

fostering perspectives

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

What do children look for in social workers?

When agencies evaluate child welfare social workers, they seldom ask for input from children in foster care. There are very valid reasons why this isn't done. Yet in some ways this is a missed opportunity. After all, no one has more of a stake in the performance of social workers than these kids. What's more, many children in care are only too qualified to evaluate social worker performance: they have seen enough of them come and go to know what good social work looks like.



Ashley Burley

In an effort to draw on this untapped expertise and to celebrate the successes of North Carolina's caring professionals, *Fostering Perspectives'* latest writing contest asked kids in foster care if they ever had a social worker they really liked, and what made that person special.

Their responses were enlightening. In addition to telling us about some special people—including Sampson County DSS's Ashley Burley, pictured above—the letters we received painted a clear picture of what children value in social workers, such as:

- **Staying Power.** Kids liked social workers who stuck by them and supported them year after year.
- **Commitment to Family.** Many praised social workers for keeping them connected with their siblings, birth parents, and extended family.
- **Dedication.** Kids valued workers whose actions showed them that they really matter to them.
- **Connection.** Children loved social workers who were accessible, approachable, and engaging. Some saw their workers as friends who appreciated them for who they were. Others loved their workers for being role models and counselors who helped them develop the skills they will need to succeed as adults.

If you spend time with kids in foster care, this list probably holds no surprises for you. Still, we hope it is useful. Next time you evaluate yourself, think about your work in terms of the qualities that matter to children. As these young people have shown, your performance in these key areas can make a big difference.

—John McMahon, Editor

Additional essays from kids in care on this theme can be found in the online version of this issue at <www.fosteringperspectives.org>.

Tawni, age 17

I have been in [foster care] for five years and have had six social workers. The social worker that I've really liked is Ashley Burley. . . . She has gone way out of her way for me. She never doubted me. She encouraged me not to quit school. She helped me through my drug problem and has somehow always made me laugh or smile when I was crying or depressed. And I just want to thank her for being the person she didn't and doesn't have to be. Some people say it's her job. I say it's not her job to find a babysitter for her son so she can come and pick me up at 10:30 or 11:30 at night. Mrs. Ashley has never given up on me. At first I wouldn't talk to her about my personal life. I would just push her away. I find it hard to trust people. In fact, she is one of three people I trust. And I trust her the most.

"She has never doubted me. . . . she is one of the three people I trust."

Tawni's letter won first prize, for which she was awarded \$100

Jaquette, age 17

Yes, I have had a social worker I really like and she is still my social worker at the moment. Her name is Linda Davis Buie, with Wake County Human Services in Raleigh, North Carolina.

She is so special to me because she does everything that she can to keep me happy. If there is anything that I need to talk about I can talk to her and feel a whole lot better. She is my encouragement, inspiration, and joy. With her being that, I know I can make it through life even though I'm only 17. I feel as though I am one of her own kids.

"If there is anything I need to talk about I can talk to her . . . I feel as though I am one of her own kids."

When she takes me to my biological family for a home visit she makes statements like, "Girl! You better give your grandma a hug. You ain't seen her in a while!" I just sit there and smile.

If there is anything I want to participate in at school then she is willing to back me up 100% if she can. I only have four more months with her because I turn 18 on September 8th. But I'll never forget her. She will always have a place in my heart!

Jaquette's letter won second prize, for which she was awarded \$50

Kids in care pay tribute to their social workers

continued from page 1

Rachel, age 15

My social worker Cheryl Walker . . . was special to me because even though our family was split up she kept my siblings and I close. We had regular visitations and we enjoyed each others' presence.

But a few months before I turned 12 I got placed with the best family ever. They became my adoptive parents. So this letter goes to Cheryl for sending me to them.

And [thanks also] to my real parents. Without them giving me up, I would have never met Cheryl and I would have never met my new parents. Thanks, Cheryl, for helping me through that hard time and for being there for me and my family.

Thanks to my new parents for giving me a chance to show them who I was inside. Even though I had a few problems they still stood by my side and no matter what I said or did they did not send me to another foster home. They kept on loving me even when I would say I hated them out of anger. But no matter what I do they still continue to love me. I love my new parents more than anything in the world.

And my biggest thanks goes to Jesus for sending them my way and for helping me through those hard days. Without Jesus I could not have made it. "I once was lost but now I'm found. I was blind but now I see."

Rachel's letter won third prize, for which she was awarded \$25

"Thanks, Cheryl, for helping me through that hard time and for being there for me and my family."

Andrea, age 13

I have been in foster care for about three years off and on. During that time, I have had very many social workers. All of

my social workers have come and gone and the one I am with now I have never gotten to meet because I live in North Carolina and my social worker lives in Tennessee.

Even though I don't have a favorite social worker, I do have a favorite Guardian ad Litem. His name is Bill. I like Bill because he has stayed with me through the good and the bad times of these three years. I really like Bill because a GAL mostly speaks for you in court. Bill lets me do my own speaking in court. I am really glad to have Bill with me. Bill is a good GAL and a good friend.

Andrea received \$15 for having her letter published

"Though I don't have a favorite social worker, I do have a favorite GAL."

Courtney, age 18

I have had many social workers since I have been in the system. But the one I really like is the one that I have now. Her name is Carmelita Coleman . . . Carmelita is special to me because she provided a lot for me, such as helping me get money to go to the prom this year.

She also finds ways to keep me in the system and always gives good advice to me. Carmelita has been there when I needed her. She always came to check up on me when it was time for her to. Carmelita is the best social worker I have ever had in the system, and I have been in the system now for 18 years.

Courtney received \$15 for her letter



"She provided a lot for me, such as helping me get money to go to the prom this year."

David, age 15

My social worker now is a good social worker. Her name is Sue Kirkman and I really like her. She has a good personality and she is sweet. She listens to me, even if she doesn't agree with me. She might say, "Well, I don't think so," but when you've got some more to say about it, she still listens. . . .

My foster dad says Sue treats each kid she works with personally. . . . If I am having a problem, she doesn't compare it to someone else, she will ask what happened and how did it start. She will talk to you calmly. Some of my old social workers would get a little attitude problem and talk to me all hyped up, which doesn't help me calm down. To be honest, I do get a little hyped up myself sometimes, but I am working on it.

If I had a choice of a lineup of social workers, and you had visits with them to see how they were, I would pick Sue. I like Sue a lot.

David received \$15 for having his letter published

"If I had a choice of a lineup of social workers . . . I would pick Sue."

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Mission. *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare workers and foster parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system can exchange ideas about foster care and adoption in our State.

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

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Celebrating Special Social Workers

We want to give you a chance to learn a little bit more about the social workers Tawni, Jaquette, Courtney, Rachel, Andrea, and David celebrate in their essays. As you read these short profiles, keep in mind that the people described here are just a few of those who deserve to be recognized for their dedication to children in foster care. Unfortunately we can't name each and every one of them here in *Fostering Perspectives*. But if you know a social worker, foster parent, or anyone else who goes above and beyond the call of duty on behalf of kids, please take the time to let this person know how much you respect and appreciate what he or she does.

Linda Davis Buie, is a senior human services practitioner with Wake County Human Services. She has more than 19 years experience in the field of child welfare, and currently works with older teens, especially around adoption. When asked about her work, Ms. Buie says simply, "I just really enjoy working with teens."



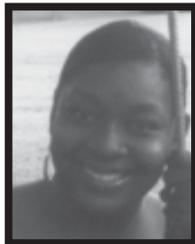
Linda Davis Buie

Ashley Burley has been a foster care social worker with Sampson County DSS since 2000. She says, "Reading what Tawni wrote about me helps me realize exactly why I continue to stay in this profession." Asked why she thinks Tawni chose to write about her, Ms. Burley says that it all boils down to commitment. "[Tawni] saw that I was going to be there for her. She told me that I had been around the longest of any of her other social workers."



Ashley Burley

Carmelita Coleman has been working with teens for Forsyth County DSS for three and a half years. She says in that time she has missed only three days of work because, "I really love my job." She believes Courtney singled her out because, "I'm not judgmental. I try to listen, and I really try to relate. These kids have seen so much disruption. I believe that as social workers it is up to us to demonstrate our support for them, to show them we're going to be there for them consistently."



Carmelita Coleman

Sue Kirkman, of Guilford County DSS, thinks her success with David stems in large part from her willingness to connect with teens on their terms. This means doing things that teens like to do, such as driving around listening to music and eating fast food. She says kids open up to her during this unstructured time. "For example, we talk about their music. I don't always like it, but showing an interest in it shows that I take them seriously."



Photo
Unavailable

Sue Kirkman

Bill Routh, a lawyer, has been a Guardian ad Litem since 1984. He thinks Andrea likes him because, "I don't talk down to her. I know she's very intelligent and very eloquent." It is obvious how much he admires Andrea. He says, "To have come through the hard times that Andrea has and to still shine the way she has—she's truly remarkable."



John "Bill" Routh

Cheryl Walker works for Eckerd Youth Alternatives, though she was with Columbus County DSS when she worked with Rachel. She says, "More than anyone else, Rachel and her family taught me that no matter what moms and dads may do, they still love their kids, and the kids still love them." She also says that her success with kids always comes down to two things: simply being there (she was Rachel's worker for seven years) and listening. She says, "Whether they are right or wrong, whether you want to or not, LISTEN!"



Cheryl Walker

The connection to worker recruitment and retention

Cynics sometimes say that children in foster care, especially teens, don't really care about their social workers. The winners of the writing contest in this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* make it abundantly clear that the opposite is true. Individual social workers can make a huge difference and play a big part in kids' lives—IF they are there to support children and stick by them over time.

Unfortunately, turnover among child welfare social workers in county departments of social services often makes this a very big "if." According to the NC Child Advocacy Institute, in 2001-2002 DSS's in North Carolina struggled with an average turnover rate of 30% among child welfare staff.

North Carolina is trying to address this problem. A prime example of this is a new federally-funded training project called "Child Welfare Staff Recruitment and Retention: An Evidence-Based Training Model."

Based out of the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work, this project aims to help child welfare agencies recruit, select, and retain a competent and committed child welfare workforce. Over the next four years, staff from UNC will work with 16 participating counties to develop:

- A toolkit to help agencies recruit favorable candidates for child welfare positions
- A process to help agencies select the right applicants, and
- An evidence-based training course to help supervisors and managers improve the recruitment, selection, and retention of public child welfare staff.

The effectiveness of these interventions will be thoroughly and rigorously evaluated. In 2008, at the conclusion of this project, these

recruitment and retention aids will be made available to child welfare agencies in North Carolina and throughout the country.

To learn more, contact the project's principal investigator, Nancy Dickinson (t: 919/962-6407; ndickins@email.unc.edu).

Families and children are more likely to experience improved outcomes when staff turnover is low.

Intervention Counties

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| • Buncombe | • Madison | • Rutherford |
| • Caldwell | • McDowell | • Sampson |
| • Duplin | • Mitchell | • Watauga |
| • Edgecombe | • Nash | • Wayne |
| • Franklin | • New Hanover | • Wilson |
| • Halifax | • Polk | |

A reader asks . . .

If you have a question about foster care or adoption in North Carolina, please write, e-mail, or fax your question to us using the contact information found on page 2. We'll do our best to respond to your question either in a direct reply or in a future issue of this newsletter.

Question: Why do I hear agencies need more foster parents, when licensed foster parents like me are still waiting to have children placed in our homes?

One of the goals of North Carolina's child welfare system is to have "one stable foster placement for each child in foster care in the child's own community." This means we continuously need to recruit families all across North Carolina, in every community. The definition of *community*, according to Webster, ranges from "a unified body of individuals... living in a particular area" to the "society at large." This range is pretty big!

When it comes to recruitment of foster/adoptive families, North Carolina interprets *community* this way: keep the child close to familiar friends, neighborhood resources, school and/or extended family. Since there is no way to predict what geographical area a child will be removed from, we need to be ready in all areas. This means some families may have a steady flow of children placed in their home temporarily while others may not. I know it can be frustrating to have gone through so much to become licensed and not yet have a child in your home.

There are a couple things you can do. First, talk to your agency about providing respite care for other parents in your county. Many families only ask their agency about respite when they are going on an extended vacation, but there are plenty of foster parents who would appreciate respite just for a weekend. Self-care is important, especially for foster/adoptive parents, and a weekend for rejuvenation is not only needed, but will help the agency with retention!

Second, verify with your worker that you have realistic expectations regarding the type of children in foster care in your county. For example, if you are hoping for a child under the age of ten and all the children in your area are over 14, you may want to consider adjusting your age preferences. Also, if you are uncomfortable working with the child's birth family towards reunification, the agency may be selecting other families that are more willing to do that. Just make sure you and your agency are on the same page.

Third, get involved in other aspects of child welfare. Become an advocate for children in your community by giving presentations at civic groups or in your faith community. Become a *guardian ad litem*, a mentor, a big brother/big sister, or help at the boys and girls club. Ask the agency if they need help with recruitment, following-up with interested families, or transportation. Ask them to put you in contact with local group homes that may need volunteers.

I know the wait can be difficult, but I encourage you to stay licensed, stay involved, and to join a local support group or foster parent association if you do not belong to one already. You never know when a child from your community will need the loving family environment you can provide.

Question: Sometimes when people learn I am a foster/adoptive parent they say stuff like, "You are such a SAINT! I could NEVER do what you are doing!" What should I say in response?

This is such a great question because this has happened to most of us at one time or another. I encourage everyone to use these opportunities to educate people by saying something like, "I think you could do it too, but I respect your decision. There are other ways you can be involved other than becoming a foster/adoptive parent, though. We could really use your help!"

Then, educate them about the possibility of donating money or fundraising for your local parent support group, the NCFPA, SAYSO, etc. Or, let them know we really need more big brothers/big sisters, more *guardians ad litem*, more mentors in schools, etc. Ask if they could help by volunteering at local events or at their local Boys & Girls Clubs. Or perhaps they could sponsor a child in foster care to go to a camp in the summer, or help coordinate the collection of gifts for foster children over the holidays.

The bottom line: ***There is plenty for people to do, even if they choose not to foster or adopt.*** It isn't for everyone! But if someone admires you for it, get them engaged in the system. They clearly care. Plus, do you know how many people become foster/adoptive parents because they know a specific child in need? LOTS! The more people we engage in the child welfare system as a whole, the greater chance we have of someone else coming up to them in the future with that same sentence! "Oh, I could NEVER do what you do!"

Responses by Jeanne Preisler, Director, NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network



Why do I hear agencies need more foster parents, even though I am licensed and have no children in my home?

Advocating in school for the children in your care

Schools are generally well-equipped to cope with the “average” child, one with no special problems. Children in foster or kinship care and those who have been adopted after being in care often do have difficulties in school. They may be behind academically, or have trouble getting along with teachers or other children, or be stuck in behavior patterns which make it hard for them to learn.

Part of your job as a resource parent is to make sure the school recognizes your child’s academic challenges and takes some action to address them. Schools are required by law to provide certain kinds of services to meet special needs, but don’t assume it will be done automatically. You may need to assume the role of advocate for your children to ensure that they receive the services to which they are entitled. Here are tips for helping you get your child’s educational needs met:

Learn assertiveness skills. Assertiveness is an attitude and a set of relational skills that help you get what you want without being angry or aggressive. You may be able to find a short class in assertiveness skills through your local school district or community college. It’s a great subject for in-service training—suggest that your agency or foster parent association develop and teach a course on it.

Within the limits of confidentiality rules, let your child’s teacher know enough about the child’s background to help him or her understand special problems. When information cannot be disclosed, stay focused on what the teacher needs to know to help the child in school. The details of an event in a child’s life may not be as important as the effect the event is having.

Build a relationship with the child’s teacher over time. Introduce yourself soon after the child is placed in the classroom, and talk regularly about how school is going—including what is going well. Don’t wait until a major problem occurs.

Put the teacher in touch with the child’s school history. If possible, help the teacher contact the child’s former teacher and school to find out about academic status, strengths, challenges, and history.

Describe the ways that foster care placement impacts schooling. Help the teacher understand that children and youth in care tend not to perform as well in school as others; this is often due not to inability or a learning disability, but to school and family issues that make it difficult for the child to succeed. For example, the enormous emotional burden of grief, loss, and uncertainty about the future can impair a

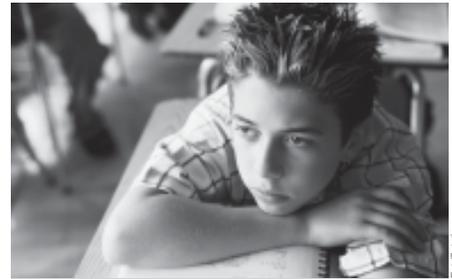
child’s ability to concentrate and learn.

Help the teacher understand the impact of placement changes. Explain that each move a child makes can delay his or her academic level by months and that many children in foster care have a harder time learning because of what they have been through. Note also that some kids in care have experienced educational settings in which they were not supported well because they were seen as transient students bound to be moved again.

Support efforts to help the child experience success. Help the teacher structure materials and tasks in the classroom to help the child achieve success in some areas, even if academics are a problem. For example, the teacher can foster a sense of competence by giving the child responsibility for feeding an animal, watering plants, or passing out supplies.

Share written resources. If you have any books that depict foster, adoptive, and relative caregiving families, share them with the teacher. This can broaden the diversity of families to which all the children in the classroom are exposed.

Understand that your child may not be able to complete certain assignments. For example, constructing a family tree or bringing in a baby picture can be impossible for a child who has been frequently and suddenly moved, suffered neglect, or has little contact with birth family. Similarly, getting permission for a special activity such as a field trip can be problematic if you do not have the legal authority to give permission for the child. Make sure the teacher understands these issues.



Part of your job is to make sure the school recognizes your child’s academic challenges and takes some action to address them.

Be constructive and respectful. Some teachers may feel challenged by highly involved resource parents who advocate very strongly for the children in their care. Be respectful of the teacher’s position and understanding of the fact that there are perhaps 20 to 30 other children in the room, many of whom have their own problems. When you ask for something, find ways to offer help in providing it. Let the teacher see you as a resource, not as someone who is only asking for things.

Share information about education and foster care with the teacher.

Originally published by the Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support. Currently available from the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning
<<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>>

Educational Advocacy in North Carolina

- **Exceptional Children’s Assistance Center (ECAC)** is an educational advocacy organization parents can call for training and one-on-one assistance. Tel: 800/962-6817; www.ecac-parentcenter.org

IQ Scores Not Lower in Babies Exposed to Cocaine

Research from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio finds that babies born to mothers who used cocaine heavily during pregnancy do not have lower IQ scores than other children, as originally believed, according to an article in the May 24, 2004 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study found that cocaine-exposed babies do have problems with specific skills. Yet babies placed in foster care or in adoptive homes appeared to overcome even these problems.

“It’s important to dispel the myth of the crack-exposed baby that condemned them to hopeless status,” said lead author Dr. Lynn Singer. “Cocaine-exposed children are not as devastated as preliminary reports proposed, and can benefit from stimulating caregiving environments.”

The study tracked 190 cocaine-exposed children from birth until age four. They were compared to 186 children who were not exposed to the drug. The cocaine-exposed children performed worse on tasks involving visual-spatial skills, such as puzzles, and general knowledge and arithmetic tests. However, the researchers found that both groups of children had similar IQ scores at age four.

Source: Reprinted from JTO Direct, 5/27/2004





N.C. Foster Parents Association

WEBSITE: WWW.NCFPA.ORG

PHONE: 1-866-NCFPA-4U

E-MAIL: NCFPA@UNCG.EDU

NCFPA Board Update

NCFPA exists to serve all foster, adoptive, and kinship parents in North Carolina. You are not alone in your challenges. There are support groups available and people who really want to help you in any way they can.

Being a foster, adoptive and/or kinship parent is one of the most rewarding and chal-

lenging experiences anyone can have. The Board of Directors wants to help. Please contact your regional representative today if we can do anything for you, or you have some time to help us with our mission. Together, we can make a big difference.

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Ex Officio	Claretta Witherspoon, NCFPA	(866)623-7248	ncfpa@uncg.edu

A Few of the Association's '04-'05 Board Members



Sheryl Ewing



Geraldine Fox



Donna Greene



Kay Gillis



Joanne Scaturro



Matt Davies

Support Us So We Can Support You!

The goal of the North Carolina Foster Parents Association is to provide you with support and training to help you be the best foster, adoptive, or kinship parent you can be. If you are not already a member, please join today!

Membership is open to anyone interested in strengthening foster and adoptive services in North Carolina. Send this form, with payment (DO NOT send cash), to: NCFPA at UNCG, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170. Make checks payable to the NC FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION.

Regular membership is open to any foster or adoptive parent and is \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a couple. **Associate membership** is \$25 per person and is for anyone who is not a foster or adoptive parent.

First name #1: _____ First name #2: _____

Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

County: _____ Licensing Agency: _____

Home phone: () _____ E-mail: _____

Membership Amt. included: _____ Donation Amt.: _____

SAVE THE DATE



Creating Happy Memories: A Training Conference for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents

April 15-17, 2005

The annual training conference of the NC Foster Parents Association will be held April 15-17, 2005 at the Sheraton Imperial Hotel in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Be sure you mark your calendars now, and visit our website (www.ncfpa.org) for additional information as we get closer to the conference.

As foster, adoptive, and kinship parents, our job is to create happy memories for our children. The NCFPA 2005 training conference will create happy memories for you and give you additional skills and support to help you create happy memories for your loved ones. Don't miss this opportunity!

If you are interested in helping us coordinate this conference, please call us at (866) 623-7248. We always need help securing door prizes, financial sponsorships, committee support, and much, much more. If you have some time and are willing, please give us a call.

SaySo youth head to Raleigh!

by Glenda Easterling and Nancy Carter

This summer nine members of SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), a group representing those who are or have been in North Carolina's foster care system, participated in the House, Senate, and Governor's Page Programs.

From June 28 to July 2, nine youths from Wake, Guilford, Moore, Montgomery, and Cumberland counties traveled to Raleigh to participate in the Page Program, which enabled them to learn about the legislative process and North Carolina's government, share information about foster care, and promote the Page Program to other foster youths. This is the first time foster youths have participated in this program as a group. Participants stayed with host families in the Capitol area and worked side-by-side with those who make decisions that govern our lives.

What is the Page Program? The Page Program gives youth in high school the experience of a lifetime. Pages live with a host family, where they are treated like a member of the family. Other pages also live with the family, so it is a 24/7 experience. Each morning after breakfast, the host family brings the pages to work. The Governor's page program runs throughout the year, while the Senate and House programs operate only when the legislature is in session. Pages provide much of the clerical work necessary to in-



Governor Easley with foster youth participating in the NC House, Senate, and Governor's Page Program.

form legislators of current issues. SaySo pages found North Carolina legislators to be "real people" and very approachable.

Many youths participating in this year's program said the experience changed their lives and future plans. Overall, youths felt the legislators cared about them and that their presence was significant.

One voice can make a difference! Chris, a Senate page, got to know Lieutenant Gov. Beverly Purdue. They first discussed some personal interests and then turned to foster care. Chris told her how the House wanted to pass a bill that would increase payments to foster families but the Senate would not

agree. Chris spoke of his foster family experiences. Lt. Gov. Purdue said that she would return to the Senate to ask for a special provision to increase the payments. The end result: payments were increased by \$25.

See the difference one voice can make?

Glenda Easterling is a member of SaySo. Nancy Carter is the Executive Director of Independent Living Resources.

Join SaySo

If your child has been in an out-of-home placement and is between the ages of 14 and 24, encourage him/her to join SAYSO. To learn more, contact Independent Living Resources (tel: 800/820-0001; e-mail: sayso@ilrinc.com; online: www.saysoinc.org)

Advocacy in action! What a sight!

by Melinda Medina and Nancy Carter

This summer North Carolina hosted the second national foster youth leadership conference. Coordinated by Independent Living Resources, Inc. and sponsored by SaySo, Inc. (both of Durham), "Advocacy In Action: Becoming A Powerful Voice for Youth" attracted 120 foster youths representing North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, South Carolina, and South Dakota. The conference was held July 20-22, 2004 in Research Triangle Park. True to the conference's theme ("becoming a powerful voice for youth"), workshops were facilitated by youth. Youth facilitators were SaySo members and showed by example that learning how to advocate means being around others who want to make a positive difference in the lives of foster youths.

In one workshop, foster youth created a skit in which adults were asked to play the roles of foster youth.

One workshop, "You GOTTA Vote!" focused on the importance of voting. Youths learned that politicians actually create policies that govern the foster care system. Therefore it is important to vote for politicians who will help support foster care initiatives. The outcome: 19 North Carolina youths registered to vote at the conference with the help of the nonprofit group Democracy North Carolina.

In another workshop, SaySo youths presented their experiences as part of North Carolina's Page Program. They commented on how one voice made the difference in helping pass the \$25 increase for monthly foster family rates. (*Editor's Note: this increase applies to North Carolina's adoption subsidy as well.*) This workshop, which highlighted the impact the Page Program had on SaySo members,

was a great reminder to all participants that their voices matter.

Another workshop that inspired youths and adults was, "Do It Like Act 5! Speak Through Acting." Facilitated by five SaySo youth, this workshop placed adults in the roles of foster youth. The workshop



Medina



Carter

taught participating youth how to create similar skits. It gave adults an appreciation of what it was like to live in foster care.

During the conference youth facilitators offered 20 workshops on topics related to speaking out responsibly. Other offerings included an alumni panel of adults who are continuing to make a difference in the area of foster care despite aging out, a trip to UNC-Chapel Hill, a dance/pool party, and a stunning keynote presentation by George Duvall, a foster care alumni and national speaker from Kentucky (*see his article on page 9*).

By the last night of the conference the youth were ready for the conference headliner, the "Advo-Variety Show." Youth were confident, comfortable, and ready to showcase their talents. The audience offered their support as youth shared their stories, songs, poetry, and dance. It was a night of tears, laughter, support, and encouragement. It was a conference to remember, a time to cherish, and the start of friendships that will last forever.

Melinda Medina is a member of SaySo. Nancy Carter is the Executive Director of Independent Living Resources.

Kids' Page

Words and Pictures by and for Children in Foster Care

Vol. 9, No. 1 • Nov. 2004

My life in foster care

By Nicky, age 12

When I left my mom, I was four years old. When my mom was younger, she was in foster care, because my grandma didn't take care of her.

While she was in foster care she got pregnant with me at the age of 14. She was at least five months pregnant before she actually told anyone that she was pregnant.

The reason she was in foster care also was because my grandma had a bad habit of doing drugs and so my mom ended up in foster care. After she had me, she left me with some of her friends and said she was going to come back, but she never did. She would call and say that she would come back and didn't show up again. My mom also got paid to marry this guy so that he can be a part of this country.

When I came into foster care, my first parent's name was C, and she was really nice. When I left C I was 10 years old and I had stayed with her for seven years. I really missed staying with her, but I know that she can help someone else the way she helped me. When I left C I was really sad that she wouldn't adopt me. I wanted to run away at first until I thought how it would hurt her if I got lost or hurt.

I next went to a couple named the R's and I didn't like them a lot because Jackie would yell at me if I didn't do everything correctly, but I told my social worker that I didn't like staying there and that I wanted to be moved.

Then I went to the H's. They were nice at first until I really got to know them. Their family was nice to me and my favorite cousins out of all of them were Alexis and Moe. They were nice to me even when I got in trouble.

My home after that was Mrs. B. and she would just let me eat anything and she would also expect me to lose weight. She would tease me about being bigger than her. (But the last time I saw her and I had lost more weight than she had!).

My last home is the A's. They are nice to me and they don't care about the way I look. They only care about helping me with my problems and I know that I can trust them with anything I tell them. They don't criticize me about my weight, they help me lose weight. They love me for who I am, and they treat me the way that they want to be treated by me. They also help me with my attitude problems. I know again what it feels like to have people who love me and care for me.

If you have kids, keep them from losing their parents and show them that you care for them.

Foster parents, you can learn a lesson about not giving up on the foster kids you have now. You should have a close relationship with your child or a foster child, and they will show you that they love you, too.

Nicky received \$25 for having her essay published

"Foster parents, you can learn a lesson about not giving up on the foster kids you have now."

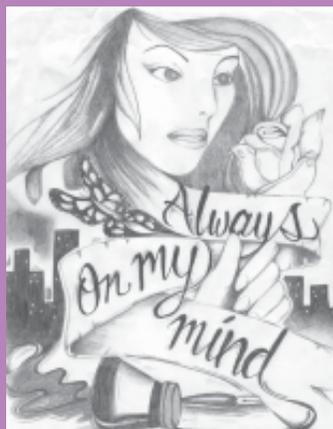
The Cheetah's Life

by Destiny, age 9

There was a cheetah who was named Destiny Ann. She was born in the wild where somebody was going to make her into a fur coat. But we rescued her from the wildlife. The sad part was that she had to leave her mother. She went to the wildlife center. We wrapped her in a blanket and we fed her. After that we gave her warm milk. After a few days passed, she was getting sick so we took her to the vet and they checked her and they put her on special pills. After a few days we gave her a bath. We went to the market to get her toys. We put a blanket on the floor and we put her on the floor and let her play with the toys and after a while she fell asleep. She felt very comfortable. When she grew up she went back to the wild and she became a female cheetah and we visited her every day until she had babies. Her babies grew up too to be just like their mommy and their daddy. The end.



Destiny received \$25 for having her story published



Diamond, age 15



Trey, age 17



Andrea, age 13

FP Artists

In this issue we are proud to present the work of Diamond, Andrea, and Trey. They all received \$15 for having their drawings published in *Fostering Perspectives*. These works are all untitled, though Diamond included a note saying her drawing is dedicated "to everyone in my life."

No reason to fail: The George Duvall Story

As a child, George Duvall's own family told him he would be dead or in prison by the time he was 13. By the time he was six, he was a thief, frequently truant from school, and involved with gangs. Then he spent 15 years in foster care and in boys facilities.

Often when children have experiences like these, they continue to struggle long after they reach adulthood. Some even meet the fates George's family predicted: incarceration and untimely death.

But not George Duvall. Today he is a college graduate, the director of programs for youth in foster care, and a nationally recognized motivational speaker, comedian, and trainer. He is also a devoted father and husband.

Here, in his own words, is his story and some of the lessons he has learned.

My mother had five children and was on welfare. My father was not present in my life. I was about four years old when I began to get into trouble in the ghetto streets of Lexington, Kentucky. By the time I was eight, I had been in and out of juvenile detention centers for years. Finally the judge told my mother I was out of control and she was unfit to be a parent. I was sent to an all-boys facility for delinquents.

I spent a year and a half at that place and then got into trouble again, this time for stealing money from the Director. After that I was sent to another boys facility 90 miles away from Lexington. For me, that was a turning point in my life: I had never been so far away from my mother.

When I first arrived at this boys home, I heard some of the staff members talking about how "bad" a kid I was. So, I acted just as they suspected. After several months, I realized my actions would not help me get back to my mother or siblings. So, I decided to make a change. I decided I would do whatever I had to do to gain respect, no matter what!

The boys facility started a foster care program several months after I became a resident. After my attitude change, I was one of the first to be on the possible foster care list because for good behavior. Interested community families would come on weekends and tour the facilities to help get to know some of the boys who lived there. The boys in the home would dress up in their best gear in hopes of being the one they would pick to go home with them.

I lucked out. After many visits, this family picked me to be their foster kid. To me, it didn't matter who this family was. My plan was to get back to my family in Lexington, 90 miles away.



"I would not be where I am today if it were not for my foster parents."

I was about 11 or 12 at this time.

I spent six years with this family despite the fact that my foster family was white and I am black. I grew up in the hood where black people were all around me. Now I was living in the "sticks," where the nearest neighbor was a "holler" away. I was one of the first black kids to attend my elementary school and the only African-American kid in the community. Now, I was going to face a whole new problem other than foster care...Racism!

Being a foster kid was hard, but the racism I encountered in rural Kentucky was out of this world. There were five black people in my high school. Three of them lived in my home.

The racism I faced from members of this community was echoed by discrimination from the black community when I would go on home visits. After spending six years with a different family (culturally) you take on their actions and life styles—the way they walk, dress, and talk. So when I went home on visits, people noticed that I was not talking black, acting black, or being the "badass" kid everyone was used to seeing. The same kids I used to get in trouble with were telling me I was "acting white."

I didn't fit in at home in Lexington. I didn't fit in the community where my foster parents lived. I didn't fit in anywhere!

However, during high school I made a positive name for myself as a college-bound football star. On the football field I was "George Duvall." Not foster care George. Not black George. Just George. I saw how "people"—not just my foster parents or social workers, but the community where I lived—looked at me when I scored four or five touchdowns or ran for 200 or 300 yards on Friday nights. That look told me that I was going to be something great.

But I knew that football wasn't going to be my out. I knew I had to educate myself. So when I graduated from high school, I went to college to pursue my degree instead of football. I was an LD/BD (Learning Disability/Behavior Disability) student, and I knew I needed extra help with my studies. I sacrificed my dream of playing in the NFL to gain my dream of becoming the first person in my family to graduate from college.

Today I am a college graduate, youth advocate, nationally recognized speaker, comedian, trainer, father, and husband.

I would not be where I am today if it were not for the sacrifices of my foster parents Melanie and Greg Harris. From the

moment I walked into their home my family showed me they didn't care about me being a foster kid. They allowed me to make mistakes and they didn't hold those mistakes against me.

More importantly, they didn't give up on me, even during my worst choices. All they cared about was that I received my education. They also never blamed my biological mother or my family history. (One of the photos I look at the most in my wedding album is the photo of my foster mother on one side, my biological mother on the other, and me in the middle.)

These actions built pride within me as a foster kid and as a young African American.

As I have traveled across the U.S. I have tried to share with people the things my foster parents taught me and the other things I learned on my journey. One of them is this: we have to believe in the youth voice. We have to be honest with our youth. We have to put them in real-life situations to help them understand what it takes to become successful life long learners as they transition into adulthood.

Another is that although foster parents don't get enough credit, they need to understand that they have the chance to be champions of the youth who enter and leave their homes. The true rewards of their hard work are most often seen long after a youth has left their home, but they are still real. Just look at me.

The people closest to me as a child would not have thought in a million years I would be where I am today. But thanks to the support of my families—foster and biological—and the sacrifices they made for me, I have no reason to fail.

George Duvall directs two programs designed to empower youth in foster care in Kentucky to speak up for themselves and other youth in care. He is also a motivational speaker and a comedian. To contact him, call 859/257-4094 or send an e-mail to gduvall@uky.edu.



Photo of my brother Qwa'el's graduation from the Navy. From left to right my family: Melanie, Greg, Larry, Qwa'el in the center, and George.

Facts about Single Adoptive Parents

How many singles seek to adopt?

- Research in the 1970s found that an estimated .5% to 4% of persons completing adoptions were single. Studies in the 1980s found from 8% to 34% of adopters were single (Stolley, 1993).
- Across the country the number of single parent placements slowly and steadily continues to increase, both in domestic and intercountry adoption (Feigelman & Silverman, 1993).

Who are they?

- Most single adoptive parents are female, are most likely to adopt older children than infants, and are less likely to have been a foster parent to the adopted child (Stolley, 1993).
- Single parent applicants are self-selective. Most applicants have high levels of emotional maturity and high capacity to handle frustration, and are independent but linked to a supportive network of relatives (Branham, 1970).
- As a group, the single parent adopters of U.S. children tended to adopt "special needs" children who were older, minority, and/or handicapped children (Feigelman & Silverman, 1993).

What research has been conducted?

- In a study undertaken by the Los Angeles Department of Adoptions, researchers found that single parents tended to have more difficulties in completing their adoptions. Thirty-nine percent had made three or more previous attempts to adopt, compared to only 18% among the couples (Feigelman & Silverman, 1993).
- In 1983, Feigelman and Silverman recontacted 60% of the single-parent respondents from their earlier study in 1977. Six years after the initial study, the adjustment of children raised by single parents remained similar to that of children raised by adoptive couples (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).
- Groze and Rosenthal conducted a study that reports on the responses from parents in three Midwestern states who had finalized their adoption of a special-needs child before 1988. The sample included 122 single-parents and 651 two-parents families. Researchers found that comparisons of single-parent homes to two-parent homes showed that children in single-parent families experienced fewer problems (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).
- In the same study, research found that single-parent families were more likely than two-parent families to evaluate the adoption's impact as being very positive (Groze & Rosenthal, 1991).

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Source: The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse <<http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/>>

My journey as a single foster mother by Marianne Green



Marianne Green

How could this be?! The **only** thing that I was ever truly certain that I wanted to be was a parent, and here I was 42 years old, separated from my husband and childless. This was not how life is supposed to be. Everyone gets to have children! In the spring of 1999, this was the state that I found myself in – living alone in a new city, facing the prospect of never being a parent. I knew that I had to take a long hard look at myself and decide what things or acts were most crucial for my happiness.

I had never really considered adoption but the idea of making a baby just to have a baby didn't make moral sense to me. I had no idea where to turn but for some reason a contact that I had met some years back from Catholic Social Ministries came to mind. I can honestly say that the assistance of Sue Gilbertson changed my life in the best possible way. Together we looked at my options as a single, middle-aged, not rich, working woman. There was only one feasible option: becoming a foster parent.

Thus began the journey. Within a couple of months of my talk with Sue, I had taken MAPP class and had my first placement. That placement made me see the world in a very different way. I became a mother. Family, friends, and friends of friends came out to offer supplies, support and love. I truly had never felt as cherished as during that time. I met David, my "son," when he was eight months old. He stayed with me full time for 14 months, we continued extended visits for a good while and now we see each other several times a year. I am a part of his family and he is a part of mine. His birth mother has graciously and unselfishly permitted him to have two mothers.

Since then my family has surely grown. I have had eleven other children: ages ranging from 0 to 17 years; male and female; black, white, Hispanic. They have stayed from a few days to many months. All will stay in my heart forever. Many people ask me how I have been able to love them and give them up, and adapt to a different family configuration on a weekly basis. The answer is, I don't know. With David, I learned the realities of single motherhood: diapers, feedings, sleep deprivation, daycare, and vomit. Most importantly among those realities are the love and joy that come from seeing my child learn, love, trust, and grow.

I have loved and learned with lots of children. Toddlers have learned to crawl and walk. They have fought to overcome the dam-

"Being a foster parent is the best, worst, and most important thing that I have ever done."

age of shaken baby syndrome. They have missed their mommies. Kids have laughed and cried and been strong for their younger siblings. Teenagers have run away, attempted suicide, holed up in their rooms, and fabricated excuses for not being where they were supposed to be. I probably have learned more than all of them put together because with each child I have been forced to ask myself what my role is and how can I best help him or her. As much as I hate to admit it, I have also learned that I am not super-human.

When I started fostering six years ago I wanted a "house full." I was eager to move from my townhouse to a house with a yard and more space so that I could fill it with the sounds of a healing family.

A lot has changed since then, however. On January 30, 2002 my daughter Sophie was born. After her birth I took some time off from fostering. When DSS called I wanted to help but knew that it would not be fair to Sophie, the foster child, or myself if I "bit off more than I could chew."

Don't get me wrong; I had other place-

ments, a three-year-old and a later a twelve-year-old. But they were short-lived placements because I could not attend to these children as well as I wanted without taking away from the care of my daughter.

A nagging question began to form inside me: should I foster more children if I feel stretched so thin? After months of agonizing, I signed and mailed in the paperwork to end my days as a foster parent. All of my friends and family heaved a sigh of relief. Several social workers even graciously commended me on my decision because they knew that I did not make it lightly.

Since 1999 I have said that being a foster parent is the best, worst, and most important thing that I have ever done. I am sad to admit that for me, being human has meant making difficult choices, such as closing my home to more foster children. I know that I have chosen wisely, though, and I am so satisfied with all of the lessons and experiences that being a foster parent have given me.

Marianne Green is the proud mother of a two-and-a-half-year-old, a five-year-old, a 21-year-old, and grandmother of a two-and-a-half-year-old.



Photo Illustration

I Wish

by Latoria, age 15

I wish I could fly as high as the clouds.
I wish I could speak my words out loud.
I wish I could have my Mom and Dad back again.
Loving me and holding me as I share my pain.
How can I express that it's a small world
Where nobody understands and feels the pressure,
that life is not easy at all?
I cry long days and nights and pray to the Lord to
bring me love.
Nothing less, nothing more.
I'm tired of being lonely.
I need someone to hold me in their arms and tell me
the words,
"You are special and I love you!"
I'm tired of moving house to house.
I'm ready to be stable and call a house my house
And a room, my room.
I wish I could say the words Mom and Dad again!
If only I had one.
My wishes ARE going to come true.
I just have to give it time!

Books to help you get a handle on fostering teens by Becky Burmester

My husband Joe and I made a major change in our foster parenting. After nearly two decades fostering infants and toddlers, we have decided to try sharing our home with teens.

This has not been a decision casually reached. We have worked closely with several adult birth mothers and their babies and realized that caring for the infants was a band-aid approach. The mothers were in desperate need of role models. The youngsters were confused by the inconsistency of nurturing. And Joe and I felt we were only making a very small difference.

Since mid-July we have been licensed by an agency that only works with teens. They have a new program designed to work with pregnant and parenting teens. Our role will be to provide a home (real life, warts and all) to a young person and to that young person's child. We will have the opportunity to work on independent living skills and on parenting skills. We have two adult children, a toddler, and a preschooler, plus several children who lived with us for awhile who stop in for visits.

I have been reading EVERYTHING I can find on the experience of teens in care. There is some excellent material available that I wish to share with you.

Ready, Set, Fly! by the Casey Family Foundation is an excellent resource for teaching life skills. This booklet is filled with ideas and includes listings of the ages each item is best suited to. Some items were things that we had done with our older children, but many were things we'd never thought of doing. As we seek to impart independent living skills, we will frequently consult *Ready, Set, Fly!* It can be downloaded and printed for free by going to www.caseylifeskills.org/rsf/RSF.pdf. Also available in Spanish.

Youth Communication (www.youthcomm.org) has a number of booklets that are included in the "Quick Insight" series. Each booklet contains several articles, each written by a young person who is/was in the "system." These are true stories by teens. Included at the back of each booklet are suggestions for using the booklet with adults and with teens. I am thinking now

that my next need will be for a support/brainstorming group to keep me excited about the possibilities rather than overwhelmed by the immensity of the task. ***I'm the Mommy Now: Life as Teen Parent and I've found a Home: Foster Families that Work*** are two booklets in the series that I have read and plan to reread. The booklets are \$8 each.

Represent is a periodical written by and for youth in care. Published six times a year, each issue has a theme. The May/June 2004 issue focused on teen adoption. There was also a section about life after leaving care. One page was devoted to suggestions for independent living instructors and social workers on using the articles with a group of teens. *Represent* is available by subscription for \$18 per year. Write to: Represent, 224 W. 29th St, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10001. Make checks payable to "Youth Communication."

Finally, ***The Last Chance Texaco*** by Brent Hartinger is a young adult novel about life in a



Becky Burmester

group home. The author draws on his experience as a counselor in a group home to create the mostly believable tale of Lucy Pitt and her experiences at Kindle Home. This

book is marketed to youth who are age 12 and up and somewhat reluctant readers. The story moves quickly. Much of the action and the dialogue rings "teen-age true." Kids really do these things. I can imagine using *The Last Chance Texaco* as the basis for a discussion of what it is like to be in the "system." Young people who are not in the system—and foster parents, too—could gain understanding by reading this book and using it as a starting point for discussion.

Obviously, I have been busy reading. What have you been reading? On what topic are you wishing you had a written resource? Let me know! (t: 919/870-9968; beckyburmester@mindspring.com).

As foster parents we are more capable because we reach out and continue to learn, so please continue reading and keep in touch.

A social worker reflects on books about adoption by Jane Elmore

Recently someone asked me if I had a list of books I recommended to prospective adoptive parents interested in reading about the issues they may face in their adoption journey.

There are a number I recommend. However, I'm very selective. I always make recommendations based on the parents' background and the needs of the child. I find most parents are eager and happy to read books and other materials that address their specific needs. It is not helpful to families to hand them a long list of books, especially if the child welfare professional has not even read them her/himself. Foster and adoptive parents are very busy people and we need to be respectful of their time. I recommend a very specific few books that I have read and believe will meet their needs.

One of my concerns about a few of the books I do recommend (see sidebar) is that they talk about a sense of loss for all three parties to the adoption, assuming the adoption is a second choice to anyone who adopts. My experience is that many families come to adoption for reasons other than not being able to have birth children. To these families the idea that

they are experiencing a sense of loss is very foreign. These parents look at adoption as a "gain," while at the same time understanding the sense of loss their child may feel at not having his/her birth family.

When having follow-up conversations with parents it is important to talk with them about the books or other materials they have read. If the professional has read the books that they recommended to the parents, the quality of follow up services to families will be much improved. Child welfare professionals need to insure that the parents have an opportunity to express their concerns about issues addressed in the reading materials, and the child welfare professional needs to take the initiative to discuss issues of possible concern. This includes any points of view expressed in the books that are different from the family's personal experience.

Jane Elmore, MSW, MBA is a foster and adoptive parent. She is the former Deputy Director for Foster Care and Permanency Services at the Illinois Dept. of Children and Family Services. She is currently a child welfare consultant, and adjunct professor at the Univ. of Illinois and Springfield College of Illinois.

Books about Adoption

The following books are among those Jane Elmore recommends to prospective adoptive parents:

The Whole Life Adoption Book
by Schooler

Telling the Truth To Your Adopted or Foster Child by Keefer & Schooler

Adopting the Older Child by Jewett

Parent Effectiveness Training
by Gordon

Journeys After Adoption
by Schooler & Norris

The Explosive Child by Greene

Promoting Successful Adoptions
by Smith & Howard

Inside Transracial Adoption
by Steinberg & Hall

Talking with Young Children About Adoption by Watkins & Fisher

Awaiting adoption in North Carolina

Right now there are hundreds of children in foster care in North Carolina who are free for adoption. These children long for parents who can give them a forever family. Here's a chance to learn about a few of these great kids.



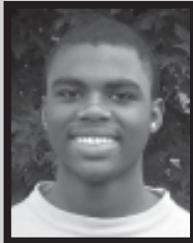
Brittany



Cameron



Chris



Darius



Jave'



Justin



Larry



Rusty



Steven



Sylvester



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

Brittany (d.o.b. 2/10/88)

Brittany is a comical young woman who is great fun to be around. She loves entertaining others and has big plans to be a singer, actress, or comedian. Brittany also enjoys writing poetry, drawing, and talking on the phone. Brittany is an A/B student when she puts forth the effort. Medication helps her maintain a level attitude. An adoptive parent for Brittany needs to be strong and provide her with structure, guidance, and love. (NC #060-2115)

Cameron (d.o.b. 10/6/94)

Cameron wins the hearts of all who meet him. Intelligent, creative, and curious about the world around him, Cameron is an eager learner with an abundance of energy. He has greatly benefited from therapy and medication, which help him concentrate and learn more appropriate ways of expressing his feelings. Cameron gets good grades in his regular classes at school. His foster family has helped him to thrive by providing him with the structure and boundaries he needs to succeed.

(NC #092-2079)

Chris (d.o.b. 4/6/87)

His JROTC teacher says that Chris is a joy to be around. "He tries really hard to accomplish his goals." Chris is good at drawing, woodworking, and anything he can do with his hands. He hopes to become a computer engineer and is fully capable of doing so. Chris is maturing and has shown tremendous improvement in managing his feelings this year. He is working on goals to improve his conduct and relationships with kids his own age. (NC #051-1838)

Darius (d.o.b. 9/20/88)

His intelligence and conversational ability are what Darius' foster mom likes most about him. He is always willing to help around the house, which is also a plus in her eyes. Darius would make a good entertainer and he hopes to be a model, singer, or actor. He attends regular classes at school where he receives average grades. His conduct has improved since moving into his current home. Darius would like a family to be loving, caring, and friendly and he would like to be the only child in the home. (NC #060-548)

Jave' (d.o.b. 12/16/90)

Jave' is a sweet boy who enjoys listening to his foster mom's grandchildren and hearing his foster mom's voice when she holds him. He is unable to make his needs and desires known, so his foster mom must try to anticipate them. Jave' receives speech therapy to help his chewing and swallowing reflexes. He also receives occupational therapy and physical therapy. Jave' needs an adoptive family that can give him time and attention and meet all scheduled appointments for his health and well-being. (NC #060-549)

Justin (d.o.b. 6/24/91)

Justin is a happy boy who likes to make people laugh. His foster dad says he has a great sense of humor. He sees the potential in Justin and says, "He is still at an age where you can turn things around for him. I don't see that in all the children." Since living with his foster dad, Justin has made a tremendous turn-around in attitude and actions. He needs structure, stability, and a family that will spend time with him, encourage his academics, and give him the love and nurturing he deserves. (NC #092-1004)

Larry (d.o.b. 10/17/90)

Larry is a happy and engaging boy with a bright outlook on life. He is loving, has a fantastic sense of humor, and is insightful. He seeks to make every opportunity a personal growth experience and has done remarkably well remaining positive. Larry is on the A/B honor roll and has committed to achieving certain goals in his life and he has been very successful. He is a charming, loving, and interesting young man whose positive attributes will become more evident when safety and stability are clearly in his environment. (NC #080-620)

Rusty (d.o.b. 7/5/91)

Since coming into care Rusty has enjoyed activities he was never able to experience before. He loves the outdoors and had the opportunity to attend different summer camps and vacations. Rusty has made some tremendous improvements since coming into foster care. His teachers report that he is working hard and doing great in class. Rusty's adoptive parents need to be positive role models, set consistent boundaries, and provide the love and support he needs. (NC #059-1239)

Steven (d.o.b. 10/20/87)

Steven has made a lot of friends at school, but also enjoys being independent. He is very coordinated and loves playing the drums in his school's band. He is even considering going to college to become a band teacher. Steven attends mainstream classes in school. Through successful counseling, his coping and social skills have improved dramatically, as have his conduct and attitude. Steven needs an adoptive family that will continue to encourage his positive progress, both intellectually and socially. (NC #026-2076)

Sylvester (d.o.b. 9/8/97)

Sweet, loving, and funny, Sylvester is an adorable boy with good manners. He currently takes drum lessons and has a talent for drawing. Sylvester attends a special preschool to assist with his development and give him the attention he needs to be successful. Speech classes help his articulation and he has made good progress. Sylvester needs a patient family willing to devote a lot of time and attention to him and his needs. (NC #026-2071)

Resources for foster parents searching for training

To remain licensed, every foster parent in North Carolina must attend 20 hours of in-service training every two years (NCDSS, 2004). For most foster parents this is not a problem—they are already on the lookout for ways to expand their knowledge and enhance their parenting skills so they can provide the best possible care to the children in their homes.

To help them in this ongoing quest, *Fostering Perspectives* offers the following list of potential training resources. However, if you want your learning to count toward the training required for foster parent relicensure, it is a good policy always to check with your licensing worker first. Because your worker knows you, he or she may be able to direct you to training resources that are closely suited to your interests/needs. Furthermore, as a representative of your licensing agency, your worker has a tremendous amount of discretion when it comes to deciding what will and will not count for credit toward your relicensure. So, before investing time or money in training, check with your worker.



Foster parents in North Carolina must attend at least 20 hours of training every two years.

Training Resources for Foster and Adoptive Parents

- **Fostering Perspectives.** Read an issue cover to cover, take the quiz in that issue, and present your answers to your licensing worker for 30 minutes credit toward your relicensure.
- **Your Supervising Agency.** Ask your worker if there are upcoming agency-sponsored training events for licensed foster parents.
- **NC Foster Parents Association.** Attending the next NCFPA conference, "Creating Happy Memories," on April 15-17, 2005 in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, could meet all training requirements for an entire year. Learn about this and other NCFPA training opportunities at www.ncfpa.org
- **Local Foster Parent Associations.** Contact the association nearest you (it may be in a neighboring county) to find out if they have any training events scheduled.
- **FosterClub.** Offers continuing education credits free at www.fosterclub.com/training. To learn more call 503/717-1552 or e-mail: celeste@fosterclub.com.
- **Foster Parent College.** Online courses available for \$8, though to access these you will want to have an Internet connection faster than dial-up. Also available on DVD for \$15 for personal use by parents, and \$99 for group use by organizations. To learn more visit www.FosterParentCollege.com, call 800/777-6636, or e-mail fpc@SocialLearning.com.
- **Foster Care and Adoptive Community.** Offers 61 courses. FCAC contracts with Oklahoma and Maine to provide online training to their foster families. Cost: \$4-\$6 per course. Go to: www.fosterparents.com
- **Child Trauma Academy.** Online courses on human development, childhood trauma, and the impact of working with high-risk children and families. At www.childtraumaacademy.com/

Source: NC Division of Social Services. (2004). Children's services policy manual: Chapter 1213. Raleigh, NC: Author. Online <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-40/man/CSs1213-03.htm#P164_17977>

From foster care to adoption



New Information from the Family Support Network of NC and the NC Division of Social Services

by Kathryn D. Kramer and Irene N. Zipper

During the past several months, the Family Support Network of North Carolina (FSN-NC) has been conducting a study to determine issues that slow down the process of adopting children from the foster care system, particularly children who have developmental disabilities and other special health care needs. The study is titled *From Foster Care to Adoption: Identifying System-Level Challenges for Children with Developmental Disabilities*. This project is funded by a grant from the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the topic of study was one of the Council's designated areas of research for 2004.

Adoptive families and families who are adopting a child with developmental disabilities and other special health care needs were invited to participate in the study. Three focus groups were held during the NC Foster Parents Association Conference on April 24-25, 2004. Another focus group was conducted with system-level participants (including social workers, a lawyer, a Guardian ad Litem director, a private adoption agency representative, a state level DSS administrator, and a county DSS director). All groups discussed the strengths and limitations of the adoption process in North Carolina.

Initial findings indicate that issues that affect the pace of the adoption process include:

- 1) The appeal process in the state;
- 2) The termination of parental rights (TPR) process;
- 3) Variations from county to county in policy and practice;
- 4) The multiple numbers of social workers and lawyers involved in placement; and
- 5) Values that affect the choice of permanent placements, such as beliefs about traditional vs. non-traditional family placements.

Each focus group emphasized the importance of strong communication and training for parents and professionals.

At press time a working conference including family members and other stakeholders is scheduled to be held in October. At that time, information from the focus groups will be shared, and recommendations will be developed to address the challenges and build on the strengths identified through the focus groups. It is hoped that these activities will help to promote practices to ensure that children in the foster care system who need permanent placements are adopted in a timely manner.

For further information, please call the Family Support Network at 800/852-0042, visit <www.fsnnc.org>.

Kathryn D. Kramer is Coordinator of Research and Evaluation for the Family Support Network-NC. Irene N. Zipper is the Director of the Family Support Network-NC.

Partnership gives scholarships to NC foster teens by Joan McAllister

In 2003-2004, North Carolina formed a partnership with the Orphan Foundation of America to help foster youth transition successfully to adulthood.

The Orphan Foundation of America was established in 1981 by the late Joseph Rivers, who grew up in foster care near Syracuse, NY. Rivers' vision was to help foster youth and orphans to transition successfully to adulthood, placing particular emphasis on college and vocational training.

Since 1981 OFA has been a leading voice for older foster teens. It has served thousands of youth with scholarships, and tens of thousands with care packages and mentoring. For ten years OFA has been bringing exceptional students to Washington DC every summer to put a face to foster care and the needs of foster youth in college and training programs. These young people's stories helped to raise public awareness and captured the attention of our nation's lawmakers, playing a significant part in the passage of the **Chafee Education and Training Vouchers Program**, also known as ETV.

For fiscal year 2003-04, approximately \$42

The NCDSS and the Orphan Foundation have given scholarships to over 200 NC youth aging out of foster care.

million were distributed to the states through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The funds are intended to help young people who aged out of foster care or were adopted from foster care after their 16th birthday to attend post-secondary educational or vocational

training. Students who meet these qualifications are eligible for up to \$5,000 of the total cost of attendance as estimated by their college or technical school. These funds may be used for tuition and fees, school supplies, a computer, and approved living expenses including rent, transportation, health insurance, and child care.

With 20 years of scholarship expertise serving this population and their fundamental understanding of students' financial and emotional needs, OFA offered to contract with interested states to administer their ETV programs. Currently, OFA administers ETV programs in **North Carolina, Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, and Ohio**. OFA has a website, www.statevoucher.org, to support the program and to offer information to young people from all 50 states. The ap-

plication and all record keeping are online and available to state staff for oversight purposes.

OFA looks at every ETV applicant individually, assessing his or her tuition need and cost of daily living, and each student gets the ETV disbursement that best suits these needs. Further, each student receives three gift boxes a year through the Care Package Program and is offered group and individual online mentoring. OFA charges less than 10% of the federal grant for its services.

North Carolina, like the other five contracting states, is pleased to report that all funds were appropriately disbursed by the end of the federal fiscal year, benefiting over 200 individual students. The contract has been renewed, and we expect the partnership to continue to benefit young adults from the foster care system.

To learn more or to apply for a scholarship, visit <http://www.statevoucher.org>.

Joan S. McAllister is the NC LINKS Program Coordinator for the NC Division of Social Services in Raleigh.



Joan McAllister

NC holds conference to support adoptive families

As part of its ongoing efforts to support adoptive families, the North Carolina Division of Social Services held "Rekindling the Spirit, Celebrating the Family," a post-adoption services conference in Greensboro on August 13-15, 2004. The conference was funded with federal incentive monies North Carolina received as a result of its excellent performance in placing foster children in adoptive homes.

By all accounts, the event was a huge success. Despite the approach of Hurricane Charley approximately 1,000 adoptive family members showed up for the conference, including parents, birth children, and adoptive children. Participants also included representatives from the faith community, county departments of social services, and agencies working with children with special needs.

Amelia Lance, a program consultant with the Division, says the biggest challenge in planning the conference was finding child care and creating programming for approximately 600 children between the ages of one and 17 so parents could attend workshops. To meet this need, Lance says, "we had 64 child care providers and state staff working with the kids to make sure they had an enjoyable, fun-filled, safe day." Programming for school-aged children and teens included workshops on substance abuse, lifebooks, safety, and motivational speakers. Kids were also treated to a step show, juggling talent show, drumline, storytelling, tumbling activities, arts and crafts, movies, and many opportunities to network and bond with other adoptive children.

One little girl had such a great time she said she wanted to stay at the conference "for a month."

In August 2004 more than 1,000 families gathered to share the triumphs and trials of adoption.

For many participants the most moving part of the conference occurred when teens came together to reflect on their experience through poetry, rapping, songs, comedy. Many teens gave powerful testimonials of what it means to them to be in loving adoptive home.

The conference offered adults intensive preconference institutes and more than 40 shorter workshops. Preconference institutes addressed topics such as re-

active attachment disorder, adoption support groups, behavior management, and parenting children who have been sexually abused. Regular conference workshops addressed many topics, including post-adoption support, cultural diversity, self care, and "For Women Only," during which participants were pampered with make-overs, manicures, etc. The conference's "Regional Roundtables" also gave families, communities of faith, and agencies a chance to begin partnering to develop resources to support and strengthen adoptive families.

Child care and children's programming continued well into the evening so that adoptive parents could attend a banquet in their honor. At the banquet Ruth Emerson, founder of Another Choice for Black Children, gave the keynote address and a local band provided music for parents' dancing and listening pleasure.

Many participants reported that they found the conference to be uplifting, stimulating, informative, and inspiring. Others praised it as a wonderful opportunity to get to know other adoptive families—to share triumphs and trials and begin new friendships. The NCDSS's Amelia Lance says, "We have received several inquiries about making this an annual event!"

Writing Contest

Send us a letter or short essay in response to the following:

Imagine you know someone entering foster care for the first time. He or she is the same age you were when you entered foster care.

Based on what you know now, write a letter giving advice to this boy or girl.

Deadline: February 4, 2005

Anyone under 21 who is or has been in foster care or a group home can enter. Mail your letter to:

Fostering Perspectives
NC Division of Social Services
1459 Sand Hill Rd., No. 6
Candler, NC 28715

Include your name, age, address, social security number (used to process awards only, confidentiality will be protected) and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards specified above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published in *Fostering Perspectives*, for which they will also receive a cash award.

We're Also Seeking Artwork

Submissions can be on any theme. Submission requirements described above also apply to submissions of artwork, which should be mailed flat (unfolded) on white, unlined paper.



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

Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy reading *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of credit toward your in-service training requirement. Questions about this method of gaining in-service credit? Contact the NC Division of Social Services at 919/733-7672.

In-Service Quiz, FP v9#1

1. Based on the letters from children that appear in this issue, what are four things kids in foster care look for in their social workers?
2. What did Cheryl Walker learn from working with Rachel?
3. When and where will the next NC Foster Parents Association conference be held? What is the theme of the event?
4. How did race and culture affect George Duvall's experiences in foster care?
5. Describe the drawing by Andrea that appears in this issue. What is your reaction to it?
6. According to the FSN-NC, what five things slow the process of adopting children from the foster care system in North Carolina?
7. What is the web site address (URL) where North Carolina youth aging out of foster care can apply for a scholarship from the Orphan Foundation of America?
8. Name one way North Carolina is trying to address the problem of turnover among county DSS child welfare social workers.
9. Describe the good news and the not-so-good news contained in a recent JAMA article about babies exposed to crack cocaine.
10. Name three books about parenting teens Becky Burmester would recommend.

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VIEWS ON FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION IN NORTH CAROLINA

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