

October 2008 Foster Parent Spotlight

Drew & Julie Blischke



Both Drew and Julie Blischke are from Brookfield, WI and met each other in high school while we were working at Steins Garden Center. After going their separate ways for college, their paths crossed again and they were married in 1995. Drew is a carpenter and Julie is currently a stay-at-home mom but her background is in journalism and banking. The Blischke's have 2 children -- Caleb is 7 and in 1st grade and Ethan is 4 and in pre-school. Drew and Julie have most of their family in the area which has been such a great help especially after their children were born. As a family, they enjoy camping, fishing, sports (playing and watching), and spending as much time together as they can. Julie and Drew are also very active in their church.

The Blischke's chose to become foster parents because of an experience with their youngest son Ethan. When he was 1 year old, it was determined that he needed to have surgery and extensive ongoing therapy to correct a birth defect. They spent a lot of time at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee because of his health problems. That opened a whole new world to both Drew and Julie. The first night that Ethan was in the hospital, there was a 2 week- old baby boy in the room across the hall from him. The baby had no family. Because the nurses were so busy with all of the children on the floor, no one could hold the baby so he cried the entire night. It was heartbreaking. At that moment, Drew and Julie knew that they had to help, they had to open their home to a child that needed a safe and loving place. They were determined that after they resolved Ethan's health problems that they would pursue becoming a foster family.

Julie and Drew have had one placement in their home -- a 10 day old little baby boy who was with them until he was 10 months old. The Blischke's jumped right in to shared parenting with the birth parents. "Shared parenting was one of the most challenging and difficult things that we have ever done, but it has turned out to be the most rewarding experience of our lives. We had the privilege of watching the birth parents slowly but surely make significant changes in their lives in order to give their son the best possible situation to return to. " On the day of his return, the family was very sad to let him go but the most amazing thing happened that day. Because the family had developed a relationship with the birth parents, they felt comfortable enough to

ask the Blischke's to baby sit 2 to 3 times a week while they were at work! The Blischke's were so thrilled to be able to continue to be a part of all of their lives. Now, the roles have completely changed but they still get to see the baby (now 14 months old!) that the family loves and adores. Julie sometimes still can't believe it. The Blischke's know that not every situation turns out like this but "we are here to advocate that although shared parenting can be so intimidating in the beginning, it is worth a try. You never know what your influence, no matter how big or small, can have on the parents of the child in your care."

Since their first placement, they have done respite care 2 times and they currently do not have a placement. Julie and Drew just completed the new Foundation training and found it to be extremely helpful and informative. They enjoyed getting to know the other foster parents. "It is so beneficial to be able to talk to other families who are in similar situations. We are also very grateful for all of the support we received from the social workers."

Foundation Training for Foster Parents Winter 2009

January 10
9:00 to Noon
1:00 to 4:00
Partners in Permanency
Effects of Fostering on the Family

January 24
9:00 to Noon
1:00 to 4:00
Dynamics of Child Abuse & Neglect
Effects of Trauma on Child Development

January 31
9:00 to Noon
1:00 to 4:00
Attachment, Separation & Placement
Guidance & Positive Discipline

February 12
6:15 to 9:15 PM
Sexual Abuse

February 21
9:00 to Noon
1:00 to 4:00
Family Connectiveness
Cultural Issues in Placement

All classes are held at the Waukesha County Department of Health & Human Services located at 500 Riverview Avenue. Please enter the building at Door #6 and proceed to G137. To confirm your attendance call Shari Rather at (262)548-7267. Register early—class size is limited to 30.

This is required training during the first 2 years of your license.

Contact Numbers:

Waukesha H & HS
262-548-7212

Children's Mental Health Outreach
262-548-7666

Medical Emergency: 911
Family Emergency: 211

Foster Parent Mentors
Nikki Mertens
(12 and under)
262-246-6180

Bette Winkler
(over 12)
262-679-9634

Lisa Roberts, Supervisor
262-548-7271

Shari Rather, Foster Care Coordinator
262-548-7267

Michelle Cornwell, Visitation Coordinator
262-548-7370

August 2008 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
45 Children
0 Admitted
8 Discharged

Treatment Foster Care:
22 Children
2 Admitted
1 Discharged

Group Homes:
7 Children
2 Admitted
1 Discharged

Residential Care Facilities:
6 Children
2 Admitted
3 Discharged

Relative Placements:
29 Children
0 Admitted
0 Discharged

Social Workers:

Suzanne Arnold
262-548-7348

Peggy Beisser
262-548-7261

Kathe Blum
262-548-7275

Jeannine Eng
262-548-7268

Steve Handrich
262-548-7262

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

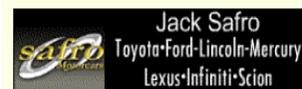
We Need You!

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.



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
October 2008



Stress In The Foster Home By Emil Baldwin, Jr., LSW

There have been several studies conducted that indicate that child abuse occurs at a higher rate in foster homes than in the general population. How could this be possible? Most foster parents are good people who become involved in the program because of a genuine desire to help children. Most have had home studies done to see if they "have what it takes". This information has been reviewed at least by the person doing the study but often several people have participated in that final approval decision. And lastly, most have received at least a basic level of training to help prepare them for what is to come. So...once again, we have to ask...how in the world could this ever happen?

One obvious conclusion is that sometimes the process just doesn't do a good job evaluating applicant and people who shouldn't become foster parents are licensed. As one who evaluates those applicants, I know it can happen for different reasons and most of the time, there is no one to blame. I have often said to my colleagues that after the evaluation is done, I wish I could look the applicants in the eyes and know FOR SURE that this is a potential abuser or molester. If I could do that..."I would be outta' here in a minute and would be making millions of dollars a year...because everyone would want to hire me as a consultant." Unfortunately, for me and the children of the world, I don't have that skill.

Another major factor that causes this type of abuse to occur is...the one and only...good old-fashioned...maker of heart attacks, fist-fights, and food fights...stress. Foster families, like any other family, are subject to the wear and tear of everyday life that we call stress.

Some of these components can include.

Financial status...loss of job, reduction of hours worked, reduction of benefits, your bills go up dramatically, problems with the house, you win the lottery, etc.

Structure changes in the family...birth, death, marriage, someone moves in with you, child becomes an adult and "leaves the nest", child becomes an adult and does NOT "leave the nest", etc.

Health...a family member has a serious health problem, emotional illness, always tired, sick often, etc.

Relationships...marriage problems, parent-child conflicts, fights with extended family or neighbors, someone important to you moves away, problems on the job, you find a new love, etc.

Foster families have to face all of the above...plus:

The characteristics of the children...neglected, abused, sexually abused, ADD, ADDHD, FAS, etc. It would be unusual to find one child in your "average ordinary family" that had any of these characteristics but one foster family might have several of these children in the home at the same time.

Number and type of children...the family has more children than their "approved capacity", have different population groups (mixed ages-teenagers with small children; different sex, race, etc.), concerns about accepting a child that really isn't what you wanted ("If I don't take this kid, will they ever call me again?"), accepting a child for placement to prove that "you can handle anything", wanting to take care of all the children of the world, you are "talked into" doing something that you don't feel comfortable in doing but feel pressured to do, etc.

THE AGENCY (The Agency causing stress? I know...this one's a shocker)... the boarding care check is late...again, the medical card doesn't come, going through training, going through the homestudy process, nobody returns phone calls, no co-operation, little support,

etc.

Lack of support...may of your friends think you're nuts for wanting to do this, often there is no ongoing recognition for the job you do, social workers expect you to "have all the answers" when it comes to parenting, you are treated as a "second-class citizen" by professionals, not allowed to join in the decision-making for the child, don't receive ongoing training, services, or information that would make "the job" easier etc.

There are many more factors that could be listed above and although many of those elements might be on your list, there are many more things that might not be. Each family...each person...has things in their life that causes stress. Your first task in learning to make things better is to develop a personalized plan to minimize the NEGATIVE effects of stress (Yes, Virginia...there are positive effects). This can be done by going somewhere that you find relaxing and can concentrate on the task at hand. Take a piece of paper (or a notebook) with you and try to identify the things (or people) that cause you to get upset. Write these down and add extra details if there are any. Some of these details might be: the times that you feel stress (certain days, at meal times, etc.), who is there at the time, and what is going on (doesn't mind me, arguing, ignoring me, etc.). This in itself can be harder than you think. Some things will come easily...some will take more thought and insight to identify. Once you get started, you may wish that you had brought the notebook instead of a single piece of paper.

If sitting down and formally trying to come up with a list is too hard for you to do, you might start carrying a notebook (or diary) with you and write the incidents down when they occur. Many times we tend to forget or gloss over things that bother us particularly if we have had an "eventful", busy day. One extra bonus you get with this technique is that writing the items down seems to be therapeutic in itself, particularly if you write down what happened and how you felt about it. It's almost as if the list making activity gives you more control over your life and in fact...it does. Another variation to this technique is to write down the hundreds of things we do "right" in our lives every day. This can be a very positive "eye-opener" for those people who claim that they never do anything right or they never have anything good happen to them.

Another good thing to include with either of the above activities is to try to monitor your physical condition and see if your stomach-aches, headaches, body-aches, muscles tense, or whatever occurs when you are under stress. Many times these are brought on or highly influenced by our emotional state of being. Additionally, these emotions can cause some other symptoms that might not be so obvious...such as changes in blood sugar, blood pressure, lower resistance to infections, colds, etc. So...think about your body. If you get tired more easily when you have to be around someone or do certain tasks, your body may be trying to tell you something.

There are many techniques to combat stress and they can be discovered at the library, by surfing the net, asking for advice from friends and family members, or interacting with that very large extended (but often dysfunctional) family...the talk shows. These resources should be added to your beginning inventory but eventually this list should also become very personal and only include the things that make YOU relax.

Some of the techniques I find interesting are:

Letting your feelings out by: screaming (by yourself), writing a letter to someone who irritates you but don't send it, put your feelings on a tape recorder, or keep a diary.

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Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and Family Division

I recently got a phone call from a foster parent about an upcoming court hearing. She was unable to reach her social worker or supervisor and our receptionist referred her to me. I was able to speak to her and provide her with the information she needed. Afterwards, I thought it might be good for me to write an article in "Jesse's Corner" about this, so here I go!

When your social worker is not here, there is always someone available to respond to your questions or concerns. If it is not an emergency or you do not need an immediate response, I would suggest you wait until your social worker returns to work. If that is not possible then you should talk to the on-call social worker for the unit. We have coverage for staff when they are on vacation, attending training, sick, etc. If it is a planned leave, the social worker will pass a sign up sheet amongst their unit. Unit staff will sign up and cover when your social worker is not here. We expect the on-call social worker to answer any phone calls, handling emergencies, attending court hearings or community meetings on behalf of your social worker. The on-call social worker will follow up as needed and update your social worker when they return. In most cases, they consult with Lisa Roberts, Permanency Unit Supervisor to make sure she is aware of the situation. Social workers also inform our receptionist when they are gone and give a copy of the on-call schedule with them. If you call and cannot reach your social worker, you can press "0" and you will be connected to the operator who can direct your call.

If the social worker doesn't know in advance that they will not be at work ie...sick, and then you can call Lisa Roberts at (262) 548-7271. Lisa will follow up with your concerns. If Lisa is not here, you can press "0" and ask the operator to assist you. The operator will direct your call and connect you with the on-call social worker, their supervisor or the on-call supervisor.

In addition to the on-call social worker the supervisors in my division, Mary Alice Grosser, Jayne Weyer-Smith and Don Daniels sign up for coverage when one of them is gone. If you cannot reach your social worker or their supervisor, you can always press "0" and ask for the on-call supervisor. They will follow up with your concerns as needed.

For after hour emergencies call 211 and they will get you in touch with the on call crisis intervention worker. If it is after 11:30 at night, the staff at the Children's Center will assist you and you can access them by call 211.

As always, we want to be responsive to your needs and I hope this information is helpful to you.

Jesse

Picking Your Battles By Jo Ann Wentzel

Foster kids rarely have just one area where problems exist. Most kids, in fact, have several bad behaviors to correct, issues they must overcome, and goals they must reach. The foster parent sees their job as mender, fixer, or repair person. We are never content to just let these issues resolve themselves and rightly so. We arm ourselves with ideas, solutions, and prayer to battle the various problems.

One thing wrong with this strategy is the fact that we attack on all fronts, instead of focusing on just one enemy at a time. Foster parents must pick their battles carefully. There are two basic reasons that this is best. Number one is the fact that kids can not usually successfully work on a whole array of problems at one time. The second reason is for the sake of the foster parent. You will burn out too quickly if you don't reserve your strength.

But you say, these kids have so many problems. They need so much help. You count off the problems on your fingers, but before you get to your toes, slow down. Try to remember it took many years for these problems to develop. You cannot fix this child by Friday. You will need to pick your battles.

This assessment to decide which war you wage may take a bit of time. It is also hard to do when you still do not know the child well. Until you truly connect with a child, you must rely on first impressions and what you have actually witnessed.

It is necessary to prioritize this child's needs when deciding which behaviors to conquer, and help him meet challenges necessary for a functional life. We developed a system. First, list all the major problems. Put things in perspective, this is usually not going to include things like he does not

make his bed, or he forgets to brush his teeth. If these are this child's most pressing problem, pat yourself on the back, give him a big hug, and be content that you are so lucky. I'm thinking more in terms of items like he is violent toward others, he uses pot, he steals, or he cannot stay in school. You know the kids of issues foster parents deal with every day.

Next, start to prioritize them. I tend to divide them into the following categories.

1. Behaviors, activities, or problems that are dangerous to other's well being.
2. Behaviors, activities, or problems that are dangerous to the foster child's physical well being.
3. Behaviors, activities, or problems that are dangerous to other's mental/emotional well being.
4. Behaviors, activities, or problems that are dangerous to the foster child's mental/emotional well being.
5. Behaviors, activities, or problems that are against the law.
6. Behaviors, activities, or problems that interfere with the foster child's education.
7. Behaviors, activities, or problems that interfere with the running of the household.
8. All other negative behaviors, activities or problems that you need to work on.

Start at the top and work your way down. Work on one problem to its solution before tackling another one. The only time you should break this rule is when you are getting nowhere after months and months of work then focus on another problem for awhile, going back to the first after the new one is solved.

You may see this list differently than others do and change the arrangement of priorities. Even foster parents have pet peeves, pet projects, or their own things that drive them crazy. I remember one foster mom who took really tough kids. The only ones she would refuse were those with blue hair. Drove her crazy. We can laugh about such a silly thing, but if the child is where you can see them, day after day and a little thing sets you off, you will be unable to parent that kid effectively. I believe foster parents should always have the option to decide if a child will fit into their home and lifestyle. There are so many kids out there; we should be able to accommodate most parents. I also believe their requests should be reasonable, blue hair is probably not a real valid excuse, but I can understand it just the same.

I feel any behavior that can lead to death or injury for anyone must be number one on your list. That battle has a high chance of casualties if you do not attack there. One battle at a time, unless the problem will prove to be a small, little skirmish. Kids can work effectively on correcting one behavior. They will be more successful if they believe this is the one thing that will please you (and shut you up). When you approach with a long list in hand, they don't fight, they don't surrender, and they just play dead. They don't hear you or even care what you are saying. It is impossible to redirect them. It is impossible to implement a plan or develop a procedure. They have turned you off, and they will not be part of your little war since they are sure they cannot win. Make it easier on them by giving them one front to battle at a time. Then, everyone wins.

To all foster parents who have taken up arms to battle for our kids, I commend you.

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

October 2, 2008	6-9 PM
October 16, 2008	6-9 PM
November 6, 2008	6-9 PM
November 20, 2008	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.

Stress In The Foster Home—Continued

Try relaxation techniques by meditating, praying, yoga, listening to music, going somewhere by yourself, or communing with nature.

Exercise by walking (slowly and taking in the scenery), undertaking a special restoration or cleaning project, sewing, doing crafts, or "working out" at a gym.

Share yourself by getting a pet, volunteer, doing church work, getting a job, etc.

Rent several funny movies, do something silly...even if you are old like me, you still can find humor in life...if you look for it.

A final part of your personal stress prevention plan is to identify those people around you that can give you support. This support can be in the form of talking, listening, "hanging out" with you, giving advice, etc. These people could be family members, co-workers, other foster parents, social workers, ministers, grocery clerks, the local court jester or village idiot, etc. Again, the key is...whomever makes YOU relax or feel better. This list can be a source of help to you with the day-to-day stress that occurs but also will be helpful at those times when you are under heavy pressure. At those times, your thinking might get a little muddled and it would be helpful to have a resource list of people already available that you can use for help. And even though a lot of people don't want to get involved with the mental health profession...it may be necessary. So you may want to identify resources in the community by talking to others who have used counselors (or whatever) and have gotten good results.

In case you haven't guessed it by now...I confess...I used to be a Boy Scout (SURPRISE!). One thing I remember about scouting (obviously) was the old motto about "being prepared". For the most part I believe the motto is true. I think that most of life's situations for us and our children are made better if we know what to expect and what our options are. However, somewhere along the way we have come to believe that stress is one of those things that just happens to us...that we have no control over it...that we have to suffer our fate, and so on. But I believe that it is possible to soften it's negative effect on us by being actively involved in shaping our future. Review the above and try out parts of it, shape it to your needs and lifestyle, share it with your kids, ask them what they do to reduce stress (they probably can add a lot of good ideas), and see if it doesn't help both of you. And last but not least, always remember two old sayings: If they're not stressed...you're not stressed (and vice versa) and that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". How true they are.

Self Care for Families

Foster and adoptive families do one of the most difficult and essential jobs in our society. They care for children when their birth families are unable or cannot provide that care.

They open their homes and their lives to give children security and love. In addition, foster families work within a complex system of rules and strict procedures while providing a sense of normalcy and safety to the children they take in.

Because of the challenges, some families can reach a point where they feel the task is too difficult and the emotional cost too high.

Following are tips or things to do to prevent caregiver fatigue.

- ★ Honor yourself by acknowledging that this work is hard and if it was easier other families would be adopting and fostering.
- ★ Ask for and seek help when you need it.
- ★ Take Breaks! Respite care is handled in many different ways. It is important for you to "build" your own system of supportive caregivers that can provide care for the children in your care when needed.
- ★ Participate in trainings and conferences. Learn new ways to parent and get support.
- ★ Share experiences with others who foster or have adopted.
- ★ Consider talking to a counselor who is familiar with foster care and adoption issues.
- ★ Realize that placement disruptions occur and forgive yourself if you reach the conclusion that a child in your home may be too difficult for your family.
- ★ Know that you may experience grief and loss when a child goes home, is adopted or moves to another home. Talk to people who will understand the grief.

What Do You Do to Keep Your Emotional Well from Running Dry? By Becky Burmester

Being a foster parent is hard work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. It is wonderful and awful—sometimes at the same time. Friends who are not foster parents cannot understand why we keep on keeping 'on.

Yet without the support of those who understand, we cannot continue to be foster parents or we begin to provide less than the best care possible. This lessening in the quality of the care we provide is unintentional—we simply have a dry emotional well. But it has profound effects on the lives of the children in our care.

After 19 years as foster parents, we recently considered surrendering our license. This was the first time that our well had gone very dry. There had been occasions when we talked about taking a break between placements, but never a time when we felt we just could not do this any longer.

So what was happening that led to our dry well?

We were in the process (still are) of adopting two children and it was not going smoothly. Foster parents sure are emotionally out there once they have decided to adopt! The role becomes totally different emotionally (or at least it has for us).

Add to the situation, a child previously placed with us needed to come back into care. Suddenly we found ourselves caring for three preschoolers! Our licensing agency was undergoing a major reorganization so we were no longer working with the people we'd worked with for ten years. My husband's employer was in the midst of a fight for survival in this strange new economy. We were looking for a new church home (predominately African-American) to reflect the experience of the children we hope to adopt. It is no wonder our well was nearly dry.

Refilling the well happened slowly. We took a week's vacation with all three kids, flying several hundred miles to spend a week at a ski lodge near where our first son is stationed with the Navy. There were no phones and very few distractions. We played and we read and we slept. We shared our stresses with our friends in our Racial Reconciliation Group and in our Covenant Group.

Orphans of the Living, by Jennifer Toth, was one of the books I read that helped fill the well. In its case study format, the reader is drawn into the lives of four children in the social services system. This nonfiction book is one that might be dismissed as far fetched by non-foster parents, but we know better.

Another is *The Lost Children of Wilder*, by Nina Bernstein. This book is a multigenerational recounting of one family's experience with foster care. Through three generations, the reader follows the effects of the child welfare system on one family.

Swings Hanging from Every Tree, edited by Ramona Cunningham is a book of daily inspirations for foster and adoptive parents that I highly recommend. Each entry is only a single page, yet flipping through to read the entry for a specific date or stopping to read because the title caught my eye invariably strengthens my resolve to be a good foster parent.

The Privilege of Youth, by Dave Pelzer, is the latest in the series that began with *A Child Called It*. In my view much of this book is a bit "over the top," but parts are certain to touch any foster parent's heart. We really can make a lasting difference in the life of a child, even if we share in their life for only a short while. Dave was not an easy child to foster, yet foster families made a real difference in his life.

As we continue as foster parents, my husband and I will continue to read and participate in training opportunities like the ones offered by the Foster Parents Association. We know now—more than ever—that our emotional well needs to be replenished constantly if we are to do our best for the children in our care.



Foster Parents are the Best Recruiters

If you refer a friend or family member to us to become licensed and they complete the process we have a gift for you. Please call: Shari at (262)548-7267 with your referrals.