Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
May 2009

Foster Parents Are Professionals

By Jo Ann Wentzel

My dictionary describes a profession as one requiring training and specialized study. A person engaged in that occupation is considered a professional. So, why not foster parents. For many years now, I have been fighting for foster parents to be considered professionals. As a foster parent I went through the experiences of being talked down to and considered a non-professional. I think the fight must go on because foster parents deserve the classification of 'professionals.'

A good foster parent goes though may hours of training every year. You are required to educate yourself on a number of pertinent issues. Every year, new information, concepts, programs, and issues are brought forth. A foster parent is required to study these just to do their job. If training makes one a professional, an expert, than surely the foster parent should be considered so. When others are heard to say, but they are just foster parents, I start to lose control.

Lots of foster parents have worked with kids for decades. How many "professional" people do you know that study that long to be a doctor, lawyer, or teacher. We consider these people professionals, however.

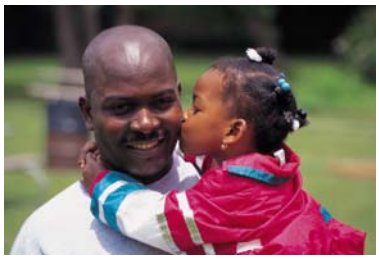
What people tend to forget is the fact that in addition to training, required and otherwise, foster parents must learn on the job everyday. It becomes a necessity for new topics to be mastered with every new foster child. You may be immediately forced to learn about specific learning disabilities, behaviors, and illnesses.

A foster parent seeks out information needed and begins to study the facts until they are well versed on the subject. An older, more experienced foster parent will already have studied hundreds of topics, while a beginning foster parent will need to learn everything quickly.

As a new foster parent, I knew little about drugs. As an experienced foster parent, I knew much more than I cared to know. I learned the general symptoms of a child on drugs and also the symptoms of each individual drug. Eventually I recognized many drugs by sight, knew the street names, and what they sold for. I even know by whom and where they were being sold sometimes. The point is by necessity I became an expert on the subject.

Foster care requires a proficiency in behaviors and the accompanying acronyms that describe these disorders. Most foster parents develop an amazing medical knowledge since you regulate the health and monitor the medication of those children placed in your home. You must know CPR and first aid and be able to qualify in the Red Cross testing of these skills. A foster parent knows about a variety of medications and how to determine if they were really taken or not.

Today's foster parent must be pretty aware of all the educational options for kids. It is imperative that they know what the rights of children are in the expectation that they receive an adequate education. You must understand Personal Education Plans and often act in the place of a parent when making educational decisions.



When foster kids challenge the law, they usually lose. The foster mom or dad is probably the one to make sure they have an adult present when being interrogated. They know a great deal about court proceedings since they attend hearings so often. They must learn the process and often know as much as lawyers about possible resources for the children. Community service spots, restitution possibilities, programs with available space, and even which judge is best for which kid is common knowledge to the foster parent. They may have researched facilities and can advocate for their kids when the decision is being made as to where to put them.

You add to this that foster parents must understand, be able to function in, or at least have knowledge of youth culture and you start to see how versatile these folks are.

The foster parent is an efficiency expert in feeding large amounts of people and running a huge household on a limited budget. An expert at scheduling, they balance more meetings, appointments, and activities than a business executive does. The foster care chauffeur has figured out how to drive everyone, everywhere in different directions and get them all to their respective places on time. The schedule some foster parents keep would wilt the toughest person.

Together, foster parent couples have studied enough topics to earn several degrees, but where is their diploma. Some certification is now available, but it is still a far cry from the degree.

Yes, the lawyer, doctor, and teacher have a great deal of knowledge and do deserve the professional designation. Usually, they are only experts in on general area. Foster parents need to be master of many areas.

So foster parents act like and expect to be treated like professionals because you are. The rest of the world will recognize it some day. T ill then, some of us do consider foster care a profession and all of you professionals. I salute you.

Ribbons of Hope

May is National Foster Care Month and we wanted to remind all of you that our ribbons of hope event is coming up this May! This year will be a little different than the last. Following the ribbon tying at 5pm there will be a light dinner and the class on **Life Books from 6:00 to 8:00!** We look forward to seeing you there!

RSVP to Shari Rather @ 262-548-7267 or srather@waukeshacounty.gov

Where: Meet in the lobby at Waukesha County Health and Human Services 500 Riverview Avenue
When: May 5th 2008 at 5:00pm–8:00 pm

Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and Family Division

As most of you know, May is National Foster Care Month and on behalf of the Department, I would like to thank you for your dedication and support of our foster care program. Your willingness to provide a safe and loving home for our most vulnerable children is truly appreciated! Please join us for our annual Foster Care Ribbons of Hope Ceremony in front of our main office building at 500 Riverview Avenue on May 5 at 5:00 pm.

As most of you know, the economy is having a significant impact on on-going funding for child protective services. In the Governor's proposed biennial budget, we anticipate reductions in federal and state funding for prevention and early intervention services in 2010. As a result, we have fewer dollars to purchase services for our families. Our local policy makers have continued to support our efforts and one of their strategic goals is a "Safe Community". We are reviewing our budget to determine what changes can be made in response to these anticipated funding reductions while remaining focused on our core responsibility of safety, permanency and child well-being.

Several of our staff are involved in a committee to consider a level system for foster care providers from Level I (court ordered relative placement); Level II (Foster Care); Level III and Level IV (Treatment Foster Care) and Level V (Shift staff foster care). As I understand it, this system would assist us in determining where a child should be placed, matching the need of the child with the foster parents skills and abilities. If this were to occur, I would anticipate that all of our court ordered Kinship Care placements will be licensed as foster parents (Level I). If this were to happen, I think they would need to follow through with most, if not all, of the current licensing and training requirements our current foster homes. Shari Rather and Lisa Roberts are participating in this committee and will keep you posted on future developments.

At a recent meeting that I attended there was a discussion about increasing the number of individuals who could supervise visits. One of the people who attended suggested that we ask the foster parents who do not have a foster care placement. They indicated that some foster parents might be interested if they were offered training and support. We currently have a provider who trained new staff and student interns and we are willing to talk to them if some of you would be interested in supervising visits. At this point not all the details have been worked out. Please contact Shari Rather at 262-548-7267 and let her know you are interested. If there is enough interest we will follow up with our contract provider to provide the training. I thank you in advance for your willingness to assist.

I would like to wish all of our Foster Mothers a very Happy Mothers Day!!!

Jesse

Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

May 7, 2009	**6-9 PM**
May 21, 2009	**6-9 PM**
June 4, 2009	**6-9 PM**
June18, 2009	**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.

One Hour Trainings Are Available In a Limited Supply on the Following Topics:

Building Self Esteem for Foster Children
Bridging the Parental Gap
Working together When Reunification is the Goal
Creating a Safety Net for the Internet
Foster Parents in Court
Grief and Loss Issues are Difficult to Resolve
Creating More Special Times
Building Emotional Understanding with your Child
Dealing with Anger and Aggressive Behavior
Respite, Stress Management Play a Crucial Role
Promoting Child Safety in the 21st Century
Life Skills Training Promotes Independence
Understanding and Treating Attachment Disorder
Settling Boundaries & Promoting Positive Guidance
Helping Foster Youth Transition to Independent Living
Improving Children's Mental Health
Keeping Your Cool *Anger Management for Children*
I was Here First *Blending the Needs of Biological and Foster Children*
Better Understanding Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties
Parents as Partner
Protecting Yourself for Allegations of Maltreatment
Surviving the Infant and Toddler Years
Redirecting Anger
Helping Abused Children and those with Sexual Issues
Emotional Abuse & Neglect
Working Together *Active Parenting in Foster Care & Stepfamilies*
How Attachment Problems Affect Foster Youth

Please contact Shari Rather to obtain a copy. Read the material and complete the attached test and return the test for credit for your on-gong training requirements. If you attended the **annual meeting** you will receive **three hours of training credit.**

Good Night, Sleep Safe Waukesha Police Department

An alarming trend has come to light as the number of infant deaths in Wisconsin where sleep environment may have contributed has reached at least 12. In Waukesha County alone, four recent infant deaths under review by the Child Fatality Review Team were found in unsafe sleep environments. Since 2000, the Waukesha County Child Fatality Review Team meets and discusses every child death in Waukesha County from birth though age 19. Over the years we have seen many preventable infant deaths, but these last few in so short of a time span is unusual. Placing infants in an unsafe sleep environment increases their risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and suffocation.

Safe sleeping involves placing a baby on its back to sleep, having no extra pillows or blankets, no co-sleeping with parents, not sleeping in chairs or on couches with parents. Not every child will die if placed on their stomach or on a couch to sleep, but if a child is a vulnerable infant *an infant with an underlying physical defect, abnormality or sickness), is in a critical developmental period (the infant's first 6 months of life) or is exposed to outside stressor(s) (exposure to tobacco smoke, overheating, or prone sleep position), their chances of fatal injury are much greater.

Save the Date...

Annual Foster Parent Picnic
June 24, 2009
3:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Foxbrook Park in Brookfield

Reasonable Expectations of Foster Kids
By Jo Ann Wentzel

When a kid comes into your home and you are suddenly in charge of helping to shape his life, it is very easy to get caught up in the moment. You want to do great things for them and with them. You want significant changes to appear before your eyes. If you are too impatient, this unfortunately can mean you also have unrealistic expectations of that child.

DON'T GET ME WRONG I DO NOT BELIEVE IN GIVING KIDS A FREE RIDE. I do believe in making them responsible for all their actions and certainly the resulting consequences, but do keep in mind what has happened to them recently.

Before they reached your home, they were taken out of theirs. Most times, they were not given a choice if they wanted to stay or not, just told they must go. They are going to live with strangers (hopefully you won't be that for long, but you are now.) They are going to need to sleep and eat with people they don't know. The house is strange, the rules are different, even the food may be different. We're talking significant changes in their lifestyle.

These kids lost all control of what happens to them. They may have very little say in what they do or don't do. Suddenly everyone is making decisions for them. Up to this point, they may have made their own decisions or maybe no one cared enough to make any decisions. No matter how you slice it, you may be the bad guy and cannot expect them to immediately warm up to you, much less work the program you have in mind for them. No matter how many heart to hearts, or home-baked brownies, this is going to take time.

Your first few days, possibly weeks need to be used to get to know each other and gain trust. They won't work with you or for you until they trust you. Often, kids are not given enough adjustment time. Foster parenting is about staying in there for the long haul. It teaches one patience, endurance, and what I refer to as stick-to-it-ive-ness. Remember, don't ever give up on these kids. That's often what the parents did and now their children live with you. Think of the honor of being the only adult in their lives who ever stuck it out. The only person they could take at their word and count on.

When starting to work with these kids, remember where they came from. They may never have had to do chores. Saying grace at the table may scare them. Doing homework before they receive nasty demands may be foreign to them. We had one kid whose mom loved him so much she would not make him do homework. She believed he should just play. Maybe these kids are not well versed in hygiene and good personal habits. Manners may mean nothing to them.

Keeping your expectations reasonable may mean learning to choose your battles. We always started with the tough ones. For example, most of our kids had chemical problems of one sort or another. We worked on that issue rather than worried about whether their room was clean or not. We always prioritized. We did not let go of trying to accomplish other goals with that child. Instead, we worked on those things most important. Years ago, we even allowed our almost grown boys to smoke, that issue has been settled for foster parents now. At the time our thinking was I really need to keep him from abusing drugs or shooting up. Yes, smoking is not good for your health, but it was of very little concern as if he overdosed and died.

I have known foster parents to do the white glove test to check rooms. Personally, I find that ridiculous. Our house ran on, "Clean enough to be healthy, dirty enough to be happy." Sometimes even that was a challenge when the house was filled with 8 oversized boys.

Most kids, once they connect, want to please you. If they don't connect, the battle is more difficult and will require more time. Even when they wish to please you, they may not know how. Remember the mom who thought homework was not something her child had to do. The kids we get come from anything but traditional situations. The relationships in some of their families are so confused with roles being muddled and boundaries blurred that it is difficult to even understand your foster family. They don't even recognize the family concept.

Expecting these kids to come from losing their parents, siblings, home, and all their important stuff, and to immediately fit right in and "get it" is too much. To expect perfection when their abilities are too few is hopeless. If you think they will be perfect kids in two weeks just cause they live in your house, you are lying to yourself. It took some of them 15 years or more to get this messed up, it will not change overnight, no matter how wonderful you are or what you do.

Sit back. Take a deep breath. Realize this may be the challenge of a life time. Accept the fact that you can do it. Ask for guidance from a higher power and recognize the fact that you are human. And so is this kid. Give him what he needs most—like love, attention, guidance, patience, a chance to succeed. Reserve the bad stuff—like judgment, impatience, intolerance, and anger.

Adjust your expectations and you will both be happier.

If A Star Came Down and Kissed Your Nose
From the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center

If a star came down and kissed your nose, what would you do?
Would you make a wish?
Would you get up and run?
Would you think this is really fun?

If you were laying on the ground,
next to your mama, chubby and round,
looking at the moon shining in the sky
What would you do if the moon came down and said,
I want to be your friend.
I think I would run away, but then again,
my friend the moon would be sad.
So I guess I would be his friend.

If you were out on a dark cloudy nigh,
and the wind whispered, I want to play with you.
Would you run in the house and get your kite?
To fly so high on a dark windy nigh.

What if the clouds came down and said,
I think you are cute.
I guess I would just shrug and say,
God made me that way.

The wind and clouds and moon and stars
remind me of the love I feel,
like when mom holds my hand and makes me giggle.
When Jon tells me jokes and gives me a Pichachu.
When Anna and Alicia let me dance with them,
and Sam swings me round and round.
Shelly and Dad take me for bike rides and keep me safe…
so I guess if a star came down and kissed my nose,
I would ask if he knows,
that my family could use a kiss too!

The End
By Nick and Mom

Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services and the Southern Child Welfare Training Partnership Presents

Sexual Behavior in Children a Caregivers Guide

May 16, 2008

9:00 am to 4:00 pm

La Casa De Esperanza

410 Arcadian Avenue, Waukesha

Trainers:
Debbie Kuehn
A foster parent with 20 years of experience
And
Howard Harrington
Social Worker with

Foster Parents are frequently asked to care for children who are at high risk for sexual behavior because they are victims of sexual abuse. Although these children may at times present perplexing behavior problems, foster parents with self awareness, knowledge and specific behavior management skills are capable to provide stable, positive placement for most of these children. This training provides tools to give caregivers the confidence needed to parent sexually abused children.

To register: Call Shari Rather@262-548-7267 Class size is limited to 30 due to room size.

May 2009 Foster Parent Spotlight

Banessa & David Tries

David and Banessa both grew up in Wisconsin, David in Wauwatosa and Banessa in Oak Creek. They currently reside in Brookfield, WI. David and Banessa met through acquaintances while at Riversplash. They have been together now for about 15 years. David works at Arandell Corporation going on 18 years. Banessa has been a stay at home mom for the past 9 years but prior to being a stay at home, mom she worked at Marquette University for 8 years.

The Treis have two biological children and one child that is in the process of being adopted. As a family they enjoy tennis, hiking, water sports, and ping pong. The Treis became foster parents when Banessa saw an ad called the number to get more information and the "next thing I knew, Shari Rather had me all signed up! Since becoming foster parents, they have had two placements both of them going very well. Family and friends have been a great tool for support through their placements.

The most rewarding part of being a foster parent is "knowing that through our love and support, we can make such a positive difference in a troubled youngsters life." On the other side "it is disappointing knowing that the system returns children to kinship foster care instead of licensed foster care—sometimes a little to automatically believing that family will be a better placement than non-family."

The Starfish

As the old man walked the beach at dawn, he noticed a young man ahead of him picking up starfish and flinging them into the sea.

Finally catching up with the youth, he asked him why he was doing this. The boy answered that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun.

"But the beach goes on for miles, and there are millions of starfish," countered the old man. "How can you make a difference?"

The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it to the safety of the waves.

"I made a difference to that one," he said.

~ Anonymous

Mother's Day

Happy Mother's Day to all of our dedicated foster mothers.

Happy Memorial Day

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
(12 and under)
262-246-6180

Patty Vorlob
(12 and under)
262-521-1397

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator
262-548-7267

March 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
43 Children
0 Admitted
2 Discharged

Treatment Foster Care:
19 Children
0 Admitted
0 Discharged

Group Homes:
4 Children
1 Admitted
0 Discharged

Residential Care Facilities:
9 Children
0 Admitted
0 Discharged

Relative Placements:
35 Children
0 Admitted
0 Discharged

Social Workers:

Jennifer Alder 262-548-7262

Suzanne Arnold 262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser 262-548-7261

Angie Briggs 262-548-7275

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

Jennifer Wygle 262-548-7260

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