



The Fostering Connection

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

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FALL 2009

November 20, 2009 – National Adoption Day Celebrations!

Our National Adoption Day Celebration will be held at 9:30 AM Friday, November 20, 2009 in the Grand Ballroom of Onondaga County OnCenter. Cayuga, Lewis, Oneida and Oswego Counties will be joining Onondaga in this year's celebration. Hon. James C Tormey, District Administrative Judge will be presiding over the event. Guest speakers include Joanne M. Mahoney, Onondaga County Executive and Josh & Steve Orsino, Adoptive Family from Oneida County. The public is invited to attend. Agencies will have information available for those interested in becoming foster/adoptive parents. Refreshments will be served. An estimate of approximately 50 adoptions will be occurring on that day directly following the event. Hope you can join us on this very special day.

Be Inspired, Visit Foster Club.com

Foster Club.com is a National Network for young people in foster care, a peer support network which opens the way for young people to transform their lives. The stories are compelling and are an inspiration to all who are involved in the foster care system.

We are re-organizing...Do you want to help?

The Foster Adoptive Support Group has been relatively non-existent over the past couple of years for multiple reasons mostly due to the organizers being busy and overloaded with personal family matters. Although none of us wanted to have to step back, our families had to take precedent over the group. As our family lives have settled down a bit, we are at a point where we feel it is important to reorganize now and proceed into the future with a solid direction and foundation to not have a disruption again. In order to make that happen, the board needs to have your help in this organization! We are looking for individuals and partners to help in various ways from organizing mini seminars/speeches to family fun events, etc. The board will be holding a re-organizational meeting at the Barnes & Noble on Erie Blvd., Dewitt, NY on **Monday, November 9, 2009 from 5:30-7:30PM** If interested in attending, please contact both Karen kvedder@verizon.net and Bill FosterDad2@gmail.com so that we can make proper arrangements.

Electronic Forms Available on Web

We are very excited to announce a new service that we hope will be a timesaver for you. We have added a new section to our web site that will have many of the forms that you use on a regular basis. You should no longer need to wait for any of these forms to come in the mail.

Check it out. Type in: www.giveyourlifeasmile.com Click on the forms button, look at what is available.

Some forms require signatures and must be printed out and sent in to the agency. An example of this is the billing sheet. **Billing sheets require original signatures; you can print the sheets off the web site and mail them or bring them in. For your convenience, remember, we have a drop off box for accounting in front of the Madison Street entrance to the Civic Center.**

If the form you need to submit does not require your signature, you can e-mail it in. For example, you can e-mail your day care application to your caseworker.

We want your opinion about how this works for you, so that we can change or improve it if needed. If there are forms that you use that are not there, please let myself or your Homefinder know and we will see about adding them to the site.

Barbara Gifford
Homefinding Supervisor



More Car Seat Legislation!!!

Effective late November of 2009 - the new Booster Seat Law will go into effect. The new law: **Any child under the age of 8** must be in an approved child car seat. For our older kids that would be either a high back booster, or a no back booster.

To accommodate this law and the fact that we will see larger children who now need a booster seat, manufacturers have put new booster seats on the market that will accommodate weight up to 120 lbs. I expect to have this seat available soon.

Please advise your foster parents, relatives and others of the change in this law. We will now have to put our 7 year olds back into a booster seat. If you have any questions, contact Onondaga County Car Seat program at 315-435-3280

Syracuse Crunch Tickets



As a sponsor of the Syracuse Crunch, Denny's Restaurant is pleased to donate a night of fun with the Syracuse Crunch to a few of our Foster/Adoptive Families. This will include game tickets in the Denny's seating section, a t-shirt, and a Crunch souvenir. If your family is interested in attending this event, please contact **Judy Burrows at 435-8226 by Thursday, November 12th**. Include the number of adults and children you would need tickets for.

Please note there are a limited number of tickets available on each date, so if the responses are too numerous we may utilize a lottery or something similar to give away the tickets.

Game nights are Friday December 11, 2009 and Friday, March 5, 2010.



FRIENDLY REMINDERS:

TB Tests are only required for your initial medical-upon certification. Medicals every two years, thereafter, do not have to include a TB test.

Please notify Judy Burrows with any new or changed e-mail addresses.

Please notify your child's caseworker before making any changes in employment Day Care. You will need to complete a new babysitting form and have it submitted to Judy Burrows.

When you receive your Foster Parent contracts from our department, you need to sign and return **BOTH** copies to the Accounting Department. Delays in doing so can effect reimbursement of your room and board.

Helpful Website for Foster/Adoptive Parents

If you have a chance, visit <http://nysccc.org/>. The NY State Citizen's Coalition for Children website features an abundance of information for fostering and adopting. The website includes topics such as: legal issues, financial supports, shared parenting, transracial and transcultural issues, identity issues, "hot topics", training, and information.

In addition; there are also links to support networks for foster/adoptive families and links of where to go for more information as well as a section just for kids and a section written by children.

Articles Wanted

If you come across an interesting article or have an idea about a story or topic of interest, feel free to email Bill Gambino at Fosterdad2@gmail.com in order for us to share it with all of the Foster Families throughout the county.

Our Website...

Keep your eyes and internet turned....we will be launching The Fostering Connection website very soon....informational articles, past copies of the newsletters and a bulletin board for posting info, questions, concerns, etc...

www.fosteringconnection.org

What We Wish We Had Known

A mom and her daughter share lessons learned about older child adoption.

By Judy and Sara Myerson

She was the one whose picture we kept going back to, the one whom we couldn't turn away from of the hundreds of waiting child pictures we studied for months. She looked out at us, unsmiling eyes shadowed by heavy bangs. My son, Daniel, then 11, called her "the sad one" and said, "Take her, Mom, please." I said, "But, she's older than we planned. She'll be eight or nine by the time she comes home." He replied, "Take her." So we did.

Adopting an older child, one who comes "ready-made" with a distinct history and personality, is a decision that ultimately comes from the heart. The journey of adopting an older child sight-unseen is a leap of faith on the part of the family and of enormous courage on the part of the child. It is also a journey we entered into, like many well-meaning parents, somewhat naively. Prior to Sara's adoption in January 1997, we were a family with two parents and two children—12-year-old Daniel (biological) and two-year-old Mia (adopted from China as an infant). Now, four years, one marital dissolution and a lot of turmoil, tenacity, reading, professional help, hard work, and heart-opening later, we are a family of five, with a different configuration. Sara is my very own daughter and I am, as she recently told me, her "real, not pretend" mother. Of all my children, she is the one who has caused me to stop, look, and stretch myself the most. I

would not take back any of our last four years; however, there are things that we both wish we had known before her adoption, things that might have made the journey easier.

I needed help!

Not only did I need help, but there was nothing wrong with me because I did. Parents are often ashamed to let others know that they might be having trouble in a family arrangement that they wanted so badly.

I did not call my agency or social worker when I began to realize we were in “uproar.” As a clinical social worker with expertise in working with adolescents and eight years experience in a psychiatric hospital, I should have known what to do. Finally I sought help, and, thank goodness, it wasn't too late.

I did not really have a chance to say yes.

When they told me there was a family from America who wanted to adopt me and asked if I wanted to be adopted, of course I said yes. When they gave me photos of my new house, family and friends, everything looked so nice. I felt special; everyone treated me differently and paid attention to me.

When my new family came, I was excited and scared. As soon as I met them, I left with them and was adopted. Other children had gotten to visit with their new family, and then the family left and came back again the next day. I thought that was going to happen to me too. But, I never had a chance to go back, think, and talk to my friends about it. I never really got to know this family, to say no or yes to this adoption. I would have said yes, but I would have liked to have been able to choose.

Children in placement and in orphanages are kids whom things happen to. They have been abandoned, neglected, and mistreated. They've been removed from families, sent off with new ones, placed in orphanages and group homes by adults, usually without explanation, preparation, or warning. They do not get to choose much of what happens to them, often growing up feeling powerless.

To Sara, her adoption was merely one more thing that happened to her. We should have insisted that Sara have several visits with us prior to adopting her. At the very least, we could and should have allowed Sara the opportunity to say yes (or possibly no!) to us.

Initial bonding with an older child is extremely important.

Any child who was in an orphanage or foster care will have had major interruptions and disruptions with primary caregivers, and at worst, never had an adult with whom to bond.

We were lucky. Sara came to us with a memory of strong primary attachments to both her birthmother and birthfather. She also came with the history of having been

abandoned by those parents, with no explanation of why she had to go or why she was the one so chosen. In her four years at the orphanage, she did not find one adult who took care of more than her physical needs. She was not about to trust that we would truly be there and remain. She had also perfected a number of survival skills—a defensive prickliness and pushing-away behaviors—that could make it hard for someone to want to bond with her.

When I watch Sara's adoption video now, several things jump out at me. The first is how often I allowed Sara to walk with, hold hands with, be given things, and be comforted by our guide, rather than me or her father. The second realization is how my energy was focused on caring for two-year-old Mia, not Sara.

We should have been doing all the care-taking. I should have been holding Sara's hand, not a shopping bag. Mia could have been cared for by her brother. Those first moments, when Sara was most afraid and vulnerable, were golden opportunities to establish us as the ones she could turn to, and to establish me as her mom.

I wish Mom had known how much I needed her.

Even though I was nine and had taken care of myself, I wanted Mom to do things for me, like pick out my clothes. Instead of getting annoyed when I got mad and said, “No, you pick,” she should have understood that there were too many choices. I'd taken care of myself too much.

School-age children can show a confusing mixture of over-independence and neediness. Their “age-inappropriate” requests can be signals of their emotional state. Responding to their emotional needs decreases their anxiety, makes them feel secure, and facilitates attachment. The more opportunities, the better. This includes rocking, singing lullabies, drinking from a sippy cup and sometimes even bottle-feeding. Parents are often fearful that if they allow or encourage regressive behavior, their children will stay young forever. But I've found that providing children with what they need allows them to move through that place, not get stuck there.

I should have set clearer rules and expectations.

In Sara's first few months with us, I did not address certain negative behaviors I knew came from her past experiences or current fears. For example, I did not establish clearly the idea of “mine” and “shared” property, and I allowed Sara not to share because I knew that she needed to have things that were hers alone. This exacerbated 12-year-old Daniel's feelings of anger, displacement, and territorialism. Once bad behavior had been allowed (“You never said or did anything about that before!”), it was harder to address later. I was the bad guy and Sara the victim. Just clarifying rules and expectations for your child will help him meet those expectations and fit into your family structure. This will help increase your child's sense of

security, and will keep you, the parent, from losing your mind.

I wish mom realized that I never had slept alone.

I was given a bed in a room all by myself. I had never slept in a bed without someone else in it, much less a room. I was used to the lights and sounds of the city. Now I was alone in a big quiet room in the dark. I kept all the lights on, but I was scared.

Children from other countries often sleep with their parents and, as they become older, with their siblings. In many orphanages children sleep two to a bed, head to feet, in a room filled with children. Children in placement seldom have a room to themselves. Sleeping near or with a parent creates a sense of safety and encourages trust and bonding. I believe that, of all the things that I did, allowing Sara to sleep in my bed brought about a major shift in her sense of security.

The hard times are the most important ones.

Parenting a child with a history of loss, trauma, and neglect is not smooth sailing. Such children test and push limits to see if these parents will also send them away. Sara came with abandonment and trauma issues, and she acted out in ways that I did not like or initially understand. She pushed buttons that I didn't know I had, and tapped feelings in me that I thought unthinkable. What helped me was realizing that when I experienced anger or helplessness, this was what Sara was feeling as well. This helped me to connect with her than rather than simply reacting to her behavior.

Attachment is about more than bonding. It takes place best when a parent stays with their child through the hard moments and remains there afterwards. For Sara, those moments were when she began to integrate her emotions, past experience, and present actions. By helping her name, express and understand her feelings over time, she no longer feels as controlled by them or that they or she are "bad." By coming back, talking, laughing, and sometimes apologizing when I have been angry, Sara has learned that neither her anger, nor mine, means she will ever be abandoned again.

Sara, at nine years old, came to us with a clear, strong sense of individuality. Our temperaments were not a natural "match," and my own patience and objectivity were, I'm sure, hampered by illness and marital stress. Sara was and is gentle, loving, giving, and forgiving. She is bright, talented, creative, funny, and insightful. Her strength, will and holding power have taught me what it means to stay in a relationship without sacrificing truth. Her way of letting feelings go once they have passed has been a lesson for me. Most of all, Sara has shown me my own capacity for commitment and love. While there are many things I wish I had known before Sara's adoption, the one thing I never could have possibly known is how much I could love her and hold her in my heart.

Judy Myerson lives with her family in Chester, New York.

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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, and 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.

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

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