



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
January 2010



By the Grace of Foster Parents: Fostering Pre-school Age Children By Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Jeff and Maria, who had never had a young child placed with them, were excited to take their first toddler. They agreed to take Claudia who was three. This tiny dark-eyed beauty came into their home without a whimper. She let both Jeff and Maria hold her immediately.

But that was the first few hours. That first night she began yelling with a high pitched wail. She did not stop for the better part of four months. She threw herself into furniture. Jeff and Maria realized that she went limp whenever they held her. Her lack of eye contact and inability to focus became more noticeable as time went on.

Sadly, this was Claudia's third placement. Jeff and Maria saw quickly that Claudia needed specialized care and intervention.

All children who come into care experience the loss of their primary family and all that is familiar. Studies show that removing infants and toddlers from their primary caretakers often seriously affects their development.

These critical developmental milestones are rooted in the bonding experience with primary caretakers during infancy and early childhood. Toddlers and infants who come into care may have formed few or no bonds with caretakers and may exhibit serious signs of developmental delays. They may not be able to sooth themselves or respond to attention. Or some toddlers coming into care may have challenges from genetics, emotional or nutritional neglect while the mother was pregnant or the effects of prenatal drug and alcohol abuse. These children often require trained foster parents who can devote extra time and attention to their special needs.

Some Suggestions

Here are some suggestions that foster families, social workers, doctors and mental health workers have for those who foster toddlers.

- Plan to spend a lot of effort and time with these small ones. Although many may not display troubling behaviors, all of them have suffered the trauma of being separated from the people and world that they knew. Despite the fact that small children do not have the language to share their feelings, they are deeply affected by separation.
- Work with your social worker to determine the needs of the toddler in your home. If the child has had psychological evaluations, follow the treatment plan. You will probably participate in therapy with this youngster.
- Be a careful observer of the toddler's behavior. Write down what you observe and discuss your observations with your social workers and the therapist if there is one involved. Record anything that you think may be of interest or may be a clue to finding the best ways to parent this child.
- Pay special attention to withdrawn children. Children who are withdrawn or ones who seem to resist your affections may be easy to care for, but may be deeply wounded. They may need special attention to learn to feel safe and express emotions. These emotions may not come out in ways that are easy to handle.
- Find out all you can about the life the child had before they came to you. This will make it easier for you to help the child transition to your family routines.
 - ◆ A Wisconsin worker recently related that she and her colleagues would sometimes get calls from frantic foster parents unsure of how to soothe the toddlers in their care. The workers said, "this may sound strange, but try giving him some pop

and potato chips," because this was something they were used to from their home.

- ◆ Similarly, a Wisconsin foster parent recalls putting a three-year-old to bed who was outraged by reading stories and listening to quiet music at bedtime. She could only fall asleep with a movie on and had a temper tantrum with what the foster mom thought was a nurturing activity.
- Provide for continuity of routines as well as possessions such as clothes, eating utensils and toys.
 - ◆ For example, a blanket or teddy bear may not smell good to you, but is often comforting for a child. It can be an assurance to children that they are safe transferring from one place to another. Don't wash it for awhile
 - ◆ One foster parent and her child in care made sure to bring a teddy bear to the visits with the girl's mom. At the visit, the mom also had a teddy bear and they would trade so that each could have something that smelled like the other.
- You may be involved in visits with the parents and former caregivers. Be patient of all involved including the other children. Sharing visits and information may be critical to the welfare of the toddler and an essential part of her transfer to a new home.
- Change routines, foods, and clothing slowly. Abrupt changes without explanation or a comforting transit period are often difficult for an adult. Imagine the thoughts and fears of a toddler.
- Continue to talk about what is happening. Children understand more language and speech than you know. If a child is slow with language skills, talking to her will be essential to her development. Keep talking even to the babies.

When Dawn and Rich began fostering Dianna at the age of three, she did little else but scream. She screamed day and night. Needless to say, Dawn was stretched to her limits. Rich took over for her when he could to give her a break.

Dawn tells of singing Jingle Bells in the middle of July during bath time, because it seemed to quiet Dianna a bit. The screaming lasted for six months. Dawn and Rich persevered, and have a family member who now says she has two moms. Dianna calls her birth mom, as well as Dawn, "Mom."

-excerpt from FCARC's
A Family Created in Many Ways
<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/library/525/creatingfamily.pdf>

Facilitating Transitions for Preschoolers

You are an essential part of the team who help facilitate the children moving onto adoption or back to their birth families. Here are some things that would make the transition of a preschooler the best it can be.

- Focus on the best outcome for the toddler. Ideally, the visiting and transition schedule are designed around the child and her routines. In many circumstances, you may need to compromise for what works out with the birth family as well as your own family—and sometimes with the children's preschool, if they're in school.
- Be open to pre- and post-placement visits. If your worker hasn't suggested a formal transition plan, encourage her to facilitate a meeting to work on a plan. A carefully planned schedule of contacts between the toddler and the new caregiver make the transition easier for all who are involved.



Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

Training

Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services Presents Foster Parent Foundation Training Winter Session 2010

Saturday January 9, 2010
Partners in Permanency 9-12
Cultural Issues in Placement 1-4

Saturday January 23, 2010
Maintaining Family Connectiveness 9-12
Guidance and Positive Discipline 1-4

Saturday February 6, 2010
Dynamics of Abuse and Neglect 9-12
Impact of Trauma on Child Development 1-4

Saturday February 20, 2010
Attachment 9-12
Placement and Separation 1-4

Saturday March 6, 2010
Dynamics of Sexual Abuse 9-12
Effects of Fostering on the Family 1-4

All Classes are held at Health and Human Services in the
Brookfield Room . Enter the Agency at Door #6.
Call Shari Rather to register 262-548-7267

As some of you may know, we made some changes in the Children and Family Division effective January 1, 2010. We have reorganized the division and eliminated the Child and Family II unit. We have reassigned the staff to the other child welfare units in our division and we have unfunded the social worker supervisor position. As a result, the Permanency Services Unit will have two new social workers, Cindie Remshek and Deanna Stevlingson. In addition, our eWiSACWIS support staff, Cindy Emery will also be reassigned to Permanency Service unit. Lisa Roberts will assume the responsibility of supervising three more staff. Cindie, Deanna and Cindy bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the unit. I would like to welcome them to their new unit and encourage you to do so as well!

The remaining social work staff, Michael Reed and Libby Sinclair, along the contracted parent support worker, Angie Katsafanas will be reassigned to the Child and Family unit supervised by Mary Alice Grosser. They also bring a wealth of knowledge and experience that will be beneficial in working with our families.

In addition to these staff changes, we transferred three (3) experienced staff to the Adolescent and Family Division. I would like to thank Peggy Beisser, Jennifer Eiler and Jeannine Eng for the dedication and support to the children, youth and families that they have served over the years. They did a tremendous job working with children and youth primarily in treatment foster care, group homes and residential care and we will miss them. With this change, the Children with Special Needs Unit expanded to include another social worker, Jennifer Cera. Don Daniels will continue to supervise this unit and the ever-expanding Children Long Term Support Program as well as our Family Support Program.

Please welcome the staff to their new units and say a goodbye to the dedicated staff that has served our most vulnerable children and youth over the years.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Jayne Weyer-Smith for her 30 years of dedicated child welfare work. Jayne has worked in many different capacities at the agency, most recently as a Supervisor in the Child and Family II Unit. We wish Jayne well in retirement and look forward to seeing her in the future.

Jesse

**Pre-Placement Training
for Prospective Foster Parents**

Tuesday, January 5, 2010 6-9 PM
Tuesday, January 12, 2010 6-9 PM

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 6-9 PM
Tuesday, February 9, 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.

Parents Place Programs 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.

New and Effective Strategies for the Challenging Child

Tuesdays, February 2 - 23
6 - 7:30 p.m.

Many parents find that the methods their parents used don't work well with their own children. This course presents new strategies and provides a way of measuring your child's behavioral improvement.

Calming the Explosive Volcano

Mondays, February 1 - 22
6 - 7:30 p.m.

This course will teach you how to deal more effectively with angry, explosive and defiant children. You will learn what the "magic wand" of parenting is, and three specific skills for using it to calm the explosions and tantrums.

Parenting: The Early Years

Tuesdays, February 2 - 23
5:30 - 7 p.m.

Together with other parents, we will discuss key factors that prepare us to be successful parents and raise happy well-adjusted children.

Love and Logic®

Tuesdays, March 2 - 30
5:30 - 7 p.m.

Love and Logic is a philosophy founded by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D., and provides simple and practical techniques to help participants 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.

Adults Managing Anger

Mondays, February 1 - 22
5:30 - 7 p.m.

Explore common causes of anger, learn how to manage your emotions and find techniques that will help you control your actions before they hurt someone or yourself.

The Argumentative Child

Mondays, March 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.

By the Grace of Foster Parents: Fostering Pre-school Age Children Continued from Page 1

Some of you may have watched the powerful video called, "Multiple Transitions: A Young Child's Point of View About Foster Care and Adoption." <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-306211141837494846#>

A Sample Transition Plan

1. The first visit with the new caregiver occurs in your home.
2. The next visit is longer. The child is left with the new caregiver for an hour or two.
3. The following visit takes place in the new caretaker's home.
4. The foster parent leaves the toddler with the new caretaker for gradually longer periods of time.
5. The toddler spends an overnight at new caretaker's home.
6. The toddler spends more than one night.
7. The transition to the new home takes place. All of her possessions go with her. The foster parent puts the child in the care of the next caretaker and says "good-bye."
8. Regular contacts with the foster parents are maintained. Foster parents provide respite and babysitting.
9. This period may be stressful for the child. She may regress or withdraw for a period or withdraw for a period or show agitation, difficulty with sleep or feeding.
10. Take pictures and keep records and mementoes during the time the child is in your care. Give copies of all these to the new caretakers. Even though children may not remember, they will know they were loved and cared for.

In the video, a child says, "Don't imagine that I will ever stop yearning for my birth family (even though, as in other things, I will pretend otherwise). Help me find some way to keep a connection with them, even if I never see them again. Bring out pictures, or a Life Book and hold me while I rage or sob or stare, or all of these at once."

"And understand that none of this is a reflection on you. Don't be surprised when I come back from a visit with them peeing my pants or throwing tantrums in the bath that night. I told you: **things matter to me.**"

"So I am going to have feelings about things that matter to me. It would help a lot if you would make the decisions that you need to make and stick with them."

Claudia, Jeff and Maria were a fictionalized composite of some real situations.

I'm Glad We Changed Our Minds about Fostering Teens By Angie Clontz

When my husband and I became foster parents in July 2005, we told the agency we were willing to take in children ages 0-21. Deep down, however, we really wanted young children—infants to age six.

Our Introduction to Fostering

Before long we were blessed with our first placement, a 5-year-old. Less than a month later we received an 11-month-old boy. Then our 5-year-old moved to another home, leaving us with the now 14-month-old.

Just before Christmas, we learned this child would be going to live with a family member. This was very hard—we had fallen in love with this little bundle of joy.

We became foster parents to help children in need, and we were told from the beginning that the children leaving would be very hard. But we did not understand how hard it would be to let them go until we had to.

After this child left, we told our social worker we didn't want another placement for a while. Our grieving period was very hard. It brought back memories of

losing our child when I was only 6 to 8 weeks pregnant. We even thought about giving up foster parenting because it is so difficult when a child leaves.

The Start of an Adventure

Two months later, we received a call from our social worker. They were looking for a placement for a 13-year-old girl. My husband and I told her we would talk about it and call her back. At first, we agreed to say "no." But we could not make the call.

We said to each other that since teenagers tend to keep you at arm's length, it might not hurt so much when they left. We called our social worker back, told her yes, and picked up our 13-year-old daughter on Valentine's Day. That was the start of an adventure for her and for us.

A month later, my husband received a call from our social worker stating that they took a 16-year-old girl into care the night before and placed her in a group home. The social worker said this girl was not adjusting well to being in the group home and asked if we would take her.

We said yes. In truth, we were a little mad at the agency. Why would they automatically place this girl in a group home instead of calling us first? Later on we learned from other foster parents that agencies do this because "no one wants teenagers."

On the Right Path

When we picked up our new 16-year-old, our 13-year-old told her not to worry. She assured her, "Mom and Dad will make sure you get everything you need. They will give you all the love you could want."

At that moment, my husband and I knew that no matter how young or old a child is, all they want is someone to love, care, and believe in them.

A Different Kind of Parting

Eventually our 13-year-old went to live with family. ON the day she left, we took her to her family's house because we thought it would be easier for us to drop her off. We were able to meet her Aunt and Uncle and their family. It was great, but our hearts were still breaking.

We said good-bye and told her we loved her. Walking to the car, we heard her calling our names. She was running, crying, and yelling that she loved us and wanted to keep in touch.

When I turned around, her biological mother was right in front of me, crying just like me. She said, "Thank you for caring so much for my daughter." We said her daughter was a blessing and that we would keep in touch. Later, she invited us to be her daughter's god parents and to come to her first communion. We did, of course.

Graduation and Beyond

A few months after she turned 17, our remaining daughter told a judge she wanted to stay with her foster parents. That was a strong confirmation for us that we were doing the right thing in being foster parents.

At her high school graduation, our daughter told her birth family that if it were not for us she would not be graduating or be where she is now. That filled us with pride.

After graduation our daughter joined the National Guard and was accepted into college. This filled us with pride, too!

While at National Guard boot camp, our daughter called every Sunday night to say she was homesick and missed us. I would cry with her. One night I told her I was a little surprised she was homesick—I imagined that since she had been taken from one home, being away from us would not be that hard.

She replied, "Mom, you and Dad have shown me what a home is."

What We've Learned

Though all this, my husband and I have learned that teenagers just need someone to love them unconditionally and be willing to give them a chance. We also learned that teenagers do not keep you at arm's length—they will open their hearts to you if you open your heart to them.

Being a foster parent to a teenager is very difficult, but very rewarding. We would not trade our experiences for anything. We love each of our daughters and are still in touch with them.

We are in the process of adopting our 18-year-old daughter. We pray the adoption will be complete before her 19th birthday.

Our girls have been a blessing to us and our family. We would encourage more people to open their homes to teenagers because they need people to love, care for, and believe in them just like younger children.

Remembering Foster Children This Holiday Season



The Permanency Services Unit at the Department of Health and Human Services received special gifts through several area organizations for our foster children in Waukesha County.

Jenna Mielke, an independent Silpata Jewelry representative, with the help of Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator, who hosted a Silpata Jewelry party and donated \$550 of the proceeds from the party to purchase gift cards for the foster children.

GE Health Care Systems also donated to our foster children this holiday season. The company once again, had their giving tree where employees picked an ornament with gift requests from the child and purchased the request. They provided gifts this Christmas for over 40 foster children. The gifts arrived December 11, just in time for the holidays.

The Waukesha Kiwanis Club donated gift stockings for the children over 12 in foster care. They have been doing this for the past several years and this year we put a twist on it by having them make the stockings for the older children (whom are often forgotten at this time of year).

During the year, **Jack Safro Toyota** sponsored our summer picnic. The dealership has done this for the past five years to our services!

The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association held their fall conference in Ashland on October 23 - 25, 2009. They provided comprehensive training regarding the Foster and Adoptive Support and Preservation Program (FASPP). The FASPP initiative is scheduled to begin on January 1, 2010. The FASPP initiative is designed to provide parent to parent phone support for day to day foster or adoption related concerns.

Save the Date. The Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (WFAPA) will hold their spring conference at the Best Western Grand Seasons Hotel in Waupaca on the weekend of March 26 - 28, 2010. For further information, go to www.wfapa.org.

Update: Amy Hansen's breast cancer has returned and she has been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Please keep Amy in your thoughts as she continues to battle breast cancer.



Without the contribution from **Jack Safro Toyota**, we could not continue to have this fun event for the children and their foster families. We appreciate their continued support.

The Oconomowoc Junior Women's Club, Queen of the Apostles St Vincent DePaul Society and the Mothers of Twins Club has supported us with donations to our clothing closet. Those donations included; pack and plays, strollers, clothing, high chairs and starter packets.

We had a very special volunteer this year, who has worked miracles in our clothing closet we want to thank Virginia Steilen for all of her hard work and dedication.

We also want to share that Fox River Christian Church has assisted the clothing closet on their second Saturday program by helping us with the change of season by switching clothing from summer to winter and winter to summer..

The Permanency Unit is grateful for the money, time and gifts donated from these organizations. We want to thank everyone who has assisted us in 2009 and we look forward to their assistance in 2010.

Foster Parents Needed

Foster Parents are our best recruiters and we need your help. We need more foster parents willing to take teenage age children. Get a friend to join us and we will reward you with a gift card. Gift cards will be awarded once the licensing process is completed. Call Shari Rather for more details at 262-548-7267.

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



November 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
48 Children

Treatment Foster Care:
15 Children

Group Homes:
5 Children

Residential Care Facilities:
3 Children

Relative Placements:
61 Children

Total Homes Assisting Other
Counties:
26 Homes

Social Workers:

Bob Alioto
262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold
262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser
262-548-7261

Angie Briggs
262-548-7275

Jennifer Eiler
262-548-7260

Jeannine Eng
262-548-7268

Margaret Johnson
262-548-7265

Elizabeth Russo
262-548-7349

Kim Sampson
262-548-7273

Linda Senger
262-548-7698

Ted Wuerslin
262-548-7269

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.

