



Foster Care Forum

Waukesha County
Health & Human Services
September 2009



Helping Kids In Care Change Schools From the Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Children who are in care often face educational challenges that require a great deal of attention and support from foster parents. These children who are traumatized by the abuse and neglect that brings them into the system also deal with the trauma of being removed from their homes.

They bring these experiences into the classroom and often find education secondary to their need to deal with the emotional challenges brought about by their life experiences.

Studies show that children with multiple home placements (and thus often in multiple schools), gave a low rate of graduation from high school. Reading levels on average are lower for children in foster care. They need extra support and assistance to succeed in school.

Foster parents are faced with the challenge of supporting these vulnerable children during school transitions. In an ideal world, a child who is placed in a new foster home would have the time to adjust to the new physical setting and neighborhood, get to know the family, and learn the new household routines before entering school. Foster parents would have time to guide their new family members through their personal and educational transition into a new school.

In the real world of foster care, an abrupt transition to a new home is frequently a necessity. This transfer to a new home happens at any time—including during the school year and on days when the foster parents have to work. Often the families and workers don't have the luxury of time to prepare the kids for the experience of going to a new school. They need to be registered and begin school upon placement in new homes, sometimes within the following day of that placement.

Here are some things you can do as a foster parent to make sure that the school transition is the best it can be.

Preparing for school

- Get to know the local schools and their locations if you are not familiar with them. Most foster parents enroll their child in public schools, but you may also choose a private, parochial or charter school if the child's parents and social worker also think that's a good idea.
- If appropriate and approved by the social worker, invite the child's parent to accompany you to the school. Involving the child's parent from the beginning may help the child make a smooth transition and helps build respect.
- Obtain any health forms and immunization records from the child's parent or your social worker as soon as possible. They are required for school registration. You may have to schedule physician, dentist or optometrist visits.
- Work with your social worker to obtain the necessary signature from the parent or legal guardian. Schools vary as to how strict they are about who is able to sign for what activities.
- Learn what forms you can legally sign. Often caseworkers recommend that foster parents cross out "parent or guardian" under the signature line on any form and enter "foster parent" in bold letters with their signature.
- Consult with your caseworker about an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) if the child you foster is in special education. (See Page 3 of this newsletter.)
- Keep copies of all school forms that you sign in a confidential file, as well as any paperwork that you get from the school. Work with the child's parents about signing permission forms and school communications. You can become a mentor for the birth parent, if he or she isn't always very involved with the school system.



Preparing the child

- Practice your name, address and phone number with new children in your home, whether the children are six or 16. Make sure that they have a written copy of your name, address, place of employment, telephone numbers, and any other pertinent information. Put a copy of this information in their backpacks or secure place for younger children where they know they can find the information.
- Take the child with you to the school when you register, whether he is six or 16.
- Show your child the route to school or the bus stop. If possible, consider taking her to school the first day or two or introducing her to the bus driver.
- If possible, introduce your kids to the teacher, the principal and other school staff before the first day.
- Tour the school with the child and familiarize him with his classrooms, locker, gym, library and cafeteria. Some schools arrange a school tour for older children or have another student show them around.
- Get to know the teachers. Introduce yourself and tell them that you are a foster parent. Make sure they have your contact information, including cell phone and e-mail address.
- If children are in special education classes or have other support teachers, get to know those teachers as well. Remember that foster parents cannot sign for any (IEP) forms, although the responsibility is for the school personnel to get the right signature.
- Prepare children for lessons about genealogy and their family history so that they can participate in these lessons in the most comfortable way they can. Share with teachers that these assignments may be difficult for your placement child as well as other children not living with biological families.
- Help children develop an age appropriate story with which they are comfortable so that they can respond to questions others may ask. See the article Children Who Are Adopted and School issues at www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/164/ADOPTED%20CHILD%20GOES%20TO%50SCHOOL_ADOPTED%20CHILD%20GOES%20TO%20SCHOOL.pdf for information about developing life stories.
- Learn what the extracurricular activities are at the school and encourage the children you foster to become active in one or more of these activities.

Working with the School

- Remember that you are an advocate for the child. Work with the school and communicate with them assertively, while also recognizing the constraints the schools have. Remember that teachers have many other children in their classrooms and their time is limited. However, they may be very willing to give special assistance to children when they are aware of their challenging situations.
- Talk to school librarians and suggest books about foster care and foster children.
- Visit the school for open houses and volunteer there, if possible. If there is not enough time to bake for bake sales or make classroom treats, buy some snacks to send with your child. Studies show that when parents are involved in the schools their kids do better.
- Become familiar with county, agency and school district guidelines if children have an IEP. Also see FCARC Tip Sheet, "Working with an IEP" (<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/519/IEP.pdf>).





Jesse's Corner

Jesus Mireles
Manager of the Children and
Family Division

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable summer! As summer is ending, you are probably getting your foster children ready to return school. For some foster children, it is an opportunity to see their old school mates, for others, it may mean attending a new school and adjusting to new students and teachers. As you can imagine, this may be a difficult for some children. To minimize the effect on your foster child, you may want to talk to your social worker, school counselor or teacher to develop a strategy to assist your foster child with the transition. I think it is important that you share as much background information about your foster child's educational background in order to assist school staff in meeting the needs of your foster child. I would like to ensure that all foster children in the most appropriate educational setting for them to succeed. If you need any assistance or feel your foster child could benefit from additional support, please contact the school and/or your social worker. I am sure either one of them can assist you. . In addition, it is important that you become knowledgeable of the resources and support that the school may offer like, counseling, the hot meal program, tutoring, after school program, etc. These supportive services can assist your foster child in being successful in school. As many of you know, we encourage and support school representatives (teachers, school counselors and administrators) to attend any case staffing, team meeting or meeting to share their perspective on how your foster child is doing. We understand that many school representatives are busy and may not have the time to attend a meeting. If that is the case, please encourage them to share their thoughts and opinions by writing a letter or sending a progress report about the successes, challenges and concerns they have about your foster child. We will review any information brought to our attention and respond accordingly. Historically, many of our foster children have been successful in school and that is a direct reflection of the cooperation and collaboration between foster parents, schools and our social work staff. I would like those successes to continue.

Jesse



Please join our team

*Miracles Happen
for the Susan Komen Race for the Cure*

On Sunday, September 27, 2009

*At the Milwaukee Lakefront the Event is a
5K Walk/Run*

*We are doing this race this year to honor:
Amy Hansen's battle with Breast Cancer.
Amy has been a foster parent and a trainer
for Waukesha County for the past five years!*

Questions please call Shari Rather at 262-548-7267.

Helping Kids in Care Change Schools Continued from page 1

- Talk with the teacher or guidance counselor about the behaviors of the children that result from their difficult backgrounds without violating confidentiality. Know the guidelines for confidentiality. It often helps to tell teachers information about what some kids in care experience in general, rather than your child specifically. (i.e. Many children in foster care have had multiple placements, making school and friendships difficult for them.)
- Educate classroom teachers and other staff about foster care. Many may know little about foster care and the obstacles kids in care encounter.

With thoughtful preparation and support, you can help ease the transition to a new school when children come to your home. Talk to the children in your care regularly about their school experiences and maintain good communication with school staff.

Resources:

Casey Executive Bulletin. http://www.svcf.org/downloads/Casey_ExecSummary_NCLB.pdf

National Foster Parent Association

www.nfpainc.org/uploads/Advocating_in_School_for_the_Children_in_Your_Care.pdf

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction bulletin defining the rights of foster parents in working with the Individual Educational Plan of children with disabilities.

<http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/bul00-11-2.html#q71>

Supporting Youth Who Transition out of the Foster Care System at Age 18 From the Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Youth who leave the foster care system at age 18 form a special group in our society. These youth have been legally children of the state and have had difficult childhood experiences leading to many finding the challenge of independence daunting.

If the plan is for the youth in your home to move out on his or her own after turning age 18 or graduating from high school, you and your child should work on a transition plan to help prepare for the move. Here are some things you can do to help youth transitioning to adulthood:

1. Advocate for government agencies and local communities to expand services to these adolescents and support a move for extending foster care until 21 years of age.
2. Begin teaching your children in foster care from an early age about caring for themselves.
 - Teach them about cleaning, cooking and caring for their clothes.
 - Teach them how to shop for groceries, clothes, and household items.
 - Talk about house and car maintenance.
 - Teach them about money, how to save, how to use a checkbook, and how to invest.
 - Talk about insurance, payments and using a bank.
 - Help them navigate the world of dental, medical and mental health care. Teach them to make and keep appointments and how to manage the necessary follow-up.
3. Talk about the importance of education and what is needed for different kinds of work. Talk about college placement tests; encourage them to go to technical college and four year college fairs to learn about careers. Talk about your own work.
4. Elicit the help of school counselors, community agencies and other resources in these tasks. Make sure that your foster child knows these agencies and community resources and how to access them.
5. Help your youth maintain a life book with legal, birth and family history facts, dates and information. Have them include important documents such as their birth certificate and social security card. Make copies of these if you can in case they lose them.
6. Few of us turned 18 and negotiated adulthood alone without much trial and many errors. Remember that when dealing with these young persons and add to that the life history that makes uneven footing for transitioning into adult roles.
7. Most important: Remember that the first signifier of success for youth who age out is a strong relationship that he or she has with a supportive adult. Be available if you can. If that is not possible, help the youth identify adults whom they trust and teach them how to maintain that relationship.

Fostering a Child with an IEP From the Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Many children who are fostered experience difficulties in school. Traumatized by the abuse and neglect which brought about their placement in foster care, along with the trauma of being removed from their families, most of these children have difficulty directing their attention and energies to learning in school.

In addition, frequent transfers from school to school and multiple moves may add further strain to the burden these children carry. Handling the emotional and developmental problems which are part of their young lives does not make school a primary focus for many of these children. These vulnerable children require special educational provisions for many of them to progress in school.

By law, children have a right to special educational services from the ages of 3 years old up to 21 years old or not yet graduated from high school if they are affected by disabilities based on emotional, learning, or physical disabilities. These disabilities are categorized as:

- Cognitive disabilities (CD)
- Hearing impairments (HI)
- Speech and language impairments (SL)
- Visual impairments (VI)
- Emotional behavioral disability (EBD)
- Orthopedic impairments (OI)
- Autism
- Traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Specific learning disabilities (SLD)
- Other health impairments (OHI)
- Significant developmental delay (SDD)



Some children require physical or occupational rehabilitation to meet their educational goals. Others require special instruction provided by specially trained cognitive learning disabilities teachers (CD) or emotional behavioral disabilities teachers (EDB) and support staff. They may require special educational settings and equipment.

When a child has such disabilities, schools are required by law to create an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), specific to that child. This plan is based on an evaluation conducted by the school to determine what disabilities the child has and which services must be in place to help a child meet individual educational goals.

The IEP is developed by a team of people, which may include teachers, school guidance counselors, special education directors, social workers, school nurses, administrators, and school psychologists.

Others who should be involved include: people from supporting agencies, foster parents, involved relatives, and the child when possible, as long as there is permission of the birth parent or the person who has been granted signing authority by the school to act in place of the parent.

An in-depth evaluation is conducted of the child prior to this meeting. Specific plans of action are then proposed to help the child meet defined educational goals.

As part of the assessment, parents may be asked for input that is often invaluable to the total assessment. You may be asked to complete a home assessment or inventory to describe the child's behaviors and abilities.

However, it is important to know that foster parents are not a part of the IEP team unless the birth parent gives written permission for the foster parents to be part of the team.

In rare circumstances, if foster parents meet the specific criteria specified in Wisconsin DPI Bulletin 00.11 (<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/sped/bul00-11.htm>), they may also meet the legal guidelines for participation as a member of the team. Also, in some circumstances, foster parents may be brought into the IEP meeting as an advocate if the birth parent agrees. Consult with your social worker for further clarification.

Wisconsin schools must follow strict Wisconsin and federal education laws and regulations in creating these educational plans and in implementing them. These regulations are created to protect the educational rights of all children to an education that accommodates their individual needs and abilities.

As a foster parent, it is important for you to have complete and detailed information about the educational rights of the children you foster and the process for obtaining appropriate education and special educational services.

You may request an evaluation for a child if you suspect that he or she has a disability which affects his or her ability to be successful in school. Connect to this link for further information about making that request: <http://www.specialed.us/pl-07/pl07-index.html>. In all cases, foster parents must talk to the social worker before making the referral so that the child's parent is

informed.

As a foster parent, it makes good sense to stay in contact with the teachers and others at school. But if the child you foster has an IEP and is involved in special educational services, it's even more important to stay in good communication with the child's teachers, the special education teachers and aides, guidance counselors, school social worker, administration and anyone else who is involved regularly with the child.

If your child in care has been identified as having an IEP and has been in special education in a previous school prior to a new placement, an evaluation is given to the new foster parents by the social worker. It is the responsibility of the new school to request the records. If there is an IEP, the law mandates continuity of special educational services for the child by the new school.

Complex laws and regulations govern the IEP process. However, there are excellent resources at the state and national level to help foster parents understand this process. Many can be accessed through our center. These excellent resources help foster parents navigate through the complexities of the assessment and IEP process.

One excellent resource is the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & support, Inc. or FACETS. Their staff can be reached, toll free at 1-877-374-4677, or at: <http://www.facets.org>.

Another great resource is an online guide, A Guide to Special Education Advocacy for Resource Families, from the Casey Family Foundation www.svcf.org/downloads/Casey_ExecSummary_NCLB.pdf.

Know that you are an important link in meeting the special educational needs of the children you foster. Your daily support and encouragement can make all the difference in the educational achievement of these vulnerable children.

Making the Transition from Foster Care to College

For foster children to succeed in higher education, they need information, encouragement, and ideally an advocate who concentrates on their schooling. These recommendations came from three experts — a college sophomore named James who went through foster care and two high school seniors, Helen and Shannon, who are preparing to make the transition from foster care to college.

Studies show that fewer than half of foster children graduate high school, only 38 percent find a job within 18 months after leaving the system and only one in eight graduates from a four-year college. The panelists recommended the following strategies for foster children:

- **Offer encouragement to pursue education.** Foster parents must consider education vital, and caseworkers must promote higher education. All three students said they experienced some encouragement, but were discouraged by guidance counselors who suggested they seek a G.E.D. instead of a high school diploma and by foster parents who offered tepid support for their education. "Once the student knows the importance of education, they'll go get it," James said. When he suggested having caseworkers follow each foster child's education—a kind of "educational mentor" - Helen said, "That would be one of the best gifts a foster kid could have." She added: "To have one person with me would help me 10,000 times more than having a huge group to support me."
- **Provide information about loans, grants and scholarships.** As Shannon pointed out, "I can't really go anywhere without money." All three students said they were never made aware of many potential sources of funding. Sandy Lieber-Hale, major gifts officer for The Villages, Indiana's largest child-welfare agency, found this comment illuminating. "I just assume that information is out there, and kids access it," Lieber-Hale said. "Well, that information might be sitting on a counselor's table or in the counseling office, but unless there's going to be a class or a person designated to get that information to kids, they're not going to get it."
- **Give support while kids are in school.** James said while he hears his roommate getting calls from family, "I don't get calls like that." "If you want to help people," James added, "you have to do more than just your job."

The foster kids' comments resonated with their audience. "We haven't thought globally enough about what these young people need as human beings," said Maria Garin Jones of the Child Welfare League of America. "In order to be successful, in order to be happy and fulfilled, and a contributing member of society, you have to be connected to people who care about you. That's a basic right, I think, of all people."

"We haven't focused on that for young people in foster care. But I think that's changing. I think people are recognizing that those are the things that are really important, and education is emerging as one of those things we focus on. Without adequate education, without the access to postsecondary education, young people come out of foster care not able to maximize their potential."

September 2009 Foster Parent Spotlight

Robin & Mark Boever



Mark is from St. Cloud, MN and Robin from Waukesha. Currently they live in Waukesha. They met at a Bible study at Elmbrook Church (Mark was the leader of it). They

have been married for 6 years. They do not have any children of their own. Mark works for MAB Mortgage (1 year) and Robin works for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (16 years). For support, Mark and Robin look to each other, Christian friends, parents and mentors. Some of the activities they enjoy are traveling to various parts of the world when they can afford it (Italy, Germany, Denmark, etc), going to movies, Bible study, ministries, working out, hiking and reading.

Mark and Robin first considered foreign adoption, but later decided to become foster parents. They have had 5 placement since being licensed, and currently have 2 placements for respite on the week-ends. "It has been rewarding overall." Mark and Robin have had attended all the trainings needed to become licensed and are planning to attend training this fall. The trainings have helped them prepare to be foster parents and provides some useful background information so they are able to better understand the foster children. They feel the most rewarding part of being foster parents has been "making a difference in the children's lives." "The experience has also helped us learn more about ourselves."

"Scheduling visits has sometimes been challenging." Since Mark and Robin only do respite foster care, they do not get a

chance to get to know the kids as well as they would like to. Their advice to all other foster parents is "try to be patient, do not let the kids take charge (remember you are the parent and they are the child) and do fun things with them so that they can start building a collection of happy memories."



Save the Date
Boundaries & Ethics Training
for Foster Parents
 October 24, 2009
 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 More Information to Come!

Pre-Placement Training for Prospective Foster Parents

September 3, 2009	6-9 PM
September 17, 2009	6-9 PM
October 1, 2009	6-9 PM
October 15, 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.

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

July 2009 Placements

Regular Foster Care:
44 Children
0 Admitted
3 Discharged

Treatment Foster Care:
16 Children
1 Admitted
0 Discharged

Group Homes:
5 Children
1 Admitted
0 Discharged

Residential Care Facilities:
5 Children
0 Admitted
1 Discharged

Relative Placements:
28 Children
2 Admitted
0 Discharged

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.