



The Fostering Connection

A quarterly publication from the **Onondaga County Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group**

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Inside This Issue.

2	Current Email Address Updates...
2	Certification Requirements
2	"Shadawn Baker, Lincoln County, OK. Foster Parent"
3	With sincere Thanks...
3	Dear Stay-at-home Foster Parents...
3	Training Opportunities for 2006
4	Visiting ENHANCE: A Lot of Visits!
4	Loan Closet
5	Training Input Request...
6	The Kids Corner



Another Year....

I hope you had a wonderful summer and a terrific start to the new school year. In August, we held our first Foster/Adoptive family picnic, hopefully our first of many, at Marcellus Park. Nearly 100 adults and children attended the event. The weather was beautiful, the food plentiful and the company was outstanding.

I know that the cancellation of the regional training seminar has put some people in a bind on their training hours. Hopefully you signed up and attended the mini-conference offered October 29th at the Center for Development of Human Services training facility. This training provided participants with 4 of the 5 required hours of training. If you were able to attend the November support group meeting that should have allowed you to get that other hour before the end of the year. New starting in January, DSS will be offering bi-monthly

training seminars, also at the CDHS training facility. The first sessions cover topics requested in the survey done last year. Future topics will come from your selections of the enclosed survey. A babysitting allowance will now be available to you during training sessions.

On November 15th the children's division had an open house. This was a great opportunity to put a face to that voice on the phone, to visit your caseworker's area, and see the new visiting rooms, which have just been redone. And in 2006 the county hopes to have a mentoring program set up for our new families.

The support group is looking for some of the members to step up and help with organizing and setting new goals for the group. The current board has met most of the goals that were originally set in 2003. We need some fresh ideas and new people. We already have people in place that are ready to stuff envelopes, create flyers or help organize events but we have not utilized these people enough. You don't have to do it alone (like I am guilty of trying to do). If we have one person who can keep the calendar, make sure we have a time and a space to meet and make sure that the flyer goes out in a timely fashion. A second person is needed to work on planning special events. A third person to help collect content for the newsletter would be helpful and a fourth person to facilitate discussions at meetings would be really nice. Some members of the current board are beginning to burn out or are overloaded and I personally would hate to see the group not move forward after so much has been achieved. Please feel free to call any of the current board members to volunteer.

Debi Southard

New Supervisor in Homefinding

I am the new supervisor of the Homefinding Unit. I come to you with thirty years of experience in Children's Division, having worked closely with families and foster children. This is an exciting time for Homefinding, as we are planning to double the number of foster homes in Onondaga County. I am looking forward to your involvement and exchanging ideas with you as we embark on this important project.

Barbara Gifford

Current Email Address Updates...

The support group would like to ask you to make sure that we have your current email address. Frequently, we become aware of information or opportunities that would benefit our foster families but have no method of distributing that information to you other than the newsletter which is only published quarterly. Email is the fastest and cheapest way for us to reach you. If you receive periodic email from Cathy Dutton in homefinding, then we have your current email address. If you don't, would you please update your information by sending an email to debisouthard@twcny.rr.com and Cathy.Dutton@dfa.state.ny.us Please include your name so that we can update our records. Please remember us when you change your email address in the future.

Thank you.

Certification Requirements

The Homefinding unit needs the help of our foster families to keep your home certified. Please let us know if anyone moves in or out of your house, or if any of your children or foster children turns 18. Some examples of changes you need to report are:

When a young person turns 18

An adult child moves in or out

Any other adult moves in or out (sorry, borders aren't allowed)

Children of friends and/or relative move in/out

You have a new baby!!!

***Please note that any children who turn 18 or any new adults living in your home will need to be fingerprinted for clearances before they can live there, and if the adult is a new partner or spouse, they'll need to go through our certification process.

"Shadawn Baker, Lincoln County, Oklahoma Foster Parent"

It all began innocently enough...my decision to become a foster parent. I have no wonderful, earth-shattering reason why I decided this was what I was going to do. No powerful sermon was preached about it the previous Sunday. There was no profound moment. I just woke up and knew it.

I called DHS and thus the roller coaster, known as "being a foster parent" began. I began my classes, and with each class, I was convinced this was something I was meant to do. Through rose-colored glasses, I saw myself as Wonder Woman saving the world from imminent evils. Keep in mind that at this time, my heart was securely intact and as good as new.

My very first placement was a dream come true. I picked up a beautiful newborn baby boy from the hospital and brought him home with me. That dream turned into a nightmare the very next night when I picked up his four-

year-old brother. I am pretty sure he was my own personal war on terrorism. This was a child who wanted to grow up to shoot windows out of cop cars. He did not want to become a firefighter, a pilot, or a cowboy; he wanted to shoot windows out of cop cars. My heart sank, and reality started seeping in.

I was not dealing with innocent children who were thankful you rode in and rescued them. I was dealing with broken children... even the newborn, who did not ask to have drug withdrawals, but that was the life his mother chose for him. I was dealing with four year olds, who should be playing with cars and building forts, but instead they could out cuss a sailor, acted out violently, and knew what "weed" was. I thought that the 4 year old was beyond help. With consistent structure, firm guidance, and love, however, I was beginning to see his potential when he left. I'll never forget his last words, "I'll very miss you so much." It was then I noticed my heart had little cracks in it.

I, in my innocence, thought I would be teaching them, but rather they taught me. They taught me that not everyone lives a sheltered life where they are loved and provided for. They taught me food was not something expected to be on the table when you were hungry, but food was a blessing to receive. They taught me that not everyone thinks the world revolves around babies, but rather that babies can be left strapped in car seats for hours upon hours until that beautiful little girl has a permanent head tilt and crooked jaw...all because she was in the way of mommy's partying. My heart broke. I somehow managed to patch it up with a little bit of duct tape and gathered myself together and answered the phone once more for one more baby.

I learned that parents do not show up for visits and/or court dates to get their children back, much less PTA events, recitals, soccer games, and music programs. I have learned that babies at eleven months old have already learned that life is not fair and they can and will give up on life. I had thought that at eleven months old your only thought was "what can I get into today?" Unfortunately, for some eleven-month-old babies, their thoughts are more along the lines of "I saw daddy hit mommy. Cops took me away, and I am now in a shelter where there are 23 other babies my age. There is nobody to hold me or love me. I cannot deal with this any longer".

I've learned that politics are more important than a four-month-old's well being. I have learned that someone in the DA's office can work deals under the table unbeknownst to DHS. I learned that politics in the system did not care that Mom and Dad could not stay clean. They did not care that Mom had previously lost two children to adoption because she could not change her life. They did not care that Mom could not trouble herself to come to court or come to visits except sporadically. Because a child is ONLY property and has no rights, they sent him home. They never gave Mom a chance to clean up and to be the appropriate Mom a baby with health issues needed. Knowing that he was leaving to go home to unsafe

"Shadawn Baker, Lincoln County, Oklahoma Foster Parent"

(continued)

conditions, this time, my heart shattered. Duct tape was not enough to mend it. With a bit of baling wire and lots of duct tape and patches, I put it together the best I could and questioned my decision to become a foster parent.

In the midst of my grief and reconsidering my decision, the phone rang. The voice on the other end said "There is an 11 month old in the shelter. He has given up. He is no longer interacting with staff nor responding, and he has shut down. Can you take him?" When I picked up that beautiful brown eyed baby boy and looked into his eyes, what I saw broke my heart. Instead of the innocent happiness of a child, I saw a long black tunnel of despair and hopelessness. Again, my heart broke. I would rock him to sleep each night, kiss him on the forehead, and put him in his bed while my heart broke knowing his story. I brought out the duct tape and baling wire once more.

No longer is my heart in the perfect condition it once was. It has now been broken and repaired more times than I can count. Whereas it used to gleam, it is held together by duct tape and baling wire. An ocean full of tears has been shed. I have been asked by many "How do you do this? Don't you get attached and get your heart broken? How do you keep doing this?" I look at the picture of the 11 month old (now 18 months). I look at his eyes in the pictures I picked up yesterday, and where there once was despair and hopelessness, there is now mischief and happiness. Instead of lying there listlessly and not responding, there is a little boy who loves to say, "hut-hut" and then tackle mommy.

I do not do this for myself. I do not get my heart broken repeatedly because I enjoy it. I do it because of all my past, present, and future babies. I do it because they need to go to bed at night hearing "I love you". Is it easy? Not only no, but heck no. But every child, 0-18 years old, needs to know what it is like to not have to worry about if they will be fed or not. Even if it is just a few months, they know what it is like to be safe and sound. My heart is not near as important as they are. It will recover; that child may not.

With Sincere Thanks...

The Department of Social Services would like to express our appreciation to the Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group. On Saturday October 29, 2005, Onondaga County sponsored a "mini" training conference for our Foster and Adoptive families. The event was held at the Center for Development of Human Services training facility in Liverpool. The Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group provided the refreshments, including danish, donuts and cookies. Although the workshops were wonderful, the goodies certainly made the event that much sweeter. Thank you to Onondaga County's Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group for all that you do!!!!!!

Dear Stay-at-home Foster Parents:

More Music, More Fun, More Time For Everyone! We are seeking volunteers to participate in an exciting new program called "Baby and Me." Share your expertise in helping to enrich a parent's relationship with their child. Support families with children in foster care ages birth to 3 years in learning how to have fun together. Volunteers will model how to interact and play appropriately. Parents and volunteers may read to a child and/or group, do musical activities or just plain cuddle! Volunteers will help compile a family photo book.

Starting January 23, 2006, Baby and Me will meet Mondays and Thursdays for 12 weeks at the Dewitt Community Library located in the Shoppingtown Mall. Each session will last 1½ hours. You may commit to as many sessions as your schedule allows. Training will be provided prior to the start of this program.

Enhance a family's life. Watch a family grow. Please call us now for more information! Contact Karen Reid at 435-2884

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2006

ATTENTION:

Onondaga County Foster/Adoptive Parents

In your response to your requests, the Foster Parent Workgroup for Onondaga County DSS Children's Division is excited to announce an instructor led training schedule for 2006.

January 2006 (*Safety vs. Risk – When children are returned home*)

1/17 PM Or 1/18 AM

March 2006 (*Separation and Loss for Foster/Adoptive parents*)

3/21 PM Or 3/22 AM

May 2006 (*Managing Difficult Behaviors – Pre Teen*)

5/23 PM Or 5/24 AM

June 2006 (*Managing Difficult Behavior – Teen*)

6/5 PM Or 6/6 AM

September 2006 (*Normal Sexuality*)

9/26 PM Or 9/27 AM

November 2006 (*Parenting the Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused*)

11/28 PM Or 11/29 AM

Contact the Children's Division Home Finding Unit at 435-8347 for times, and course registration.

Visiting ENHANCE: A Lot of Visits!

Every foster parent knows that children in foster care are different than kids not in foster care. The most obvious difference is they don't live with their biological parents and many don't live with their biological siblings. Similarly, from a health perspective, children in foster care are also different than children not in foster care. Many suffer the effects of exposures to drugs and alcohol, chronic neglect in the home and chronic medical neglect. Once in foster care, they have the trauma of separation from their family.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and Child Welfare League of America have published recommendations on providing health care to this "at risk" population of children. Additionally, children in foster care must be cared for in accordance with New York State and Federal regulations. To meet the medical, developmental and psychological needs of these children and to comply with the national and state recommendations and regulations, ENHANCE and the Onondaga County Department of Social Services have a schedule for health care that is comprehensive, but may appear to parents as confusing.

Upon entering foster care, all children are to be seen for an **Initial Visit**. Often, this occurs while the child is at the Family Support Center. If a child enters your home without coming from the Family Support Center, please call ENHANCE immediately to arrange for the Initial Visit within the next 2-3 days. At this visit, the health care process begins with a physical examination, laboratory evaluation and tuberculosis testing. Medications and therapies are reviewed.

One month after the Initial Visit, children will be seen for the **Comprehensive Visit**. Commonly, foster parents do not identify medical problems until this visit. Laboratory and other testing can be reviewed. Vision and hearing screening will be performed at this time. Often younger children will receive immunizations, provided we have an accurate immunization record. Older children will meet with the child psychologist. Younger children will have development testing at a **Home Visit** either prior to or after the Comprehensive visit.

After the Comprehensive Visit, children will be seen for a **Placement Visit**. This can occur anytime within the next few days up to 3 months. These visits focus on the placement, such as is the child fitting in with the foster family; are referrals occurring as planned; are daycare or school issues being addressed; etc.

Children will also be seen frequently for **Placement Checks and Follow Up Visits**. Given the high prevalence of medical, developmental and mental health problems in these children and the stresses of foster care placement, children will be seen for additional visits. Placement checks focus on the child's

placement in foster care. Follow up visits include placement checks (these terms are sometimes used interchangeably) or may be for follow up of illnesses such as ear infections, asthma, etc.

Discharge Visits are scheduled just prior to discharge from foster care, whether the child goes to the biological parents, a guardian, an adoptive parent or is adopted by the foster parents. At this visit, medical history is reviewed. Active medical problems or new concerns are discussed and the child is examined. ENHANCE staff will assist in the transfer of care to new health care providers.

ENHANCE is available by telephone 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. We provide care to children admitted to the hospital. If you have a question, please call.

Children in foster care, by law, have many medical visits. ENHANCE recognizes that this is a major time commitment by the foster parents. We cannot stress how valuable it is to have you come to each visit. You (and the biological parents) know your child the best. If we can help you in any way, please let us know. We look forward to seeing you.

Steven D. Blatt, MD

Loan Closet

Do you have an attic, basement, or closet that is full of things you no longer need? Do you have a new placement and need anything? A loan closet for foster parents would be really handy. You could lend and receive things from other foster parents on an as needed basis. If you have items you need or items you are willing to give or loan to another foster family, please contact Suellen at 673-4076 or send an e-mail to Cathy Dutton at cathy.dutton@dfa.state.ny.us. Since we don't have a place to store these items, we will be maintaining lists of things that are needed and things that are available for loan. If there is something you need, we will connect you to the person who is willing to loan the item. If there is something you wish to loan, we will connect you to the person who needs the item. We will try to keep you informed of what is needed and what is available through the newsletter, and we will work toward establishing a website for this purpose.

The first item to be featured is: A foster parent has a pair of flexon eyeglass frames they no longer need. The frames are for a 2-4 year old child. They had trouble with regular frames breaking and purchased these flexon frames. The flexon frames are great, you can twist them, step on them, and it doesn't hurt the frame. The foster parent would like to give them to another foster child that could really use them. They are more of a boy's style frame, brown in color and would just need to get the prescribed lenses put in.

Cathy S. Dutton
Homefinding Caseworker

Training Input Request...

*We would like your input on what training you would like us to make available to you in the future. Please choose two from the list below and either mail your response to homefinding or email your choices to Cathy Dutton at Cathy.Dutton@dfa.state.ny.us please type **TRAINING CHOICES** in the subject line of your email. We will be offering your choices in 2006. Thank you.*

Anger Management

Participants will identify reasons children behave in angry and destructive ways and recognize and accept their own feelings toward children who are angry and/or destructive. Foster parents will demonstrate methods to modify angry and destructive behavior in children as well as develop a plan to manage their own angry emotions.

Dealing with Allegations of Abuse and Neglect

Foster parents need to recognize the risks of allegations of abuse and neglect that arise from the role of foster parents. The goal of this workshop is to assist them in lowering the risk through the use of knowing the children, effective discipline and developing a working relationship with the child's parents. In addition, the workshop will help prepare foster parents to respond to an allegation appropriately and effectively.

Attachment and Difficult Behaviors

Foster parents need to thoroughly understand the dynamics of attachment. They need to recognize the expression of needs in the difficult behaviors children exhibit in their homes. Foster parents will develop responses to meet those needs that promote attachment and security in the child while managing the behaviors. Participants will also learn to recognize the powerful effect children with attachment difficulties can have on the family and how to respond effectively.

Lifebooks

Lifebooks are a chronological record of events in a child's life. In this workshop, participants initially explore early memories in their own lives and why and how they remember them. Most usually they attach their memories to strongly emotional events, both positive and negative. We then discuss lifebooks for children in care and how they can help children maintain important connections in their lives. Participants practice developing lifebooks using many different methods.

Stress management

Participants look at what stress is and what stresses them. We ask them to share what works for them to relieve stress. We then explore some very basic techniques to relieve stress that require no special ability or equipment

such as breathing exercises, relaxation techniques and some visual imagery and/or combinations.

Growing Up and Out of Foster Care

Using childhood memories of a child who grew up in care, we explore some of the theoretical issues from GPS including, the cycle of need, attachment, connections, separation and loss, developmental stages, and identity. It assists participants to get "inside the head of a child", to understand things better from the perspective of the child in care.

HIV/AIDS – Spanish and English

Language and terms are defined and explained. The stages, transmission and treatment are presented and discussed. The treatments are explored, as well as the precautions. The issue of consents for treatment is presented, as well as testing.

ADHD

Participants will list behaviors common to ADHD, explore possible causes and develop resources for assistance with diagnosis and treatment. Foster/adoptive parents will recognize the impact of living with a child with ADHD in everyday life and develop a strategy to cope with the effects on the family. Key strategies for managing the behaviors arising from ADHD and guides to raising a child with ADHD will be explored.

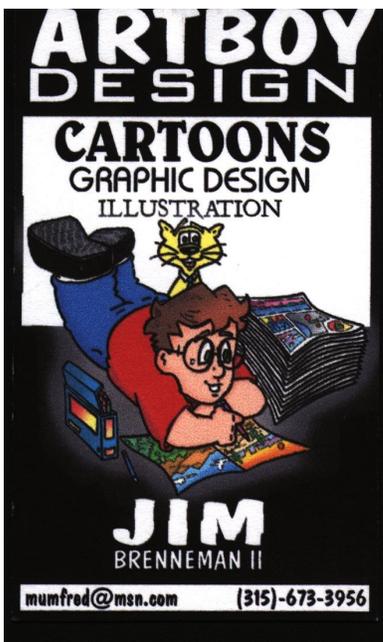
Play is a Child's Work

Using a guided imagery exercise, participants will look at the critical elements of successful play and its effect on child development. Using the video "Play is a Child's Work", participants will explore play strategies to help stimulate a child's (communication, attachment, trust, curiosity, motor skills). They will also examine play techniques for parents (playful motivation, imitation, following child's lead, giving choices and interactive play) that promote attachment and development.

ANYONE INTERESTED?

Are you a full-time foster parent interested in connecting with other stay-at-home foster parents? Chris Shultz would like to form a casual coalition of stay-at-homes for the purpose of joining together for play days, outings, babysitting and general support. Don't feel isolated!!

If interested call Chris at 479-8602



A Special Thanks to ARTBOY Design
For donating the new cartoon for each
Newsletter! Thanks Jim!!

Who we are...

The OCFAPSG was founded for the benefit of all foster/adoptive parents and children in their care. You are the group, the organization, the members that make the OCFAPSG what it is. If there are any questions, concerns or comments regarding this organization, please feel free to contact any of the Board members listed below.

Millie Williams
millanese1@aol.com
488.3236

Colleen Hedges
mchedges@att.net

Debi Southard
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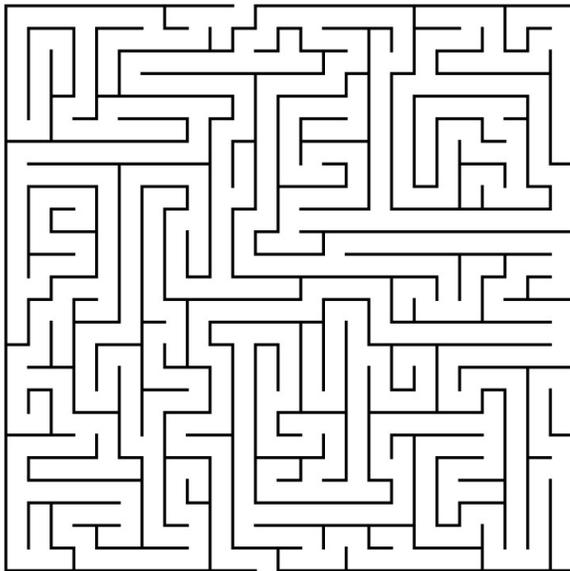
Karen Vedder
kvedder@twcnny.rr.com
445.1086

If you have an article or tidbit that you would like to submit for upcoming issues, please forward to Debi Southard at the above email or mail to:

Debi Southard
3305 Cedarvale Road
Nedrow, NY 13120

The Kids Corner

Can you help
the pilgrim catch his
Thanksgiving dinner?



Thanksgiving Jokes!



What did the turkey say before it was roasted?
Boy, I'm stuffed!

Why did the police arrest the turkey?
They suspected it of foul play!



Which side of the turkey has the most feathers?
The outside!

Can a turkey jump higher than the Empire State Building?
Yes. A building can't jump at all!

If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring?
Pilgrims!

Why did the turkey cross the road?
It was the chicken's day off!

What key has legs and can't open doors?
A turkey!

