



The PEN

Parent Empowerment Newsletter

MAY 2014

Department of Social Services

Welcome to the Parent Empowerment Newsletter!

This newsletter is intended to help educate, support and connect foster, adoptive, resource, kinship families and all those who care for and support the youth in San Luis Obispo County! The newsletter is published quarterly. If you are interested in submitting an article for publication or would like to join our mailing list, please contact PENnewsletter@co.slo.ca.us.

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

After a brief winter hiatus, during which I had an adorable baby girl, I'm happy to be back and jumping into all the programs that support our awesome foster parents! We have lots of exciting events coming up:

May is National Foster Care Month and we will be commemorating this important month at the Board of Supervisors on May 13, 2014. Join us at 1:00 on May 13, at the County Government Center, 1055 Monterey Street in San Luis Obispo.

The Foster Parent Academy is on May 16 at the Atascadero Bible Church (6225 Atascadero Ave) from 9:00 am – 2:00 pm. Dr. Thomas Wylie, will be our guest speaker. Childcare and meals are provided free of cost. Please RSVP to Arya Jones at 781-1753.

The Foster Parent Association has the following events scheduled for the year: Meeting - May 6, 6:30-8:00 pm, Rm 101 of DSS in SLO. Annual BBQ for all foster parents, Aug 5 at Santa Margarita Park. Meeting – Nov 4, 6:30-8:00 pm. Holiday party – Dec 13 at Cuesta College.

Available for all foster parents, the Clothing Closet is continuously open and is stocked with boys and girls clothes, sizes preemie - 14/16. They also have lots of shoes, blankets, bottles, some diapers and many other baby items. Anyone in need can call Bonni Potter at 712-7622. Bonni is running the Cry of the Heart Ministry and although they are not currently doing the Date Night, she would love to have people avail themselves of the clothing closet.

In other exciting news, we will now be offering the chance for you to get one hour of training credit by simply reading the PEN, filling out the short questionnaire on the back and mailing in your answers. By providing your name on the brief questionnaire, you will be credited with one hour of training. Each foster parent is required to have eight hours total of training each year to keep their license current. Also, we will be introducing a new feature called the "ILP Corner" in our next issue. This will be dedicated to issues of interest to our transitional-age youth and their family members and will be written by our ILP staff. And last, but not least, we have received the first wave of responses from the Resource Family Survey. Due to the large amount of info we've collected, I'll be sharing some of the results in a piece-meal format. Please take the time to fill out and return this survey in six months when we send it out again. The results are very illuminating and help us better serve your needs and interests.

Arya Jones

Join the FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION

Interested in supporting foster care in our county? We would love to have you join the Foster Parent Association. Membership is open to all caregivers, including FFAs and relative caregivers. Businesses are also able to support the association. For more information, or to join, call Mimi Feliciano-Hix at 546-3156 or email her at mfelicia@cuesta.edu.

Inside this issue:

Foster Parent Association	1
Resource Family Survey Results	2
Foster Parent Mentor Program	3
Tips for Parents And Caregivers	3
Respite	4
Helpful Information And Ideas	4
Event Calendar	4
It's Time To Go Green!	4



RESOURCE FAMILY SURVEY RESULTS

By Arya Jones

The Resource Family Satisfaction Survey was sent out as a way to gauge the services provided by the Department of Social Services to foster parents. For each statement, the respondents had the following options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, or N/A. They were also given the opportunity to comment after each question.

The first section of the Resource Family Satisfaction Survey that we'd like to highlight is the "Support Services Overall" section. When asked to rate the Department of Social Services on whether "The agency is meeting my overall needs as a foster parent," 59% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 23% were neutral, 12% disagreed, and 6% said it wasn't applicable. When asked to respond to "The agency is sensitive to issues of race and culture in working with me and the child(ren) placed with me," 42% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, 12% were neutral, and 23% found it to be not applicable. In response to the statement "The agency is meeting the needs of the child(ren) in my home," 23% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, 36% were neutral, 6% disagreed, and 12% found it to be not applicable. The statement "I am satisfied with my overall experience as a foster parent" had the following responses: 36% strongly agreed, 29% agreed, 23% were neutral, 6% disagreed, and 6% found it not applicable.

When asked for three ways the agency could improve its support to you in your work as foster parents, the following were mentioned: more training on caring for drug exposed children, esp. behavior management during the school years; increased activities for pre-teens and teenagers in our communities; exposing new foster parents to more stories from birth parents during PRIDE, decreasing the biases against birth parents; education/school; daycare options; better communication between social workers and foster parents; more appreciation of foster parents by social workers; follow through on referrals and recommendations; real help addressing behavioral problems; making it easier to move up to a higher level of pay when taking children with special needs; helping foster parents understand how/why certain relatives are cleared for children to live with them.

When asked to list the biggest challenges currently facing foster parents, we received this feedback: lack of post-adoption services, phone calls not being returned, old age, challenges of guardianship, and seeing kids put back into hard situations with birth parents, then being removed again and going to several different homes; it is hard to watch kids get hurt.

Overall, there seemed to be fairly positive feedback about the support services currently offered. It is obvious that there are many trainings that foster parents would find helpful and we are currently working with the FKCE program to bring in new and relevant trainings. Another area we will be working on, with the joint help of foster parents and social services staff through the Quality Parenting Initiative program, is improving the communication, understanding and appreciation between foster parents and social workers. We appreciate everyone who took the time to fill out this survey and turn it in. The results are very meaningful to us, as they assist us in finding areas of improvement to which we can turn our attention and efforts in order to better serve you, our foster parents who do the difficult work of caring for children in your home!



An online family resource center with a current list of parenting classes and support services in SLO County

Un centro de recursos familiares en la Internet,
con una lista de talleres para padres y servicios
de apoyo en el condado de SLO

Information (805) 543-3700



Foster Parent Mentor Program

By Cindy MacLean, QPI Coordinator



In addition to the joy and satisfaction that you experience as a foster parent, there is also much to learn, navigate and problem solve. Wouldn't it be nice if there was an experienced foster parent available to guide you through the process?

Thanks to San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services there is a mentor program. The program provides much-needed direction and personal support to new foster parents—because we want you to be comfortable and confident as you fill this valuable role in a young person's life. Mentors are seasoned foster parents who know the ins and outs of the system. They are committed individuals who develop a relationship with newly licensed foster parents during their first year of service. With their guidance, new foster parents quickly learn how to access services and resources

as well as address issues ranging from coordinating and communicating with case workers to managing children with challenging behaviors. Mentors understand how difficult it is to care for someone else's child in your home, and this ability to empathize and share their own foster care experiences is what makes them uniquely effective.

For more information, please contact Arya Jones at (805) 781-1753.

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Everyday challenges are part of life and happen all the time. Providing your love and support is the most important step in helping your little one develop the confidence to overcome anything he faces.

Sesame Street's *Little Children, Big Challenges* initiative provides tips and strategies to help you and your child (ages 2 to 5) navigate challenges and build lifelong skills for resilience.

Calming Down

When your child is feeling frustrated or uneasy, breathing and coming up with a plan can help him to feel better. Here's how:

Breathe: Encourage your child to put his hands on his belly and slowly take three deep breaths.

Think: Help your child come up with plans to solve his problem.

Do: Together, choose a plan and try it out.

Helping Your Child Cope with Big Feelings

Encourage your child to share her feelings, and comfort her with your words and actions.

- Help your child to name her feelings. Ask questions to help her open up. You might notice her frowning and say, "I see that you're frowning. Did something happen today that made you feel sad?"
- Build your child's sense of security by letting her know you're thinking about her. You might leave a note in her lunchbox or give her two kisses and a hug at bedtime each night.

Practicing Patience

As your child learns fun ways to pass the time and be patient, it will get easier for him to wait. Try these ideas:

- Give your child a special challenge, such as spying things that are blue, counting people in line, or making up a story about something he sees.
- Do a dance or sing a song with your child to pass the time.

Helping Your Child to Overcome Mistakes

Making mistakes will be less upsetting as your child learns to control her emotions.

- Remind your child that the way to get better at something is to practice doing it. Remind her of other things she's gotten good at because she practiced.
- Be a role model for your child, and let her know that everyone makes mistakes! When you confront your own mistakes, try to be positive and think about a plan to try again. Let her hear you say aloud, "First I'll do this, and then I'll do..."

Some children and families must cope with more difficult challenges. On SesameStreet.org/Challenges you'll find guidance and strategies to help your child with situations such as

- mean or aggressive behavior,
- bullying,
- sibling rivalry, and
- relocation.

For more tips and strategies to help your child build lifelong resilience skills: Explore SesameStreet.org/Challenges. Download the **FREE** *Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame* app. Watch the playlist at [Youtube.com/SesameInCommunities](https://www.youtube.com/SesameInCommunities) "Sesame Street®", "Sesame Workshop®", and associated characters, trademarks, and design elements are owned by Sesame Workshop. © 2013 Sesame Workshop. All Rights Reserved.

Helpful Information & Ideas

Respite

As the business of life and being a foster parent collide, remember that you can use a babysitter or other caregiver any time you need a break. If you're going to be gone for less than 24 hrs, the use of a babysitter falls under the "Prudent Parent" guidelines, meaning that anyone you deem appropriate to watch your children, given their specific needs and ages, is fine.

If you will be gone between 24 and 72 hours, it is considered "respite" and you can find your own provider (a family member, family friend, etc.). That person does need to be cleared through DSS, which involves a physical clearance, background check, and livescan (i.e. fingerprinting). We do not currently have a list of respite providers for our county as it is a constantly changing group of people, but if you are in need of a respite provider, you can work with your social worker. Consider other licensed foster parents, family members, and the concurrent plan family of children placed in your home.

An absence of over 72 hours constitutes a placement change and in that case children must be placed in a licensed foster home. The department will work with you to make a placement change of that duration.



Foster Care Web Resources



iFoster offers a free membership program for discounts and deals at thousands of national and local retailers, grocery stores, healthcare providers (medical, dental and vision), restaurants, movie theatres, and attractions. The discounts come in four basic forms: online discounts, coupons, and savings passes, prepaid discounts, and affiliate programs. The redemption method for specific discounts is outlined on the iFoster website for each retailer.

iFoster plans to launch other programs in the future focused on providing opportunities and experiences for children in foster care.

Who can become an iFoster Member?

Transition age youth (16-21 years)

Family (foster, NREFM, relative, guardian, adoptive) or Organizations supporting children in foster care (e.g. group home, transitional housing, CASA)

Visit the iFoster website at <http://www.ifoster.org/> for more information and to sign-up.

For a calendar of local events in your area, check out the following websites:
<http://www.ksby.com/calendar/> <http://www.newtimeslo.com/calendar.php>

QUESTIONS FOR ONE TRAINING HOUR

True or False: Experienced foster parents can become mentors to newly licensed resource families through the Department of Social Services.

True or False: You can help your child handle big feelings by asking questions about his/her day and helping him/her name the feelings.

True or False: A 14 year old youth can become a member of the iFoster Program.

Foster Parent Name and Phone # _____

Please mail to:

Department of Social Services, P.O. Box 8119, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8119, Attn: Arya Jones



It is Time to Go Green!

If you are receiving this newsletter in hard copy form please consider "going green" and let us email the PEN and other mailings to you. Save a tree, save the time and energy it takes to mail hard copies. It is quick and easy. Just email Lisa Rivera at rivera@co.slo.ca.us. Please put "Going Green" in the subject line and she will get you "green" for the next month's mailings!

Thank you for your support!

