structure and that is willing to give him the loving support he desires. Anthony would like the opportunity to participate in sports and family activities and to learn new things.



Desire and Kalliyah (age 15)

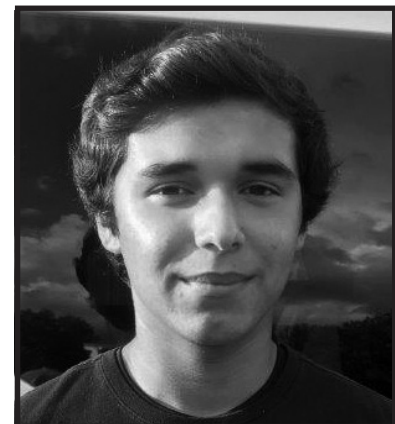
Twins Desire and Kalliyah are outgoing and athletic. They love the game of basketball. They want to play college sports and then pursue a professional sport when they are older. Desire and Kalliyah have expressed a strong desire to be adopted. They would benefit from a family willing to provide them with structure, unconditional acceptance, and love. They have a very strong bond and must be adopted together. It is also very important for the twins to maintain contact with their other siblings even after they are adopted.



Joshua (age 12)

Joshua is an energetic, charismatic, determined young man. He loves to listen to music, watch television, and play with his iPad and other electronics. His favorite outdoor activities are football and basketball. He has reservations about adoption but would thrive in a loving family that is patient, supportive,

and enjoys being active. Joshua has made strides and would do best as the only child in his adoptive home. He does well in a structured environment where he can receive a lot of attention and love from his caregiver.



Juan (age 17) and Cruzito (age 16)

These young men are intelligent, creative, hardworking, friendly, and eager to please. They both enjoy family interaction and being around positive male role models. Juan and Cruzito enjoy being in their high school band, playing sports, church youth group activities, and going to the beach. Juan plans to attend college after he graduates and Cruzito plans to enlist in the military. Both are apprehensive about adoption and wish to remain in their current school district. They will benefit from a forever family that allows them to stay active in sports and participate in weekend outings.



Kirah (age 14)

Funny, positive, and sweet are words people use to describe Kirah. This young woman is helpful and thoughtful to those around her. She enjoys swimming, watching television, painting her nails, and listening to music. Kirah has expressed interest in becoming a doctor one day. She has performed well in school and

has been a strong student. Kirah will benefit from being an only child in a two-parent family. Consistency, communication, commitment, and nurturing caregivers are essential to her success.



Victoria (age 16)

This young lady is smart, creative, imaginative, helpful, and bubbly. Victoria enjoys listening to music, eating pizza, and watching television. She wants to be loved and accepted by her peers and the adults in her life. She has stated that she would like to become a judge later in life. Victoria would benefit from

parents that promote a nurturing environment, encouragement, and assurance. She will excel in a family that is understanding of her past, supportive, calm, patient, consistent, and that shows her the love she needs.

Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) is the most sweeping federal legislation to impact child welfare funding in over 30 years. The Act, which passed in February 2018, allows states to use existing child welfare federal funds in new ways. It also contains several provisions aimed at improving outcomes for children and families receiving child welfare services. This article focuses on two primary provisions.

1. Funding for Prevention Services

The FFPSA allows states to use federal child welfare funding (often referred to as IV-E funds) for families and their children to receive services that prevent removal from the home and entry into foster care. Services include assessment and treatment for mental health and substance use disorders, as well as parenting services. This is different from the current model, which uses IV-E funding to cover services and placement for children *after* they have entered foster care. This is a significant step toward building statewide capacity to help families receiving child welfare services safely parent their children in their own homes. States may opt in to Prevention Services as early as October 2019.

2. Limitations on Congregate Care Funding

FFPSA places new limitations on how IV-E funding can be used for foster children in

congregate care placements such as group homes and other non-family settings. FFPSA restricts use of IV-E funds to the first two weeks of group care placements, unless the child has needs that meets one of these exceptions:

- Clinical need for placement in an eligible Qualified Residential Treatment Program.
- A group setting that provides prenatal, post-partum, or parenting supports (e.g., a maternity home).
- A setting that provides high quality, supportive services to children and youth who have been found to be, or are at risk of becoming, sex trafficking victims.
- The child is age 18 or older and living independently in a supervised setting.
- The setting is a licensed, residential, family-based treatment facility for substance abuse (includes facilities where children are placed with a parent receiving treatment).

If a child is in a group placement that does not meet one of these criteria, the child may remain in that placement, but IV-E cannot be used for that placement after 14 days. These limitations on group care funding are in response to the wealth of research that indicates children who live with families have better outcomes than those who spend long periods in congregate care without medical/clinical necessity.

Impact in North Carolina

If a state opts in to the Prevention Services between October 2019 and October 2021, the state must also adopt the group care funding limitations. Even if a state chooses not to opt-in to the Prevention Services, the group care funding limitations become mandatory in October 2021. This gives states time to develop plans to address congregate care funding for placements that may be impacted.

North Carolina is determining how these changes will impact children and families. We anticipate changes to congregate care funding will require increased efforts to identify relatives and kin and recruit and retain licensed foster families.

Summary

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is developing strategies to integrate the opportunities presented in FFPSA with Rylan's Law to enhance the quality of child welfare services and availability of resources statewide. To learn more about FFPSA, you may access the recording and PowerPoint presentation from our June 2018 FFPSA Stakeholder's Kickoff Meeting at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/family-first-prevention-services-act-information>. DHHS will share more information about FFPSA in the months to come.

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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 worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. Questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit? Ask your worker.

In-Service Quiz, FP v23 n1

1. How might a trauma history and "felt safety" (or a lack thereof) affect a child/youth's success in school?
2. This issue mentions many resources to help you support child/youth success in school. Name two you wish to explore further.
3. What are two of Lisa DeMarco's suggestions for navigating IEPs?
4. What report will the NC Dept. of Health and Human Services use as a "roadmap" for improving our state's child welfare system?
5. What does Anna Morrison advise resource parents to do when a child/youth has or begins to develop a negative "school story"?
6. What are "Best Interest Determination" meetings and what do they have to do with reducing school moves?
7. Explain what SaySo is and name one significant change it went through in 2018.
8. What are some "non-negotiables" in Buncombe County Schools' trauma-informed Compassionate Schools initiative?
9. What is the website address of NC's newly-reformed statewide foster parent association?
10. What's one free course or resource on fosteringNC.org that interests you, and why?

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