

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

February/March 2014

N F A P A

Foster Parents on Social Media: Think Twice Before You Post!

By Madeleine Melcher



If you are a part of a Facebook adoption support group, you may have seen them, or you may have even written them: posts by foster parents written with information specific to the foster child in their care, possibly including information about the child's birth parents and social workers.

Foster care can be hard, fraught with adjustment issues for both the child and the foster parents. I have followed many of these posts myself, crying, as I have read of some of the unspeakable circumstances these children were once made to bear, that no child should. I have prayed as I read about some of the struggles foster parents have had as they try to help these children they are caring for in their homes, and I have cheered when children who have not known a forever home find one. I have no doubt these posts are written out of a need for support or guidance and likely out of frustration with the system, and sometimes even out of joy, in the little victories of each day with their foster child. However, as I read them I cannot help but wonder if this is a safe, ethical or even a legal thing to do.

In my search for answers— answers for those

who want help, support and guidance, for those who I know want to do right, and of course for the safety of the foster children involved— I decided to talk to someone who has lived the life of a foster parent for the last 12 years. I contacted Dr. John DeGarmo, foster parent, educator, author and speaker. DeGarmo and his wife have fostered more than 40 children, and adopted two, which lead him to become an expert in the field and author of a number of books relating to foster care. His latest book, *A Different Home: A New Foster Child's Story*, is a children's book to help younger kids who are entering placement.



I wondered if he himself posted things directly in social media about his foster children, and the answer was no. Not even when he recently wanted to share a Christmas picture of the nine children living in his home with his friends and family members. Why not? According to DeGarmo, it is because he not only recognizes the dangers involved, but also the laws that preclude it.

“I do not share these pictures, or any information about them,” DeGarmo said. “To be sure, there are wonderful foster care support groups through Facebook and other social media sites, and I belong to many of them. It's important to remember, though, that it is most unwise, and even against many state regulations and policies to share any information about

Continued on Page 3

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

N F A P A

Families First is published bimonthly.

When reprinting an article, please receive permission from the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association, 2431 Fairfield St. St., Suite C, Lincoln, NE 68521; 402-476-2273, toll-free 877-257-0176, e-mail: Pam@nfapa.org. To contact a board member or mentor, visit our website at www.nfapa.org.

NFAPA Staff

Pamela Allen, Executive Director: 308-631-5847 or Pam@nfapa.org
 Barb Nissen, Program Coordinator: 308-379-5323 or rbnissen@hamilton.net
 Felicia Nelsen, Office Administrator: 877-257-0176 or Felicia@nfapa.org
 Alicia Carlson, Support Staff: 877-257-0176

Resource Family Consultants (RFC)

Tammy Welker, Northeastern/Eastern Area:
 402-989-2197 or Tammy@nfapa.org
 Robbi Blume, Northwestern Area:
 402-853-1091 or nothernnfaparb@yahoo.com
 Terry Robinsons, Central: 402-853-1092 or trobinson1978@gmail.com
 Dee Nichelson, Western: 402-853-1090 or Deirdre@nfapa.org

NFAPA Board of Directors (2013)

President Northern Representative
 Charles and Carla Colton
 32314 740 Road
 Imperial, NE 69033
 308-882-4078
 colton@chase3000.com

Vice-President Southeast Representative
 Jay & Tammy Wells
 21 N. Kennedy, PO Box 162
 Alma, NE 68920
 308-928-3111
 jtwells@frontiernet.net

Secretary Western Representative:
 Southwest
 Bob and Pat Rice
 520 North 11th Street
 Plattsmouth, NE 68048
 402-296-2621
 Rr32026@windstream.net

Treasurer Western Representative:
 Panhandle
 Lynne Wiedel
 RR1 Box 61
 Belvidere, NE 68315
 402-768-6803
 Lynne_wiedel@hotmail.com

Central Representative At Large Board Members
 Kathy Wagoner-Wiese
 17630 W. 42nd Street
 Kenesaw, NE 68956
 402-752-3712
 okwiese@windstream.net

Eastern Representative
 Anna Brummer
 17820 Jacobs Circle
 Omaha, NE 68135
 308-627-6859
 brummeram@gamil.com

Questions? Call NFAPA at 877-257-0176 or 402-476-2273.

This publication is supported by Grant #93.566 under a sub-grant from HHS Administration for Children and Families and Nebraska DHHS.

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

by Pamela Allen

Is this just about the coldest winter EVER?? As I watch the news across the United States, I do have to acknowledge however, that we are truly blessed here in Nebraska....even though we are cold....we are not buried under a mountain of snow or ice. Kudos to all of the foster parents who are braving the cold to come to support groups and trainings that have been offered over the last few months! I so appreciate your dedication to building your foster parent supports and networking with others! Over and over again I tell people that foster care is about RELATIONSHIPS. Relationships with other foster parents, with birth families, with workers, with Guardian Ad Litem....the list goes on and on.

So, as a reminder to those who have attended training facilitated by NFAPA...you all know how important we feel it is to know your Guardian Ad Litem....are you making contact within the first 30 days of your placement? Are you sending a letter introducing yourself and sending monthly documentation....the SAME documentation you are sending to your caseworker? ARE YOU SENDING DOCUMENTATION to your worker??!! Remember....if it isn't written down, it didn't happen....or, it didn't happen the way you say it did. I have received several calls this month from families who have never met their GAL or even know who he/she is. I have talked to foster parents who never send a monthly report to their worker saying the worker says he/she doesn't need them to because they do a report. Remember, YOUR voice is important! YOU are the one who is with the child 24/7. YOU need to have your voice documented. NFAPA still has RECORD KEEPING BOOKS we sell for \$5.00 a book. This is a book you purchase one time and copy over and over to use. If you are interested in purchasing a RECORD KEEPING BOOK, please contact the office. Do you have to use a certain kind of book to do your documentation? NO...the book is simply a guide. You can do your documentation in a spiral notebook each evening, on a calendar daily or whatever is going to work best for you.

Are you filling out the CAREGIVER INFORMATION FORM? If you aren't, please do....that also means you must attend court with your youth! This is also something that NFAPA feels very strongly about. Court is a scary place to be even for adults. Why wouldn't you want to be there with the youth in your care? Attending court also gives the Judge the opportunity to meet the family that is caring for the child and ask questions that he/she may have. If you do not have a copy of the form, you can download it from the NFAPA website www.nfapa.org. I hope you will all check out the upcoming trainings that NFAPA is offering this spring! I hope to see all of you there! Stay warm, stay safe and if there is anything we can help you with, please don't hesitate to call!

Thank you for taking care of Nebraska's children! You are awesome!

Foster Parents: Be careful of social media

the children, even by indicating them with an initial, because they can be tracked down. Let us remember that there are sexual predators who roam through social media sites, specifically looking for children in foster care, as these children are often the most vulnerable and weakest, and easiest to ensnare in their sexual traps. We also must remember that what goes online, stays online, FORVEVER!”

While many posts we see from foster parents on social media do use an initial for the child’s name, the poster’s name is there, too. The groups are often “closed,” but there is nothing to prevent someone who knows the family or the child from being a member of the group. In fact, a birthparent may even be a member, or find the foster family through their own social media page.

DeGarmo warns that social media sites make it quite easy for birth parents and other biological family to spy on foster parents. “Time and time again, when I host training seminars across the nation, I hear of stories of those foster parents who have been stalked by their child’s biological family members through social networking. For those foster parents who post all their actions, movements, weekend plans, and vacation destinations through social network sites, birth parents have easy and ready access to this information. These biological family members are able to determine where the foster parents will be next, along with the foster child, and arrive at the same location.”

It is amazing what social media can do and the connections it creates, even unwanted ones. But whether it is social media, or chatting with a friend, DeGarmo stresses that before speaking to anyone, anywhere, about a child you’re caring for in your

“Time and time again, when I host training seminars across the nation, I hear stories of those foster parents who have been stalked by their child’s biological family members through social media.”

~ Dr. John DeGarmo

home to think about PRIVACY.

“It is simply not allowed, not permissible, and can place a child in danger,” DeGarmo said.

So, in this world where we are so accustomed to just hitting that “post” button from our phone or laptop to social media – think twice for any child in your home, and if you are a foster parent, please know that for you, you may also be breaking laws and

opening the door to problems you never dreamed.

So what is a foster parent to do? You want to help the child you are fostering, but you may feel unprepared for the job, or just need some support from someone who has been there. Where do you go to get that, if not social media? DeGarmo suggests a good, healthy Foster Parent Association.

“Not only do foster parents understand one another better than the general public, they can appreciate what each has gone through, and can provide suggestions, help, and advice that applies directly to the situation- advice and help that others do not appreciate or understand. Fellow members have probably ‘been there, done that,’ and can offer advice based on their own experiences in the foster care system. An association can also be a place where foster parents can relax, unwind, and even share frustrations and grievances without having to be worried about being judged or criticized by outside forces.”

For those of you who are foster parents, bless you! Part of the first year of my life was spent with a foster family, and I will be eternally grateful to them. I hope you find the support you need and that you are able to do so in a safe and healthy way, for your sake, as well as the sake of the child to whom you have opened your home and heart.

For more foster care resources, please see: The National Foster Parent Association Website.

“It is simply not allowed, not permissible, and can place the child in danger.”

~ Dr. John DeGarmo

Book Review: *A Different Home*

John DeGarmo, Ed.D. is a Speaker, Trainer, Foster Parent and Author of the children's book *A Different Home: A New Foster Child's Story*
Helping Foster Children in Need

The foster care children's book *A Different Home: A New Foster Child's Story* is a sensitive picture book to help ease the anxieties of foster children aged 4 to 10 entering placement.

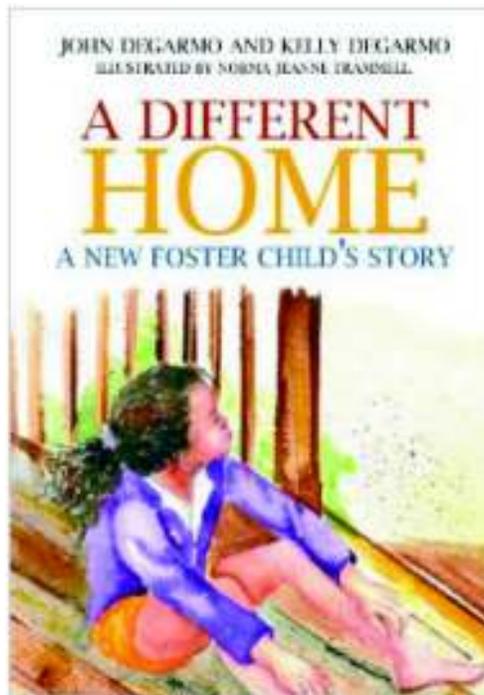
In *A Different Home*, Jessie tells us her story of being placed in foster care. At first she is worried and has lots of questions. The new home is not like her old home — she has a different bedroom, different clothes, and there's different food for breakfast. She also misses her family. When Jim and Debbie, her foster parents, answer her questions she begins to feel better and see that this different home is kind of nice.

Written in simple language and fully illustrated in color, this storybook is designed to help children in care, or moving into care, to settle in and answer some of the questions they may have. Accompanied by notes for adults on how to use the story with children, it will be a useful book for foster parents and caseworkers, as well as social workers, teachers and anyone else working with children in foster care.

The reviews are in for the newest foster care book....

"It is a PERFECT book to read to your foster child...it answers most of their 'silent' questions about what has happened to them. The graphics are GREAT too! It is one of those books your child will ask you to read over and over. I promise that you will be glad you have a copy." -Carolyn Walker, Editor of the Texas Foster Family Association

"The depth of empathy running through the story is heartfelt. I could hear, smell and feel the little one all the way through. This book will surely comfort and go



some way to allay the very real fears that run through you as a child when being placed in the care system." - Jenny Molloy, Looked After Children Adviser and Trainer, and author of *Hackney Child* written as "Hope Daniels".

'*A Different Home* transported me back to the time when, at the age of 7 or 8, I was dropped off with total strangers. I had no idea why I was there or how long I'd be there. The strangers' house was clean, their fridge was full, and they were nice — but they were still strangers. They changed my life in a positive way, for which I am grateful,

though much of my anxiety could have been relieved had they been able to read this book with me." - Rhonda Sciortino, former foster child and author of *Succeed Because of What You've Been Through*

"*A Different Home* shows how children often feel about entering foster care and being away from the only home they have ever known. It's accurate, honest, warm and a great resource for parents and professionals." - Dr. Sue Cornbluth, Psychologist, National Expert in Foster Care/Adoption and Trauma, USA

**THE KIDS
WHO NEED THE
MOST LOVE WILL
ASK FOR IT
IN THE MOST
UNLOVING WAYS**

40th Annual NACAC Conference

Kansas City, Missouri

July 24–26, 2014

Pre-Conference Session: July 23

If you have been touched by adoption, you will benefit from attending this conference! The conference has sessions designed to inspire, inform, and encourage all members of the adoption community, including adoptive parents raising children with special needs, professionals seeking families for older children, mental health or other professionals supporting adoptive and foster families, international adoptive parents, adopted persons, and others with personal or professional connections to adoption.

This educational event covers almost every adoption-related topic imaginable—with more than 80 sessions designed to meet the diverse needs and levels of experience of parents, professionals, and adopted persons.

Children’s Program: NACAC will offer a pro-

gram for children ages 6 to 17 with workshops and field trips.

Registration & Fees: Full registration includes workshops, general sessions, Saturday’s luncheon, and membership for non-members. Parent couples can register together at a discount and one-day fees will be offered. Before June 20, full conference registration is \$280 U.S. for NACAC members and \$340 U.S. for non-members. After June 20, fees increase by \$55.

To request a registration booklet (available in March), send your name, address, and whether you want the registration material by mail or email to info@nacac.org. Materials will also be posted on www.nacac.org. You can also call NACAC at 651-644-3036 to request a booklet.

SIBLINGS ARE OUR FIRST FRIENDS

Preserve those bonds at Camp Catch-Up for youth in foster care.



MAY 30-JUNE 1
Camp Firecrest
Firemont



JUNE 26-29
Camp Maanatha
North Platte



JULY 11-13
Cottonwood
Cotton



Created for kids who are separated from their siblings because of different foster or adoptive placements, Camp Catch-Up is the perfect chance to get together.

Spend the weekend enjoying fun outdoor activities, laughing, making memories and reconnecting with brothers and sisters.

Camp Catch-Up is 100% free for campers. We even provide transportation. In order to qualify for Camp Catch-Up, campers must:

- Be between age 8 and 19
- Have at least one biological sibling
- Reside in a separate home as their sibling(s)

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT CAMP CATCH-UP

- Go to campcatchup.org
- Call Alana at 402-380-4552
- Email apearson@nebraskachildren.org

Teens and Social Media: What You Need to Know

By **Robbi Blume, NFAPA North/Central RFC**

They connect to it. They download from it. They watch on it. Do you know how to monitor it?

It can be hard to keep up when today's technology easily becomes tomorrow's antiques. We want our kids to be safe online, so it is crucial we make an effort to keep them safe.

According to a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center, 78 percent of teens have a cell phone and one in four teens use their phone mostly to go online rather than a desktop or laptop computer. In addition, 95 percent of teens have access to the Internet on some kind of device.

Pew Research Center's facts on social media use:

- 55 percent of teens have given out personal information to someone they don't know, including photos and physical descriptions.
- 29 percent of teens have posted mean information, embarrassing photos or spread rumors about someone.
- 29 percent have been stalked or contacted by a stranger.
- 22 percent have been cyberpranked.

It is no surprise that parents' number one concern with teen social networking is sharing personal information online. Children who are educated on the importance of online safety are more likely to keep themselves safe than children who are not educated on safety.

Instagram

While Facebook was once all the rage, it is quickly being replaced by next-generation Apps that let users text, video chat, shop and share pictures in seconds. Instagram is a platform that allows users to snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos publicly or with

a network of followers. Instagram unites the most popular features of social media sites — sharing, seeing and commenting on photos. Instagram also lets you apply photo filters and effects to your photos, making them look high quality and artistic.

It is not unusual for teenage children to measure their success and even their self worth in the number of "likes" or comments they receive on their photos. This can become a problem if privacy settings are not adjusted, because photos are public and may have location information attached. Hashtags (#NFAPA) can make photos more visible to communities beyond the teen's followers. Inappropriate language can, and often does,



slip in.

Most terms of service (who reads those? Just click it and forget it.), specify that users should be at least 13 years old and shouldn't post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos. However, these sites do not address violence, swear words or drugs.

Snapchat

Snapchat is a photo messaging app that allows users to set a time limit on pictures and videos they send before they disappear. Snapchat loads and sends faster than e-mail and text, and was intended for teens to share fun, light moments without the risk of having them go public. Parents should know that many schools have yet to block Snapchat. It is a myth that Snapchat photos go away forever, which means sexual or other explicit photos can be saved or recovered.

Tumblr

Tumblr, a cross between a blog and Twitter, acts as a streaming scrapbook of text, photos/videos and audio clips. Parents should know pornography and depictions of violence, drug use and offensive language are

easily searchable and found on this site. Privacy can be protected, but only by a difficult bypass method.

Vine

Videos are becoming more and more popular among younger generations. Vine is a social media app that allows users to post and watch looping 6-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has many creative and funny videos, but there are also many inappropriate videos ranging from full frontal nudity to people blowing marijuana smoke into each other's mouths.

Pheed

Pheed is best described as a hybrid of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, except you can require users to pay a premium to access your personal channel. Users can actually make money by charging others a subscription fee to view their content. This new media is appealing to teens who want to have more control over ownership and copyright of their videos. Pheed has quickly become the number one free social app for teenagers.

Ask.fm

Teenagers' curious nature makes Ask.fm a popular social media site. The site allows users to ask and answer questions posted by users sometimes anonymously. It is popular among teens due to strange sexual content as well as mean posts. Bullying on this site has become a major concern, and reports even link it to teen suicides. Remember to talk to your children about cyberbullying and anonymity, which can encourage mean behaviors.

During past support groups, I have hosted speakers to discuss the dangers and privacy concerns of social media. Foster and adoptive parents have had many questions on which devices can access the Internet. There are the obvious gadgets such as computers, tablets and phones and the obscure technology like video game systems, iPods, Fitbits and watches. Even if you do not have Internet access in your home, it is still easy to access free Wi-Fi at the public library, McDonalds and many other public places.

While it is common to remove Internet privileges when children are being punished, it has become increasingly difficult. It is important we set clear and concise technology rules in our homes. At my home, all devices are upstairs charging at night, because, like my parents always said, nothing good happens after midnight.

For more information and resources on teens and social media, visit:

www.commonssensemedia.org

www.fbi.gov/stat-services/publications/parent-guide

www.ilearntechnology.com/?p=2941

www.parentfurther.com

Mine for a While

By Corina DeVries

Not by birth
 By God's knowing design
 A child of hers
 For a while is mine
 You test, you push
 Break every rule
 Then flash that smile
 Your greatest tool
 You make me think
 In a different way
 My son of hers
 Who will never stay
 I show you how
 To sing and to cry
 You teach me what
 I can do if I try
 I've watched you learn
 How to say no
 And I'm learning how
 To let you go
 I have felt your pain
 And cried your tears
 Laughed with you
 And faced some fears
 You have added a new
 Dimension to me
 And become a part
 Of my family
 Dear child of mine
 I give to you
 My heart and soul
 My conscience too
 You take my love
 And let it grow
 Pass it on
 Wherever you go
 And when you
 Become a man
 Remember me
 And take a stand
 To help another
 Child along
 So he can also
 Grow up strong
 A child of His, mine for a while....

Cultural Differences to Expect When a Child Enters a Foster Home

By Robbi Blume

Children enter foster care with established ideas of what to eat, wear, celebrate and how or whom to worship. In transcultural placements, children benefit when foster parents are respectful and supportive of cultural differences. We see cultural (the way we live day to day) differences in our same race foster children as well. Below are some common ways cultural differences are experienced in foster homes. I encourage you to learn as much as you can about your child's culture. It is up to us working with bio-families to maintain cultural practices.

Diet: Children may have food preferences based on their community or what was eaten in their family. There may be strict requirements in their culture, often religion-based, about what, when or even how much they eat. Fasting is practiced in some religions and some laws prohibit consumption of certain foods. You can discuss the dietary needs and preferences with the children and their social workers.

Dress: Children may wear clothing popular in their culture. Cultural issues of modesty can come into play. This requires sensitivity by the foster parents. Some religions have garments that members are required to wear. Help the children with ways to deal with teasing or ridicule they might experience from others. They might need to role-play how to respond to others who are curious about their clothing, for example.

Religion: Children may want to continue practicing their beliefs or faith. They may need resources and support in order to do this. Foster parents need to understand and maintain a flexible schedule in order to properly help those in their care. There are children who

believe in a higher power but do not refer to them as "God". Some children may be from atheist or agnostic families. Some of these may believe in God, but do not attend a specific place of worship regularly. We need to be flexible and accommodating to ensure the continuation of the children's religious training.

Celebrations/Observances: There are many children that enjoy Christmas festivities and traditions, but other cultures may have different holidays. I have good friends from Christian families that do not put up Christmas trees at Christmas. They feel Christmas is too commercialized and want to teach their children about Jesus being the reason. Some essential celebrations for others are Ramadan (Muslim), Yom Kippur (Jewish) Kwanzaa (African-American), Day of the Dead (Mexican, Latin American), and Diwali (Hindu). We must remember that not all African-American children in our care are going to celebrate Kwanzaa. Some African-Americans may also celebrate Christmas or Yom Kippur. Helping foster children maintain connections to cultural celebrations and religious observances can enrich the lives of foster families.

My own family is a melting pot of cultures, as we call it. I was born and raised in Southern California and prefer Mexican food and vegetables to beef and potatoes. I was taught to cook both meals because my mom grew up in Iowa. We now live in Valentine, Nebraska, where there are more cows than people. Needless to say, I now cook a lot of beef. We have had many Native American children in our home over the past 20 years or so, and have learned to eat Indian tacos on fry bread. We say in our home "It is all good."

View children waiting for adoption at:

http://dhhs.ne.gov/children_family_services/Pages/adoption_children.aspx

There are currently over

30 boys and 20 girls waiting to be adopted.

Mark Your Calendars!

NFAPA offers support groups at the following dates/times/cities. Up to date information with each support group location will be on our calendar page on the website. This is your chance to gain understanding and parenting tips through trainings, discussions, and networking with fellow foster families. In-service training is offered at most support groups. Registration is not required, unless noted, but you are welcome to contact your Resource Family Consultant to let them know you are coming! Support Groups will be cancelled for inclement weather. Call the office or check the calendar on our website at www.nfapa.org

Northern Area: Childcare offered at Columbus, SSC & Norfolk Northern Support Groups for families that attend. The Columbus support group on May 13 will be a special 3 hour in-service training.

Columbus: Peace Lutheran Church (2720 28th St) 7:00-8:30 p.m.

March 11, 2014; April 8, 2014; May 13, 2014 (Time for May 13 is 6:00-9:00 p.m.)

Norfolk: Faith Regional Health Systems (2700 Norfolk Ave, Norfolk Room) 6:30-8:00p.m.

March 27, 2014; April 24, 2014

South Sioux City: Hope Lutheran Church (218 W. 18th St) 6:30-8:00 p.m.

March 11, 2014; April 8, 2014

Central Area: Childcare offered at O'Neill Support Group. Childcare provided for families that call and register the children they will bring to Grand Island & Kearney support group by calling Terry at 402-853-1092.

Grand Island: First St. Paul's Lutheran Church (1515 Harrison) 6:30-8:00 p.m.

March 11, 2014; April 8, 2014

O'Neill: Assembly of God Church (204 North 7 St) 7:00-8:30 p.m. (Childcare available)

March 27, 2014. RSVP required to attend. Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091.

Kearney: First United Methodist Church (4500 Linden Dr.) 6:30-8:00 p.m.

March 13, 2014; April 10, 2014

Western Area: Childcare offered in North Platte, Scottsbluff & Alliance for families that attend. Childcare available at the Lexington and Ogallala support groups if you call and register the children you will bring by calling Dee at 402-853-1090.

North Platte: Harvest Christian Fellowship Church (1501 S. Dewey) 1:30-3:30 p.m.

March 9, 2014; April 6, 2014; May 11, 2014

Gothenburg: American Lutheran Church (1512 Ave G) 6:30-8:00 p.m. (No Childcare)

March 11, 2014; April 15, 2014; May 13, 2014

Lexington: Parkview Baptist Church (803 West 18) 6:30-8:00 p.m. (Childcare available if needed)

March 4, 2014; April 1, 2014; May 6, 2014 (Note: Meet in February at Gothenburg Support Group)

Ogallala: New Hope Church (118 East B St) 1:30-3:30 p.m. MT (Childcare available if needed)

March 23, 2014; May 18, 2014

McCook: Community Hospital (1301 East H St) 6:30-8:00 p.m. (No Childcare)

February 24, 2014; March 17, 2014; April 21, 2014; May 19, 2014

Scottsbluff: St. Francis Community Center (1605 2nd Ave) 6:00-7:30 p.m.

March 18, 2014; April 15, 2014 (Note: No meeting in February)

Alliance: Alliance Library Rooms A & B (1750 Sweetwater Ave) 6:00-7:30 p.m.

March 20, 2014; April 17, 2014 (Note: No meeting in February)

Eastern Area: Childcare offered for families that attend.

Gretna: Little Red School House (21730 Laura Street) 6:30-8:00 p.m.

February 24, 2014; March 24, 2014; April 28, 2014

Southeast Area: No childcare offered. This will be a Brown Bag Lunch (bring your own lunch) Support Group. We hope you will enjoy having lunch while joining us at one of these sessions. No in-service training provided.

Lincoln: NFAPA Office (2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C) Noon-1:00 p.m. (No Childcare)

February 27, 2014; March 27, 2014; April 24, 2014

Also available is an Adoption Book Club.

Lincoln: 610 J Street, Basement Conference Room. 7:00 p.m. (No Childcare)

This is an Adoption Book Club and meets the second Tuesday (NEW DAY) of each month. Contact Barb Dewey, LICSW at 402-525-9825 for more information and to let her know you are attending.



**NEBRASKA FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP
APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 1, 2014**

**NEBRASKA FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT ASSOCIATION
\$250 Scholarship Program**

NFAPA offers a scholarship for an adoptive, foster, guardianship, or kinship child who wishes to further their education beyond high school or GED. This can be either at a college or university, vocational and job training, or online learning. The scholarship form is available on our website (www.nfapa.org). Requirements and submission instructions will be listed. Other scholarships will also be available on our website.



Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

2014 Guardianship Training Classes

Education for Guardians of Nebraska State Wards

Guardians of children who are in the custody of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services due to abuse and/or neglect face many issues that normally are not addressed in the probate code or in probate court proceedings. Foster parents (prospective guardians) or guardians of former state wards should fully understand the permanency options of adoption and guardianship, including the rights, responsibilities, and commitments necessary for each. The Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association facilitates a three-hour guardianship training that provides participants with detailed information on the duties of the guardian, rights of the ward, annual reporting requirements, and instruction on the forms required for guardianships of this population of minors.

This class fulfills guardianship education requirements set by the Nebraska Probate Code. Educational requirements for guardians must be met within three months of appointment.

Note: Foster parents may attend the guardianship training for continuing credit hours.

Pre-registration is required for the class by phone or email to:

The Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

1-877-257-0176 or felicia@nfapa.org

A registration fee of \$30 per participant is due upon arrival at the class.

A full list of guardianship class are available on our website at www.nfapa.org. Below is a list of trainings available in the next three months. Registration is required at least one week ahead of the training date.

March 2014			
Monday, March 3, 2014	Madison	6 to 9 p.m.	Faith Regional 4700 Norfolk Ave Norfolk
Wednesday, March 12, 2014	Lancaster	6 p.m. to 9 p.m.	NFAPA Office 2431 Fairfield, Suite C Lincoln
Wednesday, March 19, 2014	Douglas	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Omaha Comfort Inn 7007 Grover Street Omaha

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

2014 Guardianship Training Classes

April 2014			
Tuesday, April 1, 2014	Gage	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Southeast Community College 4771 W Scott Road Beatrice
Monday, April 7, 2014	Buffalo	6 to 9 p.m.	1 st United Methodist Church 4500 Linden Kearney
Wednesday, April 9, 2014	Lancaster	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	NFAPA Office 2431 Fairfield, Suite C Lincoln
Wednesday, April 9, 2014	Holt	6 to 9 p.m.	O'Neill Library 601 E. Douglas O'Neill
Monday, April 14, 2014	Sarpy	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Midland Hospital 11111 S 84 th Papillion
Wednesday, April 16, 2014	Douglas	6 p.m. to 9 p.m.	Omaha Comfort Inn 7007 Grover Street Omaha
Thursday, April 17, 2014	Seward	6 p.m. to 9 p.m.	Seward Civic Center 616 Bradford Street Seward
Thursday, April 17, 2014	Adams	6 to 9 p.m.	Public Library 517 West 4 th Hastings
Saturday, April 26, 2014 Spanish Class	Sarpy	9:30 am to 12:30 pm	Good Shepherd Lutheran Church 11204 S 204th St Gretna
May 2014			
Saturday, May 3, 2014	Dawson	9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.	Lexington Public Library 907 North Washington Lexington
Monday, May 5, 2014	Madison	6 to 9 p.m.	Faith Regional 4700 Norfolk Ave Norfolk
Monday, May 5, 2014	Dodge	9 am to 12pm	Fremont Medical Center 450 E 23 rd Street Fremont
Wednesday, May 14, 2014	Lancaster	6 p.m. to 9 p.m.	NFAPA Office 2431 Fairfield, Suite C Lincoln
Wednesday, May 21, 2014	Douglas	9 a.m. to 12 p.m.	Omaha Comfort Inn 7007 Grover Street Omaha
Friday, May 23, 2014	Box Butte	6 p.m. to 9 p.m.	Box Butte General Hospital Hyannis Room Alliance

More than just the caregiver

By Tina Vercelli

The elevator door opened and in front of me was an all too familiar scene. It was Wednesday, the designated weekday for all foster care cases to be heard by our county's family court judge. The crowded hallway was filled to the brim with children crying, caseworkers flittering from group to group, making last minute contact with their clients, lawyers going in and out of the judges office, vying for position on the day's docket. All while the court clerk was making her way through the crowd, directing people on the small claims docket to their designated courtroom.

As I assessed my surroundings, the caseworker assigned to my foster children's case approached me. We exchanged the usual pleasantries, then almost as quickly as she appeared, she was off again to deal with one of her many cases.

So once again, the children and I were alone in a crowd of people, waiting for our turn in the courtroom. I busied myself with the children, handing them toys, and making sure they had their juice and snacks. Doing my best to keep them and myself occupied.

Suddenly, I was approached by a older man in a gray suit. He looked at me, then the children, then in a gruff voice asked, "Are these the Franklin* children?" I hesitantly replied, "Yes." not knowing who was asking the question. Before I could ask this stranger just who he was and just why he wanted to know, he quickly said, "And you are the CAREGIVER?" The feeling of contempt stuck to the words as they hung in the air, as if it pained him to even ask the question. It was obvious that he saw me as nothing more than an employee, paid to care for other people's children. As I was replying that I was the foster parent, he swiftly turned away, moving on to yet another group of people. It wasn't until it was our turn to enter the courtroom that I discovered that this man, who never even bothered to introduce himself, was the attorney assigned to represent my foster children.

After the hearing, I approached the attorney. I introduced myself to him, and asked if we could set up a meeting so he could meet the children and discuss the case. In the same curt, gruff voice I had experienced

before, he looked at me and said, "I don't need to talk to you, you are JUST THE CAREGIVER."

So many times, we as foster parents are left out of the loop. We all learned in our initial training that foster parents are to be treated as important members of the team. But what do you do when other members of the team don't want you on the field?

Some team members seem to think they know more. Attorneys know more. Caseworkers know more, counselors know more. In some cases, the foster parents are thought to know less than all of the "professionals" involved in the case. Foster parents are then left to wonder about their part in the team. When the concerns and questions of a foster parent are dismissed by other members of the team, it can be frustrating as well as detrimental to the foster child.

Good foster parents make a point to become knowledgeable about the issues their foster children face. So many times, foster children have a multitude of issues such as ADHD, attachment disorders, psychological problems, or developmental issues. The longer a child is with us, the more educated we should become about their issues. Many times, it is the foster parent that has the most complete knowledge of the child's needs. But because these children come into care with so many issues, it sometimes becomes painfully obvious that there is usually no clear-cut plan to help our foster children. Also, each professional specializes in only one, or maybe two issues. A teacher would pick up on educational or developmental issues way before an attorney would. The attorney, however, would know much more about the child's legal issues than a pediatrician. Because of this, it becomes even more important that the foster parent act as the connecting block between all members of the team who are looking after the needs of the child.

But, how do you deal with team members that don't see you as knowledgeable about your foster child's needs? What about the attorney that refuses to speak with you, or the school administrator that will not allow you input in your child's individual education plan? How do you handle a professional that believes they know more than you do about the child?

It's difficult to alter another person's belief from

thinking you are just a caregiver to understanding that you are an important, knowledgeable, and vital part of the professional team. What we can do as foster parents is control how we present ourselves to the other members of the team. The following is a list of suggestions all foster parents should remember when dealing with other members of the professional team:

1. Keep detailed documentation of the foster child's behaviors, eating patterns, and the child's likes and dislikes. Also, record all doctor appointments, dental visits, educational milestones and difficulties, contact with child welfare personnel, and visits with biological family. Be assured that the other members of the team are keeping records, so it only makes sense that you should too.

2. Research the issues your foster child has and become as knowledgeable as you can about them. The Internet can be a valuable tool to use to research things. Read books that deal with the special issues foster children face. Knowledge is power! If you think the information you find can help your foster child with a particular issue, pass that information along to the other members of the team.

3. Join your local and state foster parent associations and be active in them. You can gain a wealth of knowledge about the foster care system by talking with other foster parents. The support from others who are in the trenches with you can be invaluable.

4. Find out what your rights are as a foster parent.

Get to know what information in the case file you are privy to. Know in many cases, foster parents are allowed to make input in educational plans, case plans, review hearings and court reports. Find out what you are allowed to do and how to exercise your rights. Attend every meeting you are allowed to participate in and don't be afraid to ask questions about things you don't understand.

5. When having to deal with more narrow-minded members of the team, be calm, but persistent. Don't be afraid to step up the chain of command in order to get the services and attention that the child needs. Everyone has a boss! Attorneys have to abide by a code of ethics outlined by their state bar association. They also have to ultimately answer to the presiding judge on the case. Doctors have a code of ethics they have to follow as well. Don't be afraid to seek out a second opinion if you don't like how the child's needs are being met.

6. If, during a meeting or hearing, you get rattled or off-track, don't be afraid to excuse yourself to regroup. Always maintain a proper level of professionalism in your speech and demeanor.

Above all, don't be afraid to stand up for the rights of your foster child. Be tough, be tenacious, be diligent in your quest. You have a vital role in the professional team. Stand firm with the knowledge and understanding that you are important in the life of that child. Show the other members of the team that you are more than "JUST A CAREGIVER."

Attention Foster Parents!

Receive in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Now you can enjoy reading *Families First* and receive in-service training credit that can apply toward your relicensure as a foster parent. This in-service training has been approved by HHS. Simply read this issue, write down the answers to the questions below, and mail your answers to your licensing worker (i.e., Agency worker). If your answers are satisfactory, you will receive 30 minutes of credit toward your in-service training requirement. If you have questions, contact NFAPA at 877-257-0176 or 402-476-2273.

Questions for in-service training quiz February/March 2014

- 1) List two suggestions out of six that all foster parents should remember?
- 2) Who is your Guardian Ad Litem?
- 3) In the article "Foster care gave me a better life", at what age did she start dealing with HHS?
- 4) In the article "Foster care gave me a better life", what did the foster parents do for this young woman at age 18?
- 5) True or False: It is against the state regulations and policies to share information about your foster children.
- 6) True or False: What goes online stays online.
- 7) True or False: Social media makes it easy for biological parents to spy on foster parents.
- 8) What are some cultural differences to expect in our foster children?
- 9) True or False: 49% of teens have been stalked by a stranger through social media.
- 10) True or False: 29% of teens have posted mean information, embarrassing photos or spread rumors through social media.

Foster care gave me a better life

By Jessica Sutherland

My name is Jessica Sutherland, I'm originally from a suburb outside of Cleveland, Ohio and I am a former foster kid.

My mother was 21 when she got pregnant with me. She was told if she aborted her pregnancy there was a very large chance she would not be able to have kids, so, she decided to go through with my birth. My father died when I was seven years old and it sent my mom into a very slow spiral.

She only lasted for about three years before she started to decline. She was super-mom for a second because she had the estate money, but all of a sudden she wouldn't get up anymore, she didn't have a job, she wouldn't do the dishes. I'm pretty sure now that she was slipping into a deep depression and nobody stepped in. I think that's how she got into drugs; she felt very alone.

By the time sixth grade was over, we'd lost our home. We moved in with an assortment of friends, relatives, and strangers; we lived in motels; we lived in our car; we lived in homeless shelters; we slept outside. We did whatever we had to do. By Christmas of seventh grade, we were living in a homeless shelter. But, there would always be somebody that would come and scoop us up and we'd get a new house or an apartment. Then she'd slip, and we'd get evicted again.

In eighth grade, one of my math teachers noticed I was struggling with math, and they tried very hard to get ahold of my mother. We weren't living in the school district, so the number on my emergency contact form was for a Chinese restaurant in town. She reported us to the authorities. I was 13 years old when I got my first interview with Health and Human Services in Cleveland.

I lied to them. The idea of getting taken away from my mom was the worst idea I could possibly think of. At least once a year they'd pull me out for an interview and I would just lie. My mom would lie, too. We would lie to stay together.

It was in the spring of 10th grade when I saw my mom shoot heroin for the first time. It changed my view of my mom. I started to trust her less. Things had gotten really bad. We were living in the worst place we ever lived; there was mold growing on the walls, and the carpets were soaked in urine. We got evicted from that house and they changed the locks and put tape over everything. But, rather than leaving, my mom figured out a way to sneak in and live there anyway. We were basically squatting. I wasn't allowed to leave to go to school because we could only leave at night. It was right around then that I finally realized—you don't have to live this way. This isn't normal.

For some reason I trusted my best friend and her mom, Gretchen, with my secret. One day they picked me up and they put my mom in touch with a local church that helped her get into rehab. I moved in with my best friend while my mom finished rehab. I thought it was going to be great, but instead, my mom just moved me into the halfway house with her, where she was completely able to continue using. I was living in the city of Cleveland with a bunch of recovering junkies in a lax half-

way house across the street from the city housing projects. I lived there for about three weeks before Gretchen realized this was going on. She reported us to the school.

I got pulled out for the same interview I always got pulled out for, but this time the principal said, "Look, I'm not even going to mess around with you anymore. We know what your life is like. You wear shorts in winter, you're grossly underweight, you never come to school. We've seen the bruises. Just tell us this is happening. We can't do anything if you don't tell us what's happening." I had two choices, I could be honest about what was going on with my life, or I would get kicked out of school. I had to tell him my answer the next morning.

I went home and waited for my mom. She came home drunk. I told her. She said, "I don't care what you do." And then she left. I was at school first thing in the morning the next day and I said, "Do what you have to do. Get me out of there."

Sunday, they came and got me at the halfway house, I met with one of the city leaders, we picked up the paperwork my mom had left for us, and on Tuesday night I moved into my foster home. It was that simple. And I was very fortunate. I moved into a very nice house with a pool, a hot tub, a trampoline, a big screen TV, and food. It was a huge upgrade from the life I had been living, but it was also a really hard transition because I was still in touch with my mom those first few months after I moved in the foster home. She made me feel really bad for leaving her.

My foster parents are two of the most amazing people I've ever encountered in my whole life. They found out early in their marriage that they couldn't have children, and decided they were going to be foster parents full time. They've had over 125 foster children over 24 years and they've adopted six girls. They're just amazing. They have their own money; they're not exploiting the system at all. The money they got for fostering me, they gave it to me when I turned 18.

Another thing I really respect is that they made me sit down on my 18th birthday and write to all the family members that my mother had alienated and estranged. A lot of them didn't even know that I was in foster care. They helped facilitate those reunions, so now, even though I don't have my mother, I have relationships with her siblings, my cousins, and all of my extended family. That's pretty miraculous.

I moved to LA to go to USC School of Cinematic Arts and graduated in 2010. Since then, I started working. Now I'm the Associate Producer of a cooking show on Yahoo.com. I love what I do. Every once in a while it'll come out when I meet new people that I'm a foster kid. It's kind of cool to know that people are surprised to know this is where I come from.

I plan on being a foster parent someday, even though foster parenting presents a lot of challenges, and takes a lot of training. But to me, it's worth it. Even if you only have a child for a week, two weeks, you can make a difference. You can help them learn to trust again. I would love to start a program in schools that helps find those kids that slip through the cracks. Kids that just don't realize that there is a possibility for a better life out there.

2014 In-Service/Training Registration

March 10, 2014
Time: 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.
Good Shepard Lutheran Church
11204 S. 204th Street
Gretna, NE



3 hour in-service training
Cost: \$15 per foster/adoptive parent
\$10 NFAPA Member
\$30 agency/other

Josh Kroll is the Project Coordinator of the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center, a program of the North American Council on Adoptable Children. He has worked at NACAC for over 15 years, 9 years as a program assistant to the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center and 5 years as Project Coordinator. In his 14 years working with the Adoption Subsidy Resource Center he gained an extensive knowledge of federal and state laws and policies that he draws upon to answer thousands of inquiries from parents, workers, and administrators. Josh is coming to Nebraska and will be talking about **Adoption Assistance** where you will learn the basics of adoption assistance for children adopted from foster care. He will also talk about the **Federal Adoption Tax Credit** and will learn what is considered special needs for the adoption tax credit and how to take and use the credit. He will also discuss **Advocacy 101** to learn the tools to advocate for your child and for all children.

participants will be able to describe types of harmful contact and non-contact child sexual abuse, identify signs that are typical of younger children who have been sexually abused and identify signs typical of a teenager who has been sexually abused. You will also learn steps to take to create a family safety plan.

April 12, 2014
9:00-4:45 p.m. (Lunch on your own)
North Platte Fire Station 1
715 South Jeffers
North Platte, NE
6 hour in-service training
Cost: Free



Stan Waddell is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Texas and works at Cenpatico in both a clinical and training capacity. He is providing 6 hours of training (3 workshops) in North Platte on Saturday, April 12. In the **Resiliency** workshop participants will be able to identify human adaptive process and how it impacts resilience. You will also be able to list steps to build resilience in times of trauma and after times of trauma. The **Childhood Traumatic Grief** workshop participants will understand the impact of childhood traumatic grief, signs and symptoms of traumatic grief verses normal grief and learn suggestions that can help your child work through traumatic grief. In the **Preventing Sexual Misconduct** workshop,

May 13, 2014
Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.
Peace Lutheran Church
2720 28th Street
Columbus, NE
3 hour in-service training
Cost: Free



Stan Waddell is returning to Nebraska to provide two 1.5 hour workshops on Tuesday, May 13 in Columbus. One workshop is on **Behavior Management and Using Behavior Charts**. Participants will be able to define behavior management, identify reasons children act out and keys to successful behavior management. You will also be able to identify the use of behavior modification plan to help manage children's behaviors, use of structure, routine and positive reinforcing to improve behavior and ways to use behavior charts to improve children's behavior. The other workshop is **Coping with Trauma Reminders**. Participants will be able to identify what is a trauma reminder, role the five senses play in trauma reminders and identify flashbacks and ways to deal with flashbacks.

May 22, 2014
Time: 4:00-5:30 p.m.
NFAPA Office
2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C
Lincoln, NE
1.5 hours in-service training
Cost: Free



"Foster alumni and National Child Welfare Specialist for Markel Insurance Company, Rhonda Sciortino, will be presenting in Lincoln on Thursday, May 22nd on **Preventing Tragedy in Foster Care**. Ms. Sciortino brings 25 years of in-depth understanding of the ways foster kids and families get injured or killed. You'll hear the times of day when kids are most likely to be injured, the 5 most frequent ways kids and family members are injured, and the two months of the year when injuries occur. Don't miss this powerful training."

Please fill out the registration below and mark which training you will be attending.
Send form and payment to: NFAPA, 2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C, Lincoln, NE 68521

Foster Parent In-Service Registration Spring 2014:

Name		Training Date & Location	
Name		Training Date & Location	
Email Address	Cell #	Home #	
Address, City, State, Zip		NFAPA Membership Number	



2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C
Lincoln, NE 68521
www.nfapa.org

NONPROFIT
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lincoln, NE
Permit 1147



JOIN NFAPA....your support will enable NFAPA to continue supporting foster parents state-wide!

Benefits

- Ongoing trainings/conferences at local and state level
- Networking opportunities with other foster (resource) families, adoptive families, and relative caregivers
- Opportunity for all foster (resource) families, adoptive families and relative caregivers to be actively involved in an association by serving on committees and/or on the Executive Board
- Working to instigate changes by alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system
- An advocate on your behalf at local, state and national levels
- Alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system

Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:
NFAPA, 2431 Fairfield Street, Suite C,
Lincoln, NE 68521.

Questions? Please call us at 877-257-0176.

NFAPA is a 501c3 non-profit organization comprised of a volunteer Board of Directors and Mentors.

Name(s): _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ County: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

I am a Foster/Adoptive Parent. I have fostered for _____ years.
(circle one)

I am with _____ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
- Family Membership** (married foster or adoptive parents), \$35
- Supporting Membership** (individuals wishing to support our efforts), \$75
- Organization Membership** (organizations wishing to support our efforts), \$150
- I wish to join the effort through a donation.

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

- Gold Donation, \$1,000 Silver Donation, \$750
- Platinum Donation, \$500 Bronze Donation, \$250
- Other, \$ _____