



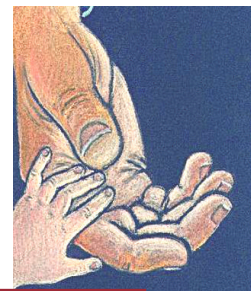
CHAPTER 9

MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

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

(415) 507-0557

www.mfpa.net



Issue 65

January 20, 2009

MFPA January 2009 Newsletter



I hope you and your loved ones had a wonderful holiday season and are off to a good new year. The Marin Foster Parent Association convened its annual board retreat earlier this month to review and evaluate the overall health, accomplishments and challenges facing the foster care community and this association. Also, the board re-examined the purpose and the mission of MFPA to ensure we all understood our roles and responsibilities to all the stakeholders who are working with foster children in Marin County, particularly the foster parents/caregivers and the foster care system. The retreat brought many wonderful, re-affirming and spirited discussions about a wide range of issues. Moving forward into 2009, in addition to all that the association already does, the board wishes to express some of our major goals for the upcoming year in hopes that you will join and support us in achieving some or all of them.

Goal #1: To continue to educate the broader community about the foster care system as a whole. We believe that by providing information about the complex nature, roles and responsibilities, rewards and challenges of foster parents and social workers, this will enable the larger community to better understand the importance and value of maintaining quality care to the vulnerable children of our county.

Goal #2a: To continue to conduct outreach for potential and interested adults in the community to consider becoming a foster parent/caregiver.

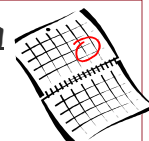
Goal #2b: To continue to conduct outreach in the larger community to secure necessary support, resources and services that will benefit foster parents and their foster children.

Goal #3: To continue to advocate on behalf of current and potential foster parents/caregivers in Marin County. We believe the MFPA has a role and responsibility not only to continue to provide quality support for foster parents/caregivers, but also to ensure that we continue to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to improve the foster care system by dealing with its current and/or long-standing challenges and concerns.

These goals will hopefully enable you to further consider contributing your time, energy and/or resources to some of MFPA's endeavors. During these tough fiscal times with dwindling resources, we will seek greater collaboration, partnerships and volunteer support to continue and further MFPA's work. If you are interested in volunteering or getting involved, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415-846-3789. Onward to the new year! -Cesar Lagleva, MFPA Board Member At Large

The presenter at this month's MFPA general meeting was Lynne Wasley from the Matrix Parent Network. Matrix is a parent run non profit organization that is federally and state funded. They serve 4 counties - Marin, Sonoma, Napa and Solano. Each center provides support and services to help families with children who have disabilities navigate the educational system and ensure that every child is receiving a free and appropriate education. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is a federal education law which requires that qualifying students with disabilities receive an education in the least restrictive environment. The Individual Education Plan/Program (IEP) is the written statement which describes the individual need/s of the child. Matrix offers workshops for parents on IEPs. Matrix is a boundless resource of knowledge, and they are there to help you. The HELP line number is 1-800-578-2592. Next month's meeting will feature a presentation by Pamela Doerr, MSN about how violence effects a child's developing brain. See attached flyer for details. -Andrea Pino, MFPA Secretary

Upcoming Events



❖ **January 30:** Soup Group at Mimi's, 12-2pm, San Rafael

❖ **February 4:** Immigration in the Child Welfare System, 10-12, San Rafael

❖ **February 5:** MFPA Board Meeting, 10:00 AM, San Rafael

❖ **February 10—** Foster Care Collaborative meeting, 10-12, San Rafael

❖ **February 11:** MFPA General Meeting—First Impressions.. Exposure To Violence and a Child's Developing Brain, 6:30-8:30 PM, San Rafael

❖ **March 6:** Perinatal Tobacco Use: Clinical Implications and Effective Interventions, 9-12, San Rafael

For information on any of the above events, contact Carol Ihlenburg.

Funding for Tutoring and After School Enrichment Programs

Thanks to a grant from The Marin Charitable Association, the Marin Foster Parent Association has funding for tutoring and after school enrichment available for children in the dependency system. This funding is available to assist foster families with tutoring and after school enrichment costs for foster children or children in the dependency system. If you have a child who needs additional academic assistance, **PLEASE APPLY FOR THIS FUNDING!!** There is a cap of \$500/family per year. If, at the end of the year, there is still funding remaining, families may re apply. The goal of this grant is to provide foster children with the extra educational assistance they need to be successful in school and in life. By providing funding to cover the cost of tutoring or other educational after school programs for these children, they will receive the benefit of being able to excel in school while they are a part of the foster care system. Funding will be distributed to foster families through an application process. The only requirements are the request is for a foster child or child in the dependency system and the funding will benefit him/her educationally. Funding will be granted on a first come first served basis with a combined monthly maximum amount of \$400.00 to be distributed amongst all approved applicants. Once your application is received, it will be submitted to the MFPA board at the monthly board meeting for approval. Once approved, receipts or an invoice for the cost of services must be submitted within one month of application approval. If you are interested in applying for this funding, contact Carol Ihlenburg at 507-1822 or via email at cihlenburg@comcast.net. We are excited to offer this assistance to foster families!



Foster Care Collaborative Update

For those of you who were unable to attend our last Foster Care Collaborative meeting held in December, below are a few updates:

- Marin County's participation in the "Better Together" initiative, delivered by Casey Family Programs, is still looking good; however, we are waiting for the California Department of Social Services to move this initiative forward. Hopefully we might start to see some progress on this sometime during the first part of this year.
- At the last meeting, Vidette Poe and I proposed that the Collaborative begin to explore and discuss some of the issues that were identified in the focus groups conducted by the Bay Area Academy in 2007. Those present at the meeting agreed to this approach. It was suggested during the meeting that we take turns addressing concerns of foster parents and social workers.

A large part of our meeting was spent hearing from foster parents about their concerns regarding the complaint investigation process. The concerns were recorded and brought back to Children & Family Services. At this month's meeting (scheduled for January 21st), Licensing Unit Supervisor Chua Chao will make a presentation and be available for questions and answers regarding the complaint process.

The following items were also identified as concerns that we might hope to address in future meetings:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| -Platform and process for individual problem solving | -Mentoring |
| -Mediator/liaison | -Suggestion box |
| -Process for deciding what the collaborative will deal with | -Listening sessions |
| -Concerns about discrimination in placement decisions/anti-Marin City | -Positive media messages |
| -CFS staff to submit newsletter articles | |

Welcome New Foster Parents

Marin Children and Family Services would like to welcome our newest foster parents, Heather and Brian Antonio. The Antonios have a daughter, Kimberly, who is 14 years old, and a son, Trenton, who is 9. The family resides in Novato and are licensed for two children. They are especially looking forward to caring for boys and girls ages 10-14. A licensed in-home day care provider, Heather has had sixteen years of experience caring for and teaching young children. Brian just completed his training to become a seasonal firefighter and hopes to begin his new career in March. The Antonios are very family oriented and are highly motivated to reach out to children in need. The Antonios infuse their approach to parenting with a great deal of humor and a strong sense of fun. Heather's interests include reading, crafts and movies. Brian enjoys seizing natural opportunities to teach their children during play and loves to cook. Their daughter, Kimberly, enjoys creative writing, especially poetry and short stories and likes to bake. Their son, Trenton, is an avid swimmer whose interests include photography and math. This family has a great deal of warmth and compassion to share, and they will be a strong asset to this agency, to the local community of foster parents, and to children in the foster care system. —Cindy Wasserman, MSW, Licensing Social Worker



Remembering Carol McKenna

Our wonderful leader of the Marin Foster Parent Association for the last two years, Carol McKenna, left the earthly world on December 22, 2008. Below are sentiments/memories of those in the foster parent community.

Carol McKenna was an aspiring person who spoke her mind, but was also so soft with her thoughts. Carol lived life to the fullest with a love of animals and children and spoke up for those who needed the help most. Carol was always there for you. Bless her now that she helps those in the heavenly realm. -Chris Andrews, Foster Parent

When Carol heard that the grandmother of two foster children placed in her care would be visiting them from out of state, she did not hesitate to welcome the grandmother into her home for over a week. On a different case, Carol was willing to meet with a parent at a park where she waited patiently even though the parent had arrived late at a different park. Not one to readily throw in the towel, she proceeded to look for the parent at other nearby parks until she found her. One of the children who had special medical needs made miraculous progress while in Carol's care. It can be said that she provided all the children in her charge with a loving and nurturing home filled with lots of laughter. We will miss her very much. -Dulce McAllister, Social Worker

Carol taught me how to be and not to be. I was lucky to be the last person to have massaged her feet - while I interviewed her for a foster parent profile. She had gorgeous, large, (but delicate) feet. I'm sure they are dancing in heaven by now. God Bless you soldier; we're gonna miss you!! -Jonathan Toste, Foster Parent

We owe a great deal of debt to Carol, not only for her role as a foster parent but also for her leadership in the Marin Foster Parent Association. Under her leadership, we've made positive strides toward a more collaborative working relationship between the Department and the foster parent community. Those of you who know her can attest to her compassion and commitment to children and families in need. She often went above and beyond the call of duty to help us out with transporting children for visits, providing respite for other foster parents, and participating in interagency collaboration meetings and events. She always managed to find humor in everything, especially when dealing with our children (and sometimes with us). One of her greatest gifts was her ability to find good in every child, which got her through many challenging placements. Carol will be missed by many. -Chua Chao, Social Worker

Carol had an uncanny ability of making everyone feel welcome and equally important at all of the MFPA sponsored events. She could easily include people who may be adversaries in a conversation eliminating any discomfort felt. She was an important person in my life during the few years we were friends. I am saddened the friendship ended sooner than either of us would have liked. I loved Carol's sarcasm and sense of humor. She was an amazing mother to Addie who flourished in her care. Her love of children was great and obvious to all who witnessed her interactions with them. She was an incredible lady and will be missed. -Carol Ihlenburg, Foster Parent

Every time I worked with Carol I felt she actually "saw" me. She always honored my being whether she complimented me on a piece of jewelry or we chatted it up about life and things that didn't necessarily pertain to the work between us. She was great to talk to and had an authenticity about her that will be extremely missed. -Kimberly Contreras, Social Worker

Carol used to like to tell this story: The day of our first home visit, Carol's daughter and grand daughter (who was quite young) were staying with her. Prior to my arrival, Carol was very busy straightening up and vacuuming. Her grand daughter asked her what all the fuss was for. "Because the social worker is coming," Carol said. Months later, long after Carol had become a licensed foster parent, her daughter and grand daughter again came to visit. During one of the days when Carol happened to be cleaning her home, the little one approached her and asked, "What are you doing, Grandma? Is the social worker coming?" -Cindy Wasserman, Social Worker

I loved that Carol was not a controlling or judgemental person. She had a compassionate ear and took time to listen. She was appreciative of ideas I shared with her to help all of us in the world of foster care and adoption have a positive relationship with each other and the Department of Social Services. I will miss her warm attitude and hope that we can keep her alive in the lives of many by continuing on with her endearing leadership skills. -Barbara Davis, Foster Parent

Remembering Carol McKenna (cont'd)

Carol was one of the best foster parents I have worked with in Marin County. She was very personable and caring. She was able to remember details of conversations we had and took the time to follow-up with me when I spoke to her about a personal matter. Carol was an amazing woman. We have lost a great foster parent and friend. I'm really going to miss her.—*Rosie Hernandez, Social Worker*



This story became most meaningful once I knew Carol had cancer. About 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years ago, she was the foster parent for a high needs child that was transferred to my case load. My first task was to find another placement because the child was getting too heavy and big, and the needs too high for Carol to continue to satisfy. Carol was very patient throughout the search, and was also very concerned about who the new foster parents would be. Once I finally found a candidate in Napa, Carol volunteered to help as much as possible with the transfer. She also asked for one more evening with the child to care for her and pack her properly. She told me that she bathed her and "packed all of her shoes" (the child's family had a habit of getting her new shoes on almost every visit). Throughout this time it always sounded to me like Carol wanted to continue to care for this child, but was unable to do so. What stood out for me the most is that Carol volunteered to drive the child all the way out to Napa. She told me later that she wanted to make sure that the new home was up-to-par. She enthusiastically reported later that the new home was like a "mansion in the hills" (which was not too far from the truth). Carol made sure this transition was as easy as possible for the child. I now look back and appreciate even more how much effort she put in at the time. Carol was a great person and I know that somewhere in her mind, this child will always remember her and everything that she did for her.--I know I do. -*Juan Funes, Social Worker*

Carol McKenna touched all our hearts. Some knew her far longer and far more intimately than I, no matter, she always seemed to touch us all one way or another with her wit and sincerity. What touched me the most about Carol was her selflessness when it came to Addy. She took Addy in and dedicated herself to making Addy's life richer and fuller in every way possible. Addy made such amazing progress it was hard to believe she was the same child I had met when she was a year old, sitting or lying with her head off to the side drooling. Carol vowed to bring Addy into her home and heart and not let her become institutionalized. She attained that goal. Addy is a thriving 4 year old running around reeking havoc. What a lucky little girl Addy is, having been fortunate enough to spend the time she did with Carol. Before her death, Carol made sure Addy was taken care of by her dear friends and that she will continue to have a wonderful loving family to share her life with. I say thank you Carol for that great big heart of yours. -*Andrea Pino, Foster Parent*

There are many interesting "Carol Stories" floating in our midst. It amazes me what a "conniving scoundrel" she was...in an endearing and loving kind of way. By the time you realized she had you in her trap, it was too late. She would get that triumphant grin on her face accompanied by that snicker of hers...you knew you were history! She was this way up until the end. In fact, while visiting her one evening, she lured me into getting Addy ready for bed. After enjoying lovingly making fun of my clumsiness...she sprung it on me. "David, you and Addy have such fun together. YOU SHOULD ADOPT ADDY!" After laughing and then realizing she was serious, we had a somewhat serious discussion about this. She tried to make the offer lucrative, so-to-speak. "My house comes with her!" Funny thing is...I think she loved Addy so much that she would have broken any ethical boundary at that time. She definitely was a maverick in her thinking. We will all miss her. Oh...and by the way...just in case you are wondering, I am not moving to Terra Linda. -*David Slotterback, Social Worker*

I did not know Carol for long, but I consider myself very fortunate to have known her and had the chance to work side by side. Carol's openness and cooperative spirit led many of us at CFS to feel like we had a special opportunity to improve our relationship with the Marin Foster Parent Association while she was President. Carol had a gift for making other people feel heard and understood, and for helping us recognize when we were taking ourselves too seriously. Carol's experience gave her great wisdom, which included a keen knowledge of how to make bureaucracies work better. I already miss her warmth and sense of humor. CFS has lost a great friend, and the children and families of Marin have lost a great caregiver and supporter. It is my hope to honor Carol by carrying her cooperative and collaborative spirit forward. -*Marty Graff, Social Worker*



Foster Parent Profile



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

This month, Kim Pollak volunteered to assist with the Foster Parent Profile. Below is her first foster parent profile. Thank you, Kim!

Foster Parent: *Sharon Skolnick-Bagnoli*
Interviewer: *Kim Pollak*

Why did you choose to be a foster parent?

I love children. I connect with them. I remember when I was 8 years old, promising myself that I would always remember what it was like to be a child. A lot of children need to be cared for, and I feel the need to care for some of them. Also, I missed having children. After a few days with a foster child, you get so wrapped up, so involved, it doesn't seem to matter if you gave birth to him or her or not. I also think my husband and I have good skills for this. We have a lot to give to kids.

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

I was born in Atlanta City. We moved to Fairfax County, Virginia, when I was three, and then to Baltimore until I went to college (Pratt Institute in New York City) when I was 16. I moved west in the 60's and lived in San Francisco

during that era, then went to grad school at the University of Hawaii in the early 70's where I studied fine art and later switched to educational communications and earned my master's degree. I am currently a graphic designer and a writer. I'm an artist at heart. I wrote a book of poetry in the realms of images and words. I wrote a non-fiction book called **Dreams of Tamalpais** that was published in 1989. I've collected decades of my poetry into an illustrated book called **Shiny Objects**, which is being published right now. I am also a new wife.

Can you tell me a bit about your husband?

My husband is a remarkable man. He's got the soul of an artist and a scientist. He works doing program management for an engineering company that constructs schools, among other things. He's very smart and sweet-natured. He loves cats and raises and collects bamboo. He's very spiritual and grateful for life. He's very good with children, and they love him.

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

I really believe in the importance of creative play, and I do it myself, even now. Because I am an artist, I go to that place of discovery. I share my insights with kids and, in turn, learn from them and help guide them. When tuning into a child, you have to take the time to connect with him or her, with anyone, really, child or adult. We are all in this world discovering it together. I can still be surprised, and then show somebody what's amazing to see ... and listen to what his or her perceptions are. Children share who they are and what they see without

guile and make life richer for the grownups around them.

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

Every child deserves to be empowered; to be seen in his or her full glory and helped to become the person he or she is inside. I'm glad there are other "shoulders to cry on" - other perceptive foster parents in the community. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and it feels like there is a village here, and that's really nice. There are some fine people in the social worker realm too. One suggestion: In my several years and various interactions with the CPS system and the County, I have heard the word *love* spoken fewer times than the fingers I have on one hand. Let's put some love into it. We actually already do, so then let's admit it. I'd like to see the entire process of foster care streamlined and softened on all levels. It would be better for the kids.

What 5 attributes best describe you?

Creative, innovative, perceptive, unconventional, respectful of life and the spectrum of human cultures and traditions. I try to see the bigger picture. I guess I'm a student of life.

The Marin Foster Parent Association (MFPA) is an organization comprised of licensed foster and adoptive parents in Marin County and members of the community interested in helping to achieve the goals and purposes of our association as stated below.

The primary objectives and purposes of the MFPA, as stated in the California State Foster Parent Association, Inc. bylaws are:

- A. To establish a local chapter of the California State Foster Parent Association bringing together all foster parents, agency personnel and interested community citizens who wish to work together for the same purposes as set forth below.
- B. To promote the general welfare of children that need protective care everywhere: at home, in the communities, in institutions and in public, private and religious schools.
- C. To develop a better understanding of the problem of foster home care by the persons and agencies involved in caring for children and the general public by encouraging and maintaining communications, and the interchange of ideas and cooperation between foster parents, county agencies, and the local communities.
- D. To encourage the training and education of personnel for work in the field of foster care, and to encourage the recruitment and retention of foster homes.
- E. To inform ourselves of the current information pertaining to the welfare of children.
- F. Notwithstanding the above statements, the chapter shall not, except to an insubstantial degree, engage in any activities or exercise any powers that are not in furtherance of the primary purpose.



Boxing Day Soup Group

I held soup group last month on Boxing Day, and I thought it might be interesting to all of you to learn what this holiday is about. Boxing Day has nothing to do with boxing up old things or getting rid of presents still in boxes. It is not about boxing the ears of those little pests who might be irritating us. It is not about putting all the boxes away or ridding the house of boxes by returning gifts still in boxes that you never wanted or needed in the first place. It is also referred to as St. Stephan's Day, and it has been celebrated in England and the commonwealth countries (Canada, Australia, etc) since the middle ages. It is thought to be named Boxing Day in deference to giving boxed gifts to the servant classes or public servants (such as postal workers etc). As (in the olden days) house servants did not get holidays like

Christmas off, they got the next day instead, thus Boxind Day became a legal holiday, and I liked the idea of anything being a holiday and really any reason to celebrate anything will work for me!!!! So for soup group I rolled up my sleeves and whipped up a yummy Seafood Chowder with salmon, cod, scallops and shrimp and invited foster friends over to eat and be merry. We all needed just a few more calories for the Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year holiday, and I did my best to provide. Again, almost more kids than parents attended. Luckily my wonderful Starchild did the entertaining of small people in the playroom while we schmoozed and slurped soup and ate crusty French bread at the dining room table. Attending were Christine Swain plus one, John and Laura Abramson, Alice Basch plus one, Rachel Norman plus one, Chris and Christine Andrews plus one, and myself plus six or seven. We discussed important Foster Parent Things and offered support and advice (we are all good at that). It was a lovely two hours. I will be cooking up something wonderful on the last Friday of January, just as we are all falling off our diets and quitting our New Years Resolutions. So Happy New Year, and I will see you January 30th at noon. Remember the support and mentorship and training we offer at Soup Group earns training hours for you so dont hesitate to join us. Kids and babes are welcome. It is not pot luck, and I love to see hungry faces. And Happy Boxing Day! -Mimi Katz

Due to lack of interest and space, the Foster Parent Exchange Program is being down sized. Currently, there is an infant swing, a stroller, a toddler car seat and clothes in various sizes looking for homes. If you can use any of these items, OR, if you are interested in taking on this project please contact Carol Ihlenburg at 507-1822.

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MARIN FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

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MFPA Membership Application

Name: _____

Complete Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

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

*Please mail completed form with membership fee to:

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

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