



CONNECTIONS

VOLUME 7: ISSUE 2

MCF NEWS BY DEB SCHAEGLER

Winter is upon us! I hope everyone is well and has survived the holidays. MCF has undergone many changes in the last few months. I hope that for most of you, there has been minimum impact.

MCF is making a change to the newsletter distribution. CWTI will continue to produce the newsletter but we will be sending the newsletter electronically to families who have an email address. If you do not have email, your local Regional Coordinator will send you a paper copy in the mail. I hope that this will not be an inconvenience for families— please let me know if you have concerns about this new process.

When I met with the MCF Foster Parent Advisory Committee, I heard about the need for clarity of task assignments for DHHS staff in some offices. One of the major concerns identified was trying to get respite and then getting it paid. I am working with each District to identify who is responsible for respite and getting bills paid in a timely fashion.

I want to thank all the families that have been patient with MCF during this transitional period. I believe that MCF families are incredibly strong and can weather difficult changes. In the end, I believe that we all have the best interests of children in our hearts. Thank you for all that you do for our children. I hope to see you all at the MCF Annual Conference/Foster Parent Appreciation and Training event on March 10, 2007.

If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know at 287-2169.



Don't forget to register for the **8th Annual Maine Caring Families Appreciation Day!**

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ONE COUPLES' LOVE OF FOSTERING TEENS

BY PAULA ROWE

Doreen and Neil Farrington are new to our Maine Caring Families Program, but they are veteran foster parents. They started this important work in 1984 while living in California. Since then, they have had over 600 children placed in their home. I interviewed Doreen and Neil recently about why they started fostering and why they continue to do it today.

Doreen reported that she first thought of becoming a foster parent on Christmas Eve in 1983. "My daughter, Sandi, was Santa's helper." A woman came to see Santa with four young children. Doreen discovered that this woman was a foster mother and all of the children were in foster care. One of the boys had been badly abused and had a crater in his head where he had been hit. Another child was just an infant. "It broke my heart." Doreen knew then that fostering was what she wanted to do. She said that it took some time to convince her husband, Neil, but he agreed. She took the classes and became licensed.

The following year, Doreen and Neil were providing short term emergency shelter for five teenagers when Doreen became pregnant. They stopped fostering for three weeks before their daughter, Ashli was born and resumed fostering when she was three weeks old. Then, they accepted six more girls into their home. The Farrington's continued to provide emergency shelter for teenage girls. Some of the girls they were taking care of gave birth while at their home. As a result, they sometimes had up to nine children in their home.

Doreen noted that she likes teenagers because she can talk to them. "It is difficult to reason with 7 to 12 year olds. If you sit down and talk to teens, you can explain and reinforce things." Neil added, "You go over it every day." Both seem to enjoy the rewards of seeing a child finally understand the concepts they are teaching them.

Doreen said that she has had many teenagers she did not think she had helped at the time they left her home. However, many of these teens have contacted her when they became adults and told her how much they learned when they were with her and her husband. For example, Heather had lived with the Farrington's for over three years. When Heather was an adult, she contacted Doreen and told her, "I

hear myself say things to people that you said to me." One 16 year old girl had only lived with the Farrington's for one month before she ran away. However, when she was in her mid twenties and had children of her own, she told Doreen what she had learned. "I see myself doing with my kids things you did with me. Every time I go by Poway (the town where the Farrington's lived in California) I think of my time with you. It was the best time of my life." Another girl later told Doreen, "You'll always be my mum."

Doreen reported, "I can turn around the teens easier than younger ones. They (the younger ones) have such a loyalty to their parents. Trying to get them through visits to rebuild relationships with parents, then if it doesn't work, then trying to adjust to adoption. That is a lot of emotional work."

"You can't go by what they say about a child. Everybody is different with different environments..."

I asked Doreen how she and Neil decide whether or not they will work with a child. She said, "You can't go by what they say about a child. Everybody is different with different environments... It's like Christmas.

You never know what you're going to get until you open the door... You don't know until the honeymoon is over. Then they test limits and they either blow or settle. You are going to have a chemistry with the kids. You won't like every kid and not every kid will like you. It is very important not to look at a kid's past. You need to feel (what it is like to be with) that child." As a result, Doreen and Neil like to meet the foster children before they take them in. Neil added, "You can't judge them the way you might have been judged as a child. It is what their limits and abilities are. Their upbringing is different than ours."

Doreen added that it is okay to say that you can't keep a child, but she and Neil are willing to try anyone. "You cannot take it personally if you cannot save a child. They are all individuals and everyone needs a different level of care. They might leave, either runaway or go to a higher level of care, but they'll take some of it with them. You are going to make some difference."

Doreen also likes helping the teenagers get ready for life. She enjoys teaching them life skills and preparing them for adulthood. At their home, they hire a cleaning

Farrington's (Continued on page 3)

Farrington's (Continued from page 2)

professional for the heavy duty cleaning, but each child has to do chores around the house. They each keep their room clean and they do their own laundry. Other rooms and the vehicles are cleaned as a family.

Doreen and Neil currently have four teenagers living in their home. They recently adopted their 16 year old son. They also have one foster child and two therapeutic foster children who work with Maine Caring Families. I asked Doreen what she likes about working with MCF. She said that she enjoys the weekly home visits by the support worker. Having “someone to vent to without judgment every week” is helpful. She also finds it helpful that we set up team meetings bringing the team members together when needed.

When asked how the Holidays are better with the teens, Doreen said that she enjoys seeing the children have a Christmas they might never have had.

We would like to thank the Farrington's for their commitment and dedication to making the lives of teenagers better. We'd also like to congratulate them on their recent adoption of their son, Seth. Their daughter, Ashli flew in from California to be with her brother and family during this special time.

FOSTER CHILDREN AND THE IRS

SUBMITTED BY
GAIL UNDERWOOD PARKER

Many foster parents wonder how their foster child/ren may affect their tax return. Each person is responsible for his or her own taxes and is free to consult with experts. Last year (for tax year 2005) there was a new definition of **foster child** for tax purposes. The information below is quoted directly from last year's (tax year 2005) Form 1040 directions.

“A foster child is any child placed with you by an authorized placement agency or by judgment, decree, or other order of any court of competent jurisdiction.

Foster children are considered in determining:

- Dependency exemptions (Form 1040, line 6c)
- Child tax credits (Form 1040, lines 52 and 56)
- Head of household filing status (Form 1040, line 4)
- Credit for child and dependent care expenses (Form 1040, line 48)
- Earned income credit (EIC) (Form 1040, lines 66a and 66b)

HOLIDAY PARADE BY DISIREE DUNPHY LIBBY

On December 2nd, a few Maine Caring Families Foster Parents, foster kiddos, Jean Leonard, Mitch from A Family for ME, his family and myself took part in the “Festival of Lights” parade in Bangor. We spent all of that day creating our masterpiece float and at 4:30 we began our journey down Main St. The float was decorated with the Heart Gallery, a blow up snowman, a Christmas tree, “fake” snow, frozen people, and music blaring the song “Christmas Carol”. Not only did we have fun participating in this event, but our float received the honor of “Most outstanding non-profit” float. We are very proud of this award and the trophy will be displayed at the DHHS office in Bangor.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize two foster families that go “above and beyond” their duties to make the lives of our kiddos more fulfilled. The Osgood's and Tapley's took the time to plan and prepare for this event. They did it all for the kiddos. These two families are absolute gifts for our children, Maine Caring Families, and to our communities. Kim and Rick Osgood and Hannah and Nathan Tapley have fostered numerous children since they began foster parenting and we are very lucky to have them as part of Maine Caring Families. I would also like to thank Jean Leonard, Mitch and family, Gary Dunphy for his time and utilization of his truck, and Troy Dunphy for allowing us to use his trailer and paint it with “fake” snow.



TIPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CHILD'S PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL

BY NEWS USA

(NU) - How are your children doing in school? Are you pleased with their performance, or do you think there is room for improvement?



No matter what letters appeared on their report cards, it's never too late to help your children get excited about learning. This can be accomplished by creating an encouraging atmosphere in your home.

"It is important for parents to make everyday learning activities fun in order to enhance math, reading, writing and study skills," said Richard E. Bavaria, Ph.D. and vice president of Sylvan Learning Center.

Here are tips from Sylvan Learning Center on how to get involved with your children's learning processes and help motivate them for the rest of the school year:

- **Set aside a specific time for homework and studying.** Take advantage of this quiet time to sit with your child and work on your own paperwork. This visually demonstrates the importance of "work time" to your child.
- **Set up a reward system.** For example, deposit change in a small jar when homework is complete. As soon as

the jar is full, treat the whole family to something everyone will enjoy.

- **Have family reading time at least once a week.** Utilize Book Adventure, a free Sylvan created, interactive reading program that is available online at www.bookadventure.com. Students choose their own books, take short comprehension quizzes and redeem their accumulated points for small prizes.
- **Refresh your child's study space.** Make sure that all materials, such as pencil sharpeners, erasers and extra paper, are easily accessible and in adequate supply.
- **Create study plans.** Have your child do the most challenging assignment first, then work on easier tasks. Finish each homework session with a fun activity.
- **Seek opportunities to teach.** Invite your child to participate in cooking or shopping to strengthen math skills.
- **Find a study buddy.** Encourage your child to choose a classmate with whom to study and swap books.
- **Talk to your child's teachers.** Find out if your child needs extra help in a specific subject in order to catch up or get ahead in the class.

For free guides and a variety of complimentary activity booklets and writing journals, visit the "Resources for Parents" section of www.educate.com or call 800-31-SUCCESS for additional information.

SERVICES FOR YOUNGER GRANDPARENT CAREGIVERS

Grandparents who are caregivers for grandchildren will now be eligible for supportive services at an earlier age. On October 17, President Bush signed the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006 (P.L. 109-365), which amended the Caregivers Support Program of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 3030s) to lower the age limit for these grandparent caregiver programs from 60 to 55.

The program provides Federal monetary support for State programs that provide older caregivers such services as caregiver training, respite care, and other supplemental services through the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP). The new law also gives priority to caregivers who provide care for children with severe disabilities.

The text of the Act is available online:

http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_bills&docid=f:h6197enr.txt.pdf (PDF - 200KB)

For more information about the Act and about the NFCSP, visit the Generations United website: www.gu.org

From the Children's Bureau Express, Issue Date: Dec 2006/Jan 2007. <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/>

RECIPE CORNER

SWEET AND SOUR MEATBALLS SUBMITTED BY COLLEEN STITHAM

Meatballs:

- 1 -1/2 pounds of ground chuck
- 3/4 cup bread crumbs
- 6 Tablespoons milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Pepper



Mix and form into small balls and place on a cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 minutes. Place cooked meatballs in a slow cooker.

Sauce:

- 3/4 cup ketchup
- 1 -1/2 Tablespoons of vinegar
- 1 -1/2 Tablespoons of Worcestershire sauce
- 3 Tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped

Mix in a small bowl then pour over meatballs and heat.

PASTA PRIMAVERA FROM THE MAINE NUTRITION NETWORK WWW.MAINE-NUTRITION.ORG

- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 1/2 cup cherry tomatoes, diced
- 1/2 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup yellow squash or zucchini, diced
- 1 cup broccoli florets, diced
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup low-fat Italian dressing
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh basil or parsley
- 1/2 pound spaghetti, fettuccini or linguine



1. Cook and drain the spaghetti according to package directions.
2. Put peas, diced broccoli, squash or zucchini, and carrots into boiling water for two minutes. Remove from heat and drain.
3. In a bowl, mix cooked vegetables, tomatoes, Parmesan cheese and Italian dressing.
4. Pour over cooked pasta and serve.

WIRE DECORATED FRAME

These trendy wire frames make great gifts and they are easier to make than you would think!

You need:

- Lucite Frame
- Low Temp Glue Gun
- Wire Solder from the Hardware Store
- Translucent Pony Beads
- Metallic Silver Pony Beads
- Wire Cutters
- Toothpicks
- Photo



Instructions:

Wire solder is very easy to bend. Decide the word for your frame and bend it using your fingers and wrapping around pens and markers to get a smooth curve. You can cut the wire into pieces like we did for the word "Mom" or use all one piece like we did for the word "love".

Bend your wire to fit around the frame. Slide on some transparent and silver pony beads. Glue in place using a toothpick and hot glue. Use glue sparingly or it will show around your wire.

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CONNECTIONS

REGIONAL NEWS

ANDROSCOGGIN, FRANKLIN, AND OXFORD COUNTIES

If you want to be included on my email list, please send me an email at: Lorraine.T.Belanger@maine.gov
For those of you who do not have email, I will continue sending information by mail.

WELCOME

Welcome to Summer & James Traverse, of Lewiston. They joined MCF in January of this year. They are in the process of adopting a toddler and currently are fostering siblings.

Welcome to Catherine & Steve Parker and their son, of Mechanic Falls. Licensed about 2 years, they provided respite for many of our foster families until they joined MCF this month. They are in the process of adopting sisters.

I am very pleased to announce Louise Hamilton as our supervisor. Many of you know her from her many years at the Department as an Adoption worker.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

I encourage you to attend the support groups. It is a great opportunity to meet other MCF families and share the day to day needs of fostering. Your support workers and I can empathize and support you but no one knows about what you do except another Foster Parent!

The Lewiston support group has returned to the DHHS in Lewiston and takes place on the third Thursday of each month 6:30 to 8:30pm.

The Farmington support group is held the second Tuesday of each month at the Franklin Memorial Hospital.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Julie Lothrop, 364-7094, julianne1963@hotmail.com

Lorraine Belanger

AROOSTOOK COUNTY

CONGRATULATIONS

To Lola Willette, the Program Coordinator of MCF for Community Care covering Bangor North, on her promotion within Community Care. Lola will continue to oversee the MCF program and staff. She will also have other supervision duties in her agency in her role as Team Area Manager. Best of Luck!

TRAINING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

We had our Annual Christmas Support group gathering on November 30th, 2006 at the Caribou DHHS office. There were 20 foster parents and staff in attendance. We had a wonderful pot luck supper of ham and all the fixings. We had a "Dixie Swap" which was fun for everyone in attendance. We talked and laughed and enjoyed each others company. It was a great team building experience.

We did not have a support group meeting in December as everyone was very busy. We will be meeting monthly starting again in January 2007. We met during the day in January then in the evening in February. We will meet alternating day and night Support Group as some foster parents are unable to attend night meetings due to their schedules.

The new Aroostook County training booklet will be out the end of January. Please take advantage of the trainings offered to foster parent in this area.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Lisa Brown, 764-8358, LMB_321@hotmail.com

Joyce Gagnon, 868-5302, ourplace128@verizon.net

Colleen Stitham, 429-9184, topper110@yahoo.com

Michael Allen

CUMBERLAND COUNTY

WELCOME

We are very happy to welcome into Maine Caring Families Betsy and Jerry Grondin from Falmouth and Kathy Tarpo from Cape Elizabeth. We would also like to welcome back to our program Juli Laughlin from Naples. Welcome aboard everybody!

TRAINING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

There continued to be a few options for you to attend a support group each month. As I mentioned in the last newsletter DHHS will offer a group every other Wednesday evening from 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. to be held at the DHHS building at 161 Marginal Way. One group per month will have a training component and the other one will be support only. Both will include pizza and childcare, if you need it. I send out reminders by e-mail on a regular basis as to when the groups are and which training is being offered. These groups include all Cumberland County Foster Parents.

- Tuesday, February 13, 2007 - 6:00-8:00 p.m., Spurwink/Fireside Room, Potluck
- No group in March as we will be holding our annual MCF Appreciation Day on March 10, 2007

- Tuesday, April 10, 2007 - 6:00-8:00 p.m., Spurwink/Fireside Room, Potluck
- Tuesday, May 8, 2007 - 9:30-11:30 a.m., Spurwink/Kaufman Building

Please mark your calendars and join us!

Wishing you all a happy and healthy New Year!

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Gail Parker, 799-1417, gailunderwoodparker@yahoo.com

Susan Hughes

KENNEBEC AND SAGadahoc COUNTIES

We had a wonderful Holiday party at the Unitarian Church in Waterville on Monday, December 11th. Many foster parents came to enjoy the festivities and each other's company. Due to my new role, I was not the primary organizer for this event. Thank you to Suzette for organizing, cooking and coordinating the food. Despite the fact that this was supposed to be an event in which foster parents aren't expected to work or watch any children, Maili Bailey was a tremendous support, and also arranged the use of the church and the kitchen.

District 4 had a children's Christmas Party on Monday, December 4 at the Inside-Outside Playground in Waterville. Many children enjoyed decorating Christmas cookies, playing in the playground and especially enjoyed a visit with Santa!

Our next Maine Caring Families event will be a sliding party on February 22nd. District 4 will also have a skating party for all district 4 foster parents during the week of February school vacation.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Randolph

- Monday, February 26, 2007, 6-8 pm
- Monday, March 26, 2007, 6-8 pm

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Pat Fortune, 582-2127, wfortune3@excite.com

Cookie Luce, 547-3385

Roger Brodeur

KNOX, LINCOLN, SOMERSET AND WALDO COUNTY

We are happy to welcome two new families into the Maine Caring Families Support Program. Jessica and Chris Higgins live in Unity with their three dogs, biological daughter and foster daughter.

Mark and Crystal Plummer live in Newcastle and are brand new foster parents with their first placement! A hearty welcome to both of these families!

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Maili Bailey, 474-7370, maili@prexar.com

Hattie Damon, 634-2711

Janet Nadeau, 487-5693

Julie Velez

PENOBSCOT, PISCATAQUIS, HANCOCK, AND WASHINGTON COUNTY

I hope you all had a wonderful Holiday!

I would first like to thank Hannah and Nathan Tapley, and Kim and Rick Osgood along with their wonderful families and their support worker Desiree Libby for their hard work on the Maine Caring Families float in the Festival of Lights parade. I would also like to thank Mitch from A Family for ME for bringing us the Heart Gallery. The float looked fabulous and we won Best Float for a Nonprofit. Your dedication and hard work is amazing. Thank you!

I would like to welcome Tammy and Ronald Dunham to the Maine Caring Families Program. They have been providing a family for foster children for 3 years. They are a great asset to the program and we are very happy to have them.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER

Nathan Tapley, 973-7240, ntap23@verizon.net

Sue Hughes

YORK COUNTY

District One had 3 inquiries over the past month of interested foster parents who would like to become MCF foster parents. We are still trying to recruit MCF foster parents and hope to be able to educate people on teenagers and the high level of need for placements.

I would like to state my appreciation to all of the MCF foster parents in District One for their hard work and dedication they give our children in care daily.

Our next support group meets on Tuesday, February 13 at the Riverside Spurwink location from 6-8 pm. Keeping our teenagers safe and helping them to make good choices on their path to independent living is a frequent concern and we look forward to discussing this topic at the next support group.

Jennifer Needham and Destry Oldham-Sibley

CONNECTIONS

CWTI TRAININGS

To register for these trainings, visit our website at www.cwti.org or call Jeanine Brown at 626-5285.

FEBRUARY 2007

February 13 - Self-Care for Parents (Topsham)

February 27 - Hair: Nappy and Loving It! (Portland)

MARCH 2007

March 3 - Documentation Skills for Caregivers (Bangor)

March 6 - Documentation Skills for Caregivers (Portland)

March 13 - EEG Neurofeedback as a Treatment Approach for Children (Portland)

March 22 - Documentation Skills for Caregivers (Presque Isle)

March 22 - Living with Autism and Aspergers (Lewiston) (Note: date change from 3/24 to 3/22.)

March 27 - Parenting Physically Aggressive Children and Youth (Biddeford)

March 27 - FASD I - Introduction to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Presque Isle)

March 27 - FASD II - Living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Presque Isle)

March 31 - Sibling Rivalry: The Struggle Between Yours, Mine, Ours and Theirs (Ellsworth)

APRIL 2007

April 2 & 3 - Conscience Development (Lewiston)

April 4 - Working with Children Exhibiting Sexual Behavior Problems (Bangor)

April 7 - Sibling Rivalry: The Struggle Between Yours, Mine, Ours and Theirs (Caribou)

April 13 - Effects of Trauma on Grief and Loss (Waterville)

April 25 - Living with Autism and Aspergers: Strategies for Families (Thomaston)

April 27 - Transitioning from Foster Care to Adoption: A Life-Long Journey (Topsham)

April 28 - Mini-Miracles Make and Take Sampler (Bangor)



Maine Caring Families

Lisa Hinckley
Muskie School/Child Welfare Training Institute
295 Water Street
Augusta, Maine 04330