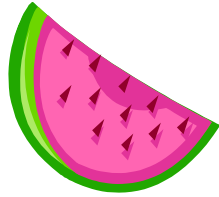




Midwest Foster Care and
Adoption Association
3210 S Lee's Summit Rd
Independence, MO
64055



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JUNE 2010



Let's get together. Join Team MFC AA
The Nancy Hodge Shy and Jay W. Jensen
Run/Walk
Saturday, June 26th
10:00AM

www.nancyrunjaywalk.com
or call MFC AA office on 816 350-0215
Cost is \$25, foster kids are free & lunch
is included

The 2010 Run/Walk will benefit Lawyers
for Kids.

Missouri Family Matters

Family Matters...AARP is working with ParentLink, a University of Missouri program, to help grandparents raising grandchildren access federal, state and private programs that help pay for health care, utilities, groceries and other necessities. AARP will sponsor conferences statewide this summer to help grandparents explore parenting resources.

Each event will include a tutorial on how to use Benefits QuickLINK, an online tool that makes it easier to determine if you're eligible for benefits. For scheduling of conferences, go to www.aarp.org/mo. For questions about parenting resources, call ParentLink at 1-800-552-8522



Midwest Foster Care & Adoption Association Newsletter



Letter From the Executive Director

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Dear Friends;

This will be the final segment in my birth parent series. (You can access the April and May articles at www.mfcaa.org). This month I'll share some of the valuable lessons that birth parents have taught me over the years. As funding for social services continues to decrease, and you are asked to assume a more active role in interacting with birth parents, I hope you'll find some encouragement in my letters to go forward with courage and see these situations as opportunities. I am confident that you'll be glad you did.

As time passed and Randy and I became experienced at fostering, I ventured beyond the traditional forced interactions and into lots of other birth parent relationships. I supervised parent/child visits, I transported children and sometimes birth parents all over the place. For one set of five siblings, logistics determined that family visitation and therapy might most easily be held in my house each week. This went on for a couple of years. Mom would come over, the therapist would come, and the family and individual kids would visit with Mom and the therapist in our basement recreation room. I was there to keep things half-way calm, and to offer support to either Mom or the kids as needed. Once, during the two plus years the kids lived with me, I took all the kids (hers and mine) to her home for a pool party for one of the kid's birthdays. Not only did her kids learn that I cared for them enough to care for their mother, but I didn't look down on her circumstances or presume that I was too good to swim in her pool, or eat her birthday cake. My own kids learned that lesson as well.

Those five kids were eventually reunified with their mother after a whole lot of work and some backsliding on her part more than once. These five kids would have been overwhelming for anyone, and their young Mom was truly scared to take them back on her own. I had many conversations with her about her ability to do it, and how much her kids needed her. The next summer, when two of the kids couldn't go to a traditional daycare, I kept them for her while she worked. A few years later, when her oldest daughter started rebelling and hating her mother, I was her respite provider each time they had a blow up.

Foster parents must become comfortable with the shared parenting role, but for those who transition and become adoptive parents the idea of sharing the parenting role with the birth parents is often uncomfortable. It's not uncomfortable for me. With my adopted children who are all grown up, we have unique relationships with the birth families. Recently, my grandson Ryder turned two. His birth grandma and great-grandma came to our home for his party. I'm secure in my role as Ryder's grandma. I have nothing to fear from his birth grandma's presence. She was thrilled to be included. And Ryder had twice as many gifts to open.

For my younger children, I'm happy to be able to share with them my experiences of knowing most of their birth parents. Many of them were small enough when they joined our family that their own memories are blurry or nonexistent. When children join my family, forever or for a little while, it is critically important to me that I know the people who gave them life. I've committed to loving and raising these children. That commitment is to love them, as they are. Who they are is inextricably part of the people who gave them life.

Always an observer, I have learned to watch the relationships my kids have with their birth parents. In those relationships I've seen the interactions that have set my children's patterns of behavior and ways of thinking into stone in their lives. Watching the parents I have stumbled into clues about the quirky genetics that molded each of them.

One of my foster children was a little girl named Jennifer B. Jennifer became the third third-grader in my family that year. At the time we were living in a fancy neighborhood where we didn't really fit in. Our kids were attending a very good school in a highly sought after school district. For the most part, even though our family stuck out like a sore thumb, many of our kids were doing a pretty good job of fitting in among the 'rich' folks, including the other two third graders. They had lots of friends, participated in many activities and did well in school.

Because we did foster care, the school office folks knew me pretty well. I spent a great deal of time enrolling kids, setting up services, and then responding to issues with those kids. I wasn't working outside of the home at that time and was generally available at any time for the kids needs. The office ladies seemed to like us at that elementary school. That's why I was really surprised when I discovered (via an internal snitch) that Jennifer B., my new eight year old, was heading to school dressed like a normal kid, and then adjusting her outfit to look like a streetwalker as soon as she passed through the doors. Apparently as soon as she arrived she'd roll the waistband of the shorts up until they were Daisy Duke's, tie her shirt in a halter knot, and strut her stuff for the third grade boys.

I was not a novice to kids who had been sexually abused, but I had not seen this particular type of behavior before from someone quite this young. Foster children have a unique way of proving that you have never seen it all. What surprised me most of all in this situation, was that the teachers, the office ladies, and even the principal, who knew and liked me, never questioned this child's apparel. Until I was made aware of the issue, by my other two children in her grade, I had no idea it was going on.

Another of Jennifer's behaviors was equally driving me crazy. Jennifer loved to be sick. Actually, sick or injured. Either would do. She was the queen of hypochondria. I could not figure out what in the world would motivate a perfectly healthy child to behave like that. Jennifer took extraordinary risks and frequently hurt herself riding a bike, or skating down the sidewalk.

Finally, her mother provided me with the answers I needed. One day, as I observed a visit with her mom and her siblings, I figured out why Jennifer behaved the way that she did. Jennifer and her three siblings were on one side of a glass wall in a playroom at the Family Services office visiting with their Mom (who also dressed like a streetwalker, Daisy Duke's and all). The four kids were competing for Mom's attention. Mom, who was more than a little into herself, was not giving out much attention to anyone. As a result, the chaos level in the room was steadily growing. Finally, Jennifer's older brother flipped himself upside down, and then landed badly on the way back down. He was hurt and crying. Mom immediately jumped to her feet and ran to his side. "Oh, Trevor BABY... Are you okay?" She stayed there for ten minutes doting on his 'injury'. Obviously that cleared a few things up for me.

But even beyond knowing my children better, and responding appropriately to the seemingly unexplainable emotions and behaviors I see, knowing their parents opens up the door for a deeper connection between my adopted children and me. I can provide some critical history to them because I knew their birth parent. Their birth parents are a pretty important part of their life story. Imagine the hole you would have in your heart if you couldn't start your story with, "I was born to" Each child deserves the dignity of a complete life story.

(continued on page 8)

The Brightside Alliance



Providing FRIENDSHIP and HOPE
to the kids who need it most!

Become a member of The Bright Side Alliance June 13, 2010, 5:00PM

We have a new opportunity for likeminded men and women who want to make a difference. The Bright Side Alliance is an exciting new auxiliary group dedicated to helping meet the needs of foster and adopted children in our community

This is a great opportunity to meet other likeminded people interested in making a difference in the lives of children who have been abused and neglected. You'll also experience the great feeling that comes from knowing that you have become part of something bigger than yourself. You'll be connecting with others across the metro area in supporting some of our community's most vulnerable children and the families caring for them.

June 13th at 5:00pm join us for an afternoon cookout and social hour. Contact Linda McNicholas at linda@mfaaa.org or Kate Schwaller kate@drumm.org or call 816 350-0215.

Foster Care & Adoption Discount Days CoCo Key Water Resort Missouri's Largest Indoor Water Resort 9103 East 39th St, Kansas City, MO

816 737-0200

\$8.00 per person (subject to availability. May not be valid on holidays or special events.

Restrictions or blackout dates may apply)

For individual family tickets

Request "Foster Care Discount Days" at the front desk of CoCo Key.

Available Monday-Thursday only. Blackout dates do apply

Pizza Hut & A&W located on property

Bring your own towel

No outside food or beverage allowed



Foster Parents Bill of Rights

The Foster Parent Bill of Rights training is an excellent way for you to empower yourselves and to truly be a part of the professional team.

The Bill of Rights was passed into law in 2008 and we are anxious to make everyone aware of its content, bringing respect to our common mission of helping heal and finding permanency for the abused and neglected children we care for everyday. Joint training sessions have been designed to bring workers and foster parents together to become aware of these laws and to put them into practice here in Jackson County.

The training dates are:

June 4th 9-11 and 1-3 MFCAA
September 24th, 9-11 and 1-3 North KC Hospital
October 22nd, 9-11 and 1-3 Dolir Building, KC

This training is 2 hours and you can sign up by calling Tammy Merriman @ 816 889-2380.
PLEASE CALL TODAY TO SIGN UP FOR ONE OF THESE 2 HOUR TRAININGS!

Important Tax Changes For Adoptive Parents

If you've adopted a former foster child in 2010, or if you will adopt a child from foster care this year, we'd encourage you to pay close attention to the following information.

The Federal Adoption Tax Credit has been extended, increased and improved. The last 3 pages of the 906 page health care bill approved by Congress and signed by President Obama on March 23, 2010 provided for certain significant changes in the adoption tax credit, including the following:

- The current adoption tax credit has been extended through the end of 2011
- The credit was raised by \$1,000 for adoptions completed in 2010 to \$13,170. In 2011 the credit may be increased, based on inflation.
- This legislation was passed retroactive to January 1, 2010
- The credit is now refundable. This means that even if you have no tax liability (and therefore couldn't benefit from the tax credit in previous adoptions), you will receive a check from the IRS for the amount of the tax credit you are due for any adoptions completed during 2010 and 2011.

This new legislation will have a huge impact for many MFCAA families. In the past if a foster family adopted a sibling group of 3 children, they may not have benefitted from the adoption tax credit if they had no federal income tax liability (if their income wasn't high enough, or if their child tax credits wiped out all liability). However, under the new law, a family adopting the same sibling group in 2010 will receive a check from the IRS for \$13,170 for each child- for a total of \$39,510.

While the credit doesn't apply to some high income individuals, if your family has an annual income below \$182, 520, you will be fully eligible for the credit.

As a service to the community (and because we have noticed that many tax preparers are unaware of the tax credit as it existed prior to these changes...much less now), MFCAA is hoping to provide a few days of free tax preparation by qualified individuals, who are trained in the tax law as it relates to the adoption tax credit, to our families in February of 2011. We'll provide you with more specific information as the details of this service are worked out.

Silver Dollar City • White Water • Showboat Branson Belle Branson Missouri 2010












Our families are always looking for ways to stretch the budget and still provide a fun time for all. A BIG THANK YOU to the people of Silver Dollar City again this year for allowing our members to participate in their Financial Hardship Group Program.

Ticket prices: Silver Dollar City (\$10.00 + tax), White Water (10.40 + tax), and Showboat Belle \$20.00 + tax). This program is not valid on Saturdays or Holidays (weekends following Holiday for all properties, as well as Friday or Saturdays 4pm & 8pm on the Showboat Branson Belle.

Your request must be submitted no later than 14 days prior to your planned visit. Be prepared with the date you wish to attend, the number of tickets you will need for ages 12 and over and the number of tickets for ages 4-11. We will also need your address and phone number. The name on your reservation form is the only person that may pick up tickets and ID is required.

If you are interested please contact Fran Hershey on 816 350-0215
or by email fran@mfcaa.org.

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|--|-----------|-----------|--|---|
| JUNE | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4  | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 Dental Van  | 9 | 10 | 11  | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15  | 16 | 17 | 18  | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22  | 23 | 24 | 25   | 26 Nancy Run/ Jay Walk 10:00am |
| 27 | 28 | 29  | 30 | | | |

NOTE: On the first Friday of each month, the Food Pantry is available to those who attend Training (in the evening). It is not open 9a-2p on this day.



Clothes Closet
10a-2p



Food Pantry
9a-2p



First Friday Training
6:30p



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

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

Dear Foster Parents,

While training “You Me and The Kids,” and the Foster Parent Bill of Rights I’ve had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know some of you. I’ve not only been impressed with your commitment to children, but have found you to be “open minded,” motivated to learn, and having a stated desire to understand more of the social workers role in working with children.

It is my hope for foster parents and Children’s Division to have more of an opportunity to come together, and have instructed the trainers within the Western Training Region to invite foster parents to any training session that is appropriate.

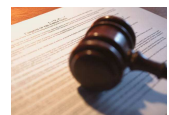
In addition, we have also begun inviting the GAL’s Office as well. As we’re all together, in a non intrusive setting, I hope we will not only get to know one another better, but enhance our communication with one another. By everyone being included in the same training opportunities maybe we can also increase the likelihood we can “be on the same page,” or at least a little closer to the same page.

I recognize this is big goal, but since we’re a solution focused agency why not practice what we preach and that is to “hold on to hope.” If you haven’t attended one of the “You Me and The Kids” training sessions or Foster Parent Bill of Rights I would strongly encourage you to do so, as I have not only seen new relationships being formed, but damaged relationships being rebuilt.

I would personally like to thank you for taking time out of your very hectic schedules to attend these training sessions and for the work that you do. We both have a huge mission, but together we can “make it happen” for our children and families!

Karle Russell, MSW

Empower yourself by signing up for one of the scheduled sessions See page 5 for dates and times.





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—On-site Trainings are held at MFCAA, in the 2nd building on the far LEFT of the drive. Please park in the paved lot (continue past the training building, and follow the drive as it curves right), then walk to the training building (for more info, call Justin at 816-350-0215). Childcare is provided, during both training sessions, for children ages 3 and older.

ON-SITE TRAINING SCHEDULE:

June 4/6:30p “How to Structure for safety when kids act out sexually”

Many parents struggle with how to deal with the behavioral manifestation of children that have been abused. There are lots of ways that you can structure for safety and help these children alter their behaviors. Presenter: Kealey Williams—MS, ATR-BC, LPC Lifeworks Family Treatment Group.

June 18/6:30 dinner (rsvp only if attending dinner (tammy@mfcaa.org) Meeting 7p. “How to Harness the rage of out of control toddlers”

We are seeing more and more very young children in residential facilities due to out of control behaviors. How do we learn the skills needed to keep our smallest children out of facilities and in homes where they grow best? We listen to those who have done it.

Presenters: David Wilson and Sarah White—M.S. LPC

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. Call Becky for special appointments (contact info below).

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 an appointment at 816-350-0215



August 21, 2010

MFCAA's 10th Anniversary Celebration. Join us at the Jazz Museum to celebrate. MFCAA has been working to support foster/kinship and adoptive families for 10 years. You can help us celebrate with a donation item.

Frequent flyer miles, Baseball/Football tickets, Opera seats?

Contact Linda at linda@mfcaa.org or call 816 350-0215.



WE NEED MORE FAMILIES!!!!

We are seeking foster parents and children in foster care to participate in a research project about what makes kids resilient. To participate, we need foster parents and children who are at least 8 years old to complete surveys. Both you and your child will receive payment for your participation each time you complete surveys.

[Worried about having time to do the surveys? Don't be! We can do surveys during the evenings and weekends at a community location convenient to your home and your family's schedule—whatever works best with your family.](#)

Please join us in this important effort to help youth in foster care – your participation is essential to helping us make the system better for youth in foster care. If you are interested in the **SPARK Project**, please call the **SPARK Project** team at (913) 897-8454. We're looking forward to getting to know you and your family!

(Continued from page 3)

For others, I watched their parents make the most loving choice in the world, and consent to their adoption, providing them the opportunity for a much brighter future.

For all of my adopted children, I can share with them their birth parent's struggles and the mistakes they made along the way. Despite my initial beliefs and fears, none of them were monsters. Not even the ones who did the most horrendous things. All of them were very real, flawed human beings. All of them loved their children very much. The saddest thing in the world to me is that none of them were able to make the choices that would have allowed them to raise their own children. The happiest thing in the world to me is that I got to be their mother because of that tragedy.

These people are part of my family, just as their children are. I have precious memories of my interactions with some of them. My heart has broken for the lives they have led. I often felt over the years that had some of these parents found a loving foster home when they were children, they might have turned out differently.

One birth mother in particular still tugs at my heart on a regular basis. She's still young, although she's lost eight children all together. I am the mother to the last seven of those children. She picked me for her children. She loves me, and she feels she has gifted me to her children. Her way of loving them is making them mine. Four years ago, after two years of foster care drama, I adopted the first four of her kids. Not long after that she had another baby, and a year later another and a year later still the last. When the fifth and sixth of her children came to my home at 2 years and 9 months of age (she had called me herself when the child welfare people showed up to investigate her so that her kids would come directly to me), I discovered that she'd taught her young daughter to call her by her given name. I asked her why the little girl didn't call her Mommy. She looked in my eyes and said, "Because I knew that's what she'd call you. I wanted her to be able to remember me, so I taught her my name." I cried that day for and with her as she gave her babies to me. I cried again a few months later when I picked her up from the hospital with her last baby, and watched her kiss her newborn good-bye before I drove home with her.

Birth parents are the people who have given me the most precious gift of all, my children. Together, we are our children's parents. I respect their ongoing role in my children's hearts and memories. I truly hope that someday, they will get to see what amazing people our kids turned out to be. I invite newer foster parents to consider challenging your expectations, and begin to open your hearts to the experience of truly working with the birth parents in your lives. Life provides us with all kinds of opportunities for amazing growth experiences. My birth family experiences were some of my best growth experiences. Chances are they might be for you too.

Sincerely



Lori Ross
Executive Director