



# The Fostering Connection

A quarterly publication from the **Onondaga County Foster/Adoptive Parent Support Group**

Volume 1, Issue 3

December 2004

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## Inspirational Quips & Quotes

*"Many find that things can be done in a day if they don't always make that day tomorrow."*

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*"Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up."*

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*"A smile of encouragement at the right moment may act like sunlight on a closed-up flower; it may be the turning point for a struggling life."*

## ALERT! Post adoption services funding

Dear Friends: Even though the Gov vetoed the TANF preventive services funding, which supported post adoption services, and even though Senate and Assembly overrides are uncertain, it is still important to let decision makers know that post adoption services are vitally needed! Write now, right now! If you can write only one letter, it should go to:

Governor George Pataki  
Attention: MARK KISSINGER  
Senior Program Associate  
State Operations  
Executive Chambers  
State Capitol Room 245  
Albany, NY 12224

If you can write two letters, the second should go to:  
Joseph Bruno

Senate Majority Leader  
LOB Room 909  
Albany, NY 12247

If you can write three letters, the third should go to:

Sheldon Silver  
Speaker of The Assembly  
LOB Room 932  
Albany, NY 12248

Let them know that TANF dollars are vitally needed to support and sustain adoptive families. Providing adoption preservation services protects NY's investment in adoption and supports statewide efforts to achieve permanence for NY's foster children awaiting adoption.

Together we CAN make a difference. Thank you for caring.  
Judith Ashton, Executive Director  
NYS Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc.

## Website under construction

The Onondaga County Foster/Adoptive Family Support Group's website is under construction. We will let you know as soon as we have it up and running.

## Teenagers: Just give one a try.

### Top 10 reasons to Foster a Teenager

1. No diapers to change.
2. They sleep through the night.
3. They will be ready to move out sooner...but they can still visit.
4. They know how to set the time on your VCR/DVD player.
5. They can keep you up to date with the latest fashions
6. No more carpools: they can drive you places.
7. No bottles, formula, or burp rags required.
8. They can help around the house.
9. They can learn from you.
10. They can teach you how to run your computer.

Homefinding has a desperate need for foster families to take our teenagers. Think about it and give one a try.

## Operation Good Things

Every holiday season, NewsChannel 9 collects new, unwrapped gifts from the community and then distributes them to the children and senior citizens in the local hospitals. This year teaming with the OCFAPSG, WIXT has decided to collect duffel bags for all the children and teens in foster care. Our children arrive into care usually with few belongings, stuffed into a grocery or garbage bag. Sometimes our kids move from foster home to foster home or group home or just return home, once again with all their belonging stuffed in a trash bag. What message does this send to our kids? What does it do to their self-esteem?

Gary Thurston of Hayner Hoyt Construction has generously donated 500 duffel bags for our kids and is providing the warehouse space and manpower to stuff the bags. WIXT continues to collect things to stuff these duffel bags with to give our foster children a wonderful holiday. A flyer will soon be mailed out with details on distribution of these bags. Tentatively the pick up date is set for Friday December 17<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 to 9:00 pm and Saturday December 18<sup>th</sup> from 9am to noon. Watch your mail for details.

### Upcoming Events Calendar

- March 22 -** Support Group Meeting at 6:45pm Hazard Library, 1620 West Genesee Street, Syracuse Speaker: Karen Vedder on responsibilities of Law Guardians
- April 21 -** Support Group Meeting at 6:45pm Hazard Library, 1620 West Genesee Street, Syracuse Speaker: Karen Howard, BOCES – topic will be Special Education

## The Great Gilly Hopkins

The Redhouse Theater in conjunction with The Gifford Family Theater is currently performing a musical production of **The Great Gilly Hopkins**. The play is based on a Newberry award-winning book written by Katherine Paterson.

This is a play about an eleven-year-old foster child who tries to cope with her longings and fears as she schemes against everyone who tries to be friendly. Gilly has been placed in more foster homes than she can remember, and she has disliked them all. She has a countywide reputation for being brash, brilliant, and completely unmanageable. So when she is to live with the Trotters (by far the strangest family yet) Gilly decides to put her sharp mind to work. Before long she's devised an elaborate scheme to get her real mother to come rescue her. But the rescue doesn't work out and the great Gilly Hopkins is left thinking that maybe life with the Trotters wasn't so bad....

As a courtesy, The Redhouse and The Gifford Family Theaters invited Onondaga County foster families to attend their final dress rehearsals free of charge on November 28<sup>th</sup> and November 29<sup>th</sup>. The play is open to the general public with shows on December 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 28, 29, and 30. Performances begin at 7:00pm. Saturdays will have shows at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm. General admission tickets are \$14.00, students or seniors \$10.00. For more information please contact:

The Redhouse  
201 S. West Street  
Syracuse, NY 13202  
425-0405  
[www.theredhouse.org](http://www.theredhouse.org)

## NATIONAL FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION SCHOLARSHIP

The National Foster Parent Association Scholarship Fund was established to benefit foster, adoptive and birth children of foster parent members (parent membership application and fee can be sent with scholarship application). Five \$1000 scholarships are awarded annually. Each scholarship may be for college, vocational training or other educational pursuits. Applications are available from the NFPA National Office or on the NFPA website. Applicants must be high school seniors. The application deadline is March 31<sup>st</sup> of each year.

Website: [www.NFPAinc.org](http://www.NFPAinc.org)  
Phone: 800-557-5238  
Email: [info@NFPAinc.org](mailto:info@NFPAinc.org)

# Keeping Good Records

As parents it is always hard to find the time to keep good records. I know at one point I considered giving up and telling my youngest birth child that his baby book was destroyed in a fire. A fire that mysteriously only consumed his baby book and nothing else. All joking aside, foster parents need to keep good records.

A lifebook is one of the records you should be keeping for your foster child. A lifebook is the child's story. It should contain such vital information as date, time and place of birth. A copy of the Birth certificate and Social Security number should be included. Also, Birth parent information as well as any information on siblings should be put in the book. Pictures, school information, and immunization records are also good things to include. I would encourage you to take pictures of your foster child as early in the placement as possible and to send a disposable camera on any parental or sibling visits to capture those memories for your child. I recently had a foster parent tell me that she regretted not doing this because the birth mother disappeared after a few visits and her daughter now has no pictures to remember her birth mother by. A lifebook should travel from home to home with a child but I would encourage you to make a photocopy for your records, in case the original is lost. The caseworker may also like a copy for the records. This may sound like a lot of work but this information sometimes get lost when a child has multiple placements or is adopted by a different family than their foster parents.

The second record I would encourage you to keep is a journal. A separate one for each child would be a good idea. In this journal you would record, and date, concerns and problems, behaviors, child's reactions to visits, milestones, changes in visits, etc. I personally have never been really great at this but recently learned my lesson when I had to count on my foster children's caseworker to recall information I had provided to him over a year before.

For those of us that are journalizing challenged I have a recommendation. Keep a good calendar. If a visit is cancelled, record it. If your child has a visitor, write it down. If your foster child is sick, record it. Save your calendar. Pretty basic right? You already probably do this.

Now for the concerns and problems part. E-mail. If you have a concern email your caseworker. It takes less time than playing phone tag and you can send email at two in the morning, you don't have to wait for office hours. The written word is far more likely to be taken seriously. You have time to review what you have written. You don't get that option when you make "hysterical foster parent" calls. You also can send a copy to the caseworker's supervisor if you desire. Save a copy of the email on your hard drive and print a copy for your files. Anyone who has ever fried a hard drive knows you have to have a backup. Also save and print any responses from the caseworker. I would encourage you to also ask your caseworker to put any changes in visits,

instructions etc. in email form, not just verbal instructions, so that you can print and file that. If the caseworker doesn't feel they have time for this I suggest that you summarize your phone conversations in email and ask them to merely acknowledge what you have written. If you keep a file of your correspondence you will have a pretty good record of your interactions with the department and will be able to pinpoint exactly when the visit schedule changed or when a visit went bad.

Photographs are the third records I am going to ask you to keep. I always get double prints to give to the birth family, an older foster child, or save for a younger child who has no family contact. I know of one adoptive mother who was thrilled to have a complete photo record of her daughter's life before she joined their family.

I know that record keeping takes time, something we have very little of, but these records will mean a lot to your foster child as they wonder about their past and may protect you later down the road if there are ever any questions.

## How To Know If You Are Ready to Have Children

### **Toy Test:**

Obtain a 55-gallon box of Legos. (If Legos are not available, you may substitute roofing tacks or broken glass.) Have a friend spread them all over the house. Put on a blindfold. Try to walk to the bathroom or kitchen. Do not scream. (This could wake a child at night.)

### **Grocery Store Test:**

Borrow one or two small animals (goats are best) and take them with you as you shop at the grocery store. Always keep them in sight and pay for anything they eat or damage.

### **Dressing Test:**

Obtain one large, unhappy, live octopus. Stuff into a small net bag making sure that all arms stay inside.

### **Feeding Test:**

Obtain a large plastic milk jug. Fill halfway with water. Suspend from the ceiling with a stout cord. Start the jug swinging. Try to insert spoonfuls of soggy cereal (such as Fruit Loops or Cheerios) into the mouth of the jug, while pretending to be an airplane. Now dump the contents of the jug on the floor.

### **Night Test:**

Prepare by obtaining a small cloth bag and fill it with 8 - 12 pounds of sand. Soak it thoroughly in water. At 8:00 PM begin to waltz and hum with the bag until 9:00 PM. Lay down your bag and set your alarm for 10:00 P.M. Get up, pick up your bag, and sing every song you have ever heard.

### **Final Assignment:**

Find a couple who already has a small child. Lecture them on how they can improve their discipline, patience, tolerance, toilet training, and child's table manners. Suggest many ways they can improve. Emphasize to them that they should never allow their children to run riot. Enjoy this experience. It will be the last time you will have all the answers.

# Families Need the Whole Truth

from Spring 2004 Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)

by Diane Riggs and Joe Kroll

While policies increasingly favor heightened information sharing between child welfare agencies and foster and adoptive parents, practice often lags behind. Confidentiality directives hold such sway for some that child information does not flow freely between workers or to children's caregivers. Now, concerns about privacy mandates in HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) are inspiring even less sharing—a trend we find deeply troubling since full disclosure about a child's medical, educational, and social background is key to adoption success.

## Why Information Matters

When it comes to successful parenting, more information is better. In *Promoting Successful Adoptions*, Susan Smith and Jeanne Howard list "knowing the child's history" as a factor tied to adoption stability. Richard Barth and Marianne Berry, in *Adoption and Disruption*, observe that "families with less accurate preplacement information about the child will have less realistic expectations about behavior, resulting in long-term frustration for both parent and child." In fact, Barth and Berry found that "better information" was clearly associated with fewer disruptions.

Children adopted from foster care have endured pain and loss. To even begin to prepare for and address the child's needs and behaviors, parents must thoroughly understand the child's history. Parents cannot effectively care for and bond with new sons and daughters knowing only fragments of their children's past.

Disclosure is in agencies' best interest too. Workers would certainly rather not watch families suffer, see placements disrupt, or be charged with withholding crucial information from parents. Wrongful adoption lawsuits hurt agencies and workers, and cannot make up for families' pain.

## Disclosure Laws and Standards

The federal Social Security Act mandates that state agencies collect complete health, education, and other information about foster children. Each time a child changes placements, the agency must supply updated records to the new parent(s). Most states also have disclosure laws and policies. Likely places include the state's children's code, family law code, social services code, or other adoption-related statute.\* "As a general rule," Madelyn Freundlich (co-author of *Wrongful Adoption: Law, Policy and Practice*) states, "adoption professionals must disclose [to pre-adoptive parents] all known, material information about a child's health, social, and other background."

Ideally, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) proposes in *Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services*, agencies should supply pre-adoptive parents with complete medical, mental health, developmental, psychological, educational, and social information about the child, as well

as his or her immediate birth family, and other birth relatives back several generations. CWLA also calls for detail, asking for instance that agencies disclose the child's prenatal care (including drugs or medications used during pregnancy) plus genetic links to diseases or disorders or positive family traits like longevity. Under CWLA's standards, agencies would offer adopting parents enough information to fairly assess their ability to parent specific children and gain a realistic sense of needed supports and services. Adoptees would be able to know and own their family history, and be able to provide valuable background information to medical and mental health providers.

## HIPAA

HIPAA has gained increasing attention since April 2003 as compliance dates have brought the law's privacy provisions into reality for "covered entities." As one legal expert asserts, HIPAA regulations are "chock full of ambiguities" concerning child welfare agencies' responsibilities under the law. Does HIPAA prohibit agencies from releasing identifiable health information about foster children to pre-adoptive and adoptive parents? Are child welfare agencies covered entities?

In a February 17th Information Memorandum, HHS states that "[s]ome title IV-E child welfare agencies may be defined as health care providers." The memo concludes, however, that "HHS and the Children's Bureau cannot determine whether all child welfare agencies are subject to HIPAA's regulations." In short, most state agencies have had to decide for themselves whether HIPAA regulations apply. Unfortunately, many agencies that try to follow HIPAA have begun to limit key medical information disclosure to pre-adoptive parents.

## Advice for Agencies

HIPAA regulations assert that the federal law supercedes state laws, unless the state law is (among other things) "serving a compelling need related to health, safety, and welfare." To ensure that your agency's practices are legal, and children's best interests are being honored:

**Continue to seek clarification about how or if HIPAA applies to your agency.** The New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc. wrote to the State Office of Children and Family Services last summer about HIPAA mandates. In return, the deputy commissioner explained how, in New York, HIPAA does *not* prohibit "protected health information" from being disclosed to foster and adoptive parents. If asked, your state commissioner may come to the same conclusion.

**Follow state and federal laws.** HIPAA may apply, but other laws do too. As stated above, the Social Security Act outlines foster care and adoption disclosure requirements. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act governs child protection disclosure rules. And, as outlined in *Making Good Decisions about Confidentiality in Child Welfare*, confidentiality exceptions are allowed to provide child and family services, supply information to caregivers, and protect children from future abuse.

**Work to prevent wrongful adoption actions.** Kathleen Hogan Morrison, an Illinois adoption attorney, offers this advice. First, workers must actively seek out birth and birth family records. Second, instead of simply summarizing information about the child, workers should copy the original documents for adopting parents. Finally, agencies should establish a system for learning about and complying with relevant laws.

## Thoughts for Parents

When a child is about to join an adoptive family, parents must learn all they can. "Information gathering," observe Regina

Kupecky and Gregory Keck in *Adopting the Hurt Child*, "is the most important step prospective parents must make." To maximize chances for a successful adoption:

#### **Appreciate the value of the child's background information.**

Complete disclosure is crucial for early diagnosis, to address the child's needs, to qualify for support services, and to avert possible problems down the road.

**Acquaint yourself with state and federal laws and agency rules.** Protect your family by learning about services you are entitled to receive, and then advocate for what you need.

**Ask questions and listen carefully.** Quell the inner voice that says, "This will never happen to us." Ask lots of questions and record details that workers, therapists, teachers, and former foster parents volunteer about your child.

#### **Conclusion**

The federal government is duty-bound to safeguard children's and families' well-being. As written, unfortunately, HIPAA regulations have caused some agencies to fear penalties for inappropriate health information disclosure more than the potentially dire consequences of inadequately preparing families for adoption.

To promote families' well-being, the government must clarify ways in which HIPAA applies to child welfare practice, and amend provisions that adversely affect children's best interests. Waiting children need families well-equipped to help them overcome troubling pasts and reach for promising futures.

\* The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (at [naic.acf.hhs.gov/laws/state.cfm](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/laws/state.cfm)) has a searchable state-by-state listing of statute citations that deal with information access.

## Foster Parents as Recruiters...an update

The Foster Parents as Recruiters Project was started in 1998. It is an innovative recruitment approach that uses experienced foster parents who have been trained to identify and recruit new foster parents from the community. Staff from the Professional Development Program at Rockefeller College, University at Albany and the New York Office of Children and Family Services established this program in Onondaga County in December 2003.

The group of recruiters has changed slightly since it's inception on December 30, 2003, but the purpose is still the same... to bring more families into the foster family system. Many would ask...why...why have foster parents recruit new foster parents. The answer is simple... most foster parents have the experience and background to explain to potential candidates how the system works, what are the pros and cons of the system and most importantly how the children in our care have benefited from being in our homes. How we, as foster parents have nurtured and cared for these children as if they are our own because in some small way...they are. The recruiters group does just that, they have gone out, talked about fostering, met with potential foster parents, discussed issues with potential foster parents and have led them to contact the Department of Social Services,

Children's Division. From there, we hope for the best and the department takes over but those recruiters are always there if needed. When new contacts call into the Children's Division, they are offered the opportunity to contact one of the foster parent recruiters. This allows potential Foster parents that ability to talk to actual foster parents instead of a social worker.

The one-year mark for the recruiters will be complete at the end of January, at least as far as tracking of contacts is concerned. The following numbers are current to date and reflect the benefit to having the foster parents as recruiters program in place. So far the recruiters have had 23 inquires and 2 from outside Onondaga County, 4 families have been certified, 2 families are in the home study phase, 4 families are in training now and another family starts in December. Considering that the county certified 50 new homes last year....I think the recruiters are definitely making progress!!!

## Survey Time Again...

These studies are being conducted at The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work by Ruth G. McRoy, Principal Investigator.

1. We are looking for families who:
    - are currently in the process of adopting a child from the foster care system,
    - first time adopters,
    - are early in the application process,
    - not trying to adopt a foster child who is in your home, and
    - do not currently have a child placed in your home for adoption.
  2. We are looking for adoptive families:
    - who have adopted a non-relative child from the foster care system 18 months to 5 years ago,
    - whose adopted child was age 6 or older at the time of adoptive placement,
    - in which the child's adoption remains intact,
    - in which you remain committed to parenting the adopted child, and
    - whose adopted child is under the age of 18 at the time of participation in the study.
  3. We are looking for families who:
    - applied to adopt a child from the foster care system,
    - have chosen to discontinue the adoption process at any point from application to completed home study and awaiting placement
    - were trying to adopt for the first time, and
    - applied and discontinued within the past 12 -18 months.
- If you are interested in participating or learning more about the study, please contact us:  
Project office: (866) 471-7372 or by faxing: (512) 471-9514  
Susan Ayers-Lopez, Project Manager: (512) 471-0550 or by email: susanal@mail.utexas.edu  
Ruth G. McRoy, Principal Investigator: (512) 471-0551 or by e-mail: r.meroy@mail.utexas.edu

**ARTBOY  
DESIGN**

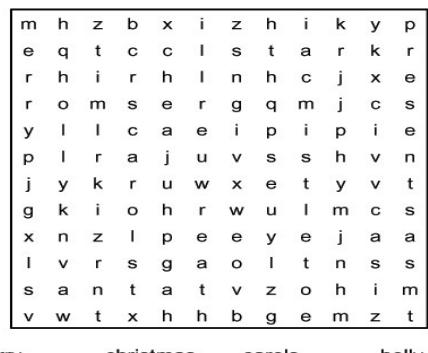
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**GRAPHIC DESIGN**  
**ILLUSTRATION**

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BRENNEMAN II

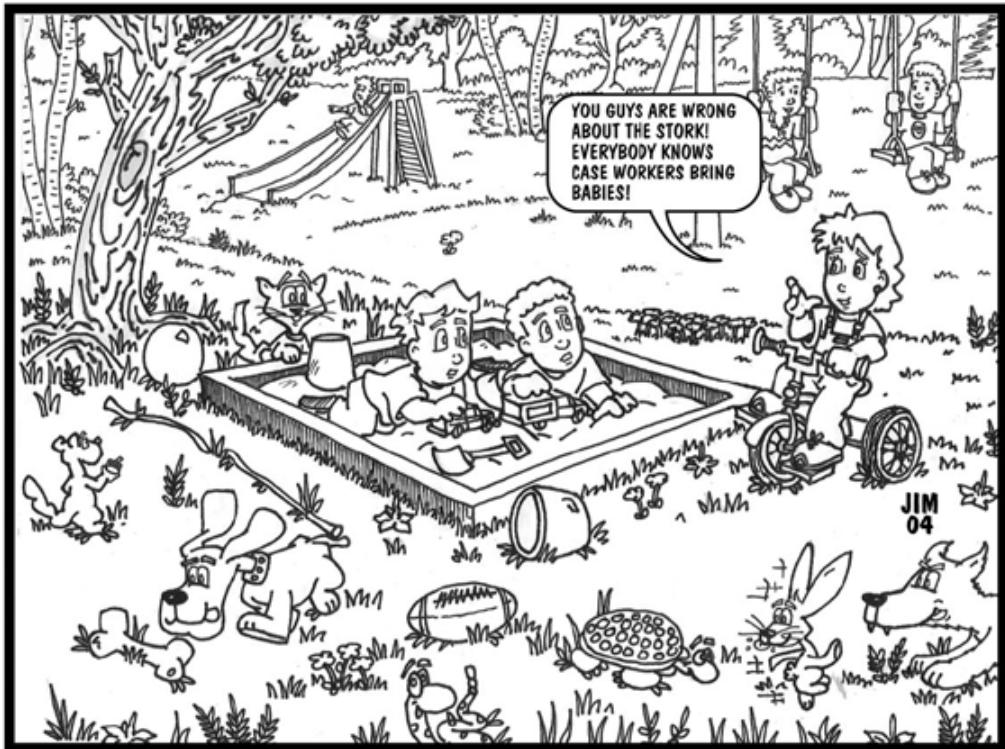
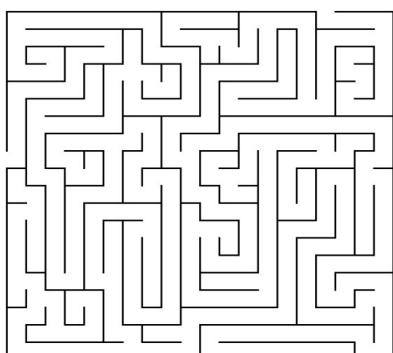
[mumfred@msn.com](mailto:mumfred@msn.com) (315)-673-3956

A Special Thanks to ARTBOY Design  
For donating the new cartoon for each  
Newsletter! Thanks Jim!!

### Christmas Word Search



**Santa is lost! Can you  
help him find his way  
back to the North Pole?**



## The Kids Corner

### Jokes About Food!

Why is a tomato round and red?



*Because if it was long and green it would be a cucumber!*

How do you make an apple puff?  
*Chase it round the kitchen!*



What did one tomato say to the other?  
*You go on ahead and I'll ketchup!*



What's worse than finding a worm  
in your apple?



*Finding half a worm in your apple!*

What did baby corn say  
to mommy corn?  
*Where's popcorn?*



### Who we are...

The OCFAPSG was founded for the benefit of all foster/adoptive parents and children in their care. You are the group, the organization, the members that make the OCFAPSG what it is. If there are any questions, concerns or comments regarding this organization, please feel free to contact any of the Board members listed below.

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