



familymatters

a newsletter for foster and adoptive families

Published by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services

Greetings from DHR Commissioner B. J. Walker

It's a very special pleasure for me to welcome the foster and adoptive parents of Georgia to the first issue of this newsletter. That's not just because I head the Georgia Department of Human Resources, which owes so much to you for opening your homes to the children in our custody. It's because when I speak to you I'm speaking to my peers. I, too, was a foster parent many years ago. My foster child is now my beautiful grown daughter who has three kids of her own.

When you open your home to a child who has had a rocky start in life, when you comfort that child and restore normalcy to chaos, that child learns to trust again. I cannot tell you how much your partnership with us on behalf of Georgia's children means.

Your contribution is enormous:

Over 5,000 families care for foster children in Georgia. Some ten thousand families have adopted children who were in state custody. Many of those were foster families, and many continue to care for foster children.

I encourage you to find connections to support groups and "buddy" families through our newly expanded resource center. I am pleased that many of you have formed your own organization for mutual aid and advocacy, another valuable resource.

Many of you have told us that you want more information about services for foster and adoptive parents and about what's going on with DHR and DFCS, especially new policies that affect you directly. This newsletter is

one more effort to help you stay connected and up to date on new policies, services, and information that can help you in your important caregiving work. Please let the editor know whether this newsletter is useful and what you would like to see in future issues.

Above all, please know that you are in my thoughts every day – because I have walked in your shoes.





New Training Requirements:

How will they IMPACT you?

Pre-service and ongoing training for foster parents has been slimmed down and revamped to focus on the information that is most important to you. IMPACT, the new pre-service training program, takes 20 hours instead of 30 (plus orientation). Starting August 19, 2004, the ongoing education requirement for foster parents dropped to 10 hours per year instead of 15. MAPP-trained foster parents can choose to attend IMPACT classes to fulfill their annual training requirements.

IMPACT stands for Initial Interest, Mutual selection, Pre-service training, Assessment, Continuing development and Teamwork. That reflects some of the features of the new certification process, which includes:

- an emphasis on partnering with placement staff through the whole process of becoming a resource family (foster or foster/adoptive) and planning the child's future;
- better staff follow-up with families from the time they first express interest in fostering until they begin pre-service training;

- a standard orientation for anyone considering becoming a foster or adoptive parent;
- a standard letter of intent for families to sign after orientation if they decide to go ahead with certification.

For more information about IMPACT and the new annual training requirements, contact your county DFCS office.

A Bill of Rights for Foster Parents

In May Governor Sonny Perdue signed into law the Foster Parents Bill of Rights. Passed by the 2004 General Assembly, the law took effect July 1. This ground-breaking legislation covers a wide range of topics, including foster parents' right to training, timely financial compensation, and information about the children they care for.

"Foster parents are key partners in our efforts to provide safe, loving homes for Georgia's most vulnerable children," said DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker in a letter to DFCS county directors. "The Foster Parents Bill of Rights provides an important new tool for us to support these partners and to strengthen our relationship with them."

In addition to spelling out the rights of foster parents, the new law requires the Department of Human Resources, the Adoptive and Foster Parent Association, and the Office of the Child Advocate to develop a new grievance procedure for foster parents who believe their rights have been violated. The new procedure should be completed this fall. Until it is available, the grievance procedure found in the Foster Parents Manual will still apply.

The complete text of the Foster Parents Bill of Rights can be found at http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/fulltext/hb1580.htm, or contact your county DFCS office to obtain a copy.

Need Help Figuring Things Out?

Help has arrived! *The Georgia Center For Adoption and Foster Care Resources and Support has a new name and an added mission.*



Since 2001 the Center has helped adoptive parents find help they need to be successful in meeting the needs of their adopted children. In July the Center expanded its services to help foster parents meet the needs of children in foster care as well. The Center provides information and referrals to

resources in your community, including health care providers who take Medicaid. They can connect you with a support group or a buddy family (another foster family to share experiences with), and let you know about opportunities to meet your annual training requirements. They also have a lending library of books, videos and magazines on foster and adoptive issues.

You can contact the Center at **1-866-A-Parent** or online at <http://www.gaadoptionresources.org>.



Safe Havens for Children

Foster children can now meet with their birth families in convenient, family- friendly places with community volunteers as observers, through the new Safe Havens for Children program.

DFCS is working with the Juvenile Courts and Georgia Presbyteries to encourage supervised visitation centers in churches and other public facilities across the state. Presbyterians are taking the lead as the first denomination to embrace the Safe Havens concept statewide.

Families using Safe Havens can meet at times that are more convenient for children,

foster parents and birth families, reducing conflict with school and jobs. Children will be able to visit more often with their parents as their cases move closer to reunification.

Billy Payne, past president and CEO of Atlanta's Committee for the Olympic Games in 1996, is again making history by urging his fellow Presbyterians to get involved in the

Safe Havens program. We are happy they have chosen this way to help meet the needs of children in Georgia.

To find out more about Safe Havens for Children visitation centers and whether there is one near you, contact your county DFCS office.

Fight the Flu This Winter



In early October one of the two companies that supply flu vaccine to the United States lost its license. As a result, flu vaccine is in short supply this year. The vaccine we do have should go first to people most in danger of suffering complications from flu. If you or others in your household are in one of the following high-risk groups, call your coun-

ty health department or family doctor about getting flu shots:

- All children aged 6-23 months
- Adults 65 and older
- Caregivers for medically fragile people
- People who take care of or live with children aged less than 6 months
- People aged 2-64 years who have chronic medical problems

- All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
 - Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
 - Children aged 6 months-18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
- Vaccination is a good defense against the flu, but there are other simple things you can do to protect yourself and your family. Get into the habit of

washing your hands often for 20 seconds with soap and warm water, and teach your children to do this. Cover your coughs and sneezes with a paper tissue or your arm. Stay home from work or school when you're sick and don't let children go to school sick.

Parents Working Together

The Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) works in cooperation with public and private welfare agencies, both local and state, as well as the General Assembly, to improve both the foster care and adoption processes. AFPAG speaks in behalf of all foster and adoptive parents in Georgia.

AFPAG offers support and educational training to help foster/adoptive families,

which encourages them to continue to foster or seek adoption. It helps parents meet and network with other parents who may be dealing with similar issues. AFPAG also holds an educational conference each February for families to enjoy. This is currently the largest state, as well as national, foster/adoptive parent conference.



For more information see www.afpag.org or contact Sharon Carlson, AFPAG president, 600 Big Bear Road, Bogart, GA. 30622, or 770-725-4455 (home) or 706-202-6389 (cell).

Working on Ourselves First

This is a two-part article. Part I focuses on accepting things about ourselves so we can help our children change. Part II (next issue) will share ideas on how we can change so our children can change.

All parents seek to guide and teach their children – but to help our children we must begin by changing ourselves.

Adopted and foster children come to us from many different painful and complex beginnings. Parental guidance is built on a foundation of attachment, connection and love, which in turn is built on months and years of shared emotions and experiences. This foundation is usually missing for parents and children in foster and adoptive families. The foundation has to be recreated by sharing memories, time together and feelings. Successful discipline helps create this foundation.

We parents have a mental picture of smart, beautiful, well behaved, organized and loving children. But the children often have a picture in their own minds of chaos, pain, neglect, loss, dirt and rejection. These two visions are doomed to conflict.

To avoid this conflict, we must begin by accepting ourselves where we are and as we are. It is extremely hard to change our own behavior. Think about resolutions to lose weight or exercise more. Remember how you feel when another adult – a boss, a spouse, a friend – ‘suggests’ we need to change our behavior. Most people don’t like this kind of advice. Our children don’t like being told to change any more than adults do.

Imagine an infant screaming because she is hungry or because he is in pain. Defiant, out of control children are like screaming babies. The mother or father needs to stay calm, because the baby will

be sensitive to the parent’s mood. Wise parents will take a deep breath, stop and think. Wise parents will puzzle out their baby’s needs. If the parent is out of control the baby will scream even louder. But if the adult is calm, the baby will often calm down too. Parents need to stay serene and calm in order to discipline their children successfully.

If your child acts up, starts a tantrum, refuses to do homework or calls you a name – STOP! Before you react, take a minute to check out what is happening inside your head and your body. Focus on your own feelings and emotions rather than on what you are thinking about the child. If you are screaming, “losing it,” or feeling furious or defeated, then you have already lost the battle.

Handling negative thoughts:

“I am so tired! I don’t need this today.” If you are too tired to deal with the behavior but the behavior is not life threatening, feel free to send the child to his room or a safe place and let him know that you will apply the consequences at a set time (in 30 minutes, after supper).

“I can’t stand this. Is this going to go on forever? Will the screaming never stop?”



Yes you can stand it! The screaming will stop. It will not go on forever. I bet you can tolerate the exact same behavior in a different setting, at a different time of day or with a different set of children.

“I don’t deserve to be treated like this.” Our children have often been treated with great neglect and pain. They have been hungry, hit, left in dirty diapers, and abandoned. They may be treating you the way they were treated, but it may have nothing to do with you. Recognize your child’s history; accept that negative behaviors make sense in the child’s mind. You must separate out your past, your “stuff” from the child’s or discipline techniques will fail. Parents with their own history of experiencing serious abuse (emotional, sexual, physical) or trauma often need a period of counseling to help them work on their past “stuff” that their foster or adopted children may trigger. You can ask your DFCS caseworker for references to counseling services.

Wendy Haus Hanevold, PhD.



Home Alone?

Foster parents are responsible for the child in their care 24 hours, seven days a week. So be sure you are very familiar with DFCS' policy about when older foster children can be left at home alone.

Foster children who are 13 years old or more may be able to stay home alone for short periods of time after school or when you have to run an errand – if you feel they are “reliable and competent.”

DFCS policy lists many things to help you decide whether your older foster child is ready to stay home alone for short periods of time. How long has the child lived in your home? Has the child shown that he or she is

mature, responsible, dependable and trustworthy? Does the child have a history of emotional stability and success in school – or a history of running away, delinquency, sexual acting out, or alcohol or substance abuse? How many children are in the house, and how do they behave together? How safe is your house? Are there hazards like a swimming pool or firearms? Is help nearby if there's an emergency?

Before you make this decision, review the policy (“Supervision of the Child in Care,” p. 22 in your manual) and discuss it with your case manager. If you agree the child can be home alone, make sure the child knows what to do in an emergency, has phone numbers of nearby friends, relatives or neighbors to call for help, and knows your home phone number.

Your Children Get Special Attention

Last year the federal government amended the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) to say that all children under 3 years old who have been found to have been neglected or abused will be referred to an early intervention program. Georgia's early intervention program is Babies Can't Wait (BCW), in DHR's Division of Public Health. This means that children under 3 years old may be eligible for services from BCW if they have a developmental delay or disability. The referral will be made before the child is placed in your home, so a BCW service coordinator may contact you to begin the assessment process.

BCW staff help the foster and birth families see that the child gets speech or physical therapy, or any other help that might be needed so the child can reach his or her potential. Services will be provided in a place that is agreed upon by everyone, such as your home or a day care setting.

DFCS and the Division of Public Health have been working together to make sure that all children in Georgia get the medical care they need. All children in foster care who are under 5 years old will be referred to Public Health's Children 1st program that follows at-risk babies and toddlers. If the child's Children 1st coordinator finds a disability or developmental delay, the child will be referred to an early intervention program. Early intervention means getting help (such as physical therapy or speech therapy) to children early, when it can do the most good.

Finally, your county public health department may call you to remind you when your child is due for a well child examination, called a Health Check. You do not have to take the child to the public health department if you have a pediatrician or other medical provider. However, the public health nurse will give you a follow-up call to make sure your child received the Health Check. Public Health will also give you referrals if the child needs specialized medical services.

Learning About Your Foster Child: The MDT Meeting

Did you know that foster parents can be present at the First Placement Best Placement meeting for the child in their care? This is called the MDT (Multi Disciplinary Team) meeting. It usually takes place 30 to 60 days after the child enters foster care. At this meeting case managers, family members, school personnel, public and mental health staff and others involved with the child's well-being are given the results of the child/family assessment. Licensed clinicians discuss the children's and their family's health issues, educational needs, and mental health concerns. They also review decisions about permanency for your foster child. It's a good way for you to learn more about the child and his or her family – and by attending you can earn up to five training hours. If you need more information about the MDT meeting, contact your caseworker.

Help find homes for children like Faron

Foster and adoptive parents are the greatest resource for children who can no longer live in their birth homes. That's not just because you do a great job parenting these children, but also because you are the best at recruiting other "resource" parents. Only you can tell what it's really like to walk in your shoes. Therefore, we need you to help us find others like yourselves.

The number of children entering foster care keeps growing. Don't you look forward to the day when we can count on placing siblings together, and on providing a home for every child?

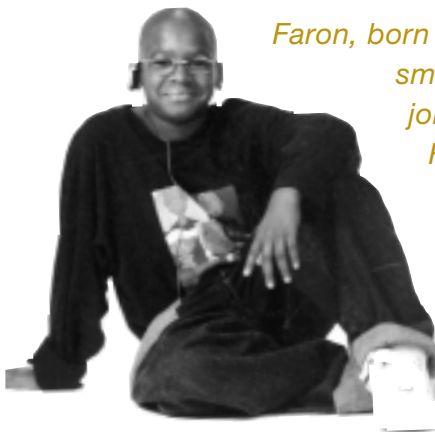
There's a special need for more adoptive parents for older children, sibling groups, and children with special needs.

In this issue we're featuring Faron, one of these children.

As you look at Faron's picture, think about children you've parented in the past, who have had some of the same needs. Do you think you can meet Faron's needs or do you know someone who can? Is there a relative, a friend, a co-worker or a church member who may be ideal for him? Anyone interested in Faron may call My Turn Now at 800-603-1322 and speak with the regional adoption coordinator for your area.

We thank you for all you already do for children. Please continue on the team and help us recruit new foster and adoptive parents.

Deborah Burrus, *Statewide Recruitment Manager, Adoption Services*



Faron, born in October 1990, is an outgoing young teen who loves to make people smile. Performing seems to be Faron's current passion. He loves to sing and joke around. He states that he is the "funniest person in the world." However, it seems that Faron is laughing on the outside, crying on the inside. Faron's unhappiness is sometimes expressed by aggressive behavior. He attends special classes for those with emotional and/or behavioral problems. Therapy and medication are helping. Faron says that he would "bring a great deal of love to a family." Faron is correct. He could bring a great deal of love to the right family, one willing to help him with his problems while providing him with unconditional love.



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The purpose of Family Matters is to strengthen the relationship between resource parents and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR); supplement foster and adoptive parents' training; and keep parents up to date about new policies and services. It is published quarterly by the DHR Office of Communications, for the Division of Family and Children Services.

Please send us your comments and ideas for articles you would like to see in Family Matters to Barbara Joye, DHR Office of Communications, Two Peachtree Street NW, Suite 29-426, Atlanta, GA 30303 or brjoye@dhr.state.ga.us. Please also let us know if you do NOT want to receive future issues.

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