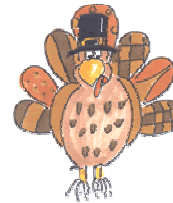




Connections

November



La Crosse County
Human Services

Volume 8, Issue 11
2006

Welcome New Foster Parents

Submitted by Will Herber



Please welcome Tina Bennett to the foster care community. Tina lives near "Ten Mile" hill on the far south side of La Crosse. She has a very friendly cat that loves to get attention from visitors to the home. She is an educator for the Sparta school district but also does substitute teaching for the La Crosse school district. Tina hopes to be able to provide ongoing care to school age children but she is particularly interested in caring for teenagers. Tina's main interest as an educator is working with high school students. Tina enjoys being active outdoors when this is possible with her busy schedule. Tina would also enjoy providing respite to other foster parents as she gets familiar with the world of foster care. She will be taking the PACE classes this fall so if you happen to see her there or at other foster care events

please take the time to introduce yourselves to her.

Please welcome Tanya and Norval Greenwold to the foster care community. The Greenwolds live in Holmen, Wisconsin with their two children. The family also has a dog and several hermit crabs. The family comes to the foster care community with the hope that they will be able to provide an ongoing home to school age children around the age of their daughters. The family enjoys camping during the summer and many other outdoor activities. Tanya is a school counselor in the La Crosse school district so some of you may already know her through your children. The family looks forward to sharing their home with another child. The parents will be taking PACE in the fall of 2006 so if you should happen to see them at this training or another foster care event please welcome them.

Please welcome Donna and Jay Hansen to the foster care community. The Hansens live in rural Bangor, Wisconsin with their four children. They have recently moved to this area from the state of Georgia where Jay was stationed at Fort Benning. The family also has a dog that loves to play "fetch" and a huge rabbit. There are a few cats that like to hang around outside but they have plans on living inside the house soon and the family is raising sheep on their land. The Hansens have a large home with several bedrooms and they hope to be able to take in a sibling group for ongoing foster care. The Hansens have also indicated a desire to be concurrent planning foster parents and are willing to adopt children that come into their home. The Hansens are attending PACE this fall so if you happen to see them there or at some other foster care training or event please welcome them to our great community of child foster care parents.

Mark Your Calendar!

Foster Parent Training – Concurrent Planning

Tuesday, November 14th 5:30—7:30pm

Administration building basement auditorium

Join us for a presentation by Megan DeVore and Tracy Puent
on TPR and the legal aspects.



Upcoming Workshops at Family Resources, 1500 Green Bay St.

For more information or to register, call 784-8125. Child care may be provided.

Make a Shopping List—Check it Twice!

Thursday, November 16th from 6:30-8:00pm

An informal discussion about what toys and materials work best and why. Enjoy some holiday treats as you browse through the stash of early childhood catalogues. Your personal order can then be placed at home, online or by phone.

Winter Family Traditions

Thursday, December 7th from 6:30-8:00pm

Focus on sharing nature with your children and the joy of being outside in the winter together. See how brain research supports this, why it is important and how to make it easy. Holiday simplicity and creating natural family traditions will be shared.

Respite Providers

As you know, all La Crosse County licensed foster homes can provide respite care to other foster homes within our system. La Crosse County Human Services also licenses families to provide respite care for licensed foster homes. Here are two homes that are currently looking to provide respite services:

Todd and Shelby Buchanan live on French Island and are available on weekends to provide respite for younger children, male or female (preferably without severe behavioral issues as they have two young sons.) (608)796-0577

Julie Beebe and Rhonda Bowlin live in Onalaska with their 5 children. They were recently licensed and are very interested in providing respite care to foster children. (608)780-6055 or (608)780-6056

Foster parents, please let your Alternate Care Social Worker know if you are available to provide respite including your preferences of age, gender, developmental/cognitive issues, and available times (weekends or weekdays). If you are a licensed respite provider and would like more foster parents to know about your availability, contact Sharon McHugh at (608)785-6056.



BY CYNTHIA STOCKER

In the last 10 years, there has been a substantial increase in the adoption of children from foster homes. Many wonderful families have realized that stepping up to the plate and offering their homes as permanent placements through adoption removes children from the uncertainty of life in the foster care system.

This selfless act of adoption has also given rise to a phenomenon: the “disrupted” adoption. This is the situation that occurs when a well-meaning family is unable to meet the “special needs” of the child or children they choose to adopt, sending them back into the foster care system. These special needs can be as basic as the effects of being in the foster system at an older age or as complex as emotional barriers to attaching to others.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than 51,000 children are placed from foster care into adoptive homes yearly. For children of any age with “special needs” placed for adoption, the disruption rate is 14.3 percent. That’s more than 7,000 children each year for whom an attempted adoption fails and the promise of permanent placement is broken. Obviously no loving adult would ever want a foster child to have a failed adoption. The ramifications of a failed adoption can be far worse for the child than continued foster care. So with that in mind, how does a loving prospective adoptive parent help prevent such a disaster from ever occurring?

Get Training: In this case, knowledge is power. Even if you have raised children before, realize that children adopted from foster care have different issues than birth or stepchildren. Arming yourself with knowledge can be your most useful tool.

Most states require prospective adoptive families to complete courses that address the general needs of these children. Take more than the required courses. Look online at waiting children’s pictures and bulletins to become familiar with what the issues are. Decide which issues and diagnoses you feel you could handle. Then seek out trainings specific to those issues. If you can’t find training, buy books. You can never be too educated.

Listen Carefully: One of the biggest challenges potential adoptive parents face is not getting caught up in how adorable these children are and how sad their story is. It’s natural to focus on the impish, dimpled grin of a 6-year-old girl. But if you don’t understand the special needs her life has generated and how they will change your life, then you are laying the groundwork for a potential disrupted adoption and the biggest failure she will have to endure in her life.

Read the child’s bulletin. Talk to the caseworker, therapist, foster parent, teacher, and anyone else who has worked with the child. Ask for diagnostic information on the child’s physical, emotional, and mental health. Find out what it’s like to spend every day with a child who has the same diagnosis or set of behaviors. Think about how it could impact your lifestyle and current family makeup. It’s natural to look for someone to tell you the problems will disappear in a stable home environment, but it’s also important to listen to what the professionals in the child’s life are saying.

The chore of finding out this information, understanding it, and deciding how to proceed can feel overwhelming. I recommend adoptive families access services through an adoption consultant. An adoption

consultant is a professional who has experience working with private and public adoption agencies and can assist in locating and matching children with adoptive families. They also assist adoptive families in accessing services and navigating the systems.

Consider Your Needs: If you’ve parented before, you already know children do not meet the needs of adults in their lives; it’s vice versa. Do an inventory of your lifestyle. Decide what you could realistically give up and what you need to be a content, healthy, parent. For example, one family contacted me, interested in an 8-year-old boy with extreme attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He had serious issues with going to bed at night. After speaking with the potential family, I realized their nightly bedtime ritual included two hours where they enjoyed reading novels in bed prior to turning out the lights. This was something valuable to unwind, but it would be a serious problem for this boy. Though they were in love with his curly mop top, there was no doubt this would not be a good match for either party.

Get Counseling: Talk with a therapist who understands adoption issues before adopting a child. People adopt for many reasons. Some of them are not conducive to raising children.

A cute couple called me several years ago interested in a sibling group of two. They had a beautiful home, a good income, and a solid nine-year marriage. On the outside, they seemed like perfect parents. This couple had never parented before, were infertile, and felt their biological clocks ticking. After talking with the couple several times, a prevailing theme arose: All their friends were having babies.

(continued on next page)

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I advised the couple to get counseling to examine the reasons they wanted to adopt at the time. Two months after getting counseling, the woman called me back and thanked me. She said she realized her desire to have children was not because she wanted to parent, but she had started to feel alienated from her peer group because she did not have children. She realized it was not the time in their lives to adopt.

Six years later the same couple called and said they adopted a sibling group of three. They told me they were so glad they waited because the intervening years allowed them to mature enough to be successful adoptive parents of three foster children. They did not believe their adoption would have been successful if they had adopted earlier.

Remember the Children: If you already have children, remember their needs too. Include them in discussions about adoption and how each of them may be affected by a new member joining their family. Talk to them about sleeping arrangements, chores, and where they will sit in the car. Those issues don't always seem important to adults, but they feel life threatening to children. Remember, as life-changing as raising another child will be for you, it's equally life-altering for children already in the home. It can threaten their everyday sense of security. Make sure they know you are not trying to replace them. Build in time to spend alone with each child and make each one a priority.

Circle the Wagons: Join a support group for adoptive families. Many of these support groups are offered through adoption agencies. A good adoptive agency should offer a group for children while the parents are in session. Some also offer mentor adoptive parents, experienced adoptive families assigned to novice families to offer advice and support.

Make a commitment to attend your group at least monthly. Make it a family event. Start attending prior to the placement of your child so you can get a feel for the makeup of the group and hear stories about raising foster children. Start making your connections before your child arrives so that support systems are already in place.

Get Hands on Experience:

Whenever possible, I strongly recommend you get hands-on experience with foster children, especially if you've never had children. Contact local agencies and offer to become a respite or foster care provider. People often shy away from this, feeling they will not be able to cope with loss if the child has to return home. The reality is that parenting is full of rewards and losses. Parents have to be able to deal with the feelings associated with loss if they are to be effective parents, particularly when choosing to adopt special needs children. Not only that, but the only real way to know what it feels like to deal day in and day out with the issues that arise from parenting a foster child is to experience it firsthand.

Rome Wasn't Built in a Day: Foster children require a great deal of patience. Depending on their ability level and needs, changes in behavior could be a long time coming. Changes should be expected in baby steps, not leaps and bounds.

I'll never forget a family who adopted a 6-year-old girl with enuresis, or bedwetting. When she was placed in the home, this child had at least three toileting accidents a day and was wet every night. After six months, the adoptive mom called to tell me that the girl had only been wet twice that week during the day. It would take another year and a half before she was dry every day and another two years before she stopped wetting at night. But she did eventually stop having accidents altogether.

As you consider adopting, know that your child's behavior will not be personal. Often, it has developed as a means of controlling the environment in a world in which he or she has had no power. While maladaptive, it was the only coping skill the child had. After years of using any skill to survive, it will take far more than a week to change it. Patience is a must for adoptive parents.

Relax: Adopting a foster child can be a great challenge, but it can also bring immense rewards. Typically, adoptive families experience much frustration, loss, and exhaustion. But, they also reap benefits that cannot be measured. Sitting with your child on a rainy day, cuddling in a chair, explaining to those adoring eyes why the sun goes away at night and comes back every day, teaching him or her to ride a two-wheeler, and baking a 7-year-old's first birthday cake are life-altering, priceless experiences. These matchless opportunities can be yours through adoption. If you go into it with your eyes open and your mind prepared, great rewards can truly be yours.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Cynthia Stocker was a social worker for the state of Oregon from 1993 to 1995. She was one of only two social workers in the state specializing in recruiting adoptive homes for foster children. In addition to recruiting for those homes, she prepared the children for adoption, transitioned them to their placement, which was often out of state and followed up with after-placement services. Currently, she works as an adoption consultant and has a Web site at www.adoptionconnections.net.

Source: *Fostering Families Today*, July/August 2005



Quick and Easy Phonics for Families

By: Lee Tobin McClain, PH.D.

Studies show the phonemic awareness--knowing the sounds of letters and letter combinations, and knowing that words are made up of distinct sounds---is an important factor in reading success. If a child's history includes breaks in schooling or a chaotic home environment, he or she may have missed out on phonics skills and phonemic awareness, making reading difficult. Here are some word and sound games you can play with kids of various ages, even while your hands are busy running a home or running kids around.

"Bet You Can't Spell..."

If you're driving, challenge your kids to a game of "Spell It." Start with a word you know they can spell, "cat" or "dog" or their name. Play up how you're sure you'll stump them: "I bet you can't spell..." when they've spelled it correctly, express surprise and admiration, say you'll stump them next time, and then say, "your turn." Now it's their turn to challenge you, and kids will often come up with long words or phrases---or if you're driving, impossible car names--- for you to spell.

As you take your turn spelling a word, show how you sound it out. "Let's see: Dodge Caravan. Dodge starts with D-D-D, that's D, then ah-ah-ah, that's O." As you spell, you're illustrating the way strong readers sound out a word.

Make sure the first few words you ask your child to spell are fairly easy, and praise efforts just as much as results. If you can build confidence and practice a couple of new sounds each time you play, your child's skills will improve.

Phonetic I Spy

This one's easy: "I spy something that starts with B-b-b." "I spy something white that ends with "th."

Rhyming Games

The ability to hear rhymes correlates with being able to decode words. If your kids in care missed out on learning nursery rhymes, you can help them catch up with simple rhyming games. "What holds a drink and rhymes with "up?" "What goes on your foot and rhymes with "who?"

You can make a game out of proverbial expressions, too. For example, start with the old saying, "Married in black, you'll wish yourself back." Then add: "married in pink ..." and trail off.

"You'll always stink! Crows the young child.

Match the questions to your child's age and interests, and give him or her a chance to stump you, too. Bonus: creativity practice and a stronger bond between you.

Kitchen Messages

You probably already have magnetic ABCs decorating your fridge. Two sets are better than one so you'll have plenty of spare letters. Their uses are wide:

"Go get me the 'b-b-b' letter" fostering letter recognition;

"Spell dog for me: d-d-d, ah-ah-ah-, g-g-g," giving practice at separating letter sounds;

"Show Janey how to spell 'cat,' would you?" allowing an older child a chance to practice sounding out simpler words.

If you give each child a special place on the fridge, you can leave messages appropriate to his or her reading level. Even a teen may appreciate a "love you" or "good luck" message. Younger kids like jokes and may run eagerly to their spot to sound one out.

Lunch box or back pack notes can have a similar, motivating effect on kids who crave attention from adults. Some will brag to friends about an "I love you" note and others will hide it shyly, but most kids appreciate the effort and thought...and will put effort of their own into sounding out the words.

Small Daily Doses

The good thing about all of these games is that they offer brief, daily practice with sounding out words. Doing one per day won't take much time, but the effect will be long-lasting.



About the Author: Lee Tobin McClain, Ph.D. directs the Master of Arts in Writing Popular fiction at Seton Hill University and is the author of three novels featuring teens in foster care: "My Loco Life," "My Abnormal Life" and "My Alternate Life."

This article is taken from Fostering Families Today, September/October Issue 2006.

What Do You Mean By

Acronyms or terms you may hear in reference to foster children and their involvement with social services or the juvenile justice system.



GAL: Guardian ad Litem. An attorney appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child age 10 or under, and in some cases, for juveniles older than age 10 whose circumstances suggest that such representation is necessary.

CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate. A specially trained volunteer who is appointed by a judge to provide information to the courts about the best interests of a child.

November is National Adoption Month

Check out this list of famous adoptees:

Mark Acre - Baseball player
Louisa May Alcott - Author of *Little Women*
Aristotle - Greek Philosopher
Halle Berry - Actress
Bill Clinton - former President
Charles Dickens - Author
Gerald Ford - former President
Scott Hamilton - Figure skater
Faith Hill - Singer
Jesse Jackson - Civil Rights Leader
Steven Jobs - Apple Computer Co-founder & Pixar Owner
John Lennon - Musician
Nelson Mandela - President of South Africa
Marilyn Monroe - Actress
Tim McGraw - Singer
Alonzo Mourning - Basketball player
Edgar Allen Poe - Poet and Writer
Nancy Reagan - Actress & First Lady of the United States
Dave Thomas - Founder of Wendy's Restaurants
Mark Twain - Writer
Shania Twain - Singer
Mike Tyson - Boxer



November 11th is Veterans Day...

... a day set aside to thank and honor all those who served honorably in the military - in wartime or peacetime.



Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Looking for information on Foster Care or Adoption? Visit us at our webpage:

www.wifostercareandadoption.org
or you may feel free to contact the resource center at our toll free number: 1-800-947-8074

or via email:

info@wifostercareandadoption.org

We welcome your feedback! If you have comments or suggestions for upcoming issues, please write, call or email Sharon McHugh at:

300 N. 4th St., La Crosse WI 54602

(608)785-6056

mchugh.sharon@co.la-crosse.wi.us



Salt Dough Leaf Magnets

What You Do:

1. Preheat the oven to 250 degrees F.
2. Mix together, salt, flour, and water until a dough is formed.
3. Knead the dough on a floured surface until the mixture is elastic and smooth. If dough is too sticky, sprinkle with flour, continue to do so until stickiness is gone. Do not add too much flour, this will dry out the dough and will cause it to crack before you get a chance to bake it.
4. Roll out the dough to about ¼" thick with a rolling pin that has been dusted with flour.
5. Use different sized cookie cutters to create as many shapes and sizes of leaves that you want.
6. For smaller children, use a single shape to make it easier at painting time. For older children, you can double up and even triple some of the leaves for a 3D affect as we did (see photo).
7. If desired, use the toothpick to draw lines in the leaves.
8. Place all leaves onto an ungreased cookie sheet and place into the preheated oven.
9. Bake for 2 hours.
10. Remove from oven and allow to cool completely.
11. Paint with acrylic paints and spray finished leaves with acrylic sealer.
12. Hot glue a round magnet to the back of each leaf and hang on the fridge!



What You Need:

- Leaf-shaped cookie cutters
- Acrylic paint in red, yellow, green, orange and brown
- Paintbrush
- Toothpick
- Acrylic spray sealer, matte
- ½" round magnets
- Hot glue gun

Salt Dough Recipe (not edible):

- ½ cup salt
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- ½ cup water

Thanksgiving Treats Hidden Picture



Can you find all of
the hidden
Thanksgiving treats?

one fork
three pumpkins
one milk carton
three corn cobs
two apples
one spoon
two Pilgrim hats
three turkeys
two loaves of bread

fostering perspectives

Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services and the NC Family and Children's Resource Program



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Thank You

by Kenneth Harding Thomas

Thank you for the helping hand in my time of need.

Thank you for pretending my faults you do not see.

Thank you for understanding the darkness in my soul.

Thank you for your patience as you lead me toward my goal.

Sorrow's hand was heavy when laid upon my life.

It carried with it guilt and fear; anger, stress, and strife.

Your loving words and gentle ways foster the strength I need

To face life each day anyway and still feel I can succeed.

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