



Connections



La Crosse County
Human Services

Volume 11, Issue 3
2009



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CLOTHING CLOSET UPDATE

A **BIG** thank-you goes out to Beth Swaney for all of her hard working in our clothing closet. Recently Beth spent several hours sorting, organizing and arranging the clothing in the closet. Her hard work has made a huge improvement in the ability of families to find the needed sizes and seasons of clothing for kids in care. Now that the closet is looking so good we are hoping we can recruit some foster families to become involved on an on-going basis to maintain the closet, keeping it organized and making sure the clothes provided are clean and appropriate. If you are interested please call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834. Rhonda has agreed to inform foster families the best times to work in the closet depending on if the auditorium is in use.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LYNN!



If you see Lynn Wilkins during the month of March wish her a Happy Birthday. Lynn's birthday is March 1st. Her age is hidden somewhere in this newsletter... Can you find it?

*"The child must know
that she is a miracle,
that since the beginning of the world
there hasn't been,
and until the end of the world
there will not be,
another child like her".
Pablo Casals*



Mark Your Calendar!

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR FOSTER FAMILIES

<i>Thursday, May 28th</i>	<u>Foster Care Picnic</u>	Myrick Park (big shelter), La Crosse
<i>Thursday, September 24th</i>	<u>Foster Care Banquet</u>	Seven Bridges, Onalaska ***Location has changed!***
<i>Thursday, November 19th</i>	<u>Holiday Open House</u>	Children's Museum, La Crosse

UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Wednesday, April 1st **Child Abuse Prevention Month Mayoral Proclamation**
April is Child Abuse Prevention Month! The community comes together to support anyone raising children and to remind us to spend one-on-one time with our kids as much as we can. Please attend a Mayoral Proclamation to support child abuse prevention at one of the following locations:

La Crosse County Health and Human Services Building	9:00am
Holmen—Viking Elementary School	11:00am
Onalaska City Hall	1:00pm
West Salem Boys and Girls Club	1:00pm

See page 9 for information on ordering a t-shirt to wear to this event!

Saturday, April 4th, 10:00am-2:00pm **Teddy Bear Clinic** Children's Museum, La Crosse
Children will receive a free teddy bear and learn more about what takes place during a visit to the doctor and a trip to the hospital. There will also be an informational booth for parents with resources on child abuse prevention. Admission is free. For more information contact Jennifer Peterson at (608)775-3258.

Saturday, April 11th, 1:00-2:00pm **Family Resources' Annual Bunny Hop** Seminary Park
3400 East Ave. S., La Crosse
Hop on over and enjoy some Springtime activities and...hunt...for what do you suppose? Registration is required. For more information, call Fran at 784-8125.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

FOUNDATIONS SPRING 2009 SCHEDULES

<i>Wednesday evenings, 5:30-9:00pm</i>	<i>Thursday evenings, 5:30-9:00pm</i>
<i>Feb. 4, 11, 18, Mar. 4, 11, 18, 25, and April 1</i>	<i>Jan. 8, 22, 29, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26, and March 5</i>
<i>Trainers: Dawn Miller and Denise Green</i>	<i>Trainers: Sarah Koenen and Rita Wolcott</i>

Call Rhonda Rude at (608) 789-4834 to sign up.

LA CROSSE COUNTY ONGOING FOSTER PARENT TRAININGS

<i>Tuesday evenings, 6:00-8:00pm.</i>	Basement auditorium of the La Crosse County Administrative Center (400 4th St. N.).
<i>May 12</i>	Topic to be announced.
<i>July 14</i>	Topic to be announced.
<i>September 8</i>	Topic to be announced.
<i>November 10</i>	Topic to be announced.

RSVP for these trainings by calling Rhonda Rude at (608)789-4834.

Mark Your Calendar!

Saturday, Mar. 17, 8:00am-12:00pm

Adult, Child and Infant CPR:
AED Review

WTC, Kumm Center Cafeteria
400 6th St. N., La Crosse

This event is free and open to the public. This is not a certification class (no card will be awarded for successful completion). Register in advance by calling Marlis O'Brien with Franciscan Skemp at (608)392-2879.

Thursday, Mar. 19, 5:30-8:30pm

To Pee Or Not To Pee

Family Resources, 1500 Green Bay St.

Learn how to recognize the signs of toilet learning readiness, how to proceed, and foremost, how to avoid turning toilet learning into a major power struggle. Presented by Fran Swift, Parent Educator. For more information or to register, call 784-8125.

Saturday, Mar. 21, 8:30am-12:30pm

"Sleeplessness in America" and
"Challenging Child Behaviors"

Gundersen Lutheran Rasmus Center
1900 South Ave., La Crosse

Best-selling author and internationally recognized lecturer and parent educator, Mary Sheedy Kurcinka, will be presenting on challenging child behaviors and sleep concerns. For more information or to register contact Jennifer Peterson at (608)775-3258.

Thursday, Mar. 26, 5:30-8:30pm

Food Labels...What Does It
All Mean?

Family Resources
1500 Green Bay St.

Learn to understand the health claims on the front of food packages and how to use the nutrition facts label to help make healthy food choices. Presented by Sheila Harding, La Crosse UW Extension. For more information or to register, call 784-8125.

Thursday, Apr. 2, 4:30-6:00pm or 6:30-8:00pm

Taming the Spirited Child:
Strategies for Parenting
Challenging Children without
Breaking Their Spirits

Radisson Hotel, La Crosse
200 Harborview Plaza

Caring for a child who is curious, adventurous, powerful, persistent and sensitive can be a challenge. Michael H. Popkin, Ph.D., will be sharing his methods for connecting with these unique children and establishing a heartfelt bond that can teach them to calm themselves and use their resources constructively. Dr. Popkin is a nationally recognized expert with 28 years of research and development of parenting tools. He has appeared on "The Oprah Winfrey Show", CNN, and more than 100 other television shows. No registration required. Free.

Friday, Apr. 3, 8:30am-4:00pm

12th Annual La Crosse Child
Maltreatment Conference

Radisson Hotel, La Crosse
200 Harborview Plaza

Conference topics include:

- Caregiver Substance Abuse: A Child's Perspective
- Growing Up the Hard Way: The Severe Impact of Mental Illness on Parents and Children
- La Crosse Police Department K-9 Unit Demonstration
- The Effects of Maternal Drug Use on the Fetus of a Newborn
- Stable Instability: The Parent with Bipolar Disorder
- Trial Strategies in Child Protection Cases
- Navigating the "New World" Online
- Stress, Adversity and Brain Development
- Medical Management of the Drug Exposed Newborn
- Undiagnosed Epidemic or Therapeutic Orgy? Bipolar in Young People
- How to Untangle the Web for Law Enforcement and Prosecution

Registration fee is \$95 which includes conference materials, lunch, and refreshments. For more information or to register call (608)392-4172. Registration is due March 27th.

Friday-Sunday, Apr. 3-5

Wisconsin Foster and Adoptive
Parents Association Spring
Conference

Holiday Inn
Manitowoc, WI

Topics include ODD, the story stick, documentation, cutting, and more. Cost is \$65 per person. For more information or to register go to the current issue of the newsletter at www.wfapa.org.

UPCOMING CHANGES TO THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

Dear Foster Parents:

For the 2009 service and budget year we have experienced significant cuts in the funding for the Independent Living (I.L.) program. Independent living services must be provided to youth 15 and older who have been in out of home care for 6 months or longer. The state provides us with a small grant that has never been adequate to fund the level of services needed by our youth. La Crosse County contracts for I.L. services from the Family and Children's Center and they employ one Youth Development Specialist, Devon Chesebro.

The average caseload of youth in out-of-home care receiving I.L. services in La Crosse County is approximately 25. Back in 2005 a new federal and state mandate required that we provide services to those youth who had aged out of foster care and were between the ages of 18 - 21. The new mandate did not include additional funding. On average we have been serving an additional 3 - 7 of the older youth, making our total monthly caseload approximately 28 - 32 youth.

Over the past three years our budget has remained pretty stable due to the commitment of the county to add approx. \$10,000 of county funds (IV-E), which was barely enough to support the salary of a 30 hour per week Youth Development Specialist. This year the county does not have \$10,000 to add to the state I.L. grant and therefore services to our youth will be cut by approximately 30%. Due to these significant budget cuts we will need to re-structure services and will be operating with significantly less time from the Youth Development Specialist from the Family and Children's Center (FCC).

FCC has diligently sought other grant funding and for the past few years they had been utilizing grant funding to offer an array of services such as the transitional housing program which was not supported at all by county funding or the state I.L. grant. They are continuing to search for grant funding to again bolster direct services to the youth - particularly those aging out.

In 2008 new guidelines came out from the state. We have an obligation under the state grant funding guidelines to serve as a priority those youth that are aging out of care, are likely to age out of care or who have aged out of care and are between the ages of 18 - 21. Therefore, at this time Devon will only be able to provide one-on-one contact and intensive services to those youth who have been in care 6 months or longer and are age 17. Due to funding cuts and the need to maximize her time with the youth Devon will be requesting that youth come to her office to meet as she does not have time to travel to various places and foster homes to meet with youth. Youth age 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ that have been in care six months or longer are able to attend the IL classes that Devon offers several times a month. Again, we need the cooperation of the foster parents or the relative care providers to get the youth to these classes and to appointments with Devon.

I know several very dedicated foster parents, social workers and the youth development specialist that have committed to seeing the youth succeed. There are several very well functioning teams that the youth are part of and that have committed to the goal of successful independence for the youth. Research that was conducted over a 6 year period of time by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago School of Social Work indicates that one of the most significant factors in whether or not a youth was successfully independent after leaving care was the connection with at least one caring adult. In my experience one of the most effective ways to teach independent living skills is in the context of the family relationships and over a long span of time if possible.

I heard a story from a social worker the other day about a 14 year old boy with some developmental disabilities who is placed in a treatment foster home in a small community. They have already begun teaching him skills that he will need to some day live more independently. The young boy needed a hair cut. His foster mom said, "let's get out the phone book

and make a call to see if you can get an appointment." Together they looked up the number, she coached him on what to say, he called found out how much it would cost and he made the appointment. He and foster mom counted out the money he would need and when it was time he walked the two blocks down the street to get his hair cut. He came home extremely proud that he had accomplished this mostly on his own.

These daily life skills are so critically important for all of our children and youth to learn and the best way to learn them is in the context of every day ordinary life.

We are now required to enter assessment data and service data in the state data system on all youth 15 or older who have been in out-of-homecare 6 months or longer. The state will finally have a very systematic way of determining how many youth are being served in each county and hopefully more equitably distributing state funding for our I.L. grant of 2010.

We are looking internally at La Crosse County to find other ways to serve our younger youth. If you have any ideas please feel free to contact, Nancy Pohlman, program supervisor from La Crosse County at (608) 785-6060 or Joannette Robertson, program supervisor from Family and Children's Center at (608) 785-0001 Ext. 259 and (507) 281-3913.

Sincerely,
Nancy Pohlman, MSSW
Supervisor
Family and Children's Section
La Crosse County Human Services Dep't

The Wish

*I caught a little leprechaun,
quite wise and very old
and he said to me, "You have one wish,
would you like my pot of gold?"*

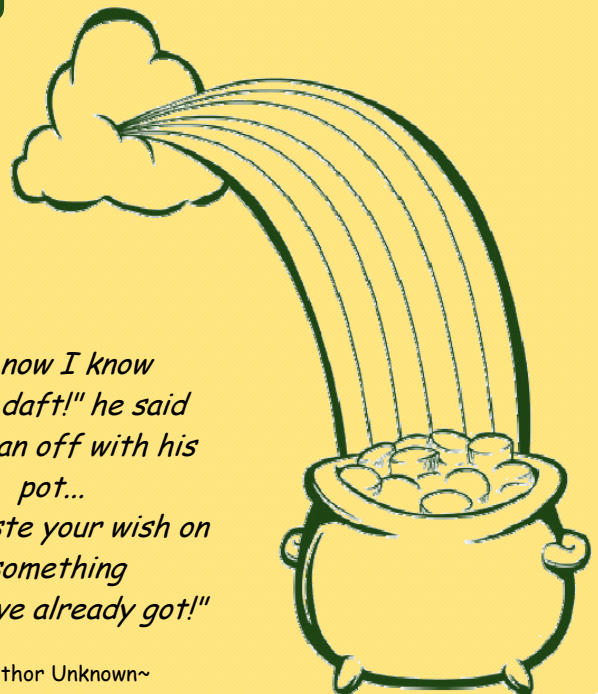
*"No thank you," was my quick reply,
"But how about another...
A gift that's truly precious
and esteemed above all others?"*

*"A rainbow's far more beautiful
than its supposed treasure
and the 'rainbow' that I'm wishing for
is priceless beyond measure.*

*"I'd like to have the dearest friends
a person ever had
to share in all the good times
and help me through the bad."*

*"Oh, now I know
you're daft!" he said
as he ran off with his
pot...
"to waste your wish on
something
you have already got!"*

~Author Unknown~



Undercover in a Kid's Online World

What one mom learned in her journey through kiddie cyberspace — and what every concerned parent needs to know



In the middle of a playdate with one of his best buddies a few months ago, my then-8-year-old came over and asked me how to spell *penguin*. "Penguin?" I asked, puzzled. "As in *Mr. Popper's Penguins*?" "No," Jake clarified. "As in Club Penguin. We want to play, but we can't get to the Website." And just like that, my third grader's age of digital innocence ended, as both of us dove headfirst into the junior cyber-social world.

And I do mean both of us. Because after Jake went to bed that night (giddy with excitement over the creation of his penguin alter ego — or "avatar"), I decided I needed to find out just what was going on in those millions of online igloos that have kids so addicted.

Aimed at ages 6 to 14, the Disney-owned Club Penguin may be one of the most popular kids' sites, but it's hardly the only one. These new virtual worlds, like Poptropica and Barbie Girls, are part social networking, part online game, part Saturday-morning cartoon — and they're everywhere. There are currently more than 100 children's social-networking sites and 35 million kids are registered members of the virtual world.

These sites generally sell themselves to parents as safe, convivial places for kids to play, learn, and make friends. But I wanted to find out exactly what Jake would be experiencing in this icy paradise. So I opened my own account at Club Penguin (I call it CP) and created my avatar, ChilyLily437. During my two-week mission, I did find four serious surprises — both good and bad.

Here's what you should know before you let your kids out into the cyber snow.

1. A Virtual Playground Is Still a Playground

Given the stats, I expected CP to be hopping, but I was awestruck at just how packed with penguins it was. I entered a chat room where scores of penguins surrounded me, and a mushroom cloud of cartoon bubbles hovered as everyone seemed to be talking at once. Here's what ensued when ChilyLily approached three cheery-looking penguins.

ME: *Hi, I am ChilyLily and I am KEWL*

DANCING PENGUIN 1: *R not*

ME: *Hannah Montana Rules*

DANCING PENGUIN 2: *weirdo*

DANCING PENGUIN 3: *we r going to a members only party*

ME: *Can I come?*

DANCING PENGUIN 1: *ewwww No!*

ME: *PLZ*

DANCING PENGUIN 2: *(angry face)*

ME: *(frowns)*

DANCING PENGUIN 3: *go away or I am reporting u*

"Reporting" means telling the CP powers-that-be that I'd been breaking the rules, which would have been untrue, but nonetheless, I took the hint and slunk away.

The Good Since many kids today spend so little time with neighbors and friends, virtual worlds can give them a comforting sense of companionship. "Children make virtual friends, but they also use these sites to meet and shore up their relationships with real-life friends," says Yasmin Kafai, Ed.D., professor of

learning sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. So even on actual playdates, kids may end up playing together online, since that's the way they're accustomed to socializing.

The Bad But just how appropriately are these avatars behaving? It's true that Club Penguin, like many other sites, works overtime to keep the chat civil. CP filters out rude language and personal information, lets kids act as secret agents and report rule breakers, and provides monitors to discourage bad behavior. According to Lane Merrifield, cofounder of Club Penguin and executive vice president and general manager of Disney Online Studios, the filters are modified almost hourly to keep up with kids' changing slang. Still, I saw cyber-savvy kids come up with all kinds of clever ways to evade these precautions. While many penguins were amicable, I was called "weirdo" twice and "nerd" three times, told to go away six times, and pummeled with snowballs and mean-face emoticons.

"It stands to reason that bullying happens in kids' virtual worlds," says Collier, "because it happens in school and on the playground, too." But in the virtual world, the inherent anonymity compounds the problem. "Kids may be much more likely to say things through an online avatar that they wouldn't say in person," says Debbie Glasser, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Richmond, VA, and founder of newsforparents.org. Because the virtual world is "just a game," kids don't feel the accountability — or

2. All Play Is Not Created Equal

During my time on Club Penguin, I became a regular at the local pizzeria where I was fascinated by the friendly waiters who never, ever delivered my pizza. I was initially stumped by this but then I realized that these kids were only *pretending* to be waiters and waitresses. And they thought I was *pretending* to be a customer.

The Good Playing make-believe is part of the magic of being a kid, and Club Penguin's fanciful locales, exotic costumes, and colorful avatars seem to invite it. From a parent's perspective, the site is an innocent, welcome oasis in an online wasteland of XXX Websites and potentially risky teen social-networking forums. From a child's perspective, it looks like a new, and highly accessorized, way to play.

The Bad But unlike traditional imaginative play, CP and other sites generally don't let kids dream up places like the Italian-restaurant scene — graphic designers do it for them. Kids' opportunities to pretend creatively on these preconceived sites seem sadly limited, as they did in that café.

"Creative play allows young children to digest life and make it their own. It's an outlet for their creativity and an absolutely critical part of childhood," states Joan Almon, director of the U.S. branch of Alliance for Childhood. But when kids spend hours in front of screens — TV, video game, or computer — they're just absorbing other people's stories and imaginations and not creating their own. "That's resulted in a steady decline in children's play," says Almon, "and will have serious negative consequences for kids' cognitive, emotional, and physical development."

3. Kids Can Become Virtual Materialists

Club Penguin, like many similar sites, may bill itself as being all about collecting friends, but believe me, it's about collecting a lot more than that. Like the sparkly pink evening gowns (600 coins), wide-screen TVs (5,000 coins), and Ice Castle igloo upgrades "crafted from the finest ice on Club Penguin" (5,100 coins) that I saw during my 14 days of penguinhood. Which is why ChilyLily437 decided to go to work. On CP, that means playing video games. Forty-five (excruciating) minutes of digital ice fishing later, I'd accumulated enough coins to get shopping. But when I tried to make my purchases, a message informed me that I couldn't buy any of these items because I was not a member! However, I could become a member if I'd like ... for \$58 a year.

The Good As CP's Parent's Guide points out, virtual-world economies give kids a taste of financial realities and responsibilities, and learning that earning comes before spending helps foster a good work ethic. The avalanche of appealing, if imaginary, merchandise teaches children about making financial choices and even basic math.

The Bad "Parents should never forget that most of these sites are moneymaking ventures," warns Liz Perle, editor in chief of Common Sense Media. "The behavior they encourage — playing games to build up 'money' kids can't spend without paying real cash — is driven by commercial impulses."

4. In Cyberspace, Kids Grow Up Even Faster

I'm not exaggerating when I say that at any given moment in any given location on Club Penguin, there's someone saying "Cute girlz" or "I like boyz" or "Will u be my girlfriend?" — which is exactly what one penguin

asked me one moonlit night in his igloo.

The Good Try as I might, I'm having trouble seeing an upside here.

The Bad Of all my virtual-world surprises, I found CP's sexual undercurrent by far the most shocking. "Flirting and dating are major parts of kids' virtual-world activity," Kafai says. "The anonymity and lack of parental supervision make them favorite spaces for even tweens to act out sexual themes they see in the media and at the playground, even before they're ready in real life." But such cyber dating can actually hinder their ability to develop off-line relationships, says Marshall P. Duke, Ph.D., clinical psychologist at Emory University. "In the real world, people communicate in many ways — body language, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. Not so in virtual worlds. But kids may think they understand relationships based on online experiences, and that can be damaging."

SMART RULES FOR VIRTUAL PLAY

Realistically, we can't raise Internet-free kids — nor should we. But here's what I've learned about helping your child find a balance between virtual worlds and the real one.

- **Be his copilot.** Understanding your kid's virtual world is a must, even if it means going undercover yourself. Then go online *with* him as he explores the site. "You wouldn't put your child in a car, hand him the keys, and say 'See ya,'" says Perle. "Don't do it with the Internet."
- **Teach her how to act.** Provide your kid with clear behavior guidelines for the virtual world, just as you do for the real one. "Before letting your child access a site, discuss how to be a good online friend," says Patricia Agatston,

(continued on next page)

(continued from page 5)

Ph.D., coauthor of *Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age*. And make sure she knows how to recognize inappropriate behavior from others (like flirtation, questions about age, bullying) and will tell you if it happens so that you can report the offender to site authorities.

- **Use parental controls and monitoring software.** Protect your child while giving him the appropriate level of independence

with Website parental controls (Club Penguin offers some excellent ones that allow parents to control when and for how long kids can use the site) and monitoring software (like those listed in the searchable database at getnetwise.org). Be up-front with kids from the start about keeping an eye on them.

- **Say when (and mean it).** Common Sense Media recommends waiting until your child's eighth birthday before letting her join a social network. Once you do, the

American Academy of Pediatrics advises limiting kids to no more than two hours a day of any kind of screen time. And balance it out with real face time with friends: These sites were never meant to replace going outside and playing.

Adapted from an article by Sharon Duke Estroff in the February 2009 issue of Good Housekeeping magazine. Find this article at: <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/undercover-club-penguin>

CRIB AVAILABLE!

Foster parent Katrina Allen has a small crib available to anyone who has a need. If you're interested or would like more information, call Katrina at (608) 385-1133.

If you have items you're in need of, or wish to donate, we'd be happy to post them in *Connections!* Contact Sharon McHugh at 785-6056.



DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME!

Don't forget to turn your clocks ahead one hour on **Saturday, March 8th**.

It might be a good time to check the batteries in your smoke detectors, too!

WELCOME NEW FOSTER PARENTS



Please welcome **Jennifer and Mark Benson** to the ranks of our Everyday Heroes. The couple lives on the south side of La Crosse with their very energetic Golden Doodle. Jennifer has experience with foster care and the child welfare system through her past employment as a parent visitation monitor. She currently provides in home child care to one child. Mark and Jennifer are looking to care for children of either sex between the ages of birth to 5 years old. Of course we are encouraging them to consider emergency foster care as well as accepting older school age children. They are looking to provide respite for other children in foster care to help them acclimate to the foster care system. Jennifer and Mark have already completed the Pre Placement training and will likely complete the Foundations training in the near future. Please welcome them to the foster care community when you see them at one of the up and coming trainings or foster care events.

VOLUNTEERING AT THE 2009 LA CROSSE INTERSTATE FAIR

Dear Fellow Foster Parents,



I am part of the Recruitment & Retention committee for La Crosse County Foster Care and we are looking to sponsor a table at the La Crosse Interstate Fair this coming summer, July 15-19. We are looking for volunteers to man the booth/table for 2 hour slots; you would receive credit for training hours too! It could be you or/and your family, we are looking to see if anyone would be interested to see how much further to pursue this idea. We are thinking of covering the busier hours of 3:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Wednesday through Saturday and then on Sunday from noon to 3:00 pm. Please let myself - Kelly Mayer (kellymayer@charter.net) or Nissa Knutson (knutson.nissa@co.la-crosse.wi.us, 789-7880) know if you are interested in helping spread the word about La Crosse County Foster Care.

*Thank you,
Kelly Mayer*

ORDER A CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION T-SHIRT!

The Child Maltreatment Task Force is selling T-shirts to promote child abuse awareness for the month of April. T-shirts are white and feature the winning design drawn by a local youth artist. Shirts are available in Infant, Toddler, Youth and Adult sizes (up to 3x). Cost is \$10 each. All orders and payments must be made by March 9th. To order, contact Nicole Milliren at (608)789-4859.



You are encouraged to wear your T-shirt at the following Child Abuse Prevention Month events:

- ☆ Mayoral Proclamations on April 1st
- ☆ "Taming the Spirited Child" Presentation on April 2nd
- ☆ Child Maltreatment Conference on April 3rd
- ☆ Pizza Dough Raising night at Pizza Hut on April 16th
- ☆ Free day at the Children's Museum on April 26th

Help spread the message to our community that it takes a village to raise a child. We're all in this together!

On Tuesday, March 31st at 4:00pm stop by the open lot across from Franciscan Skemp's Onalaska Clinic to plant a pinwheel to represent a child victim of abuse and hear State Representative Jennifer Schilling speak.



10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

1999 TO 2009



It is hard to believe but the month of March marks the ten year anniversary of the creation of the Alternate Care Unit. Since that beginning the unit has seen many internal staff changes and name changes. Our original name was Alternate Care/Resource Unit then changed to the Alternate Care Unit and finally changed to the Children with Special Needs Unit I. (Yes, there is a Children with Special Needs Unit II).

Original unit members were social workers; Deb Dehning, Will Herber, Jayne Seaquist, and Larry Winter. Support staff included social service specialists Jane Beard and Rhonda Rude, Elizabeth Genrich (independent living coordinator), and Lynn Wilkins (foster care consultant). Nancy Pohlman was supervisor of the unit.

Current unit members are social workers Kay Collister, Will Herber, Tracy Puent, Dawn Miller, and Richelle Zimmerman with Keith Keller as the supervisor. Rhonda Rude is still very actively involved with our unit but not officially in our unit. Lynn Wilkins remains as the foster care consultant.

La Crosse County's Alternate Care Unit is modeled after a similar Alternate Care Unit in Rock County. The Alternate Care Unit at La Crosse County is unique in that, of the 72 counties in Wisconsin, there are only three or four counties that devote an entire unit of social workers and support staff to the support and supervision of the foster care community.

While the number of social workers has grown by one in our unit and we have lost a couple of support staff, our unit has grown immensely in its role with and responsibility to the foster care community over the years. La Crosse County Human Services is determined to maintain the quality of resource families (foster parents/respite parents) that will provide support to children and families in need in our county.

The first official Connections Newsletter was issued to the foster community in November 1999. Review of this article indicates that the Alternate care unit had implemented two committees: the Recruitment/Retention Committee and the Training committee. Near the end of 2008, the Alternate Care Unit recreated the Recruitment and Retention Committee which has a secondary focus on trainings offered to foster parents. It is also noted in the November 1999 issue that the Alternate Care Unit was revising as well as creating policies for the foster care program that would focus on "safety and continuity for the children" in the care of foster parents. Throughout the course of 1999 policies governing physical discipline, confidentiality, emergency foster care, out of state travel, and respite care were developed. The Alternate Care Unit has continued to revise and create policies specific to the needs of children in foster care. The November 1999 Connections edition also mentioned the possible creation of an Advisory Committee made up of foster parents to "give feedback and help look at areas of deficit and work on policy...". In November 1999, the monthly foster parent meeting/training topic was "Behavioral Interventions and the use of therapeutic/physical holds which was presented by Jayne Seaquist and Will Herber. In 2009 any type of physical restraint is strictly prohibited for use in foster homes licensed under HFS 56. In past Connections newsletters, our unit used to announce "children in need of placement". Due to changes in the confidentiality laws (HIPPA) we no longer make these kind of public announcements rather our unit has a very detailed "finders meeting" to find appropriate resource families for children in need.

The subjects noted in the above paragraph are just some of the issues that the Alternate Care Unit addressed during its first year of existence. During 2009, subsequent issues of the Connections Newsletter will make reference to our early beginnings. By seeing where we started it will be easier to realize how far we have traveled. Some issues have circled back to repeat themselves while others have disappeared completely. Some of our foster parents out there remember these early beginnings. I would encourage foster parents to send in some of their comments about the first year of the Alternate Care Unit and the subsequent changes over the years and about their positive experiences in foster care since that time.



GROW A LEPRECHAUN

Celebrate the upcoming (and long-awaited) arrival of spring and St. Patrick's Day by growing your own leprechaun!

Materials needed:

- Styrofoam cup
- Crayons
- Potting soil
- Plant seeds for a green plant



Instructions:

1. Decorate the cup by drawing or painting a face on it.
2. Fill the cup halfway with soil.
3. Following the package directions, plant the seeds.
4. Place the cup in a sunny spot and water daily. When the seeds begin to sprout your leprechaun will have "hair"!

www.familyeducation.com

ST. PATRICK'S DAY WORD SEARCH



www.printables4kids.com

SHAMROCK MAZE

With no rainbow in sight, only you can help this little leprechaun find his way to the pot of gold.



www.familyfun.com

LEPRECHAUN

RAINBOW

GOLD

GREEN

IRELAND

LUCK

JIG

SHAMROCK

EMERALD

HARP



Connections



LA CROSSE COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

300 4TH SREET NORTH
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN 54601

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Pass the word on!

Do you know anyone who's interested in being a foster parent? Orientation sessions for those who'd like to learn more about the program are held the first Monday of every month from 6:00pm to 7:30pm. Those interested in attending should call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834 to sign up.

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

Please send your ideas, comments, or suggestions 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



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 .