

Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
April 2010



You Hold the Missing Piece of the Puzzle: The Importance of Documentation By: ARW/FCARC

How to provide the special care required by children in care can be a real puzzle. The birth family, therapist, judge, guardian ad litem and the team of social workers each hold pieces to this puzzle.

You have an essential piece of the puzzle. You have the best opportunity to get to know the child on a day-to-day basis. As you get to know this child, your observations provide basic information to the therapist, judge and social workers as the permanency plan for care unfolds. The best outcome occurs when all concerned parties are aware of a child's needs and work together to meet those needs.

Observing a child's behaviors and sharing that information is part of fostering. Keeping a written record of your observations helps foster families keep an accurate account of day-to-day pieces of information.

The following are reasons why you may want to record your information:

- Your account of a child's behavior and progress may be used in court and affect important decisions about placement and care.
- Your records may protect you when there are allegations of abuse and neglect.
- The child's therapist uses your information to form therapeutic plans.
- Your case worker can help you address issues and work with the child if you have accurate descriptions of her behaviors and interpersonal relationships. Caseworkers may be able to make the best determinations of a child's needs if they have a clear picture of what is happening in a placement.
- The parts of your documentation of their life with you that you can share with them can be critical in anchoring them in the world as they grow up. They will know where they were and who took care of them even if they were too young or anxious to remember, the placement was not long, or it had an unsatisfactory ending.
- One Wisconsin coordinator suggests keeping a notebook or journal of the day-to-day happenings in the life of the child. It doesn't have to be formal and she does not necessarily want to see it. Jot down notes. She has seen families use these written records in court.
- Dates are important. Record specific activities, like dental appointments, doctor's appointments, and school information. Home visits are important to record. Keep records of crises and challenges with dates.
- A Wisconsin foster parent e-mails her observations to the social worker, therapist and others on the team, which allows the same information to be shared in one step. She also includes the birth parents if they have email.
- Many families start a file for each child so that the journal and the other papers are together. It is easier if you have your information in one place.
Or you may want to keep your journal on your computer with a secure password. Some agencies may have policies against keeping files on a computer, so check with your worker if you choose to keep electronic records.
- If you think a behavior is noteworthy, write it down. Let your social worker know about it, even if it may seem insignificant.

Most importantly, *keep confidentiality in mind*. Use passwords with your computer and get a locked file cabinet for your notes.

The following are some suggestions from the social sciences field about how to observe and record information about the child in your home. Keep these questions in mind:

1. **Where?** What is the setting in which the behavior occurs? Is it in front of the TV, in the car or at meals?
2. **What time of day?** Does the behavior occur before or is anticipated after certain activities take place? Does it happen when home visits are coming up or following home visits?
3. **How often?** What is the frequency of behavior? Is it several times an hour, or a day? Count and record the number of times it happens.
4. **How long** does the behavior last, over hours or over days? How many days in a row does it occur? What is the **duration** of a behavior helps determine if there is a pattern to it?
5. **What have you done?** Have you tried to stop a disruptive or harmful behavior or reinforce positive behavior? What have you tried to do to either intervene or encourage what the child is doing? Did it help?
6. **What is the impact of the behavior?** How does it affect the child or others? How do others react to the behavior and to the child when the behavior occurs?

How you feel is important but what the child does is the first critical piece to bring to therapists, the court, and to the team.

Let's look at two examples.

Joel's behavior can be described in two ways. You might say:

Breakfast is awful because of Joel. He is surly and just plain ornery in the morning. I get so frustrated because we are late for school and work. He makes us late all the time.

Or you could describe what happens:

Joel gets up on time, dresses and gets ready for school. But he has not eaten breakfast since he came. He stands by the wall and raps under his breath. Does not talk or look at anyone. On three days this week he spent 15 minutes on the toilet before school. We have been late for school and work on three days. I sent him to school with a granola bar each morning. It's hard on all of us.

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Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

Tuesday, April 6, 2010 6-9 PM
Tuesday, April 13, 2010 6-9 PM

Monday, May 3, 2010 6-9 PM
Monday, May 10, 2010 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 most of you know we continue to look for opportunities to improve our practice and offer services to the families we serve. We are currently involved in a Strengthening Families Initiative with the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Family. The five (5) pilot counties involved in this initiative include Waukesha, Jefferson, Marathon, Lacrosse and Washington County.

The focus of this initiative is to help link early education providers and child welfare workers to help build continuity and support for vulnerable families. The initiative works to enhance 5 protective factors within families. The five pilot counties have shared their experiences and continue to explore ways to incorporate this philosophy into practice. Both Washington and Waukesha Counties have begun cross training between early childhood education providers, and child welfare workers. Foster parent training on the five protective factors also took place in Waukesha and has now been expanded to include the concept of parent cafes.

The Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership is facilitating this training. Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Children & Family Services Division in coordination with the Waukesha Center for Excellence is proposing a new parenting support/education initiative called Parent Café's.

Parent Café's are a vehicle for parents to have their own conversations about the things that keep their families strong. Parent Cafés are a way for parents to engage other parents in building the six Protective Factors identified in the national Strengthening Families Initiative. The Protective Factors are:

1. Parent Resilience: Be strong and flexible
2. Social Connections: Parents need friends
3. Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development: Being a great parent is part natural and part learned
4. Concrete Support in Times of Need: We all need help sometimes
5. Social and Emotional Competence of Children: Parents need to help their children communicate
6. Healthy Parent-Child Relationships: Give your children the love and respect they need

We anticipate that Parent Cafés will be at the Center of Excellence in Waukesha. Some Waukesha County foster parents as well as parents involved in DHHS services, Early Headstart, Headstart and other community based agencies will be invited to come together and discuss the six Protective Factors that build healthy and strong families on a monthly basis. These protective factors are being divided into three separate themes:

1. Taking Care of Yourself:
Builds these protective factors –
Be Strong and Flexible
Parents Need Friends
We All Need Help Sometimes
2. Being a Strong Parent
Builds these protective factors –
Being a Great Parent is Part Natural and Part Learned
3. Building Strong Relationships with Your Children
Builds these protective factors –
Parents Need to Help their Children Communicate
Give your Children the Love and Respect they Need

These themes incorporate all of the Protective Factors and provide a way for parents to apply them to their own families.

Each Parent Café session will be guided by trained Parent Hosts. The parents will come together and gather in small groups to explore the questions that really matter to them. Every parent will participate in gathering and sharing the group's insight and connecting diverse perspectives. Together, they listen for patterns, insights, and deeper questions. Through the Parent Café process, parents gather and share information, support, resources and knowledge that in itself helps build the protective factors and makes families strong.

Parent Cafés are currently transforming parenting education and efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect in Illinois. "They tap into the collective wisdom that is present in every community. As parents lead their own learning and growth, they gain confidence, recognize what they already know, and realize what supports they already have around them. They become clear about what their families' challenges are. With other parents, they devise ways to solve problems and resolve issues in their own families. They identify issues and find ways to address them, committing to individual action. And they build trusting relationships, social support, and connections with other parents. In the supportive environment of the Parent Café, parents come together to deal with the pressures, worries, and challenges that many have struggled with alone. Through the Parent Café process, parents move beyond isolation to give and receive the support they need to keep their families strong".

The Café's in Wisconsin will bring together foster families, community families and biological parents involved in DHHS whose children are in out of home care to work together to rebuild and strengthen each other. Hosting and facilitating Parent Cafés requires in-depth training and ongoing development. We anticipate providing the necessary training to a group of Waukesha County foster parents to become Parent Hosts. We anticipate and look forward to hosting our own Parent Cafe's sometime later this year! Participants will receive training hours for the café's they attend and host.

Jesse

Training

Shared Parenting Training for Foster Parents

April 17th, 2010

Located at Elmbrook Church
777 S Barker Rd, Brookfield

Registration begins at 8:30.

Presentation goes from 9:00-4:00

Child Care is provided!

Call Shari Rather by **April 12th** @ 262-548-7267 to register you and your children.

Parent Café Trainings

Located at the Center For Excellence

N4 W22000 Bluemound Rd, Waukesha

April 12

Part A

April 14

Part B

April 19

Part B

April 21

Part A

Trainings are from 6:00-9:00

Register by **April 8**, with Shari Rather @ 262-548-7267

NOTE: The First Parent Café will be held on May 11th, at 5:30. Child Care will be provided for the Parent Cafés!

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.

Controlling Conflict in the Family

Tuesdays, April 6 - 27

6 - 7:30 p.m.

Conflict resolution and anger management aim at peaceful resolutions when the storms are raging. Learn positive ways to control conflict and keep the peace in your family.

Disciplining the Child

Mondays, April 5 - 27

6 - 7:30 p.m.

Many parenting experts recommend a variety of discipline techniques, focusing on punishments and rewards, but too often they just don't work. This class will give parents essential skills for effectively disciplining their child.

Here is another example of describing the behavior of Kendra in two ways. You might say:

Kendra is perfect. She is so cute and fun to have. Great student too. Takes perfect care of herself. I love having her here. She has a great personality but seems a little nervous.

Or you could describe what happens:

Kendra helps around the house, keeps her room clean, does her homework and earns As and Bs. She takes a shower everyday, does her hair and make up appropriately. She answers when we talk to her and tells us she likes it here and that we are nice. She asks for nothing. Calls us "Mom and Dad" from the beginning. We do hear her awake and moving around her room at night. She puts her bitten fingernails under the table or behind her to hide them. She rocks herself and hums when she thinks she is alone.

Describe behavior, then your reactions or opinions. Most of us would guess that Joel does not want to go to school and Kendra wants to stay at this home. But both guesses might be wrong. By telling the actions of the child, you give the team information to work with.

Let's consider Tanya, an 11-year-old girl, who saves food in her room. You allow all of your children to take food or drinks to their room for snacking. But you found a store of it on Tanya's closet shelf.

Here are things you can note and share with the team:

- Did she eat the right amount of food for a child her size?
- When does she take this food?
- What does she actually have on her shelf?
- Does she eat it?
- Does she take on a regular basis or does she only do this at certain times?
- Is she secretive about it or does she share her food and knowledge of her stash with other family members, friends or you?

At a team meeting, you also might want to ask what information other team members would like to document. Sometimes you might actually be documenting too much information, causing stress for you and other teammates. You and your family, after all, have a right to be just that - a family.

You acquire important information about all children who come into your home. You see their behaviors on a daily basis. When all of the pieces fit together to form an accurate picture of a child's needs, the healing of the child is much more likely.

Sharing your observations with the birth family and listening to what the birth family is able to share in return also helps to build a united front so that kids see a team of people who are there to help them. These observations help to make the picture - hopefully the relationships therein - whole.

Resources

The National Advocate for Children, winter 2003 Foster Parent Participation in Court Affects the Decisions for Children In Care.
Regina Diehl, J.D.
http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/Foste_Parent_Participation_in_Court.pdf

New Law Strengthens the Role of Foster Parents in Court, by Regina Diehl, J.D. The National Advocate for Children, Spring 2007.
http://www.nfpainc.org/uploads/New_Law_Strengthens_Role_of_Foster_Parents_in_Court.pdf

Behavioral, social and emotional assessment of children and adolescents.

By Kenneth W. Merrell
<http://www.routledge-ny.com/>

You can read more about sharing information in the **Wisconsin Foster Care Handbook, Chapter 2**, pages 4-10.
<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/511/chapter2.pdf>

I love books. There is danger when I am in a book store and have my credit card! Regular readers of this column know that often the books I write about are ones that helped our family. My top pick for this month is *The Elephant in the Playroom* by Denise Brodey.

Right now we are struggling through the process of getting an official diagnosis for our nine-year-old son. What we know for sure is that he is somewhere on the continuum of the autism spectrum. We also now know that we did nothing (nor did his birth mother) to cause this condition and that our son will have a lot of hard work ahead of him as he learns social skills that to most of us are just automatic. He quite literally cannot read the message in my "If you do not stop that this instant..." look. Nor does he recognize the importance of "how" something is said.

The Elephant in the Playroom

The Elephant in the Playroom is a collection of essays written by parents and siblings of children with special needs. The book includes sections on self-care, schools, medication, "Going Public," "Seeing the Forest Through the Trees," "A View from Within the Whirlwind," and others.

Editor Denise Brodey, herself a parent of a child with special needs, introduces each section. There follow several essays by parents of children with differing special needs relating to the topic. Each essay is headed by a brief description of the child. For example, one essay states that the author is a mother of a 17-year-old diagnosed with autism at age 4. All of the authors write from the heart. The book is almost like getting hugged and being told it will be OK. Not easy, but OK.

The Out-of-Sync Child

I have also been rereading *The Out-of-Sync Child* and *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun*, both by Carol Kranowitz. These books deal extensively with Sensory Processing Disorder and Sensory Integration Dysfunction. The author is the preschool teacher every child should have. *The Out-of-Sync Child* is a comprehensive description of all things related to the how, why, and what of sensory processing. However, it is not a textbook, but very readable. If your child has difficulties with certain things, you could easily pick through the book reading only the sections of interest to you. *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun* is packed with safe play activities that help address sensory integration issues.

Many children with autism must deal with sensory integration issues. Carol Kranowitz is a calm, reassuring voice for the parent struggling with a child who won't or can't do many things that kids his or her age do. Kranowitz can't make the problems go away, but she does suggest things parents can do to make things better, and offers clear advice about when to seek professional help. Readers will feel empowered by the ideas she presents for helping their children.

Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents

Currently I am reading *Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Tony Attwood. Our son's therapist recommended this book highly. Attwood writes about this condition in such a way that the reader begins to glimpse what life is like for persons with Asperger's.

A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome & High-Functioning Autism

The therapist also recommended *A Parent's Guide to Asperger syndrome & High-Functioning Autism: How to Meet the Challenges and Help Your Child Thrive* by Ozonoff, Dawson, and McPartland (2002). I confess I haven't started the book yet, but as I scan the contents and leaf through the pages, this book looks like it will help us understand treatments for Asperger's and help us learn to live and thrive with this challenging condition.

What books are on your nightstand?

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April 2010 Foster Parent Spotlight

Robin & David Dozer



Robin and David have been foster parents for about five years. After having their own biological children, Amy and Andrew who are currently 19 years old and

Deanna who is currently 16 years old, Robin wanted more children. Since Robin has had the privilege of being a stay-at-home mom most of her life. She thought it would be fun to help others by becoming foster parents. The couple felt that they might possibly like to adopt, but remained open to all aspects of foster parenting. Robin grew up in Mequon, WI and David has lived in Wisconsin most of his life. The couple now lives in Brookfield. When Robin and David met, they had no intentions of dating when they were each invited to go to Great America by mutual friends. However, the couple was soon married and they have been together for 25 years. David works in West Bend as a gastroenterologist and Robin occasionally helps with research for the clinic where he works. Robin has her masters degree in social work, and although she is not currently working, she maintains her licensure through continuing education. The couple has enjoyed the flexibility of online trainings. They have also attended local school programs to obtain training hours. At this time, David and Robin have two foster children. When they are in need of support, they turn to their family. They are also very close with another foster family and the two families offer support to each other. Robin and David say that their experience with being foster parents has been full of ups and downs. Foster parenting can be incredibly fun at times but there are difficult times as well. Having foster brothers and sisters in their home has helped the couple's biological children grow quite a bit. Also, all of their children's friends have been touched by the foster children in David and Robin's home and many want to become foster parents themselves! The best thing that the couple finds about being foster parents is that they are able to share their love with so many children. Of course, it is also sad to see what these children go through. At times, Robin and

David find that it can be difficult to work with the system. Their advice for foster parents is to know that there will be good and rough times. Be prepared to experience many different emotions. There will be very rewarding times and also sad times, but remember that what you are doing for these children really does matter.

I am not sure if most of you know that Amy Hansen is fighting breast cancer and it has advanced. She now has HER 2 recurrent breast cancer and the treatments are aggressive and very expensive so several friends of Amy and Win decided to help out and hold a benefit. Amy's fund raising benefit will be Saturday April 17 at the Legion in Gilbertville from 4 to 9. There will be a buffet style dinner, a raffle, and a silent auction. Prices for the dinner are \$5.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children 5 and up. Raffle tickets are \$1.00 each. The organizers still are looking for raffle items. Let Shari Rather know if you have something to donate. There will also be T-Shirts and can koozies for sale at the event.

Amy has been a trainer for Waukesha County since 2005 and taught PACE and Pre-Placement. She also taught Shared Parenting and Attachment for the Southern Training Partnership.

We wish Amy all of the best and are praying for her recovery.



Shari



**Celebrate Earth Day
April 22nd**

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

Nikki Mertens
262-246-6180

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care
Coordinator
262-548-7267

Libby Sinclair
Relative Licensing
262-548-7277

FASPP (Support for Allegations of
Abuse and Neglect)
Norma Schoenberg
920-922-9627

February 2010 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
58 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
13 Children

Group Homes:
4 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
7 Children

Relative Placements:
58 Children

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties
20 Homes

Social Workers:

Bob Alioto
262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold
262-548-7348

Angie Briggs
262-548-7275

Margaret Johnson
262-548-7265

Cindie Remshek
262-548-7639

Elizabeth Russo
262-548-7349

Kim Sampson
262-548-7273

Linda Senger
262-548-7698

Deanna Stevlingson
262-896-8570

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.

