

RESOURCE PARENT NEWS

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Theodore Dallas, Secretary



MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY THEODORE DALLAS

Welcome to spring – and to the spring edition of “Resource Parent News.”

As always - there is a lot going on here at DHR. We are in the middle of the legislative session and are working in conjunction with our many partners on passing pieces of legislation that will help us to better serve children, families and vulnerable adults. In addition, we are aggressively moving forward with our launch of Alternative Response. We know that one size does not fit all and Alternative Response allows us to engage families to prevent instances of neglect or abuse to children. We look forward to sharing more with you about Alternative Response in the coming months.

I want to extend a warm welcome to the newest members of the Maryland Resource Parent Association Board. Teri Traudt, Dr. Joan Wharton and James Craig, Jr. are all welcomed additions to the board and we look forward to working with them moving forward.

During the month of March we celebrated National Social Work Appreciation month and certainly here at DHR we are applauding the committed workers that serve those who depend on us. We have identified workers from across the state to represent this committed workforce.

This year's national theme deals with the importance of resiliency and advocacy on behalf of others. I hope you will go to the front page of our web site (dhr@maryland.gov) to see those workers from across the state that are representing some of our best in the field. Your worker might be among those honored.

As always, I want to acknowledge each of you for continuing to be a resource for children in care. Your contributions are at the heart of all we do and is deserving of all of our thanks.



Theodore Dallas, Secretary

Simple Tips for Foster Parents

By Keiley Orellana (a Foster Teen)

When kids talk about their foster parents, they often criticize them. Many foster parents have bad reputations, and many kids think that they're doing it for the money and not for us. Caring for a child is a hard job, but in another way, the things we need are pretty simple. Here's my advice to foster parents about how to treat a child who is coming into their home.

1. Help us feel safe. When a child is put in a foster home, it's so the child can be in a safer home. Ever since I was put in foster care, I've felt like my foster mom opened the doors to her house for me to have another family. That makes her home feel like a place where I feel safe and secure.

2. Help us settle into our new life. Introduce us to your home and neighborhood. We're often placed in a home far from where we used to live and it's hard to get around where we don't know where we are. Go out with us and show us where the stores, transportation, and other important things are.

3. Speak to us and listen to us. Foster parents should be open with us. They should be willing to speak about anything we have concerns about, and should listen and take us seriously. We don't always need advice or judgment; sometimes we just need to be heard.



4. Make us part of your family. In my foster home, we are all part of a family. When the food is ready we all eat together, we go out together, and sometimes my foster mom even takes us with her to different states to visit her family. She introduces us all as her grandchildren, and her daughters introduce us as their nieces and nephews. Making us feel like we're part of your family and not just the "foster kids" helps us feel more comfortable and happy in your home. At the same time, we have another family, too, so be respectful of that and be supportive; we may be dealing with a lot of mixed emotions about our family that don't always come out in the best way.

5. Help us be independent. I think after a certain age, foster parents should let us be more independent. They should give us money to go shopping on our own. They should let us travel alone (when it is safe) so we don't have to depend on others when we are grown. They should also let us have our own beliefs. Some foster parents have religious beliefs different than ours, and I think that is OK. Foster parents should not try to change us; they should accept our different beliefs.

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(Editor's Note: There is a review of a Youth Communications book entitled "I've Found a Home" on page 10 of this Newsletter.)

The Check is in the Mail (2013 check mailing dates)

Subsidy Checks	Foster Care Checks
April 11	April 23
May 10	May 22
June 11	June 21
July 11	July 23
August 9	August 23
September 11	September 23
October 11	October 23
November 8	November 22
December 11	December 20



Please be reminded that beginning in August, 2013 the US Postal Service will discontinue Saturday mail delivery. More and more resource parents have made the choice to go to direct deposit (Electronic Funds Transfer). You can select this convenient, easy and safe option by visiting the following website: http://compnet.comp.state.md.us/General_Accounting_Division.

Once there, click on “Electronic Funds Transfer” (bottom right). Then click on “Form X-10” (bottom). Complete the form and send it by mail as indicated. Remember to make a copy of the form for your records. It takes at least 30 days to activate your direct deposit request.

Help Is Needed For Research Study

Some resource parents may be eligible to participate in a valuable study - maybe you! The study will ask your experiences as a caregiver and behaviors of your foster/kinship child(ren). Your participation in the study is confidential and is totally voluntary. Eligibility to participate is determined by two things. You must NOT have participated in the Maryland KEEP Training and you must have a foster/kinship placement between the ages of 5 and 12. You would be a part of a comparison group and would be surveyed three times by separate phone calls; and then approximately five months later you would be surveyed again by telephone. Your input regarding your experiences would be invaluable. To compensate you for your time with this study, you would receive seventy dollars (\$70.00) at the completion of your participation with the telephone surveys. If you would like to be a part of this important project, contact Dr. Elizabeth Greeno at the University of Maryland School of Social Work at 410-706-4259 or egreeno@ssw.umd.edu.

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS DEPICT THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOPTION

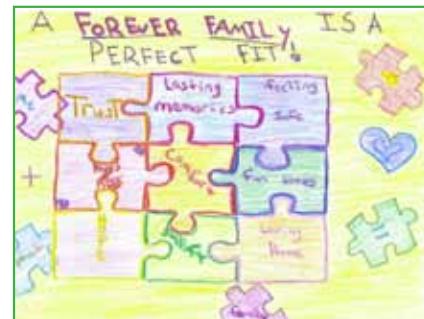
The Cecil County Department of Social Services challenged the youth in their care to help with recruiting foster and adoptive families by designing outdoor billboards. The billboards can be seen along the Route 40 corridor.

Cecil County foster children, ages 5-21, were asked to participate in the billboard design challenge by creating an artistic design that expresses what it means to them to permanently belong in a family. The children were told that the community would have the opportunity to hear from them, in order to spread the word, that more foster and adoptive families are needed to give children who need them, a forever family.

Twenty-one (21) designs were submitted and four (4) were chosen to be used as billboard advertisements throughout this year. The four “grand” winners were Harmony, age 11, who created a puzzle piece “perfect fit” design; MaKenzie, age 10, who drew a heart picture about how families guide you; Justin, age 9, created a baseball design titled “A Forever Family is a Home Run!”; and Kiesha, age 20, drew a beautiful image of a hand holding the world, with children from various ethnic backgrounds standing nearby. Each participant was awarded a \$25 Walmart gift card for their artwork. The four grand winners received a \$100 Walmart gift card, which was used to purchase a camera of their choice. The artwork was quite revealing and communicated what a permanent family means to them.

In addition to the four winning billboard submissions, all of the 21 designs were published in a 2013 calendar, which was distributed to every child who participated. Included in the calendar is information about how to become a foster parent. The Information Meeting and PRIDE schedules are included, as well. The Department distributed 2000 calendars in Cecil County in an effort to both recruit families and promote adoption. Additionally, foster parents were provided calendars to give to people they think might be interested in foster care and/or adoption. Businesses, churches, organizations, and government offices received this project with enthusiasm and were happy to help by putting stacks of calendars at their locale. This is the third year the Department used billboard advertising and recruitment calendars featuring children’s artwork, and the project has been quite successful.

For additional information about this project, please contact Tina Linkous at 410-996-0196 or tina.linkous@maryland.gov.



CONGRATULATIONS TO NEWLY ELECTED MRPA BOARD MEMBERS

The Maryland Resource Parent Association recently elected three new Board members. Congratulations to these new members:

Teri Traudt, a resource parent from Charles County

Dr. Joan Wharton, Executive Director, One Church One Child

James Craig, Jr, a resource parent from Prince George's County

(James also volunteered to work with John Bertulis on the Foster Parent Photo ID Project.)

If you know someone who might be interested in being considered for the MRPA Board, including yourself, there are still some slots open. For more information, please contact Helen Nicholson at imajunebug1937@yahoo.com, or at 410-778-0068.



Congress Passes Foster Care Education Bill

On January 1, 2013, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill that amends the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), improving information sharing between education and child welfare agencies.

FERPA, enacted in 1974, protects the privacy of student education records by giving certain rights to parents. These rights are transferred to the student when he or she turns 18 and attends a school beyond high school. The law, however, often creates problems for children in foster care by prohibiting child welfare professionals with whom the children work, including their attorneys, access to basic educational information. Challenges such as transferring schools, which is common for children in care, may be eased with better information sharing.

More information about the new changes to FERPA is available in the December 30, 2012 issue of The Chronicle of Social Change: <http://chronicleofsocialchange.wordpress.com/2012/12/30/congress-passes-key-foster-care-education-bill/>

An article from the Children's Bureau Express and the Child Welfare Information Gateway.
Child Welfare Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov
800.394.3366

NEW EDUCATION HANDBOOKS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

School is an important aspect of any child's life. Unfortunately, it is sometimes a huge struggle for foster children. On average, youth in out of home placement are two grades below level in many areas. In an effort to help resource parents address this issue, the Department of Human Resources and the Maryland Department of Education have put together a resource booklet around navigating your child's education system. This publication has been recently updated and revised making it better than ever.

Entitled "Access to Education for Children In State-Supervised Care," the booklet can be found at <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/ssa/foster/handbook.htm>. If you have trouble with the link, on the DHR web site, go to "Foster Care" and click on "Handbook." You will notice there is also a companion video found there.

Another helpful handbook can be found at the same place. It is called "School Enrollment of Children Who Do Not Live with Their Parents: A Guide for Non-Parent Caregivers, Schools, Families, and Court Personnel."

This easy-to-follow guide has troubleshooting and document checklists to help navigate the enrollment process. There is also contact information for each jurisdiction. This guide is a joint effort of the Maryland Judiciary, Administrative Office of the Courts, Department of Family Administration, and the Maryland Department of Education.

Information can also be found on the Maryland Resource Parent Association web site www.mrpa.org. MRPA strongly supports resource parents in the area of the education of foster children. They have created the Maryland Resource Parent Teacher Student Association. If you have questions in this regard, please contact Sam Macer, current President of the Maryland Resource Parent Association, at sammacer@aol.com.

This information will assist you as foster parents in advocating for and supporting the foster children placed in your home.

Impact of the Internet on Adoption

The Children's Bureau reports that the Donaldson Institute for Adoption completed a multi-year study entitled "Untangling the Web: The Internet's Transformative Impact on Adoption."

The report reflects, in part, the following findings:

- The internet has offered positive changes in adoption, including increased access to support for adoptive families and better information sharing.
- A growing number of adopted children are finding their birth relatives online, but not always with their adoptive parents' knowledge or approval.
- The relative ease of finding birth family members online may signal the end of "closed" adoptions and an increase in relationships between adoptive families and birth families.

The report and more information may be found at http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/2012_12_UntanglingtheWeb.php

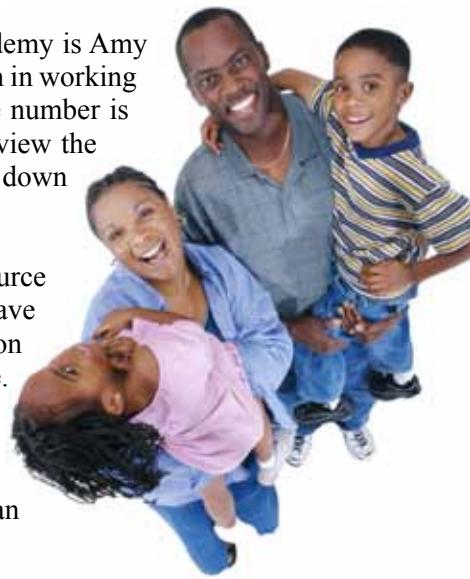
RESOURCE PARENT CONTINUING EDUCATION

Many opportunities are offered to foster parents to complete the 10 hours of required in-service training. Good information is available that can be used in your proverbial resource parent tool belt. The 10 hour requirement is just a minimum to insure that parents are current in core areas.

The Child Welfare Academy through the University of Maryland School of Social Work provides many varied continuing education sessions. As part of their contract with DHR, they are able to offer an expense reimbursement for each session. Classes are available in Baltimore at the School of Social Work and around the State.

The new manager of Resource Parent Training at the Child Welfare Academy is Amy Bouldin, who hails from Nashville, TN. She brings experience and passion in working with resource parents and she is excited about being here. Amy's phone number is 410-706-0721 and her e-mail is abouldin@ssw.umaryland.edu. You can view the calendar and register for classes online at www.family.umaryland.edu. Go down to "Training and Education" and click on "Resource Parent."

The Child Welfare Academy, in conjunction with the Maryland Resource Parent Association, DHR, and the local departments of social services have had three successful conferences this fiscal year, with one yet to come on Saturday, April 27 at Mount Pleasant Church in Northeast Baltimore. You can register at www.family.umaryland.edu go to "Training and Education", click on "Resource Parent" and scroll down to "Northern Conference." The registration deadline is April 13. Hope you can join in to participate! There will be great sessions and good food. Also, with an expense reimbursement your participation will be free of charge.



CONFERENCES

National Foster Parent Association Educational Conference

If the California sun and the Pacific surf tickle your fancy as a place for good information, come to the National Foster Parent Association Conference in Long Beach, CA. The theme is "Oceans of Opportunity...Catch a Wave to Permanence." Enjoy great sessions and beautiful weather this June 5-8. The 2014 conference will be in Orlando. For more information about the conference or NFPA in general, go to www.nfpaconline.org. There is good information available on their site. NFPA is the national voice for foster parents.

North American Council on Adoptable Children Annual Conference

DHR is offering a limited number of scholarships for our resource parents who adopted from foster care to attend this conference August 8-10, 2013. The conference will be held in Toronto, Canada. Please talk to your local department as soon as possible about these scholarships. You will need a valid passport to be able to attend. For more information, go to www.nacac.org. NACAC and their web site is the go-to place for adoption support and information.

Providing for the Well Being of Teens in Foster Care



I have had an opportunity to provide care for various age groups during my 13 years as a foster parent. The plan was to provide care for youth around the same age as my two biological children. So at the 6 and 7 year old age range when my wife and I began our foster parenting experience we had a house full of energized children all running around having a great time. As my children moved into their middle school years, the youth that shared our lives as well as my two birth children seemed to be the most brilliant children on earth, according to them they knew everything about everything. Having four middle school age children, each developing their own personalities and identities made for a sometimes challenging experience.

Now that my birth children are older teenagers I have a home of four “young adults.” I have always thought that I would never provide care for teen aged foster youth. I had heard about the many challenges I would face. There have indeed been challenges, however those challenges are no different than those faced with my own birth children: school, clothing styles, dating, budgeting, learning to cook, controlling feelings, curfew, and I could go on and on. The differences may be in the intensity of a particular issue and the decision making process used to address those issues. My two birth children have been provided an effective support system during the 17 and 19 years of their lives, but the teenagers coming into my home very seldom have the same systems of support from family, school, church, peers, etc. It is up to my wife and me to accept them as they are and begin to develop the support system they need to just get by and hopefully at some point begin to feel safe and confident they are in a “good place.”

I am now at a point where I will only care for foster youth in their teens. For me, this age group is somewhat willing to take a chance on having someone who will “have their back” once the parent/child relationship is developed.

Because my home always has teens and I discuss providing care for the older youth with many fellow foster parents, I have been asked by my peers to share my thoughts, ideas, suggestion and experiences via the Maryland Resource Parent Association web site <http://www.mrpa.org>. So beginning in May, the MRPA will create an opportunity for resource parents to share information concerning providing care and providing for the wellbeing of our older youth in out of home placement. I encourage you to visit the web site and offer your suggestions for growing the site and come back in May to offer your thoughts on sharing information and best practices to provide care for our teens. I will offer advice based on my experiences and I am certain you will have valuable input and suggestions.

I look forward to hearing from you this spring.

*Sam Macer, President
Maryland Foster Parent Association*

Lifebooks by Dr. John DeGarmo

The departure of a foster child from your home is often a difficult time. Because this can be a time of great difficulty and one of emotional upheaval, it is important to prepare beforehand when it comes to the transition of your foster child from your home into another. From the very first day you bring a foster child into your home, it is critical to remember that he will very likely not be with you forever. There will come a time when he will move to another home; whether it is reunification with his parents, his family members, another foster home, or adoption. Therefore, planning for his departure begins when he first arrives.

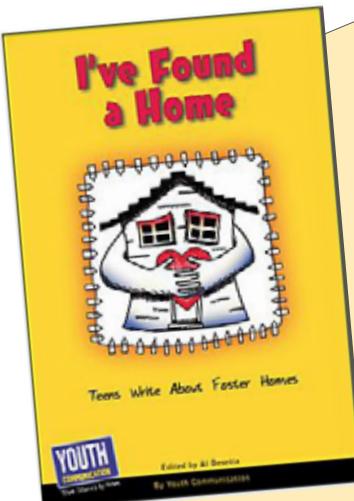
One of the ways you can prepare is by organizing a lifebook for your foster child. This book can be a wonderful healing tool for your foster child as he moves to a new home. For some children, a lifebook is the only reminder they may have of previous houses and families they once called home. Essentially, a lifebook is a scrapbook of your foster child's life, and is something he can take with him to his new home, and throughout his life. Sadly, when many foster children are placed into a foster home, much of their early life story is lost, and can never be retraced. A lifebook can not only help the child remember important aspects of his past, it can also bring to light memories that fade away when a child grows older.

When designing a lifebook for your foster child, make sure you include him in creating the book. Do your best to trace his early life; ask your caseworker for information, try to retrieve early pictures and information from birth parents and family members, if possible. Add pictures of the birth family, when possible, as well as any other foster parents he might have had. Include pictures of his friends and other important people in his life. Be sure to identify each person in the pictures. If you have any certificates of any kind that he might have earned or received, include these also. Letters from important people in his life would also be a great addition. Also, be sure to include any medical history you can locate. You may need help from his caseworker, along with his birth family, if possible. Any family history you can add would also be very beneficial to him, both now and later on in life. This might include military service, education, and accomplishment of not only his birth family, but about his biological family members, as well. Don't forget to add information about his own interests and hobbies, with plenty of pictures of him engaged in activities. Finally, leave several blank pages in the back of his lifebook, so he can add pictures, information, and even his personal thoughts later on as he grows, or perhaps even in his next foster home.

A lifebook helps a foster child recognize his or her individual worth, something that is so very important for each child in foster care. For many foster children, placement into foster care is a traumatic experience. Lifebooks can be a testament to their strength and their ability to overcome whatever challenges they may face while in care.

Dr. John DeGarmo has been a foster parent for 11 years. He is a speaker and trainer on many topics about the foster care system, and travels around the nation delivering passionate, dynamic, energetic, and informative presentations. Dr. DeGarmo is the author of the highly inspirational and bestselling book *Fostering Love: One Foster Parent's Story*. He also writes for a number of publications and newsletters, both here in the United States, and overseas. Dr. DeGarmo can be contacted at drjohndegarmo@gmail.com, through his Facebook page, Dr. John DeGarmo, or at his website, www.drejohndegarmo.com.

(Editor's note: Certainly when a child leaves your home, it could be difficult for you. Keep copies of some of the pictures for yourself so you can remember the children who have been placed with you. Children leaving your home take a little of you with them, just as they leave a little of themselves with you.)



"I've Found a Home"

Teens Write About Foster Homes

Youth Communications, a non-profit youth journalism program, does a lot of work with teens in out of home care. "I've Found a Home" features nineteen separate short stories written by adolescents about their foster home experiences.

It is hard parenting a teen; it is difficult being a teen; and, it is especially hard when you are a teen in foster care. These young people talk from the heart and tell it like it is.

Their stories paint pictures of fear and anxiety, shaded by the issues that brought them into care. These stories show that when foster parents are caring and trusting, these teens can become part of a family. It takes the efforts of both the teen and the parent.

This is a good read for foster teens and foster parents. After the first story, "Deciding My Own Worth," this reviewer was hooked. The book is edited by Al Desetta and information can be found at www.youthcomm.org.

You Know You Are a Resource Parent When...

***"When your 4 year old child is certain
where babies come from – CPS!"***

If you have any suggestions for "You Know You Are A Resource Parent When..." send your entry to john.bertulis@maryland.gov. Please be sure to put your name and the county/jurisdiction in the e-mail.

Maybe your "You Know You Are A Resource Parent When" will appear in a future edition of Resource Parent News.





AROUND THE STATE...

Western Maryland Foster Parents

Although Garrett County does not have an active Foster Parent Association, Garrett County DSS sponsors many trainings and events to support and appreciate their resource parents. Besides several different training sessions, since the summer, they had a Pool Party, a Fun Day, Summer Picnic, Fall Festival, and Christmas Carnival.

Allegany County has an association that meets regularly where families share food, fun, and valuable information. The local department sponsors trainings and events for resource families, including most recently a snow-tubing expedition. The rumor is that the adults had just as much fun as the children.

Our friends in Washington County have a “First Wednesday” support group that has a wonderful turnout. DSS has put together some innovative trainings including one on hair care. There were almost 100 registered for a recent Bowling Bash which included a buffet dinner. The Washington County League of Foster and Adoptive Parents is proud of their Facebook page.

Frederick County also has a lot going on. Their Association is busy and DSS has sponsored several trainings and meetings including their Annual State of Foster Care Sessions. They have an exciting Foster Parent Recruitment Contest going on among their resource families. They also have a monthly support group. And, they have planned a special education expo where they will meet with representatives of all phases of education in the County from infant and toddlers to high school.

There's a lot going on with resource parents in Western Maryland!

INFORMATION PACKET WEB PAGE

The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has information packets developed in the last two years that address various child welfare topics. Each packet provides an overview of the topic and directs the reader to appropriate resources. You can put check it out at http://www.nrcpfc/is/information_packets.html.

RESOURCE PARENT NEWSLETTER

The Resource Parent News is published quarterly by the Maryland Department of Human Resources. It is electronically sent to the local Departments of Social Services to be distributed to resource families and staff. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about this publication, please contact John Bertulis, Foster Parent Ombudsman at 410-767-7561 or at john.bertulis@maryland.gov.

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