

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>May is Foster Care Awareness Month</i>                   | 1,3 |
| <i>Kinship Legal Guardianship</i>                           | 1,2 |
| <i>Adoption Handbook</i>                                    | 3   |
| <i>Spotlight on Suburban Essex FAFS</i>                     | 4   |
| <i>New Message Board</i>                                    | 4   |
| <i>DYFS Waiting Child Summer Camps Heart Gallery Update</i> | 5   |
| <i>Ask Our Expert</i>                                       | 6   |
| <i>Natalie's Library Corner</i>                             | 7   |
| <i>Subscription Renewal</i>                                 | 8   |

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## May is Foster Care Awareness Month



All children deserve and benefit from enduring, positive relationships with caring adults. The same is true for the 513,000 American youth in foster care. These young people have a special need to make connections with nurturing adults because their own families are in crisis. Many require secure, stable places to call home until they can either safely reunite with their parent or establish other lifelong family relationships.

May is National Foster Care Month, where organizations and communities host a variety of activities and gatherings that help focus attention on the American children and youth in foster care and to honor the people making a difference in their lives. Foster Care Month originated in 1988 and has been going strong ever since. Early efforts were focused on appreciation and recognition of the tremendous contributions of

foster parents; for the last 15 years, Foster Care Month focused more on the needs of older youth, particularly those about to age out of the system.

Under the leadership of the National Foster Care Coalition, Casey Family Programs, as well as partnerships with 14 national organizations, Foster Care Month continues to make strides in helping and recognizing foster parents and their children.

(Continued on page 3)

## KINSHIP LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP: A GROWING TREND FOR PERMANENCY

In the last several years, there has been an increased growth in a permanency plan for children, called *Kinship Legal Guardianship or KLG*.

Laws governing child abuse neglect cases are based on a

concept of permanency.

This is a belief that children grow up best in a stable family, where each child has a nurturing, consistent person who is committed to his or her well-being. The parent-

child relationship is critical to a child's healthy development. When a child is in foster care, no one person has sole legal responsibility for that child. It is divided among the state (DYFS), the caretaker or Foster/ (Continued on page 2)

## DID YOU KNOW?

APPROXIMATELY 500,000 CHILDREN IN THE U.S. WERE PLACED IN THE CARE OF A RELATIVE FOLLOWING THE INVOLVEMENT OF A CHILD WELFARE AGENCY



APPROXIMATELY, HALF OR 250,000 WERE TAKEN INTO STATE CUSTODY, AND PLACED INTO "KINSHIP FOSTER CARE"

"BEGINNING BETWEEN 8 AND 9 YEARS OLD, THE PROBABILITY OF CHILDREN CONTINUING TO WAIT TO BE ADOPTED EXCEEDS THE PROBABILITY THAT THEY WILL BE ADOPTED."

- "THE AGE FACTOR IN ADOPTION" BY P.L. MAZA, PHD

## KINSHIP LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP: A GROWING TREND FOR PERMANENCY (CONTINUED)

(Continued from page 1)

Resource Parent and the birth parents. That is why foster care is considered **Temporary**.

The law requires DYFS to offer services to try to keep the families safely together. This is called **Family Preservation**. When a child cannot safely stay with the family, DYFS must remove the child. When a child enters the foster care system, he/she is placed with a Resource Family, which could be a relative or non-relative. With services, many children are reunited with their birthparent(s). Children who cannot be reunited with their birth parent(s) may be freed for adoption. Adoption gives the child a new **forever family**.

Adoption is not possible in all situations. If a child is

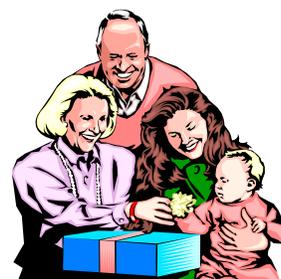
living with a relative (or non-relative) for at least 12 months who is committed to raising the child, and it is not possible to adopt the child, (such as the biological parents not willing to terminate parental rights), then a Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) arrangement may be a solution.

KLG gives the child a legal, permanent home, which will provide stability to the child until the age of 18 or possibly longer. Next to adoption, KLG is the most permanent legal option, as the guardian assumes responsibility for the care and support of the child while the biological parents retain certain rights and responsibilities (such as child support and the opportunity to visit).

A KLG parent has almost all the same rights, responsibilities and authority relating to the child as a birth or adoptive parent. These rights would

include making decisions about the care and well-being of the child, including medical treatment, schooling, financial assistance for college and the like. A monthly stipend may be available for a KLG arrangement.

For more about the details on Kinship Legal Guardianship log onto [www.kidlaw.org](http://www.kidlaw.org); select "Resources" on the left hand side; then select "Manuals." to download information on KLG. You can also contact NJ ARCH, and we will direct you to the correct legal source.



## KLG STATISTICS

In 2002, 2.3 million children in the U.S. lived with relatives without a parent present in the household. Approximately 250,000 of those children live in a Kinship Legal Guardianship arrangement.

As of January, 2007, there were 10,379 children in foster care in New Jersey. Out of

those children in care, 36% resided or currently reside in a Kinship placement compared to the 47% who resided or currently reside with a Resource Family (or foster family).

Based on these statistics, it is evident that Kinship Care is a vital part of the care of

children in New Jersey.

For more information about this and other related statistics, log onto The Department of Children and Families website at

<http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/home/childdata/dyfsdemo/>.

## May is Foster Care Awareness Month

(Continued from page 1)

Here are some ideas on how to celebrate and/or support Foster Care Month in your community:

### If you have just a few minutes:

Learn the facts about foster care and gain a better understanding of the needs of those touched by this issue.

Make a financial contribution or send a care package to help support the education or personal enrichment of a young person in foster care. To find out more, log onto Orphan Foundation of America at [www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org). [www.Fosterclub.org](http://www.Fosterclub.org).

### If you have a few hours:

Volunteer to help a foster care program in your area. Recognize /honor a person or organization helping foster

youth 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 foster child.

Make a presentation to your faith-based congregation, civic group, PTA or other neighborhood associations; encourage your community to come together to find families and resources that help foster children thrive.

Become a mentor to a young person in college. For more information, check out [www.vmentor.org](http://www.vmentor.org)

### If you have a few weeks:

Become a licensed respite care provider as a way of providing support to foster families. For more information check out [www.nfpainc.org](http://www.nfpainc.org).

Tutor a child. Many foster children often change schools

and have social/behavioral challenges. To find out how to help, contact your local foster care agency, boys and girls clubs, libraries or YMCA/ YWCA's to inquire about how to become a volunteer.

### If you have more time...

Become a foster or adoptive parent. Caring families are especially needed for older youth, siblings and special needs children. For a list of available children, check out our [www.njarch.org](http://www.njarch.org) website and select "Waiting Children". You can also check out <http://adoptuskids.org> and other related websites. For more information on National Foster Care Month, or to find out how to become a foster parent, log onto [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org) or [www.fafsnj.org](http://www.fafsnj.org) or call 1-800-222-0047.

## DID YOU KNOW?

*IN NJ, THERE ARE OVER 10,000 CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE*

*68% OF FOSTER CHILDREN ARE BETWEEN THE AGES OF NEWBORN AND 12.*



*THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF BIRTHDAYS A CHILD SPENDS IN FOSTER CARE IS TWO (OR ABOUT 27 MONTHS)*

## NEW ADOPTION HANDBOOK AVAILABLE

The *Handbook of Adoption: Implications for Researchers, Practitioners and Families* is now available for purchase or for borrowing from the NJ ARCH Library. This handbook covers many aspects of adoption-related issues that can affect adoption triad members. Designed

for counselors, researchers, students, and families, the handbook includes contributions from nationally known adoption experts. The numerous chapters include the foundation and history of adoption, statistics, trends, adoptive identity, transracial and international adoption,

special issues, including open and kinship relationships for children in foster care, training and education for adoption therapy, and more.

To order, log onto [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and search under the title.

*TO FIND OUT HOW TO BE A NJ FOSTER PARENT CALL 877-NJFOSTER OR VISIT [WWW://WWW.STATE.NJ.US/FOSTERCARE/](http://WWW.STATE.NJ.US/FOSTERCARE/)*

## 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"*

*CHECK OUT THEIR WEBSITE AT*

[WWW.FAFSONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.FAFSONLINE.ORG)



*HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!*

## SPOTLIGHT ON: SUBURBAN ESSEX FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILY SERVICES

This month we are spotlighting an active, vibrant group: the Suburban Essex Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) Support Group.

Located in Orange, NJ, the 100-member FAFS group meets monthly to discuss their children, DYFS issues and obtain support rarely found anywhere else.

Facilitated by Carmen Pinto, this FAFS group offers families many support services such as monthly educational programs, an informal "respite care" (or babysitting services) for each other, a "kids clothing exchange" as well as the wealth of knowledge offered by Ms. Pinto, the attendees, and the FAFS Support Specialist.

Ms. Pinto, who is considered a "clearing person of information" in her geographic area, averages 30-50 calls per week from foster or adoptive families. "People call about all sorts

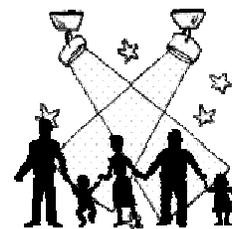
of things; camp questions, apartment issues, financial questions and the like."

"We open our hearts and our homes to these kids. Each child needs a parent - it's just so important. If you have a minute of time, an ounce of love, and a square inch of space in your home, consider letting a foster child into your home. It's the hardest job you will ever love," says Ms. Pinto.

Desperately needed are foster homes for medically fragile children (called Special In-Home Service Providers or SHIPS homes). She has seen many medically fragile children who needed to stay in the hospital since they had no place to go. Also needed are homes that will foster older children who currently reside in shelters. "We really need foster parents who will take on these types of children. Both are hard populations to care for, but these kids

need a chance too." Another huge need are foster families for teenagers. This can be a difficult age, and many families are reluctant to foster or adopt kids from the ages of 12-15, but again, they need homes as well.

Anyone interested in fostering, adopting or learning more, is welcome to attend this or any other FAFS group. The Suburban Essex FAFS meets the second Wednesday of every month at 6:00 pm at the First Unitarian Church of Essex County, located at 35 Cleveland Street, Orange, NJ. For more information, call Ms. Pinto at 973-243-1452 or e-mail her at [puppynj@comcast.net](mailto:puppynj@comcast.net).



## NJ ARCH ANNOUNCES NEW "MESSAGE BOARD"

NJ ARCH is proud to announce a new "Message Board" where anyone can post their questions, concerns or comments about adoption, foster care, search and reunion and more.

This 24 x 7 capability allows

our customers to ask questions or offer comments and suggestions to those within the adoption community any time, day or night. Staff and adoption community members can reply to postings with advice and support.

NJ ARCH will review the messages to assure appropriateness of comments submitted. To find out more, click the "Message Board" link on the left hand side of the NJ ARCH Home Page.

## DYFS WAITING CHILD: CHAZ



Chaz' favorite football team is the Oakland Raiders. He has been the assistant team manager for a local team. A sixteen year-old youngster with diverse interests, Chaz

spends his free time playing computer games, bike riding and rollerblading. He is also learning to play the piano. Chaz eagerly participates in school and especially his ROTC classes. Educationally, he receives assistance strengthening basic skills. Due to his steady achievement, the plan is to complete these services. Though Chaz is preparing to enter college in a couple of years, he still desires to have

a family to keep for his lifetime.

His forever family should be patient with building trust by keeping their promises and being consistent in all aspects of family life.

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

## SUMMER CAMP IDEAS

Summer is quickly approaching...have you signed up your child for summer camp? It may not be too late. Check out the list of camps on the NJ ARCH website. Listed are camps that specialize in adoption or foster care friendly camps as well as special

needs camps. If you are a family who would like some exposure to a culture camp, the Colorado Heritage Camps may be just for you. If you want to enjoy a camp closer to home, check out some of the local camps listed or review your local

newspaper for a list of possible camps. Let's give our children a terrific summer. For more information on summer camp options, log onto [www.mysummerncamp.com](http://www.mysummerncamp.com) or check out the American Camping Association at <http://www.acacamps.org>.

## HEART GALLERY UPDATE

In April of this year, The Heart Gallery of NJ was instrumental in promoting and placing 85 children in permanent adoptive homes. Since its inception, over 300 NJ foster children were featured, photographed and the center of attention for many DYFS and foster care families. Kids featured in the Heart Gallery of

New Jersey are older, waiting children longing for a "forever family."



The 85 that are currently in their adoptive homes is a great

accomplishment. The hope is that each child has a permanent home. Yours could be that home. Consider adopting an older waiting child.

For more information on the progress of the Heart Gallery, and/or to see the waiting children, please log onto [www.heartgallerynj.com](http://www.heartgallerynj.com).

## DID YOU KNOW?

CHECK OUT THE HEART GALLERY'S WEBSITE AT [WWW.HEARTGALLERYNJ.COM](http://WWW.HEARTGALLERYNJ.COM) TO VIEW PICTURES AND BIOS OF CHILDREN WAITING FOR FOREVER HOMES.



VISIT THEIR WEBSITE TO VIEW THEIR "PATH TO ADOPTION" PROGRAM

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT A WAITING CHILD, CALL 1-800-99-ADOPT

## ASK OUR EXPERT

E-MAIL US YOUR QUESTIONS AT [WARMLINE@NJARCH.ORG](mailto:WARMLINE@NJARCH.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.*



*My two year old grandson has been living with me for the past six months. Unfortunately, my son and the child's mother were neglecting him due to their substance abuse problems. When DYFS intervened, they asked me to care for Justin\* until his parents could attend drug treatment and complete parenting classes. Neither my son nor his girlfriend has been able to do this. Now DYFS has given me the choice of being either a kinship legal guardian or adopting the child. I need some advice on how to choose the way to go.*

How wonderful you were able to step in to parent your grandson. It is always preferable to have a child remain with family members when his parents are unable to raise him. You now have a difficult decision to make.

If you choose to adopt Justin, you will have full control and will provide him with the highest level of legal and emotional security. You can also negotiate with DYFS for subsidy to meet Justin's special needs if necessary. You will be eligible for a \$10,000 tax credit the year the adoption is finalized and Justin can receive monthly Social Security payments if

you are receiving them for yourself. Justin will also be eligible for Medicaid (usually transferable to other states), post adoption counseling and respite care as well as preschool if you work outside the home. In order to adopt your grandson, your son and the child's mother must surrender their parental rights or have them terminated by DYFS. Once the adoption is finalized, you can name a guardian for the child should you become incapacitated.

Because it involves the birth parents giving up their rights to parent their child, adoption is a difficult prospect for some families. You may believe Justin's parents have the potential to raise him sometime in the future. And, you may be concerned that they and/or Justin may become angry at you for pursuing adoption rather than give them more time to rehabilitate themselves. On the other hand, adoption provides the child with the most stable legal status and confers extra benefits on the child and the family.

Kinship legal guardianship (KLG) does not involve the termination of parental rights which means the child's parents can petition the court to regain custody or arrange

visitation. Guardianship allows you to make decisions about the child's health care, education and living arrangements without consulting the birth parents. While KLG families receive the current board rate for foster care and a NJ Medicaid card for the child, at the present time there are fewer services available to KLG families. Those families have to access community resources for services such as day care and counseling. With KLG, guardianship of the child reverts to DYFS should you be no longer able to care for him.

This is a complex decision and I recommend that you discuss the alternatives and your particular situation with your DYFS worker or call the Warm Line at NJARCH for more information and request a copy of the booklet, *Kinship Legal Guardianship: A Permanency Option in DYFS Cases*, published by the Association for Children of NJ. If adoption is a possible choice, I urge you to move ahead while Justin's DYFS case is open as the Division will assist you with many of the legal parts of the process.

\* Name has been changed to assure confidentiality.

## NATALIE'S LIBRARY CORNER

Hello, Readers! Welcome to Natalie's Library Corner. I have done a lot of reading this winter. My favorite type of book is a memoir. A spate of books has been written about foster care, adoption, and search and reunion. Since May is National Foster Care Month, it seems fitting that I share with you the brand new memoir written by Victoria Rowell titled **The Women Who Raised Me**.

"At age eight, this very young lady won a Ford Foundation grant to study ballet and later went on to train and dance professionally under the auspices of the American Ballet Theatre, Twyla Tharp Workshop, and The Juilliard School before becoming an actress. She is the founder of the Rowell Foster Children Positive Plan, which provides scholarships in the arts and education to foster youth, and serves as national spokesperson for the Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services."

Some of you may be acquainted with Victoria Rowell as she "is an award-winning actress and veteran of many acclaimed feature films and several television series, including eight seasons on **Diagnosis**

**Murder**, and has starred for the past thirteen years as Drucilla Winters on CBS's number one daytime drama **The Young and the Restless**.

Unlike most personal accounts of difficult times growing up in the foster care system, this is definitely not a "poor me" story. It is, rather, a statement of appreciation, an accolade, to the women who influenced Victoria's life.

I learned much about the author and the "stuff" she is made of just by reading the dedication: "to foster and adoptive parents and their families, caregivers, neighbors, communities, churches, social workers, justices, and legislators who fight for and feed orphans, and orphans of the living, domestically and globally..." "and to my children, Maya and Jasper, who have given me unconditional love."

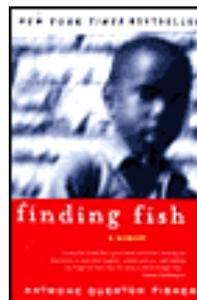
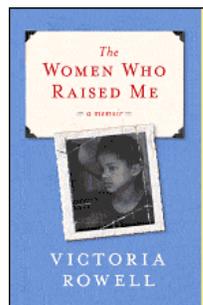
Victoria does not speak of what she has given to humanity but of the many gifts and opportunities that have been bestowed upon her. "In Memorial Regret" she lists the names of fourteen women whom you will meet in this book. All of them were key players in the "raising" of Victoria Rowell.

**The Women Who Raised Me** is divided into three parts as

Follows: Part I talks about grandmothers, mothers and aunts. Part II discusses mentors, fosterers, grande dames; and Part III describes sisters.

Born to a white mother and a black father in Maine on May 10, 1959, Victoria experienced hard times, but she also forged life-lasting bonds, love and strength in the face of adversity.

Treat yourself! READ THIS ONE! It is both uplifting and miraculous.



## DID YOU KNOW?

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

Following is a short bibliography of other memoirs that I have particularly enjoyed. They are all available from the NJ ARCH Library.

#### Finding Katherine, A Spiritual Journey to Vietnam and Motherhood

By Dr. Ellen Fitzenrider, 2005

#### Like Family, Growing Up in Other People's Houses A Memoir

By Paula McLain, 2003

#### Finding Fish, A Memoir

By Antwone Quenton Fisher, 2001

#### Ithaka, A Daughter's Memoir of Being Found

By Sarah Saffian, 1998.

#### Mother, Can You Hear Me?,

The extraordinary true story of an adopted daughter's reunion with her birthmother after a separation of fifty years  
By Elizabeth Cooper Allen, 1983

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by adoption.*

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