

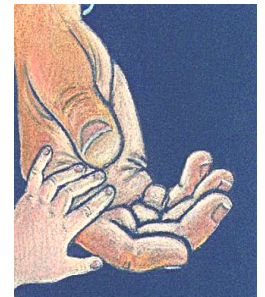


MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

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

(415) 507-0557

www.mfpa.net



Issue 72

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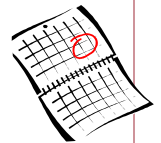
MFPA September 2009 Newsletter

On Saturday, September 19th, the Marin Foster Parent Association in collaboration with the College of Marin Foster and Kinship Care Education Program, hosted a meeting of representatives from foster parent associations in the bay area. All nine counties were invited, and seven attended. It was an awesome day filled with information sharing and problem solving. Regina Diehl, attorney/foster parent/LAPP director, facilitated the day perfectly! We heard how other county's social service departments work and interact with foster parents, what each county's association does and offers for and to their foster parents, and were able to brain storm about solutions to challenges we all encounter. One of the biggest challenges all counties expressed is finding people to participate and join their associations. We hope to implement some new strategies presented to increase participation in our county. At the end of the day, Regina filled us all in on what is new in the legal realm that effects the foster care community. She shared there will be many new community care licensing (CCL) regulations going into effect soon. If you are interested in learning about these, you can go to www.dss.cahwnet.gov/org/PG1914.htm for more information.



In October, the MFPA Meet and Eat will feature former foster youth speaking about their experience/s in foster care including what was helpful and what could have been done differently. They will also talk about how being in foster care effected their lives. In addition, there will be a short presentation by the Marin County Office of Education about what resources and funding is available to school age foster children. Please see attached flyer for more information. EVERYONE is welcome and encouraged to join us at these monthly trainings/meetings.

Upcoming Events



- ❖ **September 25:**
Soup Group, 12-2, San Rafael
- ❖ **October 7:** MFPA Board meeting, 10-12, San Rafael
- ❖ **October 14 :** Meet and Eat (MFPA's monthly meeting), 6:30–8:30 pm, San Rafael
- ❖ **October 17 & 18:** Goblin Jamboree, Bay Area Discovery Museum
- ❖ **October 21:** Foster Care Collaborative Meeting, 10-12 noon, San Rafael
- ❖ **November 7:** Raising Healthy Teens, 9-3, San Rafael

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



Do you have some extra time each month (2-4 hours)? Do you appreciate what the Marin Foster Parent Association does for the foster care community? Do you want it to continue? We need volunteers to join our board for the 2009/2010 year NOW!!! Our wonderful Secretary, Andrea Pino, has decided to step down. She has done an outstanding job for the last 4 years. Her responsibilities included taping the board meetings, typing up the minutes, preparing the agenda and reserving the location. Do you have financial skills? Carol Ihlenburg has served as the MFPA Treasurer for several years, but is looking for a replacement and would be happy to train someone. The Treasurer's responsibilities include managing the bank account and preparing monthly reports to present at the board meetings. As mentioned in last month's newsletter, Vidette Poe, who has served as the MFPA President the last two years is planning to make a move to a land unknown. Her responsibilities include monthly general meeting planning, running the board and general meetings, being the contact for those interested in interacting with the MFPA and more. Please consider joining our 100% volunteer run organization as an officer or even a member at large. If any of these positions sound appealing to you, please don't hesitate to call Vidette Poe at 465-4622. Our next board meeting will be October 7 from 10AM-12PM in San Rafael if you'd like to come and observe and/or ask questions.

Funding for Tutoring and After School Enrichment Programs

Thanks to a grant from The Marin Charitable Association, the Marin Foster Parent Association has funding for tutoring and after school enrichment available for children in the dependency system. This funding is available to assist foster families with tutoring and after school 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 re apply. 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 after school 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 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 served 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!



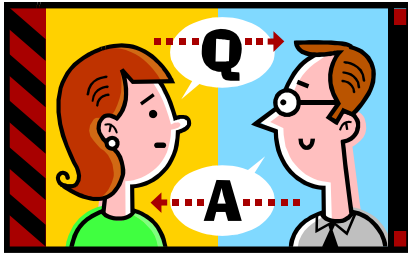
Information/Training for Prospective Foster Parents

Marin County Children and Family Services Information Meetings for prospective foster and foster-adopt parents will be held 7:00 to 8:30 pm at 3250 Kerner Blvd, room 107, in San Rafael on the following dates: Wednesday, September 23, Thursday, October 15 and Thursday, December 3. Anyone who is curious about foster care or foster adoption is welcome! The next Introductory Training required of all licensed foster parents will be held Friday, November 20 through Sunday, November 22. Please call Cindy Wasserman at 415/473-5028 for more information.

Gathering Information for Initial Foster Placements

After recent conversations with foster parents, I've noted a strong theme of frustration with the scarce information provided when a child is first placed in foster care. It must be difficult to care for a child when you know little about him or her while still providing a loving home and having an open heart. While Emergency Response Social Workers try to provide all the information they can, these social workers experience significant challenges both in obtaining the information and in finding time to communicate it to the foster parents. Emergency Response Social Worker experience, first hand, the many challenges associated with responding to a child abuse or neglect emergency. They often receive the initial referral moments before they need to respond and, with limited information, walk into a thorny scene. As they begin the investigation in any emergency, they wear many hats and are asked to gather voluminous information in a short period of time; all in the midst of, what is usually, a very chaotic situation. Some of the tasks an ER worker must complete in the span of a few hours and prior to placing a child in foster care are as follows: Assess the safety of a situation, Record and document all evidence of abuse or neglect, Interview all parties (if possible), Inquire about location of children or any missing party, Contact and work with law enforcement, Create a strategy for entry into the home (i.e. With drug task force), Visit parents in jail, Assess medical needs and seek medical care if necessary, Assess Indian Child status..And the list goes on....

We share this with you in hopes of assisting you in understanding what the beginning of a case often looks like and, more specifically, how chaotic and complex it usually is. Please be assured that when we bring children to your home, the social workers have made every attempt to gather all the pertinent information about the child in order for you to provide outstanding care for the children. Unfortunately, the circumstances at the scene of the emergency and, at times, for several weeks following the emergency, can be extremely prohibitive. Examples include: when both parents are arrested and in custody, when the drug task force is involved or the scene is too dangerous, when we are unable to locate parents, when attorneys advise their clients not to speak with us, etc. At the same time, we will continue to work hard to share any and all available information that is pertinent to the child with you as soon as possible after it's received. With all that the Social Workers are doing in the early days of a case it can be difficult to reach them for immediate answers, so please don't hesitate to contact Supervisor Julie Lenhardt 473-2606 or Supervisor Raul Munoz 473-2608. We thank you for the exceptional work you do and for your endless patience as we all work together for the safety and wellbeing of the children. —Julie Lenhardt, Social Services Supervisor, Teresa Higuera, Senior Social Worker & Hadar Hartshorn, MSW Intern



Foster Parents Want to Know...

We will be hosting a new monthly column for foster parents to ask questions about providing foster care. Kelly Reiter, Certified Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) from Family and Children Law Center and Bree Marchman, Unit Supervisor of Adoption and Licensing at Children and Family Services have volunteered to provide responses via our newsletter. If you have a question you'd like to ask, please submit to cihlenburg@comcast.net or call 507-0557.

Question: How does a foster parent deal with confidentiality when in public with foster children?

Answer (Provided by Kelly): A foster mom walks into a store holding the cutest little child and runs in to a friend who says: "Oh that baby is so cute whose is she?" What can she say? The short answer: Nothing. Sorry, but that is the law.

As a lawyer I prefer to start with the law:

The provisions of the juvenile court law ensuring the confidentiality of juvenile court proceedings and re-

cords "are intended to protect the privacy rights of the child." Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300.2

Juvenile case files, which encompass not only all information in the court files, but all information held by DCFS as well, are confidential and protected by Welfare and Institutions Code Section 827. This code sets forth who has access to said files.

Now that the legal information is out of the way, what does this mean for the foster parents who are caring for our children?

Here is the bottom line. Nobody, including myself, social workers, judges, etc is allowed to talk about the case outside of the job. Nobody is to be speaking about the cases to any other person not involved in the case.

So, what do you do when approached by a long lost friend while holding or caring for a foster child? Your friend says: "I didn't know you had another baby?" You have two choices: (1) you can lie and tell them it is yours, or (2) you tell the truth and say "it is not mine, but I am caring for him/her right now." if they ask any further questions you must politely let them know that you cannot give them any more information. If they are one of

your more intelligent or close friends, they will know what you do and can surmise, but you are not to discuss the fact that the child is a foster child.

It is human nature to want to talk to friends and family about what you are doing and what is going well/not well in your children's lives; unfortunately, you cannot talk to others about what is going on in your foster child's life as it relates *to court or to his/her family*. You can talk about how well your foster child is doing in school or sports or life, but not about his/her family, what may or may not happen in his/her future or anything else that relates to the fact that your child is a foster child.

Now you soup groupies, don't panic. We do not want to dissuade you all from getting together to blow off some steam, while eating those wonderful concoctions. It is perfectly fine to talk about yourselves and your frustrations, etc, that is what is so wonderful about this group, that you can talk with others who understand what you go through and to help with solutions and experiences. However, what you should try to avoid is talking specifically about these children's cases and families in these group contexts.

Art Contest For California Child Welfare Calendar

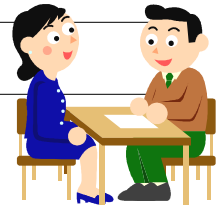
The California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts, is excited to announce the kick off of an Art Contest for children, youth and elders who have experience in California's child welfare system or courts.

The theme this year is "A Lifetime of Love: The importance of Friends, Family and Belonging". The artwork of current and former foster youth will be reviewed by a panel of judges and winning submissions will be published in a 2010 calendar for dissemination during California Adoption and Permanency month in November.

Our goal is to compile a meaningful calendar that communicates the significance of permanency from a foster child, youth and alumni perspective through art and increases understanding of the urgent need to create and sustain permanent connections for children and youth in care. Submissions are due by October 16, 2009. For more information, contact Mia Stizzo, Program Assistant California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership, mia.stizzo@cfpic.org, 916-551-1431.



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: *Kimberly Contreras*
Position: *Adoptions Social Worker*
Interviewer: *Kim Pollak*

Why did you choose to be a social worker?

My mother has been an educator and counselor all my life. While she obtained her Bachelors and Masters degree in counseling at San Francisco State, I was by her side, because she did not have childcare. Spending many hours on the SFSU campus before I was school age had an impact on me. I think that was my first exposure to the concept of helping people for a living.

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

I received my Bachelors and Masters in Social Work from SFSU. My first job where I gained social work experience was at Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center where I was a Gang Prevention and Youth Employment Counselor. I managed an office in the Southern Mission/Excelsior neighborhood where I designed and implemented a gang prevention/job readiness program for at-risk youth in my neighborhood and facilitated trainings and workshops focusing on interview skills, self-

esteem building and employment. I also did mediation with families in their home when there was conflict between parents and teens. I worked in other agencies in my neighborhood that include OMI/Excelsior Beacon Program and Balboa High School. I provided academic support and case management for high school students and ran a graffiti removal project on the weekends. Then I was hired in Marin County as an Emergency Response Worker and am now an Adoptions Worker. It will be ten years next October 2010.

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

The most rewarding part of my job is working with children and families and having the opportunity to support healing and personal growth in our clients. I find the work always challenges me to work toward *my* personal best and recognize my biases when I am trying to facilitate upward mobility. I love this job because it is "life happening" which is so rich to me. I work in an environment where life challenges and, often times, heartbreaks are the pulse of my day. I love working with my coworkers who I have found over the years to be incredible teachers. The most difficult part of my job is working in a bubble that is Marin County. As a Native of San Francisco, I grew up hearing different languages, being exposed to different foods, cultures, perspectives and vibrations. The lack of diversity in this community is very hard for me. I joined the Cultural Competent Committee as an effort to reflect on my own biases and to help shift the lens of this county to be more inclusive of other cultures and value bases.

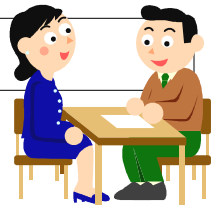
Is there anything in particular you

would like to share with foster parents?

The foster parent's role is so crucial to a child's journey. I view foster parents as the conduits and facilitators of healthy attachment through their nurturing touch. Often times our children come into this system not knowing safety, trust, security and predictability. The child's blueprint is riddled with trauma from unpredictable behavior and inconsistency. A positive experience in a foster home gives children the visceral knowledge that life can feel good and be predictable and safe—that there are possibilities. As an Emergency Response worker, I remember feeling like *I* was in a safe, predictable environment when I would drop off a child to a foster home. I value our foster parents and view them as part of a team that has the best interest of a child in mind. Sometimes this does not get conveyed to our foster parents when there is lots of pressure to do "the next task" that is mandated and time-lined. It's very tender to watch those foster parents that are very attuned to a child and the family situation and is able to foster love and compassion that meets the child's needs. There is a Hawaiian saying "Nana I ke Kumu" which means "Look to the Source". When a child is part of the dependency system it isn't an ideal environment that naturally makes a child *feel* safe or cared for but rather it is a scary, unpredictable time for a child. Then slowly, children change... drug exposed babies become developmentally on target, children who were doing poorly in school do better, anxiety decreases and security increases. Nana I ke kumu....thank you Marin County foster parents!



Foster Parent Profile



Foster Parent Profiles is overseen by MFPA Co-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: *Kathryn Jordan Whittley*
Interviewer: *Jonathan Toste*

Why did you choose to be a foster parent?

I was raised by a single mom who believed in the power of one - one person can make a difference in the world. We all have a responsibility to give back to our communities and one another. Growing up, my mom had an open door policy - If anyone needed a meal or a place to sleep, they were always welcomed in my mom's home. I felt comfortable with that and understood how much it meant to those on the receiving end. I always knew I would do the same when I raised a family of my own. When I was single and in my early thirties, my mom called one day after meeting with a social worker and said, "You have always wanted to be a foster parent, and there is a big need now. Maybe you want to explore that option soon." I did, and the rest is history.

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

I was born and raised in Lucas Valley. I have degrees in both Nutritional Science and Biology from Cal Poly and UC Berkeley. I had been priming myself for medical school when I had an opportunity to do recruitment for large corporations in the medical field. I've now had my own recruitment business for 9 years. I have been a foster parent for 5 years and been married for 3 years. We have two biological children ages 28 and 11 months, one 16-year-old foster-adopt child and an 18 year old under guardianship and in high school.

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

Problem solving was honed from my life's experiences as well as achieving my two science degrees and, coupled with patience, allows me to be good at getting my kids to understand WHY they have made their sometimes poor choices. Patience and perseverance allow me to help them unwind how their series of choices led them into predicaments they need to change. Oh what joy to start seeing them make better choices! I also believe in the power of love. To love these children for who and where they are allows them to feel safe, respected and accepted. I set high standards and give the child the tools they need to succeed. I don't expect anything from my kids that I am not willing to do myself. I live with high standards and they do also. Keep in mind, when standards are created it will be different for every child. What works for one kid might not work for

the next. Finally, being raised by a single mom meant we needed to be flexible. Things were forever changing. You have to be fluid!

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

Dealing with the court, education and other systems that require advocacy for your kids requires being firm, strident and perseverance "asking for what you need" for the kid's best possible outcome. What I've noticed is that if you are or appear to be a "passive" foster parent (i.e. just getting your kids basic needs met) - this will show through to the persons capable of helping you meet those needs. Vice versa - if you are a "follow through" advocator - this shows through and makes all the difference in giving those people in power the incentive that will help deliver those needs.

What 5 attributes best describe you?

I love kids, have a huge heart (according to my husband), I truly care about people, I am committed, and I will go to bat for those I care about to make sure their needs are met. I won't quit until the job is done to the best of my ability.

A Home Within—Free Therapy for Foster Children!

The Marin chapter of *A Home Within* currently welcomes referrals. *A Home Within* provides free ongoing psychotherapy in a private-practice setting for children and adolescents in the foster care system. The organization was founded more than 15 years ago around the belief that the trauma of chronic loss can be helped by ongoing, consistent care -- *One child, one therapist, for as long as it takes...* Learn more at www.ahomewithin.org. If you wish to make a referral, you can reach our intake coordinator at 888-898-2249.

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.

2009 MFPA Executive Board Members

Vidette Poe, President
465-4622
vpoe99@yahoo.com

Jonathan Toste, Vice President/
Phone Tree Chair
258-9459
jjtoste@gmail.com

Andrea Pino, Secretary
479-0357
andreapino@comcast.net

Carol Ihlenburg, Treasurer
507-1822
cihlenburg@comcast.net

Members At Large

Christine Andrews (785-3316)

Mimi Katz (492-0207)

Cesar Lagleva (846-3789)

Terrie Green (331-2156)

Newsletter Editors

Carol Ihlenburg
Vidette Poe



Soup Group at Mimi's

It seems I have been misspelling some very important names in my newsletter articles since the inception of Soup Group. I am thinking that this might disqualify me from providing the luncheons from now on. I mean, if I can't even spell some simple names correctly, how can I read these recipes and cook up these meals safely. I feel sometimes incompetent in too many things. I have continuously over-watered the lemon tree and killed two in a row. I have persisted in wearing mismatched shoes even after corrected by my smarty-farty kids. I drive around with rubber ducks on the roof of the car and I Honk for Peace whenever I see protesters. I even honk at kids waving from the over-crosses. My level of responsibility is depleted after all these years of big responsibility and if I am having burn-out around this name-spelling, I might be ready for the rag-heap. Oh, but I love my job, and I especially love



interfacing with the ever appreciative foster parents every month. So I guess I will make a published apology, carry on with Soup Group and see if I can't get my act together!!! (Sorry for the name-misspelling, to those who know, it was never malicious). We do so love to get together and chaw and slurp, discuss mutually exasperating issues, and plow thru dessert once a month. For some of us it's a rare opportunity to compare notes, be mentored, and "eat out" with our little ones with us. I know I am not going to Book Club, or PTA or Mom's Night Out when I have fragile or testy toddlers. So soup group really fills a niche for me as well as for many of you all. So come on over again, last of the month and lest try a new-style Gazpacho, and I think I'll make a Cream of Garlic (to really blow out your spouses or kids).

Last month I was joined by Laura Paul, Linda Grey, Christine Swain, Peggy Byrne, Stephanie Sanford, Jilma Edwardson, Monica Walsh, Alice Basch, Rachel Norman, Scott Stitham, Christine Andrews, and various sweet and lovely babes. We discussed the big change titled: "Wow, Where did all these Kids come from???", and talked a lot about the organization A Home Within and networked how to use them. A very informative meeting and lunch was yumalicious: Fresh Red Pepper and Tomato Soup, and Creamy Asparagus and Yukon Potatoes with Crab. See you all Friday Sept 25, noon till two, kids welcome, and no clean-up necessary. Mimi Katz 492-0207 -Mimi Katz

 ★ **Congratulations, Soup Group Queen, Mimi Katz, on your selection by the Angels** ★
 ★ **in Adoption program! Marin County is fortunate to have such a great fos-** ★
 ★ **ter/adoptive parent represent us in Washington D.C..** ★

MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

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!