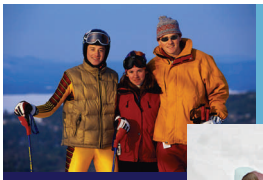

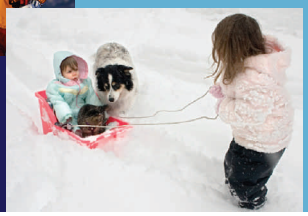

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
January 2011

Preparing Kids In Your Home For Fostering

By: Adoption Resources of Wisconsin/The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

Not only do parents make adjustment in their lives when a child in care enters their home, the children in the house are in for changes too...big changes! It doesn't matter if they are born or adopted into the family or are currently in foster care. Adjustments come easily for some — they move over at the table, know they will have to share your time and smile — while others are still processing the changes they had to make well into adulthood.

One Wisconsin dad, with humor and insight, tells a story about his 9-year-old son. On the evening that he and his wife were going to foster parenting classes, his son said "Dad, so you and Mom are going to be gone all night and neglecting me all evening so that you can learn how to care for other kids you're going to bring into our house?"

This wise father knows that his son anticipates making some big changes and is probably fearing it. It's the savvy parent who knows that the whole family will be making changes.

On the other hand, some birth children take fostering and adopting for granted. They are in a position to appreciate what their parents are doing and feel part of it. They learn their new dances in the family circle.

One woman who grew up with biological, adopted and foster siblings says, "I think I lived in my own bubble all my life. The kids who came were almost all younger than me, so I didn't have to compete with them for anything, other than the bathroom. But that was just normal.'

She goes on to say, "I was old enough to understand the basics of foster care, so the coming and goings weren't a big deal either. Growing up in a foster home is what it is — it's hard to describe unless you have lived another way to compare it to something."

Both reactions are valid. Be open to any reactions your kids may have and have some tools ready to help the family expand.

Educating Your Family

Long before the first child arrives in your home, prepare your family for the changes that will occur. Here are some suggestions from Wisconsin foster parents to help you.

Discuss what you learn in foster care training and discuss this decision to foster as soon as you can.

Talk to your kids. When a mom is pregnant, the parents tell their children to expect a sibling. People talk to them for months to prepare for the upcoming event. Do the same when preparing your family to foster.

Anticipate how you're going to answer some of the tough questions like, "Why can't she live with her real mom?" Or "Why does he do that?" When answering tough questions, it helps to talk in generalities by talking about why some kids are in care or why some kids might act out because of past trauma.

Teach your kids about confidentiality and remind them frequently about how they are expected to honor it. Tell them what they can and can't talk about and how to answer questions. Teach them to tell others, "That's not something I can share, but feel free to ask him directly."

Show your kids how to be empathetic. The child coming in has just been through a huge change and he or she is probably having a hard time with a lot of things. Talk about how this new household member needs some time to adjust. Suggest that they put themselves in his or her shoes. Most kids can understand how challenging it would be to adjust to a whole new family, school, foods, friends, teachers, and neighbors all at once.

Remind your children that they can be good teachers for the new kids in their home. Remind them that their behavior can strongly influence the new children in the home.

Consider making Welcome Home Books and Life Books for the children who come into your care and enlist the help of your *whole* family. Read our tipsheet about Welcome Home Books at: http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/964/welcomehome.pdf, and the one about Life Books at: http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/650/lifebooks-parents.pdf.

Be realistic with your children about sharing your time and energy with other children. Acknowledge that this new child may require more than might seem to be his or her fair portion of attention. Remind them how much you love them, and let them know how special they are for being part of a family that cares about people.

Learn a little about the history of orphans and children whose parents have not been able to care for them. Some movies and books to look into include: The Orphan Trains, Evelyn, The Martian Child, Antoine Fischer, Annie, Lilo & Stitch, The Blind Side, Meet the Robinsons, Hotel for Stray Dogs, Anne of Green Gables and The Lost Boy and many more.

Prepare your family for the inevitability of children leaving your home. Talk about it and let them grieve in their own ways. Some may not seem touched by the change and another child may feel the separation and loss deeply. Read A Brother's Point of View in Chapter 5 of the Wisconsin Foster Parent Handbook (http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/513/chapter5.pdf).

Continued on Page 3

Pre-Placement Training
for Prospective Foster Parents

We will have two sessions for Pre-Placement training in January and February and then move to the web-based form in March. We will continue to hold one face-to-face session each month.

Monday, January 10, 2011	**6-9 PM**
Monday, January 24, 2011	**6-9 PM**
Monday, February 7, 2011	**6-9 PM**
Monday, February 21, 2011	**6-9 PM**

All Classes are held in the Brookfield Room G137 in the Human Services Center located at 500 Riverview Avenue.

Please enter the building at door 6. Call Shari Rather at (262)548-7267 to register.

Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and Family Division

As we begin the new year I think it might be a good idea for me to share my thoughts on the year ahead. With a new Governor there will be a change in administration at the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Governor Elect Scott Walker will appoint a new Secretary for the Department of Children and Families. As some of you may know we work closely with DCF and receive state and federal funding from them. DCF provides a share of funding for child protective services cases including foster care. We use these funds to offer prevention, early intervention and on-going services for children and families who are referred for child protection. Over the past fifteen years, those funds have decreased, resulting in increased funding from counties when possible, or necessitating service reductions.

The new Secretary of the Department of Children will bring his/her own leadership team however many of the State employees will continue to work at DCF but under new leadership. The extent of the State's budget problems suggest that the next few years will be no less challenging than the past fifteen. Regardless, we will continue to work with all our partners to use the available resources as carefully and efficiently as possible to bring about safety and permanence for our children and families. In the past year, our management team has worked with our State staff to ensure we are working collaboratively and to meet or exceed the state and federal performance outcomes. As part of our State review of child welfare in August of 2010, we had a Quality Service Review-Continuous Quality Improvement- (QSR/CQI). In spite of the numerous state and funding challenges, we are proud to announce that the efforts of our foster parents, community partners, and staff again resulted in very positive findings. However, we never rest on our laurels, and continue to look to improve. As a result of that review, a "Next Step Action Plan" was created. Areas that we already worked on and will follow up in 2011 include:

- Implementing new "Conditions of Return" (from compliance to behavior changes and safety) with our legal partners.
- Following up with our Professional Development Training Partnership for staff training, coaching and mentoring on family engagement and identifying & developing informal supports. We'd also like to increase outreach to fathers and try to get them more involved.
- Following up with our workgroup consisting of mental health, alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) and child protective service on teaming and address issues of participation, scheduling, confidentiality, co-facilitation and extending teaming with "outside" mental health and AODA providers.
- Create a workgroup to integrate measurement tools to support and evaluate teaming.

We will keep you posted on the status of our "next step action plan" in future Jesse's Corner articles.

Jesse

Parent Café
January 18, 2011
5:30—8:30 PM
Center for Excellence
N4 W22000 Bluemound Rd., Waukesha
Call to register: (262) 548-8080
Child care and dinner provided

Training Offered By Waukesha County

Foundation Training Winter 2011

Saturday, January 8, 2011
Partners in Permanency 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Cultural Issues in Placement 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Thursday, January 13, 2011
Maintaining Family Connectiveness 6:15 PM - 9:15 PM

Saturday, January 22, 2011
Child Abuse Part 1 & 2 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM & 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Saturday, February 5, 2011
Impact of Trauma on Child Development 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Attachment 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Thursday, February 10, 2011
Placement and Separation 6:15 PM - 9:15 PM

Saturday, February 19, 2011
Positive Guidance and Discipline 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Effects of Fostering on the Family 12:30 PM - 3:30 PM

All classes are held at:
Waukesha County Human Service Center
Brookfield Room (Enter the Agency through Door #6)
500 Riverview Avenue, Waukesha, WI
Full day classes - lunch will be served

Register online at: southernpartnership.wisc.edu

Training

Parents Place Programs
262-549-5575
www.ppacinc.org

Prices for some classes may apply. Call 262-549-5575 to register. Free pre-registered childcare is available while attending most classes. Space is limited.

Love and Logic ®
Mondays, January 3 - 31
6:00 - 7:30 PM
Love and Logic is a philosophy founded by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D., and provides simple and practical techniques to help parents have less stress and more fun while raising responsible kids. This curriculum provides immediate results with techniques like: setting limits with enforceable statements, sharing control through lots of small choices, and many more.

New Strategies for the Challenging Child
Tuesdays, January 4 - 25
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Children today present greater challenge than in the past. This class will teach new and effective strategies for this challenges.

The Argumentative Child
(Separate parent and child classes)
Tuesdays, February 1 - 22
6 - 7:30 p.m.
When parents get caught up in arguments with their children, they give away their power and expose that they don't know a better way to handle the situation. Put an end to parent-child arguments with these effective problem-solving techniques.

Kids Managing Anger
(Separate parent and child care)
Mondays, February 7 - 28
5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
Parents learn to deal with their children's anger and frustrations while children learn the tools to curb their anger as well. Parents will meet with a facilitator while the children are in their sessions.

Co-Creative Discipline: Teaching Children to Cooperate
Mondays, February 7 - 28
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
You may have trouble teaching children to cooperate by ordering, punishing, yelling, or lecturing. This course presents five key aspects of disciplining to replace methods you learned from your own parents that may not be working well with your kids.

Preparing Kids in Your Home for Fostering
Continued from Page 1

Stress and Support

If you find yourself or your children having a hard time with fostering, talk to your workers.

You can also find tremendous support from other foster parents. Contact the Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parents Association at http://wfapa.org. Other foster parents are often an invaluable resource—they listen to your concerns, offer tremendous support, and they may have ideas to help your family adjust.

It's likely you will be part of family therapy with the child in care. The therapist may also have some ideas to help with your family, marriage, and other relationships. Sometimes, periodic check-ins with therapists can help prevent crises in foster care and families.

Your children might also be involved in some of the sessions with one of the children in care—especially if there's some kind of ongoing conflict. Honor their feelings and step back to look at the whole scene, even when you may want to judge a child's reactions.

Safety

Tell *all* of the children in your home that they can come to you any time if they don't feel safe—for whatever reason. Make that a primary household rule and repeat it often…

Children who have been traumatized may have experienced sexual or physical violence may act out. You must teach all the children to say "no" and tell you if something happens.

Adjusting

Make household tasks and jobs part of the new routine of the child who comes into your family, and do so in the first weeks. The new child may have to learn how dishes are washed in your home but that should start soon after they come.

Children learn to adjust to changes in a family, and fostering does change the family dynamics. As your children navigate the waters of fostering with you, they learn a tremendous amount about the world and how to live when they become adults.

As a parent who opens their arms to embrace children needing the fundamental love and care required by fostering, you are teaching your children the truest kindness of the human heart. Teach them well.

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What To Do While You Wait
By ARW Adoption Resources of Wisconsin

Families in the process of fostering or adopting experience a host of emotions and feelings: excitement, nervousness, wonder, eagerness and more. But the hardest part of the whole process can be waiting. Waiting to complete your home study, waiting to receive the paperwork about your prospective child, waiting to welcome the child into your home, waiting to finalize the adoption.

Unfortunately, waiting time seems to be growing. But there are things you can focus on while you wait. You can:

- Build a support network
- Prepare your home
- Research everything you can about bringing a child into your home
- Take care of yourself and your family

Building Your Support Network

Your support network will likely consist of family, friends, and other community members who are supportive of your family's decision to adopt. You can also join support groups for families who adopt.

These support groups may meet on a regular basis and plan activities to participate in, while other support groups may be online communities.

Support groups can be broad and provide support to any adoptive family, or they could be specific to a country or type of adoption.

Support groups are a great way to obtain advice and personal stories from people who understand the process and the level of anxiety that comes with it.

For a list of support groups please go to: http://www.wiadopt.org/site/indexer/476/content.htm

Preparing Your Home

Preparing your home for a new child is another great way to stay busy while in the "waiting place." A few suggestions for preparing your home and getting the everyday tasks under control are:

- Preparing your child's bedroom and childproofing the house. Buy items like furniture, baby gates, outlet covers, etc. as well as paint and decorate your child's room.
- Buy toys. You can go to a toy store to buy toys, but a great alternative is to go to garage sales. Or look on Craig's list or e-Bay.
- Prepare and freeze meals for the first few weeks after your child's arrival. With a new child in the home — whether it's an infant, toddler, or teenager — you won't have the extra time to prepare a meal every night for the whole family. It's a great way to take the extra time to bond with your child instead of making meals.
- Buy birthday, wedding cards and gifts for the next few months. With a new child in the home, you will be busier, and you may not have time.
- Make yearly doctor, dentist and eye appointments. Once again, having a new child in the house will keep you busier than you can imagine.

Researching About Your Child

Research is another key component in the adoption journey. Here are some suggestions on key topics to research while adopting are:

- If you are adopting a child internationally you may want to read about the child's culture, as well as some common foods in the area or even learn a few phrases in the child's native language. You may want to start preparing for your international travel at http://wiadoptioninfocenter.org/library/883/travel.pdf
- If you are adopting a child from the foster care system, you may want to try to understand the different family dynamics that have impacted your child's development.
- Are you adopting a child who has needs which require special consideration like attachment issues, fetal alcohol syndrome, developmental delays, speech? If you know your child's challenges, try to learn more in order to help be an effective parent.
- If you are single and adopting, you may want to read some books about single parenting. According to other single parents, make sure your support system is doubly strong.
- Consider taking a child first aid/CPR class.
- Read parenting books.
- Parenting an adopted child can present challenges that are different from parenting a birth child. You may have to modify some parenting techniques to meet the needs of your child. Just like any parent, you will test different parenting techniques to find the ones that suit your family the best.

Self Care/Family Care

Lastly, focus on caring for yourself and your family. One great way to focus on you is to keep a journal of your feelings and experiences. It can be a great reference in the future when you talk to your child about adoption.

Be sure to spend some quality time by yourself, which many people say is the most important element of self care. Try to spend some time with your partner and other children (if you have any) to keep building relationships. Spend time doing things that you like to do together and discuss ways you can incorporate your new child into your activities.

Taking care of yourself is extremely important in the adoption process so you can enjoy all the wonderful family moments to come! We mentioned just a few of the many productive activities to ease your thoughts and anxiety about adoption throughout the process and make you feel better prepared.

For more information on self care, please see our Summer 2010 Partners newsletter at http://www.wiadopt.org/snav/373/page.htm.

And remember, while you're waiting, don't forget to contact us at ARW for any questions you might have. We're here for you before, during and after your adoption journey.

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January 2011 Foster Parent Spotlight
Ruth & Dan Graczkowski

Ruth and Dan have been married 15 years and enjoy being opposites in how they can bring parts to their relationship that the other could not and they have kept their relationship strong through continuing date nights and appreciating one another. They had been friends a year before they had started dating and their young children blended into a family once they were married. The two are best friends, excited to continue in a new phase of their lives together through fostering.

Their oldest biological child, Katie, is 24 and very independent with great energy, leading her to working and go to school full-time for organizational psychology, aiming to work with training and testing in companies. Their second oldest, Tyler, is charismatic with great leadership skills who is currently in the Marine Corps in Japan. Their youngest biological child is Tucker, who is very smart and analytical like Ron, working towards a computer programming degree at North Central College in Illinois.

Ruth and Dan currently have their first foster children: a sibling group of 2. The Graczkowskis were a little surprised after expecting older teens, but have enjoyed the youthfulness involvement that the siblings enjoy, including going out for dinner, family movie nights, on walks, and to the dog park. Their foster daughter is 12 and loves to talk and tell stories and could go on for hours. Their foster son is 10 and is very smart, loves reading and knows a lot about a variety of topics. He also loves snuggling. Both enjoy kissing the dogs goodbye, good night, and good morning.

The biggest goal the Graczkowskis had is encouraging good habits at school and with homework. It has been exciting to see the kids excel from routine and consistency and improve their grades. The family recently celebrated their first week where their foster son had five 'good behavior days' in a row at school by going out for a celebration dinner. One of the most fantastic moments to report is when the siblings look like "they feel comfortable in their own skin" from being confident in who they are as kids.

The family has not been involved with the foster mom as she has been unavailable, but has spent a lot of time with who they call: "their foster grandma." Through doing relative visits with siblings' grandma, they have developed a positive, supporting relationship with her. As health problems arose, the family continued taking visits frequently to visit her in the hospital: despite the drive from Menominee Falls to the south side of Milwaukee. Ruth recalls her experiences as a kid that "if someone is in the hospital: you go and visit." Through time, the grandmother asked for help looking at rehab centers and as other needs came up the family continued to be willing to help. The grandmother had even requested that Graczkowskis have power of attorney for her health care and after realizing they were the only ones to help, they agreed. They see her as a spectacular lady her and the kids are even more grateful for what the Graczkowskis have done for their grandmother who helped raise them as for fostering them.

The family realizes that taking care of someone else's kids is an increased responsibility from even taking care of your own kids and has appreciated help from their social worker Sue Stevens in being a great resource, supporting them in reassuring their structure and routine for the kids and meeting with school contacts. They think what has been most helpful so far with fostering is to make sure they are on the same page with decisions. They feel fostering has been a really great experience and that they have gotten out of it just as much - if not more - than what they have given. They continue to work towards the goal to re-uniting the children with their parents.

Contact Numbers:

Waukesha H & HS
262-548-7212

Children's Mental Health Outreach
262-548-7666

Medical Emergency: 911
Family Emergency: 211

Foster Parent Mentor
Jen Barcus..... 262-542-2926
Judy David..... 414-461-5403
David Mersfelder 262-542-2926
Nikki Mertens..... 262-246-6180

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Mary Alice Grosser, Supervisor Relative Licensing
262-548-7272

Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator
262-548-7267

Libby Sinclair Relative Licensing
262-548-7277

November 2010 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
37 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
18 Children

Group Homes:
8 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
8 Children

Relative Placements:
53 Children

Relative Foster Homes:
18 Homes

Regular Foster Homes:
110 Homes

Total Homes Assisting Other Counties:
19 Homes

For Allegations of Abuse and Neglect Support, please call:

FASPP
Norma Schoenberg
920-922-9627

Social Workers:

Jennifer Adler 262-548-7265
Bob Alioto 262-548-7262
Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348
Angie Briggs 262-548-7275
Maria Maurer 262-548-7345
Susan Peck 262-548-7348
Janice Ramos 262-896-8069
Michael Reed 262-548-7347
Cindie Remshek 262-548-7639
Greg Rewolinski 262-548-7270
Elizabeth Russo 262-548-7349
Kim Sampson 262-548-7273
Mark Sasso 262-548-7346
Linda Senger 262-548-7698
Deanna Stevlingson . 262-896-8570
Rick Wimmer 262-548-7359

We Need You!

For more information about becoming a foster parent in Waukesha County, please contact Shari Rather at:

srather@waukeshacounty.gov

262-548-7267

Or visit our website at www.waukeshacounty.gov And follow the links to foster care.

Jack Safro
Toyota•Ford•Lincoln•Mercury
Lexus•Infiniti•Scion