



CHAPTER 9

MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 6726, San Rafael, CA 94903

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www.mfpa.net



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MFPA December 2009 Newsletter



Happy holidays and best wishes for a healthy and happy new year! The Marin Foster Parent Association is looking forward to 2010 with new board officers, new ideas and new trainings. All licensed foster parents should have received a letter and questionnaire about foster parent expectations of social workers and asking about trainings to be offered. Please take the time to fill this out and return it, so we can offer you what you want and need in the new year. (Have you figured out my theme for this paragraph? Hint: NEW!) Members of the MFPA should have received a ballot to vote for officers for 2010. Again, please take the time to fill this out and return it. The MFPA board will be meeting next month to plan next year's

trainings, activities, events and budget. If you are interested in being involved and attending this three hour brunch/planning meeting, please contact one of our board members.

I'd like to acknowledge, once again, all of the wonderful holiday donors who have given Marin County foster children donations in one form or another. Below is a list of our many donors:

Toys for Tots (new toys for foster children including new bicycles!)

The Pajama Project (PJs and books)

Mill Valley Middle School (Wonderful goodie baskets for foster children)

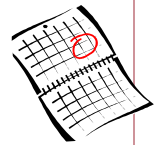
Round Table Pizza (Toys/Gifts for foster children, Pizza for the Annual Caroling Party)

2K Games (Toys/Gifts for foster children)

Sleep Train (School supplies, Shoes, Clothes)

We will be hosting our monthly Meet and Eat on January 19, 2010 (note the change of day/week). Please see the attached flyer for details. We are in the process of finding a new location for our monthly Meet and Eats, so we can remain consistent with our meeting days. Stay tuned!

Upcoming Events



❖ January

17: MFPA Board Annual Planning meeting, San Rafael, 11:30—2:00

❖ January 19: MFPA monthly Meet and Eat, San Rafael, 6:30—8:30 PM

❖ January 29: Soup Group, San Rafael, 12—2 PM

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

Welcome New Foster Parent!

Marin County Children and Family Services would like to welcome our newest foster parent, Maxeen Olenberg. Maxeen will care for girls, ages 5-12 in her two-bedroom home in northern San Rafael. She has one daughter, Alyssa, who is twenty-two years old and lives in Davis, where she attends college and is completing her prerequisites for nursing school. Maxeen's interests include cooking, baking, gardening and caring for her beloved cat and small dog. As an experienced parent and preschool teacher, Maxeen will offer a great deal of compassion and sensitivity to girls in foster care. This agency sends Maxeen a heartfelt thanks for making herself available to children who need a loving home.—
Cindy Wasserman, MSW, Licensing Social Worker



Social Worker Profile



Social Worker Profiles is something the MFPA

thought would be of interest to the foster parent community. We hope it will help familiarize foster parents with the social workers they have or may work with. We will attempt to provide a profile of a Marin Children and Family Services social worker each month. Anyone with a suggestion of a social worker to be interviewed can contact Jonathan Toste at: jjtoste@gmail.com.

Social Worker: *Veronica Perez, MSW*
DHHS, CFS, Child Welfare Worker
Ongoing Unit

Interviewer: *Linda Gregory*

Why did you choose to be a social worker?

It seems a lot of people just end up in social work, but for me, working for CPS is the realization of a long-term goal that I set for myself when I was 19. I was in my second year of Junior College taking a variety of classes that interested me and figuring out what I was going to "do". I took a course called 'Social Work and the Family' and loved it. I have always liked working with people and since 8th grade I have volunteered in the communities where I lived doing different types of social work. My own personal history and extensive volunteer experience helped prepare me to be a social worker. But, it was that particular semester where I knew that I wanted to be a social worker for CPS. I graduated from Sacramento State with a double major in Sociology and Philosophy, and received my MSW in 2007 from UC Berkeley. I really loved school and imagine someday working on a second Master's degree or PhD.

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

I have worked two and half years for the County of Marin. I feel so lucky to work in the Ongoing Unit because it offers a balance in the type of cases I get. For instance, my colleagues in other counties work with a family at only one point of time in their case, such as during family reunification. When that family moves to the Family Maintenance phase of their case they get a new social worker. If a teen from that same family moves to Permanent Placement, they get a new social worker. New workers may or may not be familiar with a family's particular issues and needs. Here in Marin, I get to work in all those realms, which makes my job more interesting as well as providing more integrated and effective services for our families. My stresses in caseload are balanced with Permanent Plan cases where I work with teens, which I really enjoy.

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

One of the biggest rewards in my job is watching a family make lasting, long-term changes in their lives. Though I am being supportive and facilitating services for them, they are the ones doing the work and empowering themselves. It is a wonderful to know that they will not fall apart when our case closes because they are the ones responsible for the changes they made. Another great experience is developing a long term trusting relationship as a social worker with a child. I really enjoy spending time with the kids and working with teens in a permanent placement.

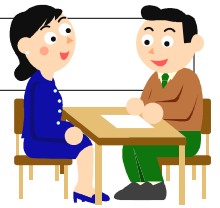
On the challenging side is the amount of everyday tasks I have. With anywhere from 10 to 18 cases at a given time, there are a myriad of things that need to be done. When a number of people are coming to me needing information or help with a crisis, and I have a pending legal deadline, I have to prioritize and decide that someone's issue is less important and will fall lower on my list. That is really hard. Some days I feel like this work is all about triage, I have to let the least important tasks wait and deal with the emergencies first.

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

You are all so wonderful and do a great job taking care of the kids! We literally could not do our jobs without you. Sometimes when I can't return a call from one of you right way I feel badly but I am confident that our foster families are very capable and resourceful. You do an amazing job figuring out how to handle issues on your own when social workers are temporarily unavailable. I really appreciate your flexibility and patience in working with us. Most of all, you give me peace of mind, which is important to maintain while doing this difficult but ultimately rewarding work with families in crisis. You provide a very crucial service to the community by giving a loving and nurturing home to children who need it the most. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to offer yourselves and your homes to the children our agency must care for.



Foster Parent Profile



Foster Parent Profiles is overseen by MFPA Vice President Jonathan

Toste. The project goal is to help share information about foster parenting and to bring foster parents together. A profile of a Marin foster parent will be shared each month. Anyone wishing to contribute as either an interviewer or interviewee can contact Jonathan at: jjtoste@gmail.com.

Foster Parent: *Carol Ihlenburg*

Interviewer: *Interviewee provided answers to questions prepared by Jonathan Toste via email*

Why did you choose to be a foster parent?

I have always loved children - specifically infants. While running an in home childcare, my licensing worker mentioned considering becoming a foster parent. I figured - what the heck - it's like providing childcare only the child stays overnight, right?

What is your background and what do you do for a living?

I grew up in the panhandle of Florida - the daughter of a naval flight instructor and a kindergarten teacher. I attended (and graduated with a BS in Business from) Humboldt State University via a national student exchange program from the University of South Florida. I met my husband, Kris (a Berkeley native), in college. We have one biological daughter (age 17) and one daughter (age 8) we adopted. I worked in the financial world for a while but realized I didn't like dealing with all the politics of office life. After giving birth to my daughter, I decided being with her was more important, so I opened an in home childcare (an occupation I had experienced prior to her birth). After

about five years of providing childcare, I transitioned into providing bookkeeping for small businesses. I have been a bookkeeper for more than ten years. It provides the flexibility to work from home yet still have contact with adults on a regular basis.

What particular skills of yours transfer to being a good foster parent?

I think my ability to persist when I think something should be done a certain way has been useful in accomplishing tasks foster children in my care may need. I am "skilled" at verbalizing what I think - and, sometimes, this is helpful (sometimes detrimental). Most of the children I care for are non verbal, so I take it on myself to assist them in getting heard and getting their needs met. I attend all court hearings the children in my care have to not only indicate to the court the children are cared for but also to hear what is going on in their case and to provide any relevant information that may be needed. I think it is important (excluding Scott Stitham's children) for children to have consistency and structure to their lives, since that is often what they have not had in their lives. Being diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at age 17 has made me realize the importance of realizing your physical limitations as well as learning to overcome barriers.

Is there anything in particular you want to share with other foster parents?

Look to other foster parents for help and advice if possible. They are the only people who can REALLY relate to the frustrations, accomplishments and challenges of being a foster parent. Realize that, although you feel you may be right about a certain belief, your feelings aren't always what count in making long

term decisions for foster children. It's important to always consider the rest of a foster child's life - which, for me, has sometimes been difficult. For example, when I feel a child's life is being totally disrupted due to visitation or appointments, I have to remember what the long term plan is. Try to support the plan yet provide your insights to what is best for the child at the time.

What 5 attributes best describe you?

I put this question out on my Facebook profile and here are the responses:

- feisty, fun, organized, generous, smart (-my best friend in high school)
- strong, funny, generous, practical, formidable (-the mother of my daughter's friend since preschool)
- A pillar upon which society is built (- Swedish exchange student who lived with our family my freshman year of college - I guess they don't use numbering systems there!)
- feisty... that's a good one. I also say "good humored" and fun. Notice how I don't say "good tempered" (-friend from college)
- Cheerful. Kind. Thoughtful. Hard-working. Plays well with others (-my neighbor)

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.



Soup Group Thanksgiving

The day after Thanksgiving is a bit like Boxing Day (which as you all know has nothing to do with boxing up stuff, as I discussed in last year's newsletter) and I was relieved to see my turkey carcass cleaned to the bone so I didn't have to make the soup. I did make two huge pots for soup group as I anticipated massive crowds and a very hungry group. We scarfed like we hadn't eaten in days, which I knew wasn't true. All these folks had just gorged the nite before and still came to my house ravenous. Go figure. I guess they had all been fasting since they got up from the holiday table the day earlier. I served a unique Gingered Carrot Soup I got from my friend Sherry and I whipped up a spicy Tuscan Lentil with Hot Italian Sausages. I foisted leftover Pumpkin Pie on everyone but a few foster Moms brought yummy Cheesecakes also, a Peanut Butter number and a pumpkin flavored cake to die for. For some reason those were the pre-

ferred desserts of the day. Go figure, I always say you can never have tooo much pumpkin pie. (Oh yes you can). A record breaking crowd showed up and we ate in shifts. I dont know if people just wanted to be with ME for the holiday or the word is out that the soups are good, or people just like getting together when they have a day off and my house was warm. (I am running the heat every day now and PG&E loves me for supporting the economy). In attendance, many toting kids, were Carol Ihlenburg, Peggy Byrne (with dessert), Laura Paul, Sherry Difranza, Stephanie Sanford, John and Laura Abramson (with dessert), Christine Swain, Alice Basch, Rachel Norman, Christine Andrews, newcomer Maxine Olenburg, and Mark and Donna Plank all the way from So-Cal. Most folks brought kids or interacted with the kids and so the table was full and noisy and the food was so delicious. It felt like a big family get-together and isn't that what community is all about? We have developed a caring and supportive network together and foster parents and adoptive parents know that if you need some time, support and advice, mentoring, or connection, we are here monthly and talk is confidential (when necessary) and the atmosphere is cozy. We touched on the holiday stresses for the kids, depression, mandated reporting, and how to buy appropriate presents for kids you don't always know real well. We discussed vegan teenagers and how to integrate the vegetarian teens into the family at mealtime, and a little recipe talk went around the table. The last Friday of this month is Christmas day and the next week is New Year's Day, so I will skip Soup Group this month as I am hosting the Singing Event of the year on the 18th. See you for January Soup Group in 2010! -Mimi Katz

2009 MFPA Executive Board Members

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vpoe99@yahoo.com

Jonathan Toste, Vice President/
Phone Tree Chair
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Andrea Pino, Secretary
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Mimi Katz (492-0207)

Cesar Lagleva (846-3789)

Terrie Green (331-2156)

Newsletter

Carol Ihlenburg
Vidette Poe
Barbara Sabido



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P.O. Box 6726, San Rafael, CA 94903



MFPA Membership Application

Name: _____

Complete Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

Membership Fees: \$ 35.00 for individual membership; \$45.00 for family membership

*Please mail completed form with membership fee to:

Marin Foster Parent Association, Attn. Treasurer, P.O. Box 6726, San Rafael, CA 94903

To be removed from the MFPA newsletter mailing list, please call (415) 507-0557!