

Foster Connection

A Safe Children Coalition Newsletter

Winter 2011

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State of the "System"

As we turn the page and start a new year, it is time to reflect on the successes and lessons learned of the year past and aspire to making reality the goals of the new one. We are privileged to be working alongside our families who are *making a difference, one child and family at a time.*

2010 saw renewed focus and broadened community engagement as the SCC engaged in a focused effort to train all case managers and foster parents on Family Centered Practice. I touched on this in the March newsletter and it appears that the working with birth families was old hat for many of our foster families. The idea that foster families can work with birth families to support reunification has been difficult for some families to respect but I am appreciative of the great majority of families that have embraced this model and are actively supporting the bio parents in their goal to reunify with their children.

In May, we joined the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) and have held four local meetings to decide, as a community, how best to recruit, train and support our foster parents. These meetings have been a lightning rod for change and there is great potential in 2011 for additional improvements. Thanks to the feedback of foster parents who attended the QPI meetings, the SCC has begun to adjust our communication strategies, the area most frequently cited as a cause for foster parent frustration.

One such change is evident as we enter into our second month of notifying foster parents of court hearings and case staffings a minimum of two weeks in advance. You know the children better than anyone. Your input is indispensable when decisions are being made about the permanency, safety and well being of the children. If you are unable to attend hearings and staffings, you can always participate by phone or submit your feedback in writing with the Caregiver Input Form.

One of the most exciting changes this year has been the development of a Foster Parent Mentor program which is explained in great detail on page two of this newsletter.

In 2011, our goal is to focus on training and recruitment. Your participation in both efforts will be essential in ensuring the success of both initiatives. As a reminder, we continue to provide \$100 incentives for our current foster families once a family you have recruited accepts their first placement.

The Out of Home Care team wishes your family a Happy New Year to all 144 of our foster families in DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota Counties. May 2011 bring you good health, laughter and joy.



Alex Kamberis

Foster Parent Mentor Program

One of the most exciting initiatives this past year has been the development of a Mentor program for foster parents. A committee consisting of the Foster & Adoptive Parent Association presidents, a volunteer from the GAL along with licensing and placement staff chose four foster parents to become the first “class” of Mentors.

Beginning in January, they will work with new families exiting MAPP to prepare them for their first placements. They are also available to all of the existing foster families. They can advocate for you, assist you in locating services, or just be a shoulder to lean on if you are struggling.

Requirements

All four who were selected were chosen for their commitment to improving the system of care, their ability to practice a family centered approach with birth families, and their desire to work with new foster families. There were some specific requirements, including:

- At least two years experience as a foster parent.
- Be in “good standing” with the Coalition and not under any corrective action.
- Two professional references from child welfare and one from a foster parent.
- Demonstrated ability to work with birth families in support of reunification.
- Ability to attend a requisite initial training course and additional trainings throughout the year.

Training

- Initial training to cover the Foster Parent Handbook, Safe Children Coalition hierarchy and contact info, local services, along with a “family centered approach” refresher.
- Ongoing training throughout the year to ensure that mentors are familiar with current policy and expectations of foster parents.

Expectations

- Mentors will be assigned to new families during the 10th week of MAPP. They will meet with families during the licensing process to keep the families engaged while awaiting licensure.
- Upon licensure of these new families, the mentors will be available to the families as foster children are placed in the homes.
- The Mentors are expected to participate in Association meetings to stay current with trainings, Association activities and to introduce themselves to new families.



Meet the Mentors

DeSoto County — Cindie Konold

Cindie and her husband Charley have fostered for three years and have adopted 6 children. Five of these were a sibling group with special needs. In 2009, the Konold’s were the recipients of the Florida State “Adoptive Parents of the Year” Award. Currently, Cindie is the President of the DeSoto Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and is excited to make a difference in the lives of children and new foster families.

Manatee County — Lynda Cole

Lynda has been a foster parent for 5 years. She has had four sibling groups and many other children, ranging in age from 1-14. Lynda has dedicated her life to children as a mother, educator and youth pastor. She loves to travel with her children and desires to help them enjoy life and experience love, acceptance and wholeness.

North Port — Heather Ridings

Heather and her husband Jeff have been foster parents for four years. Heather reports that she is excited for this opportunity to help new families navigate the big world of child welfare. She remembers what it was like being a new foster parent and not even knowing who to call for help. Heather is very familiar with services in North Port and would be happy to assist your family in getting needs met locally. Over time, her experiences have even led her to Mexico to help reunify children with their father.

Sarasota — Nancy Krizen

Nancy and her husband Ken have been foster parents for the last 10+ years. They specialize in teenagers but have taken kids aged 0-17. Nancy is currently the Vice-President of the Sarasota Foster & Adoptive Parent Association and is very involved in the Independent Living program for teenagers in foster care.

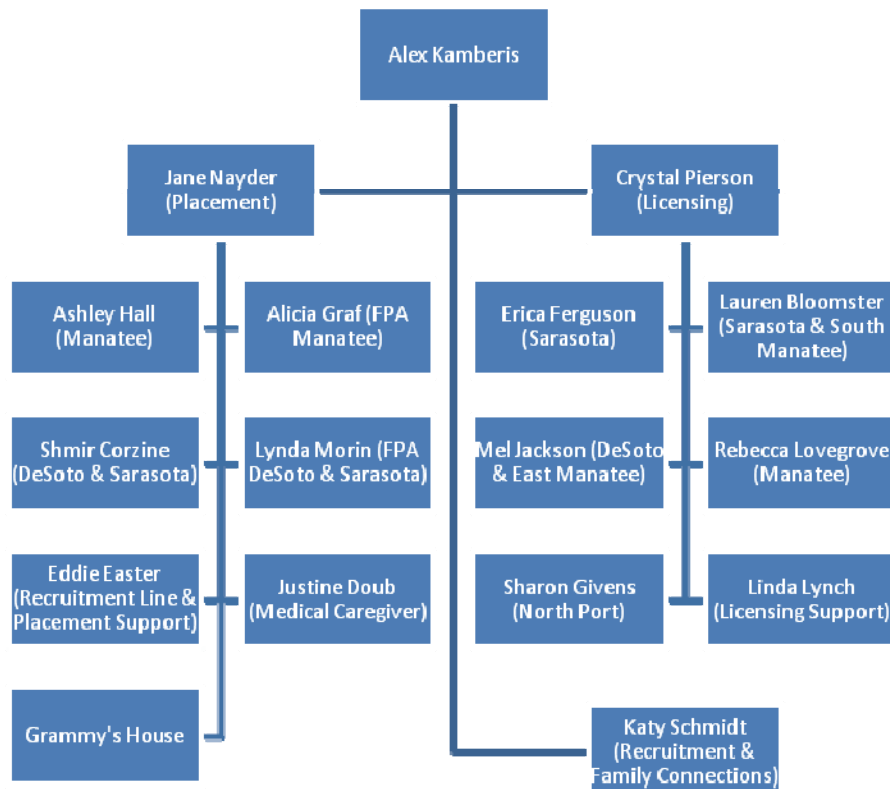
Out of Home Care Unit

Some of you may have seen references to an “OHC Unit” in emails or communications these past few months. Effective this fall, the Out of Home Care Unit was created after merging the licensing, placement and recruitment teams.

Several staff positions in the OHC Unit were realigned to better fit the needs of our foster families. Two positions were reinstated at the request of foster parents from feedback on the last satisfaction survey and from conversations at Association meetings.

- It has been a year since **Alicia Graf** and **Lynda Morin** joined us as Foster Parent Advocates. They have worked hard to introduce new families to our system of care while endeavoring to support existing families struggling with challenging behaviors or unmet needs.
- A full-time licensing specialist was converted to a trainer position and **Sharon Groover** has spent a year streamlining our MAPP curriculum to ensure consistent delivery of our Family Centered practice in the training and selection of new families. She has moved into the training unit but still works collaboratively with the OHC Unit to meet the needs of foster families.

- Medical foster parents have traditionally been unable to run simple errands or juggle multiple children with their medical needs outside of the home. That is, until we created a full-time position to provide medical foster parents the opportunity to leave the house on occasion. **Katy Schmidt** has fulfilled every expectation we had of this position as I’m sure all of her medical families would agree. We’re happy to announce that our newest team member, **Justine Doub**, will be transitioning into this role beginning January 3rd.
- Another full-time licensing specialist was converted to a recruiter/Family Connections position. **Katy** is transitioning into this role which will serve two purposes. Half her time will be spent on the coordination of recruitment efforts aimed at identifying and actively recruiting families for foster care and/or adoption. The other half of her time will be spent finding family members and researching connections for children already in foster care.
- Once the families have been recruited, they speak with **Eddie Easter**, who handles all calls to the recruitment hotline. A former foster parent and somebody who has adopted, he is the ideal person to answer the questions of prospective families.



Training Opportunities

Supporting Children and Families During Transitions: Grief, Loss, and Child Welfare

Thursday, January 6th
10:00am-3:30pm

Location: The Family Place, 9391 North Florida Ave, Tampa 33612. If you are interested in attending in person, we are carpooling. There are also some funds available for babysitting. Please contact AKamberis@TheSarasotaY.org for more information.

This workshop will focus on helping foster parents, relatives, and child welfare professionals identify ways to support children during these transitions. The workshop will address strategies to meet children's emotional and behavioral needs and reduce the trauma associated with transitions, as well as address the feelings and experiences of families who are supporting children through this process.

If you are unable to go to Tampa, you can view this training online. You must preregister for this training at <http://childwelfarecenter.cbcs.usf.edu/webinars/supportchild.html>. If you have technical questions or concerns please contact support staff at center-support@usf.edu.

A Collaborative Approach to Responding to Traumatized Children: Trauma Work with Children in Child Welfare

Saturday, January 8th
10:00am-11:30am

The most common sources of traumatic experiences for children who become involved in the child welfare system are abuse, neglect, and domestic violence. As a system, we need to utilize trauma informed child welfare systems that are more aware of and responsive to the needs of vulnerable and traumatized children. We need to use a collaborative approach across the system of care to ensure that system involvement serves to heal, rather than re-traumatize children and families.

You must preregister for this training at <http://childwelfarecenter.cbcs.usf.edu/webinars/traumaprocess.html>. If you have technical questions or concerns please contact support staff at center-support@usf.edu.

If you are unable to attend live, the webcast will be available at www.QPIFlorida.com usually 3-5 days after the event. In order to receive the training certificate if you view it from the website, you will be required to pass a short quiz to verify you have watched the webcast.

Parenting the Child with Attachment Issues

Tuesday, January 11th
7:00pm-8:30pm

This training will provide an overview of attachment and a discussion of Symptomatic Behaviors and Attachment issues after Termination of Parental Rights. It will provide Techniques and Practical Strategies in Parenting the Child with Attachment issues.

You must preregister for this training at <http://childwelfarecenter.cbcs.usf.edu/webinars/parentchildattach.html>. If you have technical questions or concerns please contact support staff at center-support@usf.edu.

If you are unable to attend live, the webcast will be available at www.QPIFlorida.com usually 3-5 days after the event. In order to receive the training certificate if you view it from the website, you will be required to pass a short quiz to verify you have watched the webcast.

Get in the Game: Become a Surrogate Parent for an Exceptional Student

Monday, January 24th
9:00am-11:30am

Surrogate parents advocate for the educational needs of children. This training is geared towards foster parents, staff and Guardian ad Litem's who want to learn more about the school system and the expectations placed on surrogate parents.

The training will be held at Toledo Blade Elementary School, 1201 Geranium Avenue, North Port.

Letter to foster parents:

This is the time of year to believe in miracles. Children in out of home care have their own dreams, fears, hopes, and beliefs. They still believe that miracles can happen. ...and they hope that this year it will be their turn for happiness, joy, safety, and love. You are in the position to produce a miracle for them.

The children hope that Santa finds them in this new placement. They hope they were good enough to deserve something from Santa. They hope; they pray in their own ways; they act up from all the stress of the unknown. Your experience will help you understand what they are going through while you patiently wait as they find their way. I believe that the life of a child is like a book. There are many chapters in their life book. You are but one chapter in a child's life. You may have an idea of what was in the preceding chapters. You will know what is written in the chapter of which you are a part. For the child, the future is only a dream. You may never know what impact you have on the child you are caring for. You may never hear from the child or know what happens to them. You are only one chapter of their lives. Only the child knows the details of their past. Only they will know what experiences will fill their futures. Your role as a foster parent is to make this one chapter of their lives the best chapter to date. You have to trust that the one inch of safety and love you provide is enough to build a life of security and success. You are making an impact. .. so make it a positive one.

Some days you wonder if all you do is appreciated. We do appreciate all the effort and time you give to the children in care. They and we need you for all the small and big sacrifices you have freely shown.

So, in this time of miracles, be the miracle in one child's life. The joy you see in their faces Christmas morning will be worth all the sacrifices you have made. Someday you may answer the door to an adult who is strangely familiar. They identify themselves and sleepless nights come to mind. They ask you if they were the worst foster child you ever had. You remember the nights you stayed up while they cried, refused to listen, ran away numerous times ...but today you are told that you were the only one that never gave up on them. For this one child ..you were their rock, their miracle. .. and all the minutes you struggled are worth it. Never give up . . .you may be the miracle that a child is searching for.

Yvonne C. Brisebois
Family Services Specialist
Department of Children & Families
Tel: 813-558-5587

Foster Parents' Access to Records

DCF has clarified what records can be shared with foster parents and what records foster parents are prevented from reading.

Allowed

- * All court orders, case plans and visitation plans.
- * All medical, dental, psychiatric, psychological, behavioral histories and documentation of ongoing treatments including Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessments (CBHA's). This may require redacting of biological parent's information.
- * Judicial & Citizen Review Reports.
- * Staffing Forms.
- * Guardian ad Litem Reports.
- * All school records.
- * Birth Certificates and Immigrant Status documentation.

Not Permitted

- * Reporter information from the Abuse Hotline.
- * Financial records of the parents or any other party to the case.
- * Records of Domestic Violence centers.
- * HIPPA protected documents of the parents (e.g. medical, psychological, and psychiatric).

Junior League

Once again, the Junior League has been a phenomenal community support for the foster families in our area. In addition to their annual Winter Carnival where they stuff backpacks with school supplies, they have donated 70+ car seats along with bike helmets, pajamas and books.

This year, they added two new charities/ events to their long-standing traditional activities. This past autumn, they were able to donate over \$4500 in scholarships for Manatee children to attend sports, arts or music camps.

On February 24th, they will be hosting a Teen Night for teenagers in foster care. More details to follow.

Independent Living Summit

Monday, January 17th

10:00am-3:00pm

The Safe Children Coalition is hosting an Independent Living Summit for foster care youth. The summit will be held at the Sarasota Y Bari Brooks Teen Center, 1075 South Euclid Avenue, Sarasota.

For more information, you can contact Layla McCarty via email at LMccarty@TheSarasotaY.org or call 941-312-4261.



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