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Sixth Annual
Ribs for Kids
Supporting
MFCAA

Ribs for Kids Celebration!
Please Mark Your Calendars,
It's Kansas City's favorite fundraiser!

Date: May 2nd, 2009 (Saturday)

Time: 7:30 a.m. til 6 p.m.



McGonigle's Market

1307 West 79th Street, Kansas City, MO
A benefit in support of **Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association**, and a chance to enjoy K.C.'s finest BBQ ribs while you help out some pretty terrific kids!

Over 4,000 slabs of ribs were sold last year. The proceeds from the sale helped provide training classes, mentoring, school supplies, family outings, respite coordination, a kids' clothes closet, holiday gifts and so much more. Bring your family, friends and neighbors and help us make this a banner year.



Midwest Foster Care & Adoption Association Newsletter



Letter From the Executive Director

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Dear Friends;

April is nationally recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month. All over the United States public and private efforts are made to raise awareness of the problem of child maltreatment. In our area, the Kansas City STAR publishes a calendar of child abuse prevention activities each year in April. People wear blue ribbons and t-shirts to signal their commitment to reducing child abuse in our area, and for those of us who participate, we feel validated by acknowledging that for one month each year, we care enough about child abuse to think about it a little.

Of course, because of my personal life choices, and the work that I do, I get to think about child abuse all year long, just like most of you. I don't just wear the t-shirt, I know lots of children who've suffered abuse. I know thousands of local heroes who work to care for and guide and heal these young lives. The problem of child abuse is very real to me. I know its face and its name.

Because of my work in the Kansas City area, I have the opportunity to serve on a committee (the Community Quality Assurance Committee) which has both the burden and the privilege of overseeing the performance of the child welfare system locally. For the past several years we've tracked (through a review process) the 'community challenges' that contribute to the occurrence of child abuse for kids in foster care. Several particular challenges have been identified each year. These are issues that we find present in the cases of the children we review year after year. The recurring issues are:

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Please spread the word!



We are now scheduling informational meetings for people interested in fostering and adoption, where we will have experienced foster/adoptive parents available to answer questions. If anyone you know is interested in fostering or adopting, please tell them to call Suzen so we can include them in our next meeting.

Suzen: (816) 350-0215 or e-mail suzen@mfcaa.org.

MFCAA CONTACT & DIRECTIONS:

3210 S Lee's Summit Rd/Independence, MO/64055

- From I-70, take the Lee's Summit Rd Exit and go North
- Drive for a little over a mile, (the last intersection you'll go through is for Kiger Rd—we are just past that)
- We are on the left side of the road (across from a park), on the Drumm Farm campus

The sign where you turn in says Drumm Farm. We are part of a collection of "houses" set back from the road. Stay to the right of the drive; MFCAA is the 2nd building on the RIGHT.

Trainings are held in the Dining Hall —stay to the far left of the drive; 3rd building on the far LEFT

816-350-0215/ mfcaa.org



Investigating Open Foster Parent Records

By: Janet Richardson

On the JCFAP email loop, at MFCAA conferences, and in other situations, the subject of 'open' foster parent licensing records has been raised by foster parents who are concerned that the very personal details about their families might be released if anyone in the general public should request them. I don't remember ever being told when I got licensed or when I took my STARS pre-service training class that my file would be considered 'public' records.

Recently, I had reason to request to review my own licensing file. Reading through the voluminous stacks of papers, I found a lot of information (some accurate and some not) about my own family, our finances, our medical information, our kids' information, etc. In my file were the notes taken by workers after visits to my home, correspondence between workers and other team members about kids in my home, and even a notation of concern provided by someone who has never set foot in my home.

As I reviewed my own file, I began to wonder what information actually is considered 'public' information in the licensing files of foster families. Then, very recently in the process of re-licensure, I was asked to provide financial information including bank account numbers, credit account numbers, investments, and retirement funds. Again, I wondered exactly how much of this financial information would be protected from the general public.

I decided the best way to find out the answer was to test the process. I obtained a copy of the policy from the Child Welfare Manual. Section 5, Chapter 2.6.1 details that the licensing records of all provider homes are available to the public under Missouri's "Sunshine Law," Chapter 610 RSMO. The specific information which can be released per policy includes:

- Assessment information with health information redacted
- STARS training information and homework
- Financial information (except account numbers, Social Security numbers, etc.)
- Home address and phone numbers (although phone numbers and addresses can sometimes be removed from the information released- this is done at the request of local staff with the approval of the Division of Legal Services); and

A licensing or approval summary (this is not a home study). The summary shall include:

- The type of provider;
- Original licensure/approval date;
- License approved until when;
- Licensed for what:
 - age
 - sex
 - race
 - handicapped
 - medical, and/or
- Behavior;
- Number of children placed since original licensure/approval;
- Number of children currently in the home: and
- Training hours.

The policy then clearly spells out the information which may not be released to the public. That information includes:

- Protected health information (HIPPA)
- Child Abuse/Neglect reports
- Foster child information (at the request of a biological parent, the information on their child can be released but not on the other children in the foster home); and
- Information on the provider's biological and/or adopted children.

Access to information on the suspension or revocation of a foster home license within the record is covered under RSMo Chapter 210.498. The determination of whether license suspension or revocation information may be released should be made by the Division of Legal Services (DLS).

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- **Drug use/Abuse by parents** resulting in pre-natal drug exposure to children, poor work stability and performance- decreased earnings and self sufficiency, poor parental supervision, decreased educational stability/poor educational outcomes for kids, homelessness, and domestic violence.
 - **Developmental Disability (mental retardation) in parents/children** exacerbated by a lack of available social support services such as assistance with employment, housing, support services designed to promote successful independence at whatever level is possible, and adequate mental health treatment for co-occurring mental illness diagnoses.
 - **Mental Illness in parents/children** exacerbated by a lack of available social support services geared toward moving mentally ill people toward the most functional level possible, funding for mental health treatment services and availability of those services, etc...
 - **Multi-generational foster care experiences** in which grandparents, parents and children have all been removed from their homes due to abuse/neglect as children, demonstrating the cyclical and exponential nature of the problem of child abuse. When interventions for abuse are unsuccessful, generations to come will suffer as a result.
- Domestic Violence** which is often both a product and predictor of child abuse. Domestic Violence results from the combination of any number of potential stressors (poverty, substance abuse, mental illness) and a total lack of appropriate coping skills and social supports.

Each one of these challenges is directly tied to the overarching issues of poverty and lack of resources. When people feel as if it can't get better, it won't get better. Hopelessness is the putrid vapor that envelops all of the factors which contribute to child abuse. While efforts like the Child Abuse Prevention Month public campaign do raise some awareness, in reality they do little to address the issues which lead to child abuse. Why? The predictors of child abuse are BIG problems that don't have easy solutions. These are large scale societal problems that will take lots of work and money. The ills that lead to child abuse won't be fixed in a short period of time. They may take generations to fix.

Real child abuse prevention would involve an acceptable standard of living for every member of our community, and an array of competent and abundant social services designed to assist those among us who really can't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Unfortunately, I believe that many of us don't really want to make the investment of our time and, more importantly, our tax (and other) dollars that would be necessary to achieve real and sustainable progress in preventing child abuse. It's much easier to close our eyes and try to wish the problem away.

I have a quote framed on the wall in my office. The Dalai Lama said, "It's not enough to be compassionate. You must act!" I think that rather than looking at Child Abuse Prevention Month as an opportunity to raise awareness, we should market the month as a call to action. Child abuse impacts everyone, as you can see from the list of its causes. It will take not only the awareness of each capable adult in the United States, but also a sincere financial commitment and the willingness to get dirty and do some piece of the hard work necessary to make things better. We must all step up to fight for those who are simply depleted of hope or physically or mentally incapable of helping themselves. It seems easy to see ourselves reaching out to help innocent children. But what we really seem to struggle with, in our individualistic society, is to care about the adults among us who are cold, or isolated, or riddled with addiction, mental illness, and fear. These are our brothers, even the least of them.

I'm writing about this a month early, because I want to give you time to think about all of this and let it digest before you decide whether to ball up this newsletter and throw it away or to take me up on my challenge. In April, I invite you to really take action toward child abuse prevention. Find some way that each of you can personally do something to make a difference in one of the core issues identified above. Contribute your money, your time, or your skills to an agency in our area which works daily with the least of our brothers, and tell them you're making that effort to work on preventing child abuse. Giving to MFCAA is a great way to help kids who have suffered abuse. (And we truly need and appreciate your support all year long). But when we focus on prevention, for that one short month each year, I'm asking you to find room in your wallets and your schedules to reach out to act. We are all responsible for the future of our children.

Best Wishes,

Lori Ross, MFCAA Executive Director



Who Was Saint Patrick?

St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is one of Christianity's most widely known figures. But for all his celebrity, his life remains somewhat of a mystery.

Taken Prisoner By Irish Raiders

It is known that St. Patrick was born in Britain near the end of the fourth century. He is believed to have died on March 17, around 460 A.D. Although his father was a Christian deacon, it has been suggested that he probably took on the role because of tax incentives and there is no evidence that Patrick came from a particularly religious family. At the age of sixteen, Patrick was taken prisoner by a group of Irish raiders. They transported him to Ireland where he spent six years in captivity. During this time, he worked as a shepherd. Lonely and afraid, he turned to his religion for solace, becoming a devout Christian.

Guided By Visions

After more than six years as a prisoner, Patrick escaped. According to his writing, a voice-which he believed to be God's-spoke to him in a dream, telling him it was time to leave Ireland.

To do so, Patrick walked nearly 200 miles to the Irish coast. After escaping to Britain, Patrick reported that he experienced a second revelation-an angel in a dream tells him to return to Ireland as a missionary. Soon after, Patrick began religious training, a course of study that lasted more than fifteen years. After his ordination as a priest, he was sent to Ireland with a dual mission-to minister to Christians already living in Ireland and to begin to convert the Irish. (Interestingly, this mission contradicts the widely held notion that Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland.)

It's Time For Consignment Sales!

Kidz Closet Consignment Sale
March 5-7/Lakeland Community Church
913 NE Colbern Rd
Lee's Summit, MO 64086

Just Between Friends Consignment Sale
March 12-15/KC Sports Lodge
19310 E 50th St, SE of M-291 & 40 Hwy
Independence, MO 64055

These sales both donate unpurchased clothes to the MFCAA Clothing Closet. Be sure to support them!

ADOPTION TAX CREDIT

FROM NACAC - Beginning in tax year 2003, families adopting a child with special needs from foster care could claim the adoption tax credit without needing to incur or document expenses. For tax year 2008, the tax credit is \$11,650 (and \$12,150 in 2009) per child and you have the year you finalized and up to the next five additional years in which to use it. If you finalized your adoption in earlier years and failed to claim the adoption tax credit, read the fact sheet *Amending Your Tax Return To Access The Federal Adoption Tax Credit* for more information.

Download the full PDF at mfcaa.org, including information on how to access the tax credit.

Celebrate! April 23, 2009 *Vision for Change!*



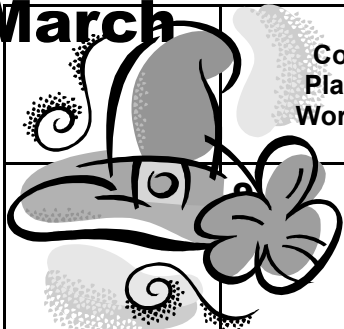







Ribs for Kids is an opportunity for our community to make a difference in the lives of children who have suffered abuse, neglect or abandonment. By becoming a Special Friend of MFCAA, you can be part of the change in many young lives.

Become a Special Friend of the children of MFCAA at the \$200.00 level or above and enjoy the following benefits:

- You and a guest are invited to attend the *Vision for Change* wine & hors d'oeuvres event on Thursday, April 23rd from 6p-8p at the beautiful River Market home of Bob and Nikki Deal.
- Acknowledgement as a *Special Friend* at Ribs for Kids at McGonigle's on May 2nd
- Acknowledgement in the MFCAA newsletter and web site
- The opportunity to pre-purchase your ribs!

Remember, all contributions are welcome and every contribution makes a difference. We cannot all be foster or adoptive parents, but we can all be part of the promise of a brighter future. You can be part of their *Vision for Change*. For more information, contact linda@mfcaa.org (816-350-0215).

March

	College Planning Workshop	3 	4	5	6  	7
		10 	11	12	13 	14
15	16	17  St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20  	21 Skate Party!
22	23	24 	25	26	27  DENTAL VAN* AT MFCAA	28 Prom Boutique
29	30	31				

NOTE: On the 1st Friday of the month, the Food Pantry is open in the evening only, for those who come to training.



Clothes Closet
10a-2p



Food Pantry
9a-2p

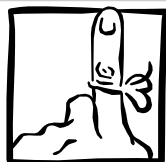


First Friday Training
6:30p



Third Friday Training—7p
(6:30p dinner)

*For Dental Van Appointments:
Bobbie Mitchell/ 816-889-3512



COLLEGE PLANNING WORKSHOP

Monday, March 2nd @ MFCAA
(Dining Hall—3rd building on the far left drive)
7p-8:30p
Available parents are encouraged to attend with their kids.

This workshop is for any high school (sophomore to senior) student interested in attending college, or interested in simply learning about their options. Perfect GPA's and college savings accounts are not a requirement for attending this workshop, or continuing education past high school!

PLEASE RSVP BY FEB. 27TH to
shandra@mfcaa.org or
816-350-0215

Spring Family Event—Skate Party!!

This year, we've reserved the rink just for our member families, and are excited to see everyone strap on their skates again in '09!

Saturday, March 21st/ 5p-7p
Winnwood Skating Rink/4426 NE Winn Rd/KC, MO
Cost: \$5 for the entire family!!
(includes admission & skates)

We have reserved the rink for 125 skaters, so please RSVP as soon as possible to reserve your spot. Because we have a limit on our number of skaters, please bring only members of your family currently living in your house—if you have family or friends who would like to come just to watch, that is fine, as we do not have to include non-skaters in our 125 count.

RSVP to shandra@mfcaa.org or 816-350-0215. Please include the number of skaters, and the number of non-skaters.

Monthly Reminders



Foster Parents are required to maintain a certain number of training hours in order to keep their licenses, and ALL parents can use additional tools to care for the children in their homes. MFCAA provides two great resources for "parent training."

Resource Library

MFCAA has a lending library with video tapes, dvd's, cd's and books that can be checked out and used for outside training hours. Call Tammy at 816-350-0215.

On-site Training (for more info, call Justin @ 816-350-0215):

March 6 - 6:30p

Childcare Provided for children over 3 yrs

Mood Disorders - Joe Beck

This session will cover an overview of mood disorders found in children placed in foster care. Diagnostics of the diagnosis, medications options and behavior interventions will be discussed in detail.

March 20 - 6:30p Dinner (RSVP to tammy@mfcaa.org)/7p Meeting

Childcare Provided for children over 3 yrs

Dealing with Defiance - TBA

Defiance is a behavior among many foster children that can wear their parents down. This course will address the patterns of ongoing disobedience, hostility, and all around defiance towards authority figures – and will offer tips and pointers on interventions that work with these behaviors.

Clothes Closet & Food Pantry

MFCAA's Clothing Closet provides clothing, shoes, coats, toys, high chairs, car seats and more, free of charge, to all MFCAA Members. In addition, our Birthday Closet offers parents the opportunity to choose a gift for each of their children.

Clothing Closet hours are 10a-2p on Tuesdays and Fridays. Contact Becky at 816-350-0215 or becky@mfcaa.org.

"A big thank you goes out to Teresa Bradley Bays, DVM and her network of friends and colleagues who have donated new pajamas, underwear and socks to the MFCAA Clothing Closet. We are really fortunate to have such great resources."

MFCAA's Food Pantry provides basic food items, free of charge, to all Members, and is open Tues and Fri from 9a-2p. In addition, the Food Pantry offers extended items, such as canned goods and hygiene products. These items are available to each member monthly, by appointment. Contact Becky for a Food Pantry appointment.



Prom Boutique

March 27th/3p-6p

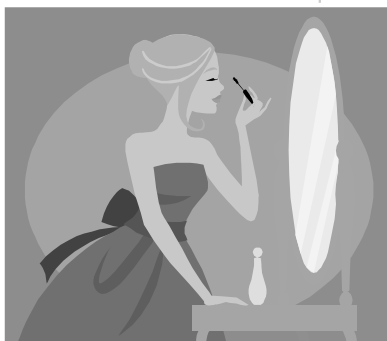
March 28th/10a-2p

@ Woods Chapel United Methodist Church
4725 NE Lakewood Way, Lee's Summit.

All teen girls who live in foster and/or adoptive homes are invited to participate. Dresses will be provided at no charge, and alterations are available.

If you have any questions regarding the Prom Boutique, please contact Becky Hughes at Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association. Becky may be reached at becky@mfcaa.org, or 816-560-6240.

Boutique Donations: If you have old prom or dance dresses that you're willing to part with, drop them by MFCAA before March 10th.



Investigating Open Foster Parent Records, Continued...

In order to test this 'public' information issue, I contacted a foster parent friend of mine. I told her that I was going to request her record in writing (per policy) and have a look at what information was provided to me, and what information was protected. She agreed to this plan and came along to review the 'public' record that I was provided on the day I went to the local CD office to have a look, along with Lori Ross of MFCAA.

Within my friend's licensing file, I found several black marks that had redacted what appeared to be names or other private information. It appeared that the CD staff had attempted to uphold their duty to protect my friend's private information.

However, also within the file un-redacted and available for all to see were:

- Case notes written by workers included incorrect perceptions that my friend had never had the opportunity to rebut. Among those was a statement in an email between a worker and her supervisor stating that my friend had lied to the worker.
- One of my friend's Foster/Adopted children was listed as having HIV (despite the provision requiring health information and information about children to be blacked out).
- There was information about her former boyfriend, including his name, address, etc.
- There was a copy of my friend's Driver's License with no address or license number blacked out. (Clearly a potential identity security issue.)
- There was a discussion of my friend's past medical issues (again despite the provision requiring health information to be removed).
- In the home study there was a discussion of my friend's sister who was mentally ill and a neglectful parent (despite the health information provision, and providing personal information about an adult who is not the subject of this license).
- In the record was a note from the GAL for one of the children discussing concerns related to the fact that she believed one of the children in the home to be an HIV infected perpetrator, which was then countered in the record by another entry saying that it wasn't true.
- The record reflected my friend's work history in other states.
- The Home Study detailed income, previous jobs, previous states lived in, extensive family history, medical issues, self-perceived weaknesses, and political views.
- The study indicated times of unemployment and how much state compensation via unemployment insurance was received.
- And finally I found places where children's names (foster/adopted and biological) were not blocked out.

I left the local CD office deeply disturbed by the results of my little experiment. Had my friend's record been requested by an angry birth parent, or a news reporter, or some less than honest individual looking for ways to take advantage of children or families, my friend would have been exposed to all kinds of potential harm from what I saw in her file.

It seems outrageous that the Sunshine Laws in Missouri protect the records of children in foster care, and the records of birth parents who commit child abuse against their children, but not the records of the families who enlist in the service of these children and the state to serve as caretakers for these children. Anyone could access my records, or the records of any other foster parent, putting their physical and financial security at risk. Despite policy to the contrary, not only would my health information not be protected, but neither would the health information of my children. Any case record notes written by any worker with whom I've ever had a disagreement or personality conflict could be open to the public as 'fact' in my record.

I plan to call and write to my elected officials and the officials at the Department of Social Services to request that this policy be changed and I'd invite those of you who share my concerns to do the same thing. The exceptions to confidentiality which already exist in law to allow for child abuse investigations, investigations by the Office of the Child Advocate and other entities should provide the public with enough assurance that the care children receive in foster homes can be assured not only within the Children's Division, but by outside accountability partners. It is unnecessary and dangerous to make this much information so widely and easily available, particularly for people who take on such substantial risk to serve the children of this state. I'd encourage you to share your concerns with me on the JCFAP loop at jjrichardson@sbcglobal.net, and provide them in writing to MFCAA via email or postal mail.