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NJ•ARCH Features:

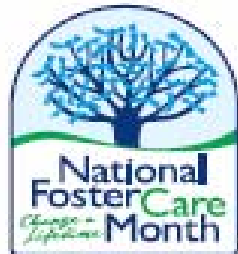
- Chat Rooms
- Lending Library
- Warm Line
- Resource Directory
- Buddy Mentors
- Support Group Advocacy
- Upcoming Events
- Speakers Bureau



CHILDREN'S AID AND FAMILY SERVICES, INC.

www.cafsnj.org

May is Foster Care Awareness Month



CHANGE A LIFETIME

Take a foster family to lunch or send a thank you note to people you know who are involved with foster care. Those are just a couple of the ideas suggested in the National Foster Care Month kits prepared by the Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support. 1

Every day, there are 518,000 children and youth living in foster care because their own parents cannot take care of them. We as a community must address the needs of these children, who require stable and secure homes until they can either return to their parents or establish a lifelong connection to a nurturing adult. 2

Thirteen national organiza-

tions, including the Casey Foundation, Child Welfare League of America and the National Association of Social Workers of America, represent over 250,000 individuals and providers involved with National Foster Care Month.

The focus of this effort is to call all Americans to take action on behalf of the children and youth in foster care and to make certain Americans know how they can make a difference in their own community throughout the year. Although each year the campaign should be growing, only 28 State Proclamations were recorded in 2005 verses the 41 in 2004. New Jersey was not one of the states that proclaimed Foster Care Month in 2005. Help us get the word out! We need to

do a better job in recognizing our foster parents.

For more information on National Foster Care Month, log onto: <http://www.fostercaremonth.org/About/>

1 http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/articles.cfm?section_id=7&issue_id=2001-05

2 <http://www.fostercaremonth.org/About/>

(Continued on page 2)

DID YOU KNOW?

- *NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH ORIGINATED IN 1988*
- *THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE IS 28 MONTHS*
- *THE AVERAGE AGE OF A CHILD IN FOSTER CARE IS 8.8 YEARS OLD*
- *MOST CHILDREN ARE PLACED DUE TO PARENTAL ABUSE OR NEGLECT*
- *ABUSE AND NEGLECT IS ESTIMATED TO COST SOCIETY APPROXIMATELY \$94 BILLION ANNUALLY*



The following are ideas in how to celebrate National Foster Care Month:

Share your Heart:

- Help a foster care program in your state. Your contribution to an agency could mean a brighter and safer tomorrow for children and youth.
- Mentor a young person. Research shows that children and youth with mentors earn higher grades and improve their relationships with friends and families.

- Donate goods such as suitcases, books, games, computers, sports equipment, musical instruments, clothing and school supplies to young people in foster care.

- Send a care package to foster care alumni attending college.
- Become a virtual mentor for a young person in college. Expand the circle of support for a youth in foster care as an e-mail/online pen pal.

Open Your Heart:

- Become a foster or adoptive parent. Caring families are especially needed for older youth, siblings and children with special needs.

- Find out how your organization can encourage people in your community and your company’s employees to get involved.

- Find out about affordable housing options for young people making the transition from foster care.

- If you are a Mental Health Professional, consider opening your practice to at-risk children and learn more about how to respond to their mental health needs.

Offer Your Help:

- Wear a Blue Ribbon during May in support of National Foster Care Month.

- Learn how to help youth in foster care explore career options, acquire new job skills, find employment or a resume-building internship.

- Make a financial contribution to support the personal enrichment or education of youth in foster care.

- Make a presentation to your faith-based congregation, civic group, PTA or other association.

- Send “thank you” letters from agency directors to foster families.

- Recognize or honor a foster parent in your community. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in praise of someone making a difference in the life of a child in foster care.

We invite you to create your own “Blue Ribbon” to help celebrate and recognize our deserving foster parents.

<http://www.fostercaremonth.org/GetInvolved/>



**FOSTER CARE IS DEFINED AS:
 “24– HOUR SUBSTITUTE CARE FOR CHILDREN PLACED AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS AND FOR WHOM THE STATE AGENCY HAS PLACEMENT AND CARE RESPONSIBILITY, WHETHER OR NOT THE PLACEMENT IS LICENSED OR PAYMENTS ARE MADE.”**

NEWS FROM THE FRONT

NJ ARCH interviewed a number of DYFS Resource Parents (Foster Parents) to report on the joys and challenges of caring for foster children. What follows is a summary of their comments.

Universally, Resource Parents relish the role of parenting. They enjoy children and derive great pleasure in the day-to-day chores of caring for children. They speak of the pleasure of smiles and hugs, the satisfaction of developmental achievements and the accomplishment of stepping in, when a parent is unable to care for their child. One resource parent told of looking back at memories, photos of children she had cared for and wondering where they are and how they are doing.

When asked what it was like to let a child go, one parent remarked that she is an optimist who believes that chil-

dren belong with their birth families if at all possible. Resource parents who met with birth parents during the time the kids were in care said they could see the birth families' love for their children. Accepting that everyone raises their kids differently is helpful. Still, there was sadness when kids left the resource home.



All resource parents voiced frustration with the bureaucracy that is inevitably part of the state child welfare system. Most had positive things to say about individual child welfare caseworkers, but also spoke of how slowly "the sys-

tem" moves when it comes to permanency for kids.

Resource parents who take on the most challenging kids, those with medical, mental health or behavioral problems, spoke positively of the supports that were provided, particularly by contracted private agencies. Counseling, wrap around day care, respite care and other programs are provided. They remarked that these extra services made it possible for them to work with these children, giving them the benefits of a home life rather than placement in an institutional setting.

To become a Resource Parent, contact Foster and Adoptive Family Services at 800.222.0047 or www.fafsonline.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

- *OVER 40,000 CASES OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT ARE REPORTED ANNUALLY TO THE NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES (DYFS)*
- *IN 2003, OVER 12,000 CHILDREN WERE IN THE NEW JERSEY FOSTER CARE SYSTEM*
- *EVERY 11 MINUTES A CHILD IS REPORTED ABUSED OR NEGLECTED IN THE U.S.*
- *MORE THAN THREE U.S. CHILDREN DIE EACH DAY FROM ABUSE OR NEGLECT*

ZIGGY AS SPOKES CHARACTER



© 2006 Ziggy & Friends, Inc.

The friendly and lovable cartoon character Ziggy is the 2006 spokes character for the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) and National Foster Care Month (NFCM) in May. Created by Tom Wilson, Sr. over 35 years ago,

"Ziggy has always been a gentle messenger, bringing people together in a caring and meaningful way." stated Tom Wilson, Jr, who took over his father's comic strip in 1987.

(Continued on page 4)

DID YOU KNOW?



FAFS Mission Statement:

“To meet the special needs of foster and adoptive families and to advocate for improved foster care and adoption services.”

Happy Mother’s Day!



SPOTLIGHT ON: MIDDLESEX COUNTY FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILY SERVICES (FAFS)

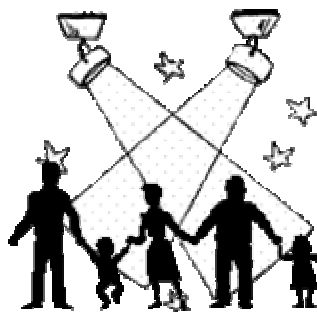
This month we are spotlighting a very active and vibrant FAFS volunteer committee; the Middlesex County Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS), led by Chairperson Janis Nietzer, whose family has provided foster care to more than 50 children over the past 16 years.

Ms. Nietzer is supported by her strong volunteer planning committee that includes, Lynn Nowak, Laura Baylo and Ken Brantley. Together they coordinate and offer an outstanding support program for foster care families.

This support group includes over 40 “dues paying” county FAFS members in addition to the 250 families who receive their monthly newsletter, *“Spotlight on Foster Care.”*

Since Ms. Nietzer is also a Vice President of the Statewide FAFS organization, she is privy to the latest DYFS updates,

event information, trainings and more.



This Middlesex Group offers monthly programs, a holiday party, a summer picnic, occasional multi-cultural events, clothing exchanges and more. In addition, many local businesses donate much-needed items to resource families in Middlesex County.

Monthly meetings are held each third Thursday of every month at the DYFS Middlesex County West Local Office, located at 53 Knightsbridge Road in Piscataway. Meetings start at 7:30 pm and

babysitting is available upon request.

Most meetings feature guest speakers who address topics related to foster care and adoption. One of the requirements of a Resource Parent to maintain their Foster Care License is to complete 10 yearly hours of DYFS approved “In-Service Training” (this requirement will be increased to 15 hours by July 1st). This group has been working hard to “certify” many of their presenters so participants can receive these training credits.

For more information on this FAFS group, contact Ms. Nietzer at info@mcfafs.com, call 908-510-0313, or watch for their new website at www.mcfafs.com.

ZIGGY AS SPOKES CHARACTER

(Continued from page 3)
Ziggy is always determined to weather the storm until things get better; that is the kind of attitude that we want to convey to our children and youth living in foster care. At the same time, he is a character

that reaches out with a helping hand when one is needed, just like foster parents.

Wilson will spread the word about National Foster Care Month through a series of Ziggy comic panels premier-

ing in May.

For more information on this campaign, log onto <http://www.fostercaremonth.org/Spokespersons/SuccessStories/Ziggy.htm>.

DYFS WAITING CHILD: GENA



Gena, age six, is a gregarious youngster, who loves singing, and anything having to do with "Barney". Although confined to a wheelchair, and requiring assistance with personal care and toileting, she relishes outdoor

activities and amusement park visits. Gena is enrolled in a developmental preschool program, where she is learning how to count, say the alphabet, and speak in short sentences. Due to the extreme prematurity of her birth, she has severe developmental delays, chronic bowel inflammation, cerebral palsy, and is legally blind. She has undergone several surgeries on her digestive tract and eyes. She now wears corrective eyeglasses.

Gena can eat pureed foods, but obtains most of her nutrition via a feeding tube. Due to her ongoing medical

needs, she resides in a rehabilitation center, where she receives occupational and physical therapy to strengthen her limbs and torso. Gena can maneuver her wheelchair, but she requires assistance in sitting up, and transferring to and from the wheelchair. She needs a loving committed family able to advocate and provide for her long term medical, physical and educational needs.

For more information on Gena, call 1-800-99 ADOPT.

DID YOU KNOW?

Recent Heart Gallery Statistics:

- Over 190 families became interested in becoming Resource (Foster) Families and were referred to DYFS Recruiters.
- 17 home studies were completed as a direct result of the Heart Gallery referrals to recruiters.
- 14 children were placed with families as a direct result of the Heart Gallery Exhibit.
- Another 60 children who were photographed for The Heart Gallery are now currently in the process of being adopted by their resource parents or another caring adult.

THE HEART GALLERY: AN UPDATE

The Heart Gallery was created to win hearts and homes. To achieve that goal, the world's top photographers volunteered their time and talent to create intimate, compelling portraits of foster children in New Jersey. The children featured in the Gallery were typically considered the "hardest to place" — those who are at least 3 years old, minorities, and/or in sibling groups, and now are available for adoption anywhere in the country.

The Heart Gallery mounted exhibits around the state beginning in April, 2005, featuring 346 of New Jersey's Waiting Children. Based on the statewide tour during the past 12 months, of the 5,700 inquires, over 3,800 were a direct result of the DYFS Heart Gallery Exhibit.

<http://www.heartgallerynj.com/index.php>

See the following "*Did you Know*" for recent statistics on The Heart Gallery and children placed in forever homes.

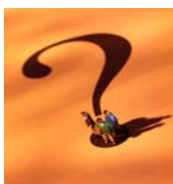
For more information about The Heart Gallery or to see the children available for adoption, log onto www.heartgallerynj.org





Barbara A. Rall, LCSW

Have a question that needs expert advice? E-mail or call the warmline; we would be happy to assist you! Frequently asked questions and responses from the staff will be published in future newsletters.



ASK OUR EXPERT

E-MAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS AT WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG

Late last year my husband and I adopted a sibling group from the state child welfare system. Mary, Peter and Joseph are now 13, 12 and 10. At first everything seemed to be going really well but recently we've had some problems. The school called to say that Mary is really behind and may have to repeat seventh grade. Peter and Joseph are always getting into scrapes, and they can't seem to follow our family rules. I'm feeling pretty upset about all this. We had hoped to be a big happy family.

You and your husband have adopted three kids who came to you with some history. I say this because almost all children who have spent time in the child welfare system have been abused and/or neglected. They may have been in one or more foster homes before they came to you. That kind of history can cause kids to have problems at home and at school.

I'm wondering what kinds of support systems you have put in place to make the transition to your family go smoothly. In New Jersey the state provides Post Adoption Counseling services to all adopted children under the age of 18. The service is provided without charge by

local agencies under contract to the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). You can obtain information about the services available in your county by calling the NJARCH warm line or checking the resources section of the web site: www.njarch.org.

It may be helpful for you and your husband to join a support group. Foster and Adoptive Family Services, Inc. has Foster Parent Volunteer Committee monthly support groups in virtually every county in New Jersey. Both foster and adoptive parents are active in these groups and most have adopted children from the child welfare system. It can be very reassuring to talk with other people who are parenting challenging children. You can call FAFS directly at 800-222-0047 for more information or find out more on their web site www.fafsonline.org.

Have you been in communication with Mary's school about her academic performance? What information do you have about her school work in her previous placement? It's difficult to tell if her academic difficulties are

due to learning problems, the adjustment to a new school and a new home or some combination of the two. You may want to ask that she be evaluated by the child study team at school. They can determine if there are learning problems and design a program that fits her needs. The Children's Legal Resource Center of the Association for Children of NJ has a booklet, *A Basic Guide to Special Education* that you may find helpful. You can access it on their web site: <http://www.kidlaw.org/home.asp?uri=1000&frst=1000>

When children are placed in a new home, there is often a honeymoon period. Later, they feel free to express their feelings.

When kids don't have language to talk about what they are experiencing, they often act it out. With counseling and other supportive services, your children can learn to talk about and process their feelings about events in their lives. While I can't say you will all live happily ever after, I hope with the proper intervention you will have the satisfying experience of raising three responsible and caring individuals.

NATALIE'S LIBRARY CORNER

Hello Readers! Welcome to Natalie's Library Corner.

Since May is National Foster Care Month, I have decided to offer you a thumbnail sketch of three books on this topic. A commonality that I found most poignant in each of these books is the need for children to know the truth about their individual situations. Their lives are often so riddled with inconsistencies that they are very anxious and cannot relax enough to concentrate on anything. Eating, sleeping, playing, working in school, controlling emotions, following directions are all difficult and almost insurmountable problems for foster children whose lives have been turbulent.

ZACHARY'S NEW HOME, A Story for Foster and Adopted Children, by Geraldine M. Blomquist, M.S.W., and Paul Blomquist, is both reassuring and sensitive in its presentation. It tells about a cat named Zachary whose parents love him and treat him well.

One day Zachary's father leaves and his mother is very upset. She is sad and mad and starts to hurt Zachary. He is placed with a foster family and misses his "real" family. The book tells of Zachary's trials and tribulations

as he adjusts to his new family.

There is loss... There is help... There is understanding... There is hope...

I'D RATHER BE WITH A REAL MOM WHO LOVES ME, A Story for Foster Children, by Michael Gordon, Ph.D., is told by a young boy in foster care. He speaks to all children in his circumstances about why his life is so difficult.

The language is straight forward. The feelings are raw. As you read, you **feel** the feelings of pain, sadness, anger, fear and hope.

I highly recommend this book. It is honest. It does not sugar coat the truth. A professional or an understanding adult should read this with the child. All foster children will relate to the material addressed. Some of it will be hard to hear.

MAYBE DAYS, A Book for Children in Foster Care, by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright, is another excellent book that should be read by a child and an adult together.

Often, the answer to the many different questions asked by

foster children is: **Maybe**.

"Will I go back to my parents?" **Maybe**.

"Will I stay with my foster parents?" **Maybe**

"Will I live with my brothers and sisters again?" **Maybe**

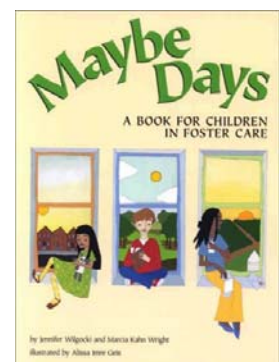
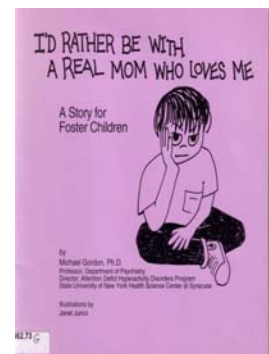
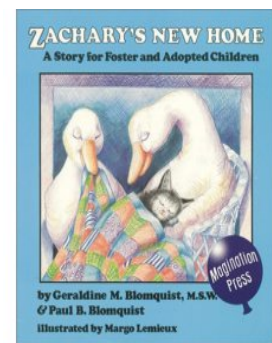
"Will I have more visits with my parents?" **Maybe**

This book gets to the root of the feelings and concerns shared by all foster children. The roles of all the grown-ups involved are discussed. Overall, the importance of open communication is evident. Children who live under such precarious conditions need special consideration, sensitivity, honesty and the knowledge of what will happen next.



DID YOU KNOW?

NJ ARCH OFFERS A FREE LENDING LIBRARY WITH BOOKS, ARTICLES AND VIDEOS



NEW JERSEY ADOPTION RESOURCE CLEARING HOUSE

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