



Connections

August

La Crosse County
Human Services
Dept.

Volume 9, Issue 8
2007

Preparing Foster Youth for Court

By Jerry Foxhoven

A sea of change has begun in the nation's dependency court systems. In more and more courtrooms around the country, youth are being called upon to attend and participate in their own court hearings. At a "Conference on Representing Children in Families" at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas in January 2006, some of the most important recommendations included that "children should have a right to attend and participate in hearings affecting them."

The American Bar Association Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing a Child in Abuse and Neglect Cases state: "In most circumstances, the child should be present at significant court hearings." Youth groups across the country, like the Elevate2Inspire group, are speaking out and demanding that foster youth be a part of the court process. Judges are reporting that youth participation enhances the decision-making process. What should have been obvious from the

beginning is now just becoming accepted. It is fundamental that youth should be involved in the court decisions about their lives.

Because of the growing trend, it is important for foster parents to prepare the youth in their care for court participation. Before any foster parent can effectively prepare a youth for court, the foster parent must recognize the importance of youth participation in the court process. The most frequent excuses for leaving youth out of the court process are rarely valid. Some argue that it is not in the child's best interest to miss school to go to court. No one questions the wisdom of taking a youth out of school for an appointment to have braces adjusted. Who could possibly think that straight teeth are more important to a youth than placement decisions for long-term permanency plans?

A second common excuse is that the youth should not hear reports of the failures of their parents. In most cases, youth are already well aware of the problems, including drugs, alcohol or other

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Mark Your Calendar!

Generalized Foster Parent Trainings

Tuesdays, 6:00-8:00pm. Human Services Building Basement Auditorium

September 11, 2007 Topic To Be Announced

November 13, 2007 Topic To Be Announced

PACE Schedule - Fall 2007

12-week cycle on Wednesday evenings 5:30-8:30 pm starting on September 19th, 2007 and ending December 12th, 2007 (break on October 31st). Classes will be held in the basement auditorium of the Administrative Center (this is a different location than normal). Trainers are Sarah Koenen and Rita Wolcott.

6-week cycle on Saturdays 9:00am-3:30pm starting on October 6th, 2007 and ending November 17th, 2007 (break on October 27th). Classes will be held in the basement auditorium of the Human Services building except for the November 10th class which will be in the Administrative building basement auditorium. Two sessions will be covered each Saturday with a 30-minute lunch which is provided. Trainers are Nissa Knutson, Tracy Puent, and Kathy Lysaker.

Please call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834 to sign up for either of these PACE cycles or for make-up classes.

Other Training Opportunities

Upcoming Workshops at Family Resources, 1500 Green Bay St.

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



Thursday, August 23, 12:00-3:00pm Stewards of Children

Nationally acclaimed training that educates adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Thursday, September 20, 6:30-8:00pm ADHD-Naturally

Listen to and explore some ways to treat and prevent ADD/ADHD naturally. Presented by Dr. Steven P. Czys, CSCS.

Special Events

Thursday, Sept. 20, Social hour begins at 5:30 Foster Parent Banquet

Drugan's

Thursday, Oct. 4, 7:00pm

Torchlight Parade

La Crosse

A minimum of 4 families need to sign up to participate this year. Please call Rhonda (789-4834) if you're interested!

Thursday, Oct. 25, 5:00-8:00pm

Harvest of Thanks

Roncalli Newman Center, 1732 State St.



Welcome New Foster Parents

Please welcome Katherine Wisland to our foster care community. Kate lives on the north side of La Crosse and has recently been authorized to provide respite care to children in our foster homes. Kate enjoys quiet times at home playing board games or watching movies. She also enjoys going to parks with children or going swimming. Kate has completed PACE training and is also planning on taking training to explore crisis respite. Kate has a couple of dogs and a couple of cats that live in the home with her so kids coming to the home should enjoy animals. If you should see Kate at any of the up and coming foster care events or trainings please welcome her.

Please welcome Amy and Kermit Murray to the foster care community. The family lives in Holmen with their son. The family enjoys going for walks, watching movies, or doing some type of activity outside. They will occasionally spend time at her sister's (Teri Roberts) home to enjoy the swimming pool during the summer months. The family is looking to provide care for children ages 0 to 12 years. They would like to gain more experience in foster care by providing respite to foster children of various ages. The couple will be attending the pre service (PACE) training within the next year and they are looking to connect with other foster licensed foster parents. If you meet them at future trainings or foster care events be sure to welcome this new foster care family.

Please welcome Tina and Todd Seefeldt to our foster care community. Tina and Todd live in West Salem with their three children. Both Tina and Todd have experience in providing care to children with high level special needs. They are hoping to care for children in their home that are under the age of 7 years. Both Tina and Todd enjoy doing arts and crafts with their children, attending festivals, going to the zoo and other parks. They also enjoy going hiking, camping, and going on long drives together. They will be attending the pre service training (PACE) this fall and they will be looking to connect with other foster parents in the community to develop their support network. If you should meet this couple at a future training or foster care event please welcome them into the ranks of the everyday heroes.



Pass the word on!

Word of mouth is one of the most effective foster recruitment tools. If you know anyone who may be interested in being a foster parent please refer them to our department. Orientation sessions for those who'd like to learn more about foster care are held the first Monday of every month from 6:00 - 7:00PM. Those interested in attending should call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834 to sign up.

WANTED: FOSTER PARENTS

Must have broad shoulders, strong enough to carry the weight of the world, yet gentle enough to rock a sleeping child.

Remember that La Crosse County has a **Recruitment Incentive Program** and that any existing foster parent that recruits a new foster family will receive a \$50 cash bonus! The cash bonus will be paid after the new home completes the licensing process and accepts a placement. Payment request forms can be obtained from Rhonda Rude.

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issues that led to the removal in the first place. It is healthy for the youth to be aware of the successes as well as the failures of the parents. This helps the youth have a more realistic view of future options and to recognize that the youth is not to be blamed for continued placement.

Most importantly, having a role in the decision-making process of his or her life empowers the youth to take a hand in the fashioning a successful future.

Once the foster parent understands the importance of youth involvement in the court process, the rest is easy. The first step in preparing a youth for court is to ensure that the youth clearly understands that he or she is entitled, not required, to participate. The youth should be told the date of the hearing well in advance to allow plenty of time for deliberation about the decision to participate. Of course, if the youth has never been to court before, there may be a hesitation for no other reason than a lack of understanding of the right to participate.

Encourage the youth to attend and participate in the hearing and explain how important it is for the court to hear directly from him or her rather than to only hear what others have to say. Do not assume that, because a youth elects not to attend one court hearing, he or she does not want to attend any future hearings. The same discussion about the youth's right to participate should be conducted before each hearing.

Everyone is nervous and uncomfortable in unfamiliar settings, and courtroom settings can be

unsettling to non-lawyers. It is helpful to take a tour of the courthouse with the youth before the first court appearance to familiarize him or her with the setting. If possible, you should even show the youth the courtroom where the hearing will occur. It is often helpful to have the youth's guardian ad litem, attorney or CASA participate in the courthouse tour.

While judges cannot talk to you, the youth, or the guardian ad litem about a particular case, most judges are open to being introduced to youth in an informal setting. When the youth is introduced to the judge, fears will normally quickly subside. Knowing what the courthouse and courtroom look like and having met the judge, most youth are eager to start being involved in the case.

It is important to dispel any misunderstandings that the youth may have about going to court, and this can only be done if there is a frank discussion with the youth about any fears or concerns that the youth may experience. It is often difficult for adults to understand the misunderstandings that young people may have because of television or other outside factors. One youth explained that, based upon television, she had the belief that, whenever there was a court hearing, someone went to jail. Since she did not want either herself or her parents to go to jail, she was afraid of going to court. Identifying these misconceptions and correcting them can completely dispel the fears and concerns that a youth may have before going to court.

Like anyone else, youth need to know what is expected to happen at the court hearing well in advance of the hearing. You should explain what type of hearing is scheduled and what

issues are before the court. If you are not sure about this, you should involve the attorney, guardian ad litem or CASA in this discussion. Most youth have watched enough television to be aware of the general rules of court: dress appropriately, stand when the judge enters, wait to be called upon before talking, and be dignified and respectful. A short discussion about these will suffice.

Most importantly, emphasize that the court needs to hear from the youth. Tell the youth that this is his or her chance to tell the judge what he or she wants to happen in his or her life. It is also important to emphasize to the youth that the judge makes the decisions in the case and that neither the youth nor any of the lawyers or parties are called upon to do so.

Go with the youth to the court hearing. Familiarity is important to dispel fears and apprehension and, because the foster parent is the person who spends the most time with the youth, attendance by the foster parents will allow the youth to relax. Everyone likes to have a safety valve "just in case" and you can provide that mechanism to your foster youth in many ways. Your foster youth will be more confident and relaxed with you sitting within reach during the hearing.

Getting to the courthouse early is also a great stress reliever. Arriving in the nick of time does not give the foster youth a chance to catch his or her breath and relax before the hearing begins. Likewise, by arriving early, the youth can see everyone there for the hearing and this eliminates unnecessary stress caused by the unknown.

Finally, when the hearing is over, take

some time with the youth to discuss what just happened. Because hearings are often hurried and the judges and lawyers often inadvertently use legalistic terms, parties frequently leave hearing wondering what just happened. By clarifying what occurred at the hearing, youth will be

more apt to view the court experience as a positive one and elect to take part in their case in during any future hearings.



About the Author: Jerry Foxhoven is the director of the Joan and Lyle Middleton Center for Children's Rights at the Drake University Law School.

Article from: Fostering Families Today: A foster care and adoption resource for America, March/April 2007, 18-21.

fostering perspectives

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What Parents Should Remember about Trauma

by Elizabeth Cassedy

It has been more than a year since I left my position as a foster home licensing worker with a North Carolina county department of social services. Since then I have been busy with my kids. I keep saying that I've learned more from parenting them than from all the schools I have attended or in my many "working" years.

One of the most important lessons that I have learned – and keep learning – is that trauma doesn't disappear from your children's lives as much as you would like. You can have the greatest therapist and you can be years into your adoption, but if you are parenting a child who has experienced trauma in the past, it will continue to rear its ugly head. This will happen during times of transition, changing grades, starting high school, leaving middle school, friends leaving, whatever. It will happen especially when you are feeling complacent, when you're thinking, "Hey, this isn't so bad. We're doing a great job."

It's important that you recognize what is happening. If your child has PTSD, he or she might

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give you random signals that flashbacks are recurring. If your child hasn't mentioned a particular person/situation for the past two years and then starts bringing the event up in everyday conversation, pay attention. The typical high schooler will have episodes of forgetting school work. If your child has always been diligent about grades and you see some major slipping, it's time to evaluate what is going on.

What do you do when reactions to trauma come back into your children's lives? You need to recognize the situation for what it is and then take action: talk to your therapist, make sure you are connected to your kid, keep talking, keep working on it. There is no magic fix. Work on teaching your kids to deal with the way their past can sometimes affect them. They need to learn the coping skills, they need to recognize that this can sweep them away. They need to deal with it.

When reactions to trauma come back into my children's lives I remind myself of five magic words: "This is not about me."

I call this my mantra. It is especially helpful to say this mantra to yourself when you are blindsided by your teenager's disproportionate response to something mundane – for example, an innocent question about his or her homework. Oh, and another thing. When your kids are speaking or acting out of a reaction to long-ago trauma, always wait a few critical moments before you speak.

I have learned that trauma's influence can mean that you must go back and parent your children as though they are the age when they were most affected by the trauma – for example, at times you might need to parent your 15-year-old as though he or she is an 8-year-old. You find that you must check homework as you would for an 8-year-old, look at assignments and make sure that they are written down, and use daily reminders about turning work in. These are the kinds of things you would typically do for your third grader, but your kid is in high school.

Trauma also can affect how your child learns. You may not discover this for years, as kids are skilled at making do, especially if they had to pretend that everything was OK when they were younger. The effects of trauma upon a child's ability to learn can be remediated to some level, but they will always affect how your child learns. This is another life skill you have to teach – your kid needs to know how they learn and why, not as an excuse but so they will understand what they need to do to succeed in school and in life.

Elizabeth Cassedy is an adoptive parent and a former foster home licensing social worker.

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Our Favorite Ogre

Y D O E W T D O N K E Y A S E
 S N B S C C O A X V G R N G Q
 C K L O W X N L U R N O O H R
 G N I M R A H C E M I Y I A N
 E C A L A P M E Y C K A F R A
 E S P V S O N P E A N L A O I
 B N F T D Y M D B B W A M L L
 S U O G Z F I W L A A A L D L
 Q O N A K P E R G O B B H O I
 B I F A R E J X I G F S I X L
 K I P I Y J R B M J L C U E M
 Z C N G Y I A H V G I I A R S
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| AWAY | BABIES | BOOTS |
| CHARMING | DONKEY | FAR |
| FIONA | GREEN | HAROLD |
| KING | KINGDOM | LANCELOT |
| LILLIAN | OGRE | PALACE |
| PRINCE | PUSS | QUEEN |
| ROYAL | SHREK | SWAMP |



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Kids Rule Summer Film Series

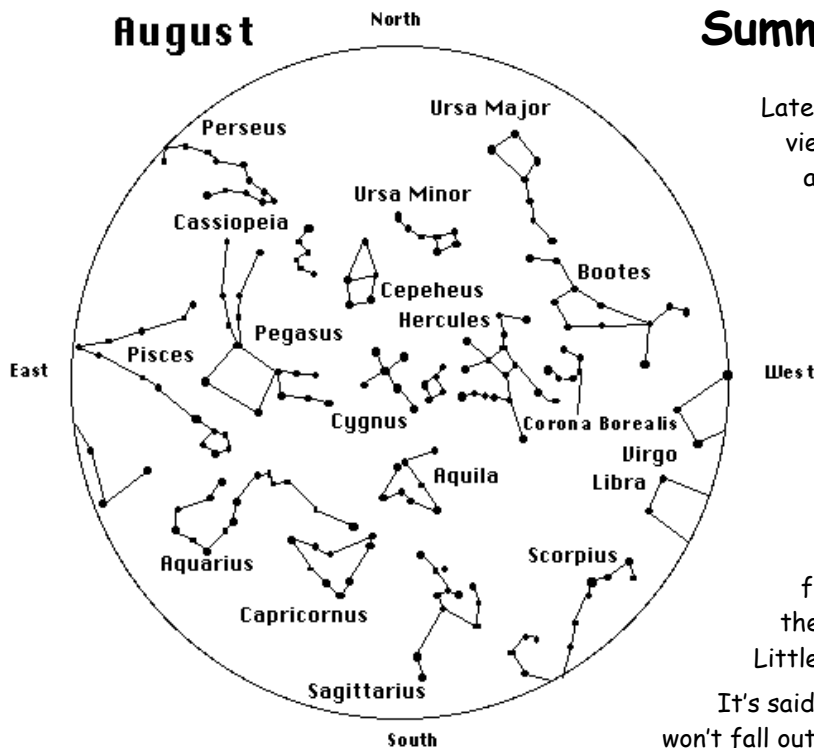
At the La Crosse Marcus Cinema,
 2032 Ward Ave. Admission is \$2.50
 and includes free popcorn.

Shrek The Third

**Showing Wed. Aug. 15th and
 Thurs. Aug. 16th at 10:00am**



August



Summer Stargazing

Late summer is a great time for stargazing. The best viewing conditions are on clear, moonless evenings away from the city lights. Bring a blanket, a flashlight and a star map (available at science or book stores). Covering the lens of the flashlight with red cellophane will let you read the chart yet keep your eyes adjusted to the dark. Lie on your back with your head pointing north, give your eyes a few minutes to adjust, and let the wishing begin!

Did You Know...

If you look at the bowl of the Big Dipper, you'll find two pointer stars that aim straight at Polaris, the North Star, which in turn forms the tip of the Little Dipper's handle.

It's said that wishes made on the Big Dipper in summer won't fall out because the bowl is facing up.

Connections



LA CROSSE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES
300 4TH SREET NORTH
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN 54601

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Is there anything you'd like to contribute to our newsletter?

Please send it to:

Attn: Sharon McHugh

La Crosse County Human Services

300 N. 4th St.

La Crosse, WI 54601

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

(608) 785-6056

*We welcome any feedback or
suggestions you may have!*



Foster Care & Adoption
Resource Center

Looking for information on foster care or adoption? The Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center provides the following services:

- Resource lending library
- Links to training opportunities and resources
- *Fostering Across Wisconsin* quarterly newsletter

Visit their webpage at

www.wifostercareandadoption.org or
contact them at their toll free number
I-800-947-8074 .