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# WCPN

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## Foster Care: Is It Better?

A substantial number of children are entering foster care due to reasons of physical abuse, neglect or sexual abuse. In fact, in June 1983, 6,859 of Virginia's children lived in foster care. Of these, 61%, or 4,195, were placed due to abuse and neglect.

Unlike children who enter foster care due to the death of a guardian or due to delinquency or parental request, abused children are frequently removed against their parents' (and perhaps their own) wishes. In such cases, where parental rights clash with the state's interest in the child, it seems especially necessary to carefully weigh the risk of continued harm from the abuse or neglect with the likely benefits and risks involved in foster care.

### Risk of Foster Care Separation Trauma

One of the most obvious risks in foster care is that of separation trauma. The universality and importance of the loss of significant people has long been recognized. In part, this realization is based on the work of child psychiatrists, such as Anna Freud and John Bowlby, asserting that separation from parents has an extremely negative effect on children, even children from "bad" homes.

The separation process, from the child's point of view, in regard to foster care really has several components. The first is the separation from the parents. The natural family is undergoing severe shock from a combination of external and internal events. The child often feels partly responsible, yet is helpless in coping with the crisis. The child may view foster home placement as a punishment for his/her wrong doing.

Theresa Reynolds, foster care worker in Harrisonburg, stressed this point when she remarked that a child feels the trauma of breaking a bond between the natural family and himself. "He wonders why it had to happen; he doesn't understand," she said. "Therefore, the child tends to blame himself."

The same observation was reiterated by a panel of social workers and foster parents at the recent 82nd Annual Conference of the Virginia Council on Social Welfare. "It



is so easy for children to blame themselves," stressed Sherry Peterson, District Supervisor of the Children's Home Society in Richmond, "It's imperative that we help a child by educating him about the change from home to foster care."

Secondly, the child must cope with the agency and the agency personnel. He may undergo testing and/or undergo other kinds of examinations. He may have to appear in court. These events are new and stressful. A child may feel a lack of security and a lack of support while undergoing this process without the presence of a familiar person — especially a parent.

Finally, the child must cope with a new family or group facility where experiences and expectations are foreign to him. Marcia Jones, foster care worker for Rockingham County, states the concern succinctly when she says, "Foster care starts a separation from the child's world as he knows it — everything he has ever known. It's a different culture for the child with many unknown rules and expectations."

There are many reactions a child might have resulting from separation and broken attachments. Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (1979) outline reactions that might be expected:

*In infancy, from birth to approximately 18 months, any change in routine leads to food refusals, digestive upsets, sleeping difficulties, and*

*crying . . . Such moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar cause discomfort, distress, and delays in the infant's orientation and adaptation . . .*

*Change of the caretaking person for infants and toddlers further affects the course of their emotional development . . . When infants and young children find themselves abandoned by the parent, they not only suffer separation distress and anxiety but also setbacks in the quality of their next attachments, which will be less trustful. Where continuity of such relationships is interrupted more than once, as happens due to multiple placements in the early years, the children's emotional attachments become increasingly shallow and indiscriminate. They tend to grow up as persons who lack warmth in their contacts with fellow beings . . .*

*For school-age children, the breaks in their relationships with their psychological parents affect above all those achievements which are based on identification with the parents . . . (Multiple placements may lead a child to avoid forming relationships with any adults, out of fear of losing those people.) In any case, multiple placement at these ages puts many children beyond the reach of educational influence, and becomes the direct cause of behavior which the schools experience as disrupting and the courts label as dissocial, delinquent, or even criminal. (pp. 33-34)*

Experts differ in their assessment of the degree of trauma involved in separation. Wald (1976) states "It seems clear that most children are strongly attached to their parents" and that interferences in that bond are extremely painful. Others point to the literature showing poor bonding between abusers and their children, and suggest that children may not be close to their parents in all cases. Some feel that a key concept is

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## Virginia Chapter of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse

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Media celebrities from radio and television stations across Virginia helped raise more than \$11,000 in April for the Virginia Chapter, National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse. The broadcast personalities, newscasters, and sports figures hosted restaurant patrons in Richmond, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, Hampton, Lynchburg, and Roanoke over several nights during Child Abuse Prevention Month. Their tips for service and sales

of T-shirts and other items were added to donations and new memberships. Organizers expect to develop the project into a yearly event.

Plans are progressing for the 1985 Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia. Sponsored by the Richmond Junior League and the Virginia Social Services Department, the conference will take place at the Marriott Hotel in Richmond.

"Hugs and Kisses," the Virginia Chapter-sponsored play that teaches children about appropriate and inappropriate signs of affection, is receiving national attention in news media, and requests for performances in other states. North Carolina, Florida, and West Virginia are among those state social services departments expressing interest in the play.



whether or not a child experiences deprivation after separation (as was the case in Bowlby's original work). Hegar (1983) states, "While children who are emotionally deprived following separation may suffer long-term harm, young children who are placed with substitute parents who provide love and nurturance quickly begin to attach their feelings of identity, security, and love to the new caretakers" (p. 440).

Unfortunately, little data is available to support either claim. Most of the early literature relates to very young children (under 5) who were deprived after separation. Wald feels "there is substantial evidence that separations cause short-term emotional trauma and pain for the child." However, Wald also acknowledges that several studies have found that children growing up in foster homes have similar incidences of criminality, mental illness, and marital success as the general population. Given the high incidence of problems upon entering foster care, one would expect a somewhat higher rate of adult difficulties in those who had been foster children. Also, Wald reports that a recent study of 500 neglected children in foster care found significant improvements in physical health, behavioral control, ability to cope in school, and peer relations. In fact, some children wished to remain in placement rather than return home.

Fox (1980) reports that foster care did not adversely affect learning in her sample. In general, the group she tested was at the low end of the average range for learning, similar to children from the same socioeconomic background but living with natural parents. The majority were at or above expected placement, while 13% were behind or in special classes. Fox felt these figures represented significantly better results than

expected given reports of cognitive and learning problems in abused children.

Studies which point to the significance of the child's total environment in determining the impact of abusive treatment lead to the conclusion that children suffer more damage from continuing to live in an abusive environment and should not be returned to such situations (Elmer, 1967; Martin, et. al., 1974; Smith, et. al., 1973). In Kinard's (1978) study, having mothers with emotional problems, as measured by psychiatric referrals, had more detrimental consequences for the emotional development of children than being placed away from the home.

Kinard (1978) summarizes by suggesting that the consequences of separation need not be negative, and may depend instead upon the child's environment following separation rather than the experience of separation itself.

There appears to be no clear consensus among professionals about the effects of separation on children. However, as various social workers have noted, efforts must be made to make this period of adjustment as positive as possible in order to alleviate long term negative effects.

### Conflicted Loyalties

While no systematic research on the subject of children's loyalties could be found, Wald (1976) in his review of literature, points out that the child in foster care may be confronted with three sets of adults (foster parents, natural parents, and the social workers) — all of whom have some stake in his care and future. In the absence of clearly structured role expectations, both power and responsibility may be shared, and sometimes vied for, by one or more of the three parties. As a result, Wald feels foster children are prone to identity problems, conflicts of loyalty, and anxiety about the future.

"There are so many adults with whom the child comes in contact," said Karen Shipman, social services worker for Petersburg DSS, "We need to help the child feel some sense of control. This can be accom-

plished by giving honest and accurate information to the child, and by clearly defining the roles of all the adults. By helping a child understand what's happening, I think we make him feel more a part of what's going on and that we are all working together for his benefit.

**"We need to help the child feel some sense of control."**

### Moves

All sources consulted were in agreement that multiple placements harm children. Wald (1976) summarizes when he states, "Each placement subjects a child to discontinuities that may impair normal developmental processes. In addition, multiple placements impair the child's ability to form lasting and trusting relationships" (p. 671).

Data indicates that children supervised by a series of caretakers have impaired cognitive abilities and lack security to explore new situations. Physical health, peer and social relationships likewise decline under multiple placements.

Social workers interviewed by VCPN frequently talked about the problem of moving children when asked about risks of foster care. Peggy Printz, previously a foster care worker for Page County, summarized by saying, "The child starts feeling like baggage! Too many placements can be especially destructive in terms of the child's ability to attach and trust others."

One might wonder, then, why 50% of foster children experience more than one placement while an additional 20% experience three or more placements. Actually, for a variety of reasons. The literature indicates that the more disruptive, unsuitable and rejecting the birth home, the more likely the child will fail in foster care (Rosmann, 1980). Older children are more likely to fail than younger ones. The pres-

ence of mental, physical, and emotional handicaps are linked to failure, as are the number and type of behavioral problems. There is also a higher probability of failure if foster care is sought for abuse, for alcoholism or mental illness of parent, or for abandonment (Rosmann, 1980). However, even given this information, predictions of how individual children will fare in foster care have not proved reliable.

#### Uncertain Status

Several studies (Lahti, 1982; Martin and Beezley, 1976) conclude that permanency is an extremely important factor in children's mental health. Lahti found that children scoring highest in well-being were younger, saw themselves as permanently placed in their homes, and got along well initially in placement. Martin and Beezley (1976) found that psychiatric symptoms increased with the degree to which the child viewed his present home as lacking in permanence, and the number of moves from one home to another.

Uncertainty is a topic of grave concern to social workers, too. "It's difficult for us when a child asks what will happen to him. Their status is often uncertain because of the parent's activity, because of their own behavior, or because we haven't located an adoptive family. So, often, we don't know what will happen when they ask," said Peterson. "In one instance, I found myself dreading any visits to a foster child because I knew he was going to ask. It actually affected my attitude. What I usually try to do in this situation is be honest, saying I wish I could answer his question about his immediate future, but I can't. However, I will as soon as I can."

### **"First and foremost, these children are provided protection."**

#### Prevention of Adoption

Wald's (1976) review of literature asserts that the longer a child is in foster care the less likely a child will be adopted. In addition, he states, it is generally assumed that older and emotionally disturbed children are harder to place permanently. "Since children not only become older during, but some also become emotionally disturbed as a result of lengthy placements, it is likely that prolonging foster care lessens the child's chance of being adopted" (p. 673).

When addressing length of stay in foster care, Virginia's statistics appear to show Wald's statements to have validity. While Virginia's children, ages 1 to 5, average 1.4 years in care, the average for children 6 to 12 years of age was 4 years, and the average length of time for children 13 and older is 6.4 years! As it is, the average length of stay in foster care for all of the children is 4.7 years (Annual Report on Foster Care Services, 1983). There appears to be, then, a real need for truly temporary foster care placement.

### **Benefits of Foster Care**

There are some very distinct and important advantages to being able to provide abused children with foster care placement.

#### Protection from Abuse

Little is known about the rate of recurrence of abuse of a child left in the home or after a child returns from foster care. It is likely that much recurrence goes undetected for parents are not likely to report themselves. Data from several studies is not promising, however.

The Berkely Planning Associate's large scale study of 11 demonstration projects found that 30% of the cases in the study population severely abused or neglected children while they were in treatment. Remember, that figure represents detected and confirmed reabuse. Actual figures could be higher.

The study tried to determine if any variables were highly correlated with the potential for recurrence of abuse or neglect. The data revealed that persons most likely to reabuse were sexual abusers (60%) followed by people who both physically abused and neglected (51%), physical abusers (37%), emotional abusers (24%), and potential maltreaters (7%). Thus, the type of abuse appears to be a useful prediction of recurrence. A second area with some potential use for prediction is the seriousness of the assault when first identified. The data showed that 56% of those labeled "serious" on intake were likely to reabuse, where only 15% of those labeled "non-serious" at intake were likely to reabuse.

When some Virginia social workers were asked about the benefits of foster care, the overwhelming response was "safety!" Judy Brown, foster care worker for Roanoke city states, "First and foremost these children are provided protection. There are many more benefits that come later, like role modeling, love, structure and limit setting, and consistency, but first comes protection."

#### Improvements in Functioning

Improvements and positive changes, sometimes drastic, are noted in the literature. Clinically, many professionals have had the opportunity to see a child "blossom" in foster care who is failing to grow or show progress at home. Changes in height, weight, IQ, academic achievement, social and emotional adjustment, and behavioral control have been noted.

A poignant example of how children can blossom was given by Peggy Bright, foster care worker in Staunton. "A couple of years ago we had two children from the most unbelievable home!" She described the children's birth home as filthy and unsafe. "Glass was all over the ground, refrigerators with doors were on their property, and garbage, dirt and sewage had to be literally shoveled out of their trailer," she said. "In addition, the children were so developmentally delayed, the workers suspected that they were retarded. Their language was not



understandable, their growth was stunted, their teeth were rotten, and they were so nutritionally deprived, they often ate garbage. They were pitiful looking children. They were black with dirt. They couldn't communicate well and were extremely withdrawn," Bright explained.

CPS workers did everything they could to motivate the parents to change. After that failed, the children were removed to foster care. "We were able to keep them together. They were so bonded to each other, separating them would have been a terrible mistake," Bright said. "It was amazing what happened after the children were cleaned up and lived in a stimulating environment!" she added. "Their language improved, their health and growth improved." Bright said that their appearance and behavior changed so drastically that "their teachers literally didn't recognize them!"

These two children, then, exemplify the possibilities of improved functioning upon entrance into foster care, and are also an example of how foster care can be used diagnostically.

#### Using Foster Care Diagnostically

Martin (1976) suggests foster care can be used as a diagnostic tool. If a child is placed in foster care without any special therapy and his/her development accelerates and moves towards normalcy, then a diagnosis of inadequate parenting has been established. Pre- and post-developmental testing is recommended to document the changes.

Clearly, there is no data which confidently determines whether foster care is likely to benefit or harm a particular abused or neglected child. There are many variables to be considered in assessing each case. Individual needs and circumstances must be taken into account when considering whether or not to remove a child from his home. Hopefully, the system is one that "makes sound decisions regarding the likely impact of removal. . . ." (Wald, p. 648). The risks and benefits of removal must be weighed along with the many other factors foster care workers must consider in their decision whether or not to remove. With this process the child can be the beneficiary of sound judgment and the beginnings for good care!

References Available Upon Request

# Virginia and P.L. 96-272



Public law 96-272, also called the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, signals an increase in federal involvement in the state's foster care program and contains major changes in the Social Security Act. The primary objectives of P.L. 96-262 are to reduce the number of children entering foster care and to ensure that foster care is used as a temporary placement rather than a long-term solution to family problems.

A review of child welfare literature from the 1970s reveals a universal concern for the plight of children who entered foster care. "Most children in foster care can expect a relatively long stay in a foster home" (Weinbach, Edwards & Levy, 1977, p. 18). "Although many foster children never return to their natural parents, long-term plans that would provide these children with a sense of security and stability are seldom made and rarely implemented" (Mnookin, 1973 p. 612) and "... the majority of children in placement remain in foster care for lengthy periods of time, without ties to their parents and without being provided with a permanent home" (Wald, 1976, p. 633) are typical statements from this period. Mnookin summarizes the tenure of the times by saying, "Children removed by the state from the homes of their parents are often destined to remain in limbo until adulthood, the wards of a largely indifferent state. On the one hand, they frequently are unable to return to their natural parents, who are offered little rehabilitative help. On the other hand, they are placed with a foster family and cautioned not to become too attached. These children, thus, grow up without a permanent and secure home" (1973, p. 613).

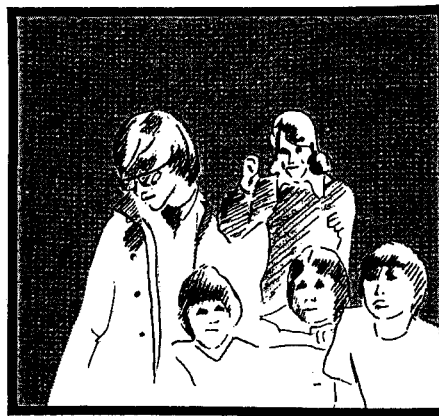
It is within this environment that PL96-272 was developed and enacted. According to Ray Sirry, Director of the Division of Service Programs, Department of Social Services, Congress generally had two dispositions at that time. "One group in Congress said 'foster care is bad; the way to fix it is to give states financial incentives for improving the system.' The other group started with the same premise, that foster care is bad. But, this group's thinking took a more punitive approach, saying that the way to fix it is to set up a multitude of barriers to placing a child in foster care and keeping him there. What we got was a merger of the two. States do get some financial incentive for providing services to families, and the paperwork and time involved

in foster care placement is so burdensome that it is difficult to place and keep a child there."

"Actually, Virginia was very fortunate," Sirry goes on to explain. Evidently, Virginia, in 1976, had applied for status as a permanency planning state. Up until that point the state — as well as the nation — had no tracking or monitoring system once a child was in foster care, and there were no case reviews. "We received a grant to start a monitoring system, and to set up a system of case review. So, we were ahead of the game when PL96-272 was implemented," he noted.

What about PL96-272, then? What is it all about? The major thrust of PL96-272 is to "redirect current fiscal incentives away from out of home care and toward alternatives to placement, and to provide protections for children to insure they enter care when necessary, are placed appropriately, provided quality care, reviewed periodically, and provided permanent families in a timely fashion" (Children's Defense Fund, 1980, p. 769).

In order to understand the law and its effect nationally and locally, we will address several requirements of the law: reasonable efforts, 6-month administrative reviews, and 18-month judicial deposition hearings. In addition, we will address prevention efforts and the impact of this law on permanency planning.



## Reasonable Efforts

Public Law 96-272 provides financial incentives to states to lessen the emphasis on foster care and to make greater efforts to provide preventive services for families whose children are at risk of being placed out of their homes. It also encourages states to provide restorative services promptly to

those families whose children have been removed. At the time a child is placed in foster care, the law requires a judicial determination that "reasonable efforts" have been made to prevent the need for removal, and a determination of whether "reasonable efforts" are being made to reunify the child with his family. These determinations must be made by the judge or the state will not be eligible for federal matching funds for the foster care program.

Phyllis Breidenbaugh, Bureau Chief for Child Welfare Services, who is currently on special assignment for the Department of Social Services to increase Virginia's compliance with PL96-272, helps us to understand. "The intent of the reasonable efforts provision," she says, "is to maintain family unity by providing services before the child is placed in foster care. These services can be given by court sources, mental health, social services or other agencies and providers. If the services are not successful in preventing a need for placement, the child comes into foster care. Service provision is then focused on returning the child home."

VCPN asked 10 foster careworkers about the "reasonable efforts" clause. What was its overall effect? Surprisingly, half the workers had never heard of the clause. Others, however, attributed some value to the idea. "The 'reasonable efforts' clause is important," emphasized Debbie Fadeley, foster care worker in Shenandoah county. "It hasn't changed what we actually do, but the requirement keeps us on top of the child's case."

Keith Sykes, Assistant Director, Hampton DDS, concurs. "The 'reasonable efforts' clause hasn't made any difference in our work. A judge almost always agrees with our workers concerning the determinations we make for a child and its family."



## Six-Month Review

Under the law, each child receiving state supervised foster care must have a service plan specifying the service needs of the child and family, and documenting that

placement is in the most family-like environment available and in close proximity to the parent's home. To prevent children from becoming lost in the shuffle, administrative reviews must be held every six months. This review is intended to assess the progress made toward returning the child home and to assess the child's continued need for placement. The review is held by a panel which has at least one member who is not responsible for or involved in the case. Some agencies use agency staff, not involved with or supervising foster care work. Others use community members to fill this slot. In addition, the review is open to the child's parents for the purpose of involving them in the planning.

How effective is the six-month review? We received mixed responses. Peggy Printz, a former foster care worker in Page County, reported that she found the reviews "extremely productive. They help clarify issues and clear the air in general. They provide a good forum for explaining new ideas."

Fadley agreed. "The reviews keep us in tune with what has to be done," she stated. "They are very helpful to the natural parents too," commented Sykes. "And, the review often offers a means for parents to show some concrete interest in their child."

Not all remarks were positive, however. Marcia Jones, foster care worker in Rockingham County, sees the six-month review as more of a hindrance than a help. "The review involves a tremendous amount of paperwork and that's all. In addition, perhaps two out of 20 natural parents will actually show up." Echoing this sentiment was Theresa Reynolds of the Harrisonburg Department of Social Services, who clarified the issue of paperwork. According to Reynolds, the law requires that two service plans be prepared prior to a review. The Service Plan, parts A and B, and the Service Plan Review comprise a total of seven pages of information that must be filled out for each child in foster care every six months. Not only is the preparation of these plans time consuming, but the process is also frustrating; questions are often reworded and asked two or three times over the course of the three forms.

Other factors, such as the length of time a child has stayed in foster care, can change a review's effectiveness. For a child in long-term foster care and for his or her foster parents, a review every six months is often a bothersome and unnecessary process. This was the opinion of Judy Brown of the Roanoke City Department of Social Services. She stated, "The six month review is not useful for long-term foster children. In these cases the review does nothing more than 'rock the boat,' disturbing the established routine."

VCPN staff was curious about foster parent's reactions to the six-month review. Of the eight foster parents interviewed, four were unfamiliar with the process. The other four had various remarks, however, ranging from being familiar with the process but having no input, to being familiar

and having a great deal to say. Connie Stephenson, foster parent in Annandale, said, "I've had a great deal of input in the reviews for my foster child. I like the process very much."

Shirley Lamb, president of Virginia's foster care association, believes not enough foster parents are involved in the process. "Agencies need to involve foster parents and allow them input," she said. "No one knows these children better than we do!"



### **Eighteen-Month Disposition Hearing**

In addition to the six-month review, PL96-272 requires a disposition hearing to be held by a court or court-appointed body after a child has been in placement for 18 months. This hearing is intended to determine whether a foster child should be returned to the home of his natural parents, whether a child should be kept in foster care for a specified period of time, whether the child should be placed for adoption, whether the child has special needs, and whether or not the child should stay in foster care on a long-term or permanent basis. After this initial hearing, further disposition hearings are mandated annually.

It is commonly believed that a child can not be held "on ice" indefinitely while parents work to resume competence (or gain competence for the first time). Most current feeling is that time limits for parental improvement need to be imposed (Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit, 1973, 1977; Mnookin, 1973; Wald, 1976). Goldstein et al. recommend one year maximum for children under 3, two years maximum for children over 3. Wald (1976) recommends one year for children over 3 and six months for children under 3.

Thus, most experts in the field are arguing that we should not remove children at all, if that is possible. Once removed, parents should have only a limited time to regain custody. If the home is not improved by that time, termination of rights should be sought and the child adopted and placed in permanent care.

The 18-month hearing is viewed by some as a "fish-or-cut-bait" situation for the natural parents. If competency is not restored by this time, the DDS should begin moving toward permanent care.

How do agencies around the state view these disposition hearings? Again, the responses were varied; some were hesitant about endorsing the 18-month hearing, others quickly gave their support. Sue Heflin of the Albemarle Department of Social Services summarized ideas most often expressed when she said, "The hearings are beneficial. They have increased our paperwork but have made us more accountable. They do, however, prevent us from handling larger caseloads."

According to Dianne Dobson, the assistant staff director of the National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, the disposition hearing is having its intended effect. Says Dodson, "If it's that much trouble, it will encourage social workers to get a child into permanent care. The benefits of the hearing far outweigh the burden. It's all part of the idea."

Breidenbaugh agrees but acknowledges that there are some problems. "Unfortunately, there was a lag between the passage of the federal law and a state law being passed. Agencies learned what they had to do ahead of the courts. This has been very frustrating for workers."

Other problems are related to compliance. Some agencies, admittedly, have not been complying with federal law or the newly passed state law. The problems center primarily around the six-month administrative review and 18-month disposition hearings. What happens when agencies don't comply?

"This lack of compliance is of considerable concern to the state," says Breidenbaugh. "It's rather complicated and has to do with funding." She continued, "Basically, in order to get funds for foster care over the base amount from the federal government, states had to be 60% in compliance the first year and 80% in compliance every year thereafter. The complicated part, however, is that states had to project the possibility of compliance, receiving funds in advance if they thought they would be in compliance with the law. The federal government then reviewed the states' activities. If they weren't in compliance after all, the money had to be returned."

Virginia was in compliance the first year, but according to the federal government not for the second year. This decision is not final and is being appealed by the state. This means, unfortunately, that the state may need to return a considerable amount of foster care money to the federal government.



### **Prevention Efforts**

The law provides major program changes that affect the focus of service delivery. The major change is requiring provision of supportive and/or restorative services to the child and the family both prior to and during placement. How effective is this strategy?

Recent research would support both the human and financial effectiveness of such a mandate. Wald (1976) cites a study by the Child Welfare League of America conducted in New York. Intensive services to parents were provided in order to prevent removal of children. Most children were

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# Foster Parents: The Mortar of the System

Children enter foster care for a variety of reasons: alcoholism of parents, parents' death, abuse and neglect, and delinquency. (Few children, however, are in foster care as a result of their own behavior.) In Virginia, over half (61%) of the children enter because of child abuse and neglect. It is likely, then, that foster parents will receive an abused or neglected child in their home.

Abused and neglected children have a variety of needs. It would seem, however, that the need for a safe home environment would be tantamount. Martin and Beezley (1978) suggest that foster care is primarily intended "to provide the child a safe home environment at a time of crisis and emotional turmoil within the biological family" (p. 189).

Martin and Beezley feel, however, that foster care can provide more for the child. "Another legitimate use of foster care is that of a therapeutic experience for the child over an extended period of time" (p. 192). But, we must not delude ourselves into believing that merely placing a child for protection is therapeutic. "To be therapeutic, foster care must do more than prevent injuries from recurring and more than merely minimize the stresses to the abused child. A therapeutic experience implies that there is something positive and beneficial in the placement that enhances and brings out the strengths and potentials for growth within the child. Foster care, to be truly helpful, must stimulate or provide good parenting" (Martin and Beezley, 1978, p. 193).

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## "Love is not always enough..."

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Foster care agencies make every effort to insure that a child is placed in a therapeutic environment, to insure that a child is received by loving parents who can provide good parenting.

Unfortunately, as many caring foster parents have discovered, love is not always enough. Abused and neglected children can pose special problems. These children can have medical problems as a result of medical and nutritional neglect, and developmental delays in their growth rate, speech and language, and learning abilities.

Generally, too, abused and neglected children have difficulties in their personality development such as low self esteem, social incompetence, impaired capacity to trust, behavioral problems, and general unhappiness. It is even possible for abused children to provoke foster parents into abusive behavior in an effort to recreate the home environment.

These, then, are children with special problems that may require special attention: medical, educational, as well as par-

enting. It takes special people to be able to provide the extra attention.

How, then, can social services secure families with the special skills needed to parent an abused child? Through foster parent screening, training, and matching. How can they keep such families? Through monitoring and consultation.

### Recruitment and Screening

Before one can adequately address screening issues, one has to consider the topic of recruitment. Obviously, in order to obtain foster homes, agencies must recruit. Horejsi (1979) defines recruitment as "a process of reaching out to the public, explaining the need for foster homes and enlisting new foster parents into the foster family care system" (p. 137). In the beginning days of foster care — over a century ago — recruitment efforts were predominately made through advertisements in local media. Today, however, more extensive techniques are used.

Social workers in Virginia use a variety of tools, such as public service announcements on television and radio, as well as newspapers, bank marquees, posters, human interest stories, leaflets placed in strategic settings such as grocery stores, department stores, hair dressers' establishments, and word of mouth. "The best method we have found," said Keith Sykes, Assistant Director of the Hampton Department of Social Services, "is word of mouth." That is, foster parents recruiting foster parents. Sykes' agency and others make extensive use of foster parents who will act as a volunteer for a speaker's bureau, going to churches, clubs, and television and radio talk shows to share their experience as foster parents.

Recruitment efforts usually result in a formal application being made by the interested parties. This application may be completed over the telephone or during a personal interview. In Virginia, the DDS, however, has an official application form that is to be completed by all applicants.

The next step is screening. According to Martin and Beezley (1978), one type of foster parent should be avoided. This is the person who is "using foster parenting as a means of proving his own value and worth as an individual and as a parent... In such a foster home there is a high investment in having the newly arrived foster child 'shape up'... There is little tolerance of the regression most children exhibit in foster care." Such placements result in continuing an environment where the child must meet the demands and needs of the parents. The extreme can be actual abuse, a repetition of a situation that placement was supposed to prevent.

Barbara Bennett, senior social worker at the Chesterfield Department of Social Services, reiterated this idea. "My greatest concern is to screen for applicants whose own needs are dominant. These folks have

a great deal of difficulty focusing on the child's needs. I consider this to be a high risk group."

Luella Hall, Director of Intake Services in the Richmond DSS, states it somewhat differently when she says, "I look for people who want to give the child something rather than wanting something from the child."

An additional tool to try to prevent the possibility of extending the abuse into the foster home is the practice of checking all applicants with the central registry to determine whether or not the applicant has a prior abuse complaint. In addition, many agencies will also check to see if a person has a record with the police registry.

What other qualities make good foster parents? Virginia agency personnel suggest a variety of general attributes: patience, compassion and love, gentleness but fairness, honesty, good communication with children, flexibility, ability to respect and love someone else's child, ability to let go, and good experience in child rearing.

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## "I look for people who want to give the child something rather than wanting something from the child."

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Many of these attributes are mentioned in the literature along with other specific positive and negative qualities. Martin and Beezley (1978) summarize by stating, "Some of these abilities that must be assessed include: sufficiency of time, availability at critical moments, experience with and insight into parent role, concern with child care practices and information, confidence in the parent role, perception of children and particularly the abused child, quality of physical and social interaction with children, tolerance of developmental problems in children, handling of negativism, emphasis on independence and self reliance v. dependence of the child, expectations and standards set for the child, quality of authority used, types of discipline used, acceptance of responsibility as social arbiter, tolerance of possible shortcomings and deviances of biologic parents, ability to share parenting role with spouse, energy level and resourcefulness, and conscious motivation" (p. 194).

Motivations which might have a negative impact on the child include: using the foster child as treatment for the marriage, viewing the child as an extension of maternal control, seeing the child as an object, substituting the foster child for a child lost through death, or accepting a foster child while waiting for an adoptive child to become available.

Another negative motivation addressed by social workers is that of money. All social workers interviewed categorically eliminated anyone from consideration who suggested a desire to become foster parents based on monetary gain. "Foster parents don't receive money," says Sykes. "Anyone who thinks they do does not understand the nature of the system." Shirley Lamb, foster parent and president of the Virginia Foster Parent Association emphasizes the same point by saying, "The money received for a foster child's care is not enough to meet the basic needs of the child. There is nothing left over. As a matter-of-fact, in order to give the child any extras — birthday or Christmas gifts — a person can count on money coming out of his pocket!"

### **"The money received for a foster child's care is not enough to meet the basic needs of the child."**

The implication, then, is that anyone who expects to use the foster care stipend as salary will not be able to meet the basic needs of the child.

In addition to screening for motivation, research has suggested various characteristics which help determine potential for success or failure as a foster parent. "Age is correlated with foster care success such that older persons (above 46) and young parents (below 25) are less likely to retain foster care wards for long durations, and are more likely to have high turnover rates of foster children . . . parents who tend to be authoritarian in their disciplinary techniques are also less successful foster parents . . . Successful foster parents usually have stable marital relationships and fulfilling relationships with their own children . . . Foster parents who are able to accept the foster child's natural parents tend to be better foster care providers" (Rosmann, 1980, pp. 473-474).

Many of the aforementioned motives and characteristics are most easily assessed during a personal interview. This interview usually involves all family members, including children, and is part of an overall process known as a home visit.

"The home visit gives me an opportunity to look at a variety of factors," explains Debbie Fadley, foster care worker in Shenandoah County. "For example, I look at the families' interactional patterns, especially the parents with their children."

All of these components — formal application, agency checks, and home visits — are the beginning and principal procedures for screening. However, it doesn't have to end there. Foster care training, in addition to providing necessary information, also provides further opportunity for social worker assessment as well as potential self-selection.

Bennett's statistics reflect the possibility of self-selection. "For every five people

who come to training, three will result in having their home certified. Most of the loss is due to self-selection," she explained.

### **Training**

A tremendous amount is expected of foster parents. The least that society expects is that each foster parent provide good parenting to their wards. Good parenting is difficult enough with biological children. To expect foster parents to naturally provide good parenting to strangers without preparation and training is, according to some, an unrealistic expectation. Martin and Beezley accent this point. "When consultation is not available as a routine service . . . the foster parents are put into an unfortunate bind of risking a great deal by asking for help. They run the risk of being considered inadequate and incompetent if they ask for assistance in understanding a foster child's behavior. When child welfare agencies do not have established programs in counseling and education for their foster parents, they are clearly giving the message that such services are not needed for 'normal' foster parents." (p. 196).

In fact, training is one method to prevent foster placement failure, or rapid turnover of foster parents. While a variety of reasons can lead to multiple placements, one major report found the primary causes were "inability to cope with foster child misbehaviors and lack of knowledge and skills to deal with the special needs of many foster children" (Rosmann, 1980, p. 465).

Unfortunately, Virginia does not mandate training for foster parents. "Each locality makes that decision," explains Lamb. "Some agencies provide it, others do not. It is my belief that no child should be placed in a home without prior training as well as continued in-service training."

Some agencies provide pre-placement group training. The format of the training and who must attend depends on the individual agency. Some require both parents to attend, others only require one. "Training with us is not optional," said Bennett when explaining her agency's training program. "While we only require one parent's attendance, most go home and share the information with their spouse. Also, we invite the whole family — spouse and children — to our last session."

Trainers can use a wide variety of techniques to help foster parents learn methods for dealing with the problems that may arise. Films, tapes, and discussions with foster parents are some of the more popular methods. Foster parents and social workers alike report that an air of informality helps.

"I found my training by People Places to be very good," comments Sten Linkard, a foster parent in Harrisonburg/Rockingham County. He and other parents described their training as meetings lasting from four to six weeks, covering topics centering around child development, discipline, parenting styles, and the agency's role in the

(continued on page 8)

## **Spotlight**



Altruistic and selfless. When writing about foster care, those words apply to many people, but none more than Blanche Jefferson.

Jefferson, 40, is a full-time parent and foster parent, and has been so for 23 years. She works out of People Places in Waynesboro and is secretary of the Virginia Foster Parent Association. She is a member of the National Foster Parent Association and her local chapter of the VFPA. But most of all, she's mom.

First in Norfolk and then, for the past 17 years, in Waynesboro, Jefferson has housed "so many foster kids I can't even count them. More than 100, I'm sure." She likes to tell the story of the first time she took a foster child. "I went outside, and saw a 13-year-old boy with no shoes and no jacket lying in our car. And it was snowing outside. We contacted the police and eventually took him in. And we've been at it ever since."

Jefferson will take all children who need temporary housing and will take children of all ages. If an infant needs a home for a week, Jefferson will assist. If a 17-year-old needs a place to live while finishing high school, Jefferson is available. It doesn't matter if the child is mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. Jefferson will take him.

"I don't want any perfect kids," she says. "Perfect kids will drive you crazy." Of all the foster children she has taken in, Jefferson and her husband, a road driver for Del Monte, have given up only three. "And that's only because I couldn't help those kids. If you're not doing them any good, you're doing them harm and they shouldn't be with you."

Many of Jefferson's foster children stay with her all year. "This is their home," she says. "Those are my kids. The rules are the same for all." Jefferson has four of her own children, aged 15 to 22.

Jefferson says her reward is when a former foster child calls on Thanksgiving or Christmas. "It's nice to get calls from the kids you raised," she says. "The contact is still there, and that makes it all worthwhile."

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## Foster Parents

*continued from page 7*

foster care placement. "The training was an important part of my preparation for foster parenting," add Ronnie and Debbie Ball, foster parents from Waynesboro.

What does the literature say about effective parent training models? Rosmann's (1980) summary of the literature states that while many curricula are available, few have been systematically evaluated. Another concern relates to method of training. Which technique offers the most beneficial effects? A number of studies have compared behavior management and reflective techniques.

The behavioral method consisted of teaching the mothers operant techniques, which they then applied to specific problems of their foster children. Primarily, the mothers learned to set goals, make reinforcement contingent upon appropriate behavior, and keep track of certain behaviors of interest. The reflective method entailed group discussions of principles of reflecting feelings, setting appropriate limits, and providing alternative activities when the child's current activities are inappropriate. Rosmann summarizes that "the results indicated that both types of parent training had beneficial effects relative to a control condition in which no training was provided, and the group trained in behavioral techniques showed greater positive change on behavioral and observational measures of child rearing than the group of mothers trained in reflective techniques" (p. 477).

### "Foster parents need more rights."

Naturally, training is least used if it is received before a problem arises. Therefore, foster parents need general information during preplacement training about the dynamics of abuse as well as some understanding of the treatment programs available. In addition, group meetings for foster parents of abused children could be routinely provided. "The purpose of such meetings could be multiple in nature; that is, they could provide in-service education, as well as providing an opportunity for foster parents to discuss disturbing behavior of the children in their care . . . The group meetings would not be a mechanism for teaching 'professional' parenting, but rather a means of providing supportive counseling for surrogate parents of a nature which, in actuality, should be provided to all parents" (Martin and Beezley, 1976, p. 96).

Clearly, training should not end at placement. Group in-service training should continue, covering specific topics and held at various intervals throughout the year. And, an individual foster parent must have easy access to foster case workers as consult-

ants when individual needs, questions, or problems arise.

### Matching

Wolins (1963) found that as the need for foster parents increased, the rate of preselection of foster parent candidates decreased and this was accompanied by a concomitant decrease in the quality of applicants accepted as foster parents. While the criteria which make the ideal foster parent have been presented and discussed, clearly not all foster parent candidates will meet all criteria. This fact, then, underscores the need for preparation and training of foster parents, especially when receiving a special child population, such as the abused and neglected. It also emphasizes the need for social workers to assess the relative assets and deficits presented by each set of parents. Rosmann (1980) suggests that "foster parents with a high number of assets should be matched with difficult foster cases when possible, instead of with the 'best' cases as is common practice in some agencies" (p. 475).

Bennett comments extensively about the importance of the matching process. "I consider the parent-child match to be of utmost importance," says Bennett. "We staff a child, discussing his or her particular profile of needs. We also assess the child's relationship with the natural family. Then we go down the list of potential foster parents and list any who might consider the child. At this point, I go through those names and think of every reason why a match might not work. Usually this process leaves me with two or three names. I then ask the caseworker to identify his or her preference."

"I then approach the foster parents with the information," Bennett continues, "We are very fortunate in that we have a list of homes that will take children on a short term emergency basis. Therefore, even if a child is in the position of needing help NOW, there is no need for urgency. The parents I approach for the longer term care can be given complete background information, and they can then deliberate, taking time to make the decision. This is the foundation of placement."

### Ongoing Monitoring

A very important consideration in the maintenance process is the quality of information given to the prospective foster parent about a specific child. Lahti (1979) reports that "it is important to the child's well being for parents to have sufficient knowledge of the child's past and to be prepared for his arrival."

In Virginia there is no consistent policy concerning amount or type of information a foster parent should receive. Instead, it is determined on an individual or agency basis. Lamb is concerned about the lack of information Virginia's foster parents are given. "Some agencies will tell parents about problems in the natural family or in other foster homes, others will not. For

instance, I wasn't told that one of my foster children had almost burned down a home in his previous placement. I discovered the child playing with matches, jeopardizing my home. When I mentioned it to the caseworker, she then told me about the child's problems. I wish I had known. It would have helped me know what behavior to look for."

Other foster parents voice concern about the quality of information and support given by agency personnel. "Foster parents need more rights," said Nancy Hopkins-Garris, foster parent for many years who is presently taking a rest from foster parenting. "I've had a car stolen and wrecked by two foster children, and other things stolen and broken. The response from my caseworker was usually 'nothing can be done. You knew the job would be tough when you took it.' Maybe — maybe not. Possibly, with more information about the children, their past and their problems, problem situations and dealing with them would be made much easier."

### "Foster parenting is a 24-hour job."

Hopkins-Garris is also concerned about foster parent input. "Foster parenting is a 24-hour job. The children need a great deal of attention. We give them nurturing care and support. Yet in many cases, our opinions are not given due consideration by foster care caseworkers."

Hopkins-Garris is typical of a new breed of foster parents concerned about their rights. While VCPN hasn't room to elaborate on the issue of rights, we frequently encountered statements by foster parents about their rights. Generally, interest centered around the quality and quantity of information received about the foster child at placement. Nationally, foster parents are also addressing issues of rights in the areas of decision making for the foster child, rights to pursue grievances, and rights to resist agency decisions to remove a child from foster care. (See the book review section for a resource published by the American Bar Association concerning foster parent's rights).

Surely as a society, we wish to provide all foster children with the best possible environment. For abused and neglected children this desire becomes even more important. With a therapeutic environment, the child can grow, develop, and blossom. By adequately screening foster homes, training foster parents, careful matching process, and provision of ongoing monitoring and consultation, much can be done to both enhance the child's development during foster care placement and support the foster parent.

References available upon request.

# What Are Foster Kids Saying?



Older foster children across the nation are having their say about foster care. A survey of foster children in San Francisco (Aware, 1982), and an article published in *Children Today* about foster children in Illinois (1977) reported some important considerations.

Some of what foster children are saying is positive. When asked about the best place they ever lived, a large majority (81%) of the San Francisco foster children reported that their current placement was best. Why? "I have fun here all the time," and "I feel safer and I love them," and "They treat me like any person would want to be treated" were some of the remarks.

VCPN staff found similar results when talking to Virginia children. "I'm happy here," said one 13-year-old girl, "because I'm with people who care." This was reiterated by a boy of 15 who said, "The best thing about my foster home is the people in it."

Even so, some foster children would like to be home. The San Francisco survey found 15% of foster children felt their birth home was the best place to live. One Virginia youth made the point when he said, "I want to return home to my dad. He is the person I admire most, and I want to live with him."

Overall, foster children report that the system very seldom meets their needs. Children related incidents they considered to be damaging to their self esteem as well as disruptive to their lives. They were moved abruptly, without explanation, from one foster home to another. Few understood the court process. "They did not realize, for instance, that the guardian ad litem was their lawyer and that they could have testified as to how they would like to see the problems solved" (Perozzi, 1977, p. 17).

Children didn't know they had a right to appeal; and, they reported feelings of guilt as if they were the culprit rather than the victim.

In addition, children reported beliefs that authorities — police, teachers, and parents — resented them as foster children, possibly believing that by virtue of their status they have a bad influence on other children. Many felt that their caseworkers frequently treated them badly.

Two areas of major concern arise from the San Francisco survey. The first is educational, as many of the children interviewed "could not read the questionnaire with comprehension, or write responses" (Aware, 1982, p. 6). The second is the children's overall lack of understanding of their foster care status and reasons for placement. When asked the question, "Why do you think you are in foster care?" many children had answers, but many also responded, "I don't know."

Realizing that foster care exists for good reason, and will always be needed, foster children had some very insightful suggestions. Many, nationally, advocate better recruitment, better foster parent training, and higher standards for certification of foster homes. Additionally, Virginia youth suggested that foster parents "make sure they give good advice, and that they care about the kids." And, one very perceptive girl noted, "If parents have problems of their own, children aren't going to make them any better, they merely add to them."

In order to try to address some of the unmet needs, Foster Children Associations are beginning to be organized. These associations have been developed for foster children by foster children to serve several specific functions — community education, advocacy, and improving foster care.

We were unable to locate any already established Foster Children Associations in Virginia. But similar needs have been recognized and are starting to be addressed in other ways. Last year a group in Virginia implemented an innovative program. Caseworkers from Montgomery County DDS and Pulaski DDS gathered together approximately 15 older foster children and took them to Ferrum College for a two-day conference. The children spent time in group discussion — often led by volunteers so that they could speak more candidly — and spent time in recreation with their caseworkers and each other. "It was such a valuable experience," said Mary Critzer, foster care worker with Montgomery County. "They complained about their treatment at home, in foster homes, and by agencies. They also gave excellent suggestions. They played and swam and had a great time. Most importantly, however, they realized they weren't alone. Meeting other foster children and getting support had a real positive impact."

It seems like the adventure had some advantages for the caseworkers' relationships with their foster children, too. Critzer reports that probably for the first time their foster children saw them as human. "They saw us wet and with our hair all messed up! They couldn't believe it. Also, they saw us in a pleasant situation rather than a crisis. It helped build trust and rapport."

Montgomery County wants to continue such a program as long as funds are available. "In addition," said Critzer, "we'd like to start a support group for foster children in this county. We saw how important that was last summer. We'd like to see it continue for our youth."

References Available Upon Request

# VCPN Child Abuse Prevention Materials Resource List

## Books For Foster Parents



**Foster Parents' Rights to Share in Decision Making for the Foster Child: Some Issues that Foster Parents Should Be Aware Of**, by Mark Hardin and Patricia Tazarra, 1981, 38 pages, Available from: *The American Bar Association, Young Lawyers Division, 1800 M Street, N.W., Second Floor, South Lobby, Washington, DC, 20036, (202) 331-2250*

This publication gives detailed and complete information concerning the following areas of foster parents' rights: pursuing grievances, sharing in decision-making, receiving adequate information concerning foster children, resisting agency decisions to remove a child, and rights relating to adoption.

This handbook is a MUST for all foster parents. It gives a good foundation of information for the foster parent in understanding rights in the foster care system.

Charlotte McNulty

**Fostering the Battered and Abused Child**, by Emily Jean McFadden, M.S.W., 121 pages, Available from: *Foster Parent Education Program, Institute for Study of Children and Families, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197, (313) 487-6372*

This training package of instructor's manual, \$6.00 each, and student workbook, \$4.50 each, is designed for in-service instruction for families who have foster children in their homes who have been abused. It is divided into eight sessions, with each session having questions for the foster parents to answer in their manual. (The instructor's manual has answers filled in).

Session 1 explains the "World of Abnormal Rearing" (as described by Ray Helfer), which illustrates how abusive parents were often abused children themselves. It also includes a brief excerpt from *Eight Parents Anonymous Members Tell Their Stories*. These excerpts are used throughout the sessions to help the foster parents see abuse through the eyes of the natural parents.

Session 2, "Perspectives on Child Abuse," encourages trainees to explore their feelings about child abuse. The chapter examines how stressful environments and culturally approved methods for expressing violence can affect people, and lead to abuse.

Sessions 3, 4 and 5 deal with helping the child's physical, social, and emotional development. They explain the feelings a youngster may have about himself after being abused and offer ways to build a trust between foster parent and child.

Session 6, "Alternatives to Physical Discipline," gives suggestions for handling specific problems without physically disciplining the child. Session 7 focuses on cognitive and moral development of the child. Helpful advice for working with school officials and information on the types of problems children experience in school is included.

The final session helps parents decide whether or not they are ready to work with children who have been abused. It presents vignettes about natural parents who overcame their problems in order to help foster parents understand why a child may be returned to the natural parents.

This training package is a valuable resource and sensitizes foster parents working with abused children to their special needs, increasing the likelihood of successful placements.

Kathy Perkins



**Foster Parenting Abused Children**, by Eliana Gil, 1982, 42 pages, \$4.00, Available from: *The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse, 332 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1250, Chicago, IL 60604-4357, (312) 663-3520*

This booklet is designed specifically for people who are foster parenting

abused and neglected children. It is the basic premise of the author that often foster parents do not receive adequate information on child abuse and neglect.

The format first covers an overview of child abuse and neglect, what it is, who abuses and why it happens. Then it focuses on possible behaviors a foster parent might expect from an abused or neglected child. The next major theme centers around handling these problem behaviors.

This is a valuable resource and should be used by all agencies in their training of foster parents working with abused or neglected children.

Charlotte McNulty

## Books For Professionals

**Standards for Foster Care Services, 1979, 125 pages, Available from: Child Welfare League of America, Publications Order Department, 67 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003**

The Child Welfare League of America's Standards for Foster Family Services is a comprehensive manual that resembles a reference book.

For someone who needs general information on foster care quickly, this book is very readable. It contains six chapters including "Services to Parents," "Services to the Child," and "Selection, Development and Use of Foster Homes." Chapters are broken into several subtopics, such as "Changing Patterns in Foster Care" and "Children for whom Foster Families are Appropriate." Finding information on the subtopics is very simple because each subtopic is no more than four or five paragraphs long.

One of the most informative chapters in the book is a section titled "Organization and Administration of Foster Family Service." It deals with authorization, licensing and legal responsibilities of the foster care agency. It is the one chapter that goes a bit beyond general facts.

For the most part, however, the book does not get involved in specifics. It sticks with what it does well — giving the interested reader facts and advice without requiring hours of searching or thumbing through every page.

Ian Katz



**The Legal Framework for Ending Foster Care Drift: A Guide to Evaluating and Improving State Laws, Regulations and Court Rules**, by Diane Dodson, 1983, Available from: *The National Legal Resource Center for Child Advocacy and Protection, American Bar Association, 1800 M Street, N.W., S-200, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 333-2250*

This volume is a useful tool for evaluating existing state laws and regulations as to their adequacy and appropriateness.

There are 14 sections, ranging in topic matter from emergency removal through the adoption process, including court proceedings. The individual sections ask comprehensive and probing questions. Each section is composed according to a threefold plan; one, a legal background section covering major issues for that topic; two, a legal framework section to specify areas in need of improvement; and three, a legal resources section to provide references such as current statutes and regulations.

This book is a very large volume designed as a resource for legislatures, agencies, foster parent associations, child advocates, or any individual who would like to evaluate their state laws "to determine whether they provide an appropriate and adequate legal framework for ending foster care drift and in formulating improved state laws, regulations, and court laws."

Charlotte McNulty

**Foster-Child Health Care**, by Florence Kavoler, M.D. and Margaret R. Swire, 1983, Available from: *Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Co., 125 Spring Street, Lexington, Mass. 02173, (800) 428-8071*

This book contains a detailed and in-depth study focusing primarily on the physical and emotional health status of a group of foster children from New York City.

According to this study, foster children tend to be less healthy than other children. Apparently, however, the existing service system is not handling the health care needs well. In fact, it appears that social workers and foster parents are not sufficiently concerned about the physical needs of their foster children. According to this data, foster parents' perceptions and attitudes about the health status of their foster children are positive even when the actual health status is poor. While foster parents express more concern about the behavioral/emotional problems, this concern typically does not lead to obtaining needed care for the foster children.

This is a highly theoretical, statistical presentation of information about one major city. There is a large amount of tabular and narrative data. It is well presented and appears to be quite thorough. This publication appears to be primarily a resource for professionals, as the large volume of data may not be easy for lay persons to digest.

Anne Frear

## Books for Children

**Without Hats, Who Can Tell the Good Guys?**, by Mildred Ames, 1976, 133 pages, \$8.50, Available from: E. F. Dutton and Co., Inc., 2 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016, (212) 725-1818

This is a story for children about a boy, Anthony, who, through circumstances outside his control, is placed in foster care. His first placement is an unfortunate one.

By the time Anthony reaches his second home, he's very unhappy, hostile, and acting out. He has a difficult time adjusting and fights with his foster sister. However, it is through the development of a relationship with her that Anthony finds a mechanism for accepting his situation. He even decides he wants to stay. This is a touching story of the problems a child experiences through rejection and loss of control. The book is designed for children age 8 through 12.

Charlotte McNulty

**The Great Gilly Hopkins**, by Katherine Paterson, 1978, 148 pages, price \$9.57 (hard), \$2.25 (soft), Available from: Harper and Row, East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022, (212) 207-7000 (hard) or Avon Books, 1790 Broadway, New York, NY (212) 399-4500 (soft)

This book contains a story for children full of joys, sorrows, triumphs, and heartaches. *The Great Gilly Hopkins* is the story of Galadriel ("Gilly") Hopkins, an unruly 11-year-old foster child. Tough and endearingly gutsy, Gilly manages to leap from one misadventure to another as she tries to cope with living in a foster home where life seems at once a puzzle and a predicament. On the one hand is Gilly's unwavering faith in her mother's love. On the other hand is her adjustment and ensuing love for her foster family. The resolution of Gilly's problem makes for both an emotional and a learning experience, one that will be felt by all. This book is grand for all children age 8 through 12.

Charlotte McNulty

**The Pinballs**, by Betsy Byars, 1977, 136 pages, Published by Harper and Row, East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022, (212) 207-7000 (No longer in print — must be ordered from local library)

Two boys and a girl with different backgrounds and personalities enter the same foster home in the same summer to put some interesting anecdotes in *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars.

One of the boys is Harvey, 13. Harvey had both his legs broken when his fuming, alcohol-happy father accidentally put his Grand Am (yes, Grand Am) into the wrong gear, running over Harvey. Harvey likes to tell people he broke his legs playing football. Thomas J., 8, had lived with 88-year-old twins for six years. They found him on their doorstep when he was 2. When they became unable to care for him any longer, Thomas J. had to move into a foster home. Thomas J.'s biggest adjustment problem was that he didn't talk, he yelled. That's what happens when you live with a pair of 88-year-olds who have hearing problems. The girl was Carlie, who carried a chip on her shoulder, was paranoid, and disliked and distrusted everyone. When asked "How are you," she would say, "What's it to ya?"

Initially, they are rough and indifferent children. However, under the influence of nurturing and caring foster parents and through their relationships with each other, Carlie becomes less cynical, Harvey emerges from despondency, and Thomas develops a sense of his own identity. *The Pinballs* is a touching story of the metamorphosis of three unfortunate children changing from social outcasts to well-adjusted and happy people.

Ian Katz, Charlotte McNulty



**Let's Talk About It! The Book for Children About Child Abuse**, by Dr. Michael L. Pall & Lois Blackburn Streit, 1983, 51 pages, \$6.75, Available from: R & E Publishers, P.O. Box 2008, Saratoga, CA 95070

This short book is designed to help children understand child abuse. The book begins by explaining what child abuse and child neglect are and focuses on the feelings that may result from abuse and neglect. It also talks about why abuse occurs, what help is available, and how to get help.

Learning to trust others and choosing to change behaviors are themes that run throughout the book. The idea of "owning" a problem is introduced, meaning that both parent and child are responsible for part of the problem and need to change their behaviors for positive results to occur.

Many children are concerned about what happens if they are removed from their home. The authors discuss foster care and present it in a positive, yet truthful way, emphasizing that "whenever a child is removed from his home, there is ALWAYS a plan made to help the family get back together again!"

The writing is fairly simple and often stated in more than one way to ensure understanding. Topics are handled in a sensitive, but straightforward fashion. This makes the book very readable for ages 8 and up.

Joann Grayson

## Resource Center

The American Foster Care Resources, Inc. (AFCR) is a non-profit corporation dedicated to research, development, and production of informational and resource materials for and about family foster care. The institute offers a variety of services.

- Assists in providing annual foster care symposiums.
- Maintains a comprehensive, computerized data bank about foster care.
- Publishes the *Foster Care Journal* nine times a year (see details below).
- Publishes numerous resources for foster children, foster parents, and foster care workers (see highlights below).
- Serves as a mechanism for people who have ideas and materials which need to be published and disseminated.

Space does not permit review of all the available materials. A few selections are highlighted below:

### Foster Care Journal

A new journal, *Foster Care Journal*, is the first of its kind to specifically address the needs and interests of those involved in the foster care system. The journal is published nine times a year and features up-to-date information, theory, research, and practical suggestions about the present and future needs of children in foster care. For example,

the April, 1984 issue contained articles about burnout, kids with drinking problems, how to develop support groups, and negative criticism. The individual subscription rate is \$8.50. Bulk rates or group rates are also available. If you are interested in submitting articles, contact Susan Meltsner, MSW, Managing Editor, Foster Care Journal, 1485 Byrd Drive, Buwyn, PA 19312, (215) 296-5820.

### Publications for Workers and Advocates

Want to know about foster care reimbursement rates? Policies on foster parent adoption? Discipline policies in foster care? Grievance procedures for foster parents? The institute publishes annual surveys on each topic.

Looking for help in creating a foster parent training program? The institute publishes a semi-annual national *Directory of Foster Care Programs and Educational Consultants*.

Do you need to recruit foster homes but aren't sure where to begin? *The Road to Quality Foster Care: A Comprehensive Recruitment Manual* will get you started and keep you going.

### Publications for Foster Parents

One series of four pamphlets can best be described as a self-help parenting aid. *The First Day, Good Kid Bad Kid... The Same Kid, The Last Day* and *After the Last Day* are full of concrete suggestions for very specific con-

cerns. They teach the parent about positive communication styles as well as the need for limit setting. In addition, the pamphlets help foster parents deal with their own issues, especially after a child is gone. These are very concise, well-written and useful materials.

Another concern foster parents face is "how do I deal with the birth parents?" *The Way Back: Suggestions for Working with Birth Parents* can help. It suggests various techniques for "fostering" the birth parents along with the child through such means as accepting the parents, encouraging them to participate in important events, and listening to their pain.

### For Children . . . Color Me in Foster Care

One of several "special topics" coloring books, this 18-page book is a cross between a story and a coloring book. Designed to help a child understand why he or she was placed in foster care, the publication stresses several themes: foster care is not the child's fault, foster care is "time out" for parents, the child should let adults know about his/her feelings, and the child can be happy either at home or in foster care. For school-aged children, \$1.95/copy.

For more information or a catalog of publications contact Mr. Jacob Sprouse, The American Foster Care Resources, Inc., P.O. Box 271, King George, Va 22485

## Virginia and P.L. 96-272

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able to remain in their home without further abuse. Wald also cites a Nashville, Tenn. project which provides 24-hour emergency caretaker (in home) service which has successfully reduced placement by 40-50%.

On a more local level, VCPN reported about efforts in York County which have significantly reduced foster care expenditures over a three-year period (Summer, 1982 issue). At that time, statistics were reported showing a drop in use of foster care funds from \$180,115 to \$59,431 over a two-year period of time due to the implementation of structural family therapy with CPS families.

Recently, in response to the prevention mandate, the State Board of the Virginia Department of Social Services allocated \$500,000 to be awarded in grants to local agencies in order to develop and improve services to families aimed at reducing the use of foster care. Fourteen grants have been awarded. Each of the grants lasts for 18 months. Several agencies will provide a variety of services such as structural family therapy, crisis intervention, parent educa-

tion, respite care, emergency funds, intensive home-based therapy, transportation, and self-help groups. "An independent group has been hired to evaluate these services," says Sirry while explaining the program to us. "We will have a good idea of what is effective after they have completed their work."

### Permanency Planning

Clearly, the intent of the law is to provide a mechanism for protecting children from unnecessary trauma of separation from parents. The issue is permanency — the recognition that children need and deserve continuity of relationships whether it be with their natural parents, long-term foster parents, or adoptive parents. The issue of permanency is a difficult one. Some studies, according to Wald (1976), show that as few as 10% of foster children in care over one year are adopted.

PL96-272 is intended to protect the child and lead to permanency as quickly as possible. Breidenbaugh summarizes, "The law provides protections and safeguards for children. If we can get past the frustrations of change and the massive amount of catching up that must be done, I think we will find PL96-272 positive and beneficial."

References Available Upon Request

## Spotlight

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Jefferson often becomes so attached to her foster children that she feels ambivalent about having them return to their natural parents. "I treat them just like they were one of my own," she said. "The attachment is a problem for the child and a problem for the parent. It's not so bad if the child goes home to a good situation. The ultimate goal is for the child to return home."

Last year Jefferson adopted a handicapped 3-year-old girl named Jessica, who had lived with the Jeffersons since she was a newborn. But in January, Jessica died after having brain surgery and spinal meningitis. "It's been very tough for us," Jefferson said. "We are getting another handicapped baby. We weren't going to; it's been very painful. But I don't think Jessica would have wanted it that way."

So Jefferson will keep on being a mom — she has four foster children with her now — because "someone has to care for those kids, and I love them."

Interview by Ian Katz



Center for Child Abuse Education  
Psychology Department

Address Correction Requested

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