



Newsletter

Valuing Identity, Promoting Advocacy and
Mobilizing Community
to better serve children and families
in the foster care system.

(810) 936-5702 www.ifosterhope.com

More than “Just the Caregiver” By: Tina Vercelli

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

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

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

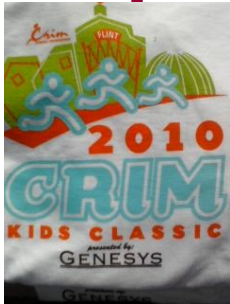
Suddenly, I was approached by a older man in a gray suit. He looked at me, then the children, then in a gruff voice asked, “Are these the Franklin* children?” I hesitantly replied, “Yes.” not knowing who was asking the question. Before I could ask this stranger just who he was and just why he wanted to know, he quickly said, “And you are the CAREGIVER?” The feeling of contempt stuck to the words as they hung in the air, as if it pained him to even ask the question. It was obvious that he saw me as nothing more than an employee, paid to care for other people’s children. As I was replying that I was the foster parent, he swiftly turned away, moving on to

yet another group of people. It wasn’t until it was our turn to enter the courtroom that I discovered that this man, who never even bothered to introduce himself, was the attorney assigned to represent my foster children.

After the hearing, I approached the attorney. I introduced myself to him, and asked if we could set up a meeting so he could meet the children and discuss the case. In the same curt, gruff voice I had experienced before, he looked at me and said, “I don’t need to talk to you, you are JUST THE CAREGIVER.”

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

(con’t next page)



More than “Just the Caregiver” (con’t)



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

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

Good foster parents make a point to become knowledgeable about the issues that their foster children face. So many

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

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

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

(con't on next page)

Melted Crayon Stained Glass Window

This melted crayon 'stained glass' window amazes kids because the finished project is so beautiful.

What you'll need: Black construction paper, Waxed paper, Crayons or crayon pieces in fall colors, Glue, Scissors, Iron (*requires adult supervision*)

How to make it:

1. Take black construction paper and cut it into 5" x 5" squares.
2. With two pieces of paper together, trace a leaf on the top square and then cut out the leaf with the two pieces together. The squares will be solid around the edges with a leaf pattern cut out of the center.
3. Next shave crayons using the colors of fall leaves. Using a warm iron, melt the crayon shavings between two pieces of wax paper. Then cut down the wax paper to fit between the two squares of construction paper.
4. To assemble the window, place one square of construction paper on the table and glue your wax paper *glass* to that square. Then place the second square over the first square making sure your leaf pattern matches up and glue the two squares together.



Foster Parent Support Group & Training



September 9th - 6:00pm, October 14th - 6:00pm

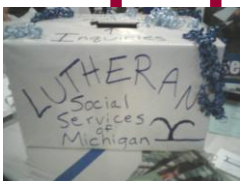
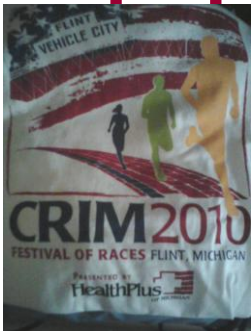
September: Create a Foster Care Binder – all supplies included
October: Working with Birth Family to Aid Reunification

Ignite Flint Church (corner of Dort & Hemphill – Flint)

Child Care for the kids*, Great Conversation and Training for you, Refreshments for all!

***Please RSVP to reserve child care. 810.936.5702**

More than “Just the Caregiver” (con’t)



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

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

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

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

5. When having to deal with more narrow-minded member of the team, be calm, but persistent. Don’t be afraid to step up the chain of command in order to get the services and attention that the child

needs. Everyone has a boss! Attorneys have to abide by a code of ethics outlined by their state bar association. They also have to ultimately answer to the presiding judge on the case. Doctor’s have a code of ethics that they have to follow as well. Don’t be afraid to seek out a second opinion, if you don’t like how the child’s needs are being met.

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

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

Apple Printing

What you'll need:

- Apples
- Paint (washable poster paint for paper, fabric paints for fabric projects)
- Paper plate, shallow tray, or wide paint brushes
- Something to print on, like paper
- Newspapers to protect the table
- Knife to cut the apple

How to make it:

1. Apple printing is always fun: there are two very different prints you can get by cutting apples in half through the middle OR from the top to bottom.
2. You can cut them in half through the stem, dip them in red and green paint, and make a very nice-looking collage of apple shapes. Cutting them through the middle makes a circle stamp with a star in the middle.
3. To paint on a t-shirt or tote, put a thick layer of paper inside the shirt/tote to prevent the paint from bleeding through to the back of the fabric.
4. An easy and very effective project is to decorate a plain tote with apple stamps cut from top to bottom (making an apple shape) in a horizontal line around the tote.
5. You can make a wreath by using two colors of green paint and apples cut through the middle (to make circles with 'star' centers). Then take a sponge, cut a triangle (for 1/2 of the bow) and dip it into red paint - add the bow. To make dark green paint, add a little black paint at a time to some green paint.
6. You can also make a fun gift for a parent, grandparent or caregiver by brushing the paint onto the children's hands and decorating the shirt or tote with those special handprints.



Meal Planning Made Easy

Check out allrecipes.com! I have been using it as an easy and cheap way to meal plan. Each week I gather (or find online) the local grocery ads. I look for great deals on meat or other main dish ingredients. Then type them each into the ingredient search section of the website and wahla, hundreds of yummy recipes appear! Then I find a recipe that fits my taste buds and time constraints, save it to my recipe box and add the ingredients to my shopping list. All with a few clicks of my mouse!

FOSTERHOPE
identity . advocacy . community . ifosterhope.com



Be sure to visit our website for more upcoming events and resources for foster parents and children!

www.ifosterhope.com 810.936.5702