



MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

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Issue 82
August 20, 2010



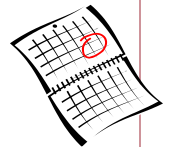
MFPA August 2010 Newsletter

As summer comes to a close and the new school year begins, the Marin Foster Parent Association continues to plan training opportunities, pursue opportunities for the foster children we care for and offer fun family events we can enjoy with each other. A grant proposal was submitted to The Marin Charitable Association in July to continue offering financial assistance for tutoring and afterschool enrichment for children in the dependency system. We recently partnered with Sleep Train to receive and distribute donations as well as with K.I.D.S. (Kids In Distressed Situations). Sleep Train is currently sponsoring their school supply drive. When these donations come in, we hope to plan a day for foster children to pick out supplies they need. A Quarterly Policy meeting is scheduled to take place September 8th. Members of the MFPA board and Children and Family Services administrators will meet to strengthen and maintain effective communication, and identify, examine and discuss issues, concerns, changes and ideas and to make recommendations.

As we approach fall and the downhill ride to the end of the year, the MFPA is always looking for new volunteers to join us in offering the best we can to those providing foster care in our community. If you are interested in becoming involved, please contact a board member. Our next board meeting is taking place September 9th—come on down and check it out! There is an immediate need for a new Secretary. Andrea Pino has been trying to step down for over a year now but has been generous enough not to leave us stranded. There is also a need for someone who has experience (or not—but is willing to learn) with website management. I have tried my best to keep the website updated, but would love for someone with more creative energy to help “spice it up” and keep it current on a monthly basis.

The next Meet and Eat is being held September 15th at the Health and Wellness Campus. In coordination with the beginning of school, there will be a presentation on IEPs and mental health services. See attached flyer for details. Hope to see you there! - Carol Ihlenburg, Newsletter Editor

Upcoming Events



- ❖ **August 25:** Understanding Transference and Counter Transference as a CASA Volunteer, San Rafael, 11-12:30
- ❖ **August 27:** Soup Group, San Rafael, 12-2 PM
- ❖ **August 31:** Native Communities and the Child Welfare System: The Indian Child Welfare Act, San Rafael, 9—1
- ❖ **September 8:** 1st Quarterly Policy meeting, San Rafael, 10-12
- ❖ **September 9:** MFPA Board Meeting, San Rafael, 10-12
- ❖ **September 15:** MFPA Meet and Eat, San Rafael, 6:00-8:30 pm
- ❖ **September 24:** Permanency: A Legal & Psychological Mandate For Foster Children, Oakland, 9 -4

- ❖ **September 25:** 4th Annual Marin City Health and Wellness Center “Unity In The Community” Community Wide Health Fair, Marin City, 10-2

For information on any of the above events, contact Carol Ihlenburg or go to our website at www.mfpa.net.

Students raised in foster care to get priority housing at California universities

Experts say stable residency is crucial for students just out of foster care, who may have nowhere to go during school vacations. A new law requires public colleges to accommodate them year-round. It can be lonely spending the summer in a mainly vacant college dormitory. But it's a worthwhile tradeoff for Daysi Espinoza, who's grateful to have a room at Cal State Fullerton to call home. For Espinoza and hundreds of other former foster youths attending California's public universities, dorm rooms provide a much-needed stable residence. While classmates can retreat to childhood bedrooms and their families' embrace, these students are often on their own and want to stay in their dorms during vacations. - Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

TRIBUTE TO JOHN ABRAMSON

John Abramson passed away at home surrounded by his family on July 7th after a short but valiant battle against lung cancer. John was recently awarded, along with wife, Laura Abramson, the 1st Annual Carol McKenna award for being an "unsung hero" in the field of foster parenting. John will never be forgotten by many foster parents in Marin County. He and Laura were instrumental in the reorganization of the Marin Foster Parent Association some 8 years ago. Below are a few tributes sent in memory of John:

It seems it was almost ten years ago that I met John and Laura for the first time, memorable enough for me to clearly remember. It was one of my first meetings and it was at Neil Cummings Middle School in Corte Madera - his (and their) openness, intelligence and dedication to foster kids was one of the reasons I continued coming to meetings and eventually joined the board. He had a strong, open, pleasant presence. MFPA owes John and Laura a lot for its existence - they were a strong tight team. They were stalwart, dedicated contributing founders of the MFPA. -Jonathan Toste

Such a gentle soul, may he rest in peace. -Andrea Pino

I am so sad we have lost John. He was a genuine sweetheart, and a truly great daddy to so many kids including one little boy we also fostered. He was so humble about receiving that award. Love and our deep sympathies to Laura, who has an amazing legacy to honor and carry on. I am glad I got the chance to "mingle" with John Abramson at the Soup Groups. -Sharon Skolnick and Bruce Bagnoli

My memories of John Abramson will stay with me forever. I met John (and Laura) in the fall of 2001 as we shared kids from one family in our separate foster homes. We began getting together regularly with all the foster families involved so the kids could play and visit. We got to know each other well. John always brought light and fun to situations when we interacted. Eating, playing cards, having a meal and helping each other with respite, John saw humor and seriousness in all situations. He teased and goofed with us, he was warm and loving with all little people, he treated all those babies in his life as though they were his own. He cheated at cards now and then, or caught me cheating, and we could always laugh and see silliness in our adventures. We got together professionally and socially. He ate any soups I put in front of him. He gave good advice, he offered guidance when asked. John Abramson brought a feeling of serious and heartfelt love and commitment to Marin County children. He treated people reverently, he adored his wife and daughters and grandson. John will always stand tall in my heart, a pillar to admire, and a man of integrity and poise. We will sorely miss you John, and I feel blessed that our life-paths crossed as deeply as they did. -Mimi Katz

Laura generously set up a fund in John's name with donations in his memory made to the Marin Foster Parent Association. We will be discussing how to distribute the donations to foster families. Laura has indicated she would like to see assistance given to infants in foster care.

Welcome Newly Licensed Foster Parent

Marin County Children and Family Services is very pleased to introduce our newest foster parent. **Shirley Hall** is eager to provide foster care to boys and girls ages 13-18, and she has the capacity to care for two children at once. Having raised two sons and having been a guardian of one of her grandchildren, Shirley approaches this work with a great deal of experience. She remains a very involved grandmother to all of her five grandchildren and she takes pride in her work as a Sunday school teacher at her local church. Young people tend to gravitate to her and she, in turn, is fascinated by them. A resident of Marin City, Shirley is employed as an assembly worker, manufacturing laboratory products in Petaluma. Her priority has always been her family but her other interests include travel, self-improvement and socializing with friends. Shirley believes in the restorative powers of love and patience, and she looks forward to providing a listening ear and a nurturing home to children in need.

Social Worker Profile



Social Worker Profiles is featured to help familiarize foster parents with the social workers they have or may work with. Anyone with a suggestion of a social worker to be interviewed can contact Jonathan Toste at jjtoste@gmail.com.

Social Worker: Bree Marchman, MSW
Position: Ongoing Unit Supervisor
Interviewer: Carol Ihlenburg

Why did you choose to work in the field of social work?

I have always wanted to work with children and families. Becoming a social worker seemed like a natural place to do this. I've always been fascinated by human behavior.

What is your background and history as a social worker/How long have you been doing this work?

I grew up in Orange County/Southern California. After high school I attended college at UC Santa Cruz where I obtained a degree in psychology. When I was about 20, I had the opportunity to work with autistic children and I was intrigued by their interesting behaviors. This led me to working with children and adults with all different types of devel-

opmental disabilities. I was a respite worker, so I worked mainly in the family's homes. Over time, I developed amazing relationships with the families because working in someone's home is such an intimate setting. It was incredible to watch children and/or adults make progress - for this population, even small improvements could be a huge milestone. During school I also worked in a group home for teenage girls. It was so difficult I almost changed my mind about working in social work. I stuck it out and found it was actually quite rewarding. After I graduated undergrad, I continued to work with children both in the school setting and in their homes. I attended graduate school in Berkeley. I had interned in Contra Costa County during grad school and worked for them after graduating for 3 months doing FM/FR work. I did mostly relative assessment and visitation, as well as some case management. Lucky for me, I was offered a job with Marin County in September of 2004.

What is the most rewarding and most challenging part of your work as a social worker?

The most challenging part is not being overwhelmed by the terrible things that happen to children daily. Even after 6 years, it is hard to be desensitized to

the awful things that happen to children. The most rewarding thing is observing successful reunification and seeing children who started out traumatized ultimately achieve success and/or overcome obstacles to obtain milestones and successfully form attachments.

Is there anything in particular you would like to share with foster parents?

I feel privileged to have worked directly with so many foster parents while I have been in Marin. I've seen foster parents go above and beyond what is asked of them. It restores my faith in humanity, because I see what a little extra "something" can do for a child in foster care. I don't think it's possible to say in words how important and how appreciated foster parents are - it goes beyond description. Particularly in Marin County, I think we have an incredible group of foster parents. I hope we can continue positively communicating and reaching the goal we are all aiming for - which is success for children and families in foster care.

Funding for Tutoring and Afterschool Enrichment Programs



Thanks to a grant from the Marin Charitable Association, the Marin Foster Parent Association has funding available to assist foster families with tutoring and afterschool enrichment costs for foster children or children in the dependency system. If you have a child who needs additional academic assistance, PLEASE APPLY FOR THIS FUNDING!! There is a cap of \$500/family per year. If, at the end of the year, there is still funding remaining, families may reapply. The goal of this grant is to provide foster children with the extra educational assistance they need to be successful in school and in life. By providing funding to cover the cost of tutoring or other educational afterschool programs for these children, they will receive the benefit of being able to excel in school while they are a part of the foster care system. Funding will be distributed to foster families through an application process. The only requirements are that the request is for a foster child or child in the dependency system, and the funding will benefit him/her educationally. Funding will be granted on a first come/first serve basis with a combined monthly maximum amount of \$400.00 to be distributed amongst all approved applicants. Once your application is received, it will be submitted to the MFPA board at the monthly board meeting for approval. Once approved, receipts or an invoice for the cost of services must be submitted within one month of application approval. If you are interested in applying for this funding, contact Carol Ihlenburg at 507-1822 or via email at cihlenburg@comcast.net. We are excited to offer this assistance to foster families!

Chronicles of Adoption by Jonathan Toste

Chronicles of adoption was created to present the gnawing questions that haunt the lives of children, adolescents and adults of broken homes. It is an attempt by the MFPA to outline the issues that children battle with, in order to create better foster parenting.

Interviewer: Jonathan Toste

Interviewee: Lucille Schiaffino

What history do you know about your biological family?

I was orphaned at birth. My adoptive mother told me the last names of my biological parents when I was in my teens. I never met or connected with any of my biological family. I was told that my birth mother was 14 years old when I was born and that she was of French Canadian ancestry.

At what age and for how long were you in adoption or foster care?

I was born at St. Mary's Infant Asylum, Dorchester, Massachusetts in 1929 and remained there until I was adopted at 18 months old. St. Mary's had a policy of housing pregnant teens if they would agree to nurse their baby and one other in exchange for the housing. Research in the late 1800's showed infant mortality was upwards of 60% without such procedures. My adoptive parents cherished me as an only child until I was 8 years old. On vacation, with my mom and I at Niagara Falls, my father was overtaken by a heart attack and died. My mother never abandoned me, but I went through many difficult changes including living with my mom's extended family for many years, boarding school

and a year alone with my mom, far from our native New England, in Florida.

What was the most comforting thing your guardians or other adults in your life did for you regarding the issue of adoption?

Once, my Uncle (my mom's brother) was angry with me and told me if I didn't listen to him they would send me back to the orphanage. My mother got so angry with him; she told him he could find some place else to live if he ever threatened me like that again (even though he was part owner of our house). I'd never seen her that angry in my life - nor him so afraid. We didn't see him for several days - in which time my mom made it clear to me that she loved me more than all the stars in the sky and she would never abandon me. For the rest of my life, my uncle was forever kind to me. One other thing really stayed with me: the day my mom first saw me, she said God spoke to her through my smile and that I should always be proud of that smile and to remember that God gave it to me and me to her.

What kind of "fantasy option" (not totally unrealistic) do you wish was available to you to solve the biggest issues you faced growing up?

I held great fear that if I located my biological mother or father, that they would totally reject me and that making myself known to them would be horribly painful to them - which would cause me

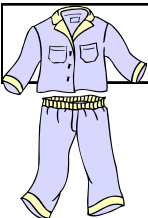
horrendous suffering as well. Looking back now, I realize it would have been better to live that possible rejection than to suffer in the straightjacket of "not-knowing" that I lived through. By the time I started my search, I was 60, and the trail and the records were too cold to locate any blood relatives.

What ability of yours best helped you to achieve the success you have found in your adulthood?

My mom had a saying - "by and by" she would say, "(this or that) will come to pass". She never struck down my hopes or fantasies - when I was sad or frustrated, she always coaxed me with her bottomless faith in hope - "by and by, you will find a man who will love you for the rest of your life" and I did.

My three grown children have all either adopted children, work with broken families or are otherwise employed in caregiving fields.

The above story is true; some names have been changed to protect identities. We are looking for other, over 30 year-old, fostered or adopted adults to participate in telephone interviews. If you or someone you know would be willing to share his/her experience, please contact Jonathan Toste at jjtoste@gmail.com.



MFPA Donation Closet

The Marin Foster Parent Association received donations from Sleep Train Foster Kid's clothing drive this month. We have clothing items in various sizes—mainly school age through adult. If you have a child in the dependency system in need of clothing items and are interested in these donations, please contact Carol Ihlenburg at 507-1822.



The Marin Foster Parent Association (MFPA) is an organization comprised of licensed foster and adoptive parents in Marin County and members of the community interested in helping to achieve the goals and purposes of our association as stated below.

The primary objectives and purposes of the MFPA, as stated in the California State Foster Parent Association, Inc. bylaws are:

- A. To establish a local chapter of the California State Foster Parent Association bringing together all foster parents, agency personnel and interested community citizens who wish to work together for the same purposes as set forth below.
- B. To promote the general welfare of children that need protective care everywhere: at home, in the communities, in institutions and in public, private and religious schools.
- C. To develop a better understanding of the problem of foster home care by the persons and agencies involved in caring for children and the general public by encouraging and maintaining communications, and the interchange of ideas and cooperation between foster parents, county agencies, and the local communities.
- D. To encourage the training and education of personnel for work in the field of foster care, and to encourage the recruitment and retention of foster homes.
- E. To inform ourselves of the current information pertaining to the welfare of children.
- F. Notwithstanding the above statements, the chapter shall not, except to an insubstantial degree, engage in any activities or exercise any powers that are not in furtherance of the primary purpose.

The Soup Group That Went Away



Once upon a time there was a cute little Soup Group that had lots of friends and fun activities and it was happy most months and well attended. Folks came from all over the County of Marin to spend time with the little Soup Group. It had so much personality and spunk. People liked to come and hang out because it made them feel important, supported, friendly and full of good feelings (physical as well as mental). The Soup Group was popular for old and young alike, and those not invited to spend time with it often longed to be included. As a matter of fact, there were a few times when those uninvited showed up and played with Soup Group also, sometimes even in disguise. Every month Soup Group was a little different, sometimes implementing creative strategies to entice more folks to come and play. Dancers, singers, bikers, knitters, firemen and the police were known to show up. Raffles were sometimes involved, yard work, and house-

cleaning, even detailing the car: all good reasons to come be with happy little Soup Group. Well a sad thing happened in the month of July. Little Soup Group was not where he/she should have been on the last Friday of the month and when a few loyal followers showed up, Soup Group was not there. Just not there. A few tears were shed, some whiners left messages on the phone machine, and a couple of eggs were thrown at the cars in the driveway. But there was no little Soup Group. Maybe Soup was ill, or out of town. Maybe Soup needed a respite and took it. Maybe Soup got burned on the stove and just locked the doors. Nobody knows, but we are all crossing our fingers that Soup Group will be back soon. Like on the last Friday in August. Yes I do believe, and I do hope that Soup will be back again. So tighten up your belts, suck it in and we hope to see you loyal followers return for another chance to be with/at Soup Group Friday, August 27. Noon till two, not pot-luck, and no clean up expected. Bring kids and an appetite and let's get this party re-started!!! Mimi 492-0207 -Mimi Katz, Soup Group Chair

"My Stuff" Bags

"My Stuff Bags" from the My Stuff Bags Foundation are available to children entering foster care. These bags contain a handmade blanket, toys and/or books, toothbrush, shampoo, comb, brush and powder or deodorant in a duffle bag. If you would like to obtain a "My Stuff" bag for a child placed with you, please call the MFPA phone number (507-0557).



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