

March 2016

The Networker



Manitoba
FOSTER FAMILY
Network

"Fostering Connections"

Executive Director's Report

Before I get into anything else, I would like to take this moment to welcome Chris Thompson to our team! Chris joins us from Swan River where he will be working alongside Charlotte to support our North region. Chris has spent some time in Child Welfare and will be an incredible addition to our Network. For a more in-depth bio on Chris, please log onto our website!

The last couple of months have been particularly interesting for me. I have had the pleasure of celebrating two anniversaries! I have gotten to see my 10 year mark with the Network and my 1 year mark as Executive Director. As these milestones have passed, I have taken the opportunity to reflect not only on the past year, but the past decade. We have sure come a long way since the days of the tiny Provencher office!

This seems like an appropriate time to take a moment to thank those in the system who have played such a large role in my life over the last 10 years. I'd like to thank my Board of Directors. Without you, the voice of foster and kinship families, we wouldn't be able to drive the Network forward and provide greater supports to our members. I would also like to thank my staff. Without the tireless dedication you all show on a daily basis, I know we couldn't achieve everything we do. Thank you to the collaterals we work with. There are far too many to list here but the ongoing support of our collaterals enables us to continue to develop our resources and services. Together we can only make the system stronger. Finally, I would like to thank the foster parents, kinship care providers and places of safety throughout our province. Your continued dedication to providing the best care possible to our children and youth never ceases to amaze me.

As we have grown as an organization, we have recognized that some of our processes need to be updated. An exciting new change for us this year is how we manage our board elections. As you read through the following pages, you will see all those currently running for our Board of Directors. I urge you to read their biographies and connect with our office for your ballot! Every foster parent and kinship care provider is automatically a member of the Manitoba Foster Family Network and ***you all have the right to vote!*** Voting can be done by paper ballot, which will be sent with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to allow for easy return, or it can be done online, by having us send you a link. Please call the office so we can make the necessary arrangements. If you have any questions, just call our office for more information.

Looking now into the future, I am excited to see the anticipated growth of this organization and I eagerly look forward to seeing what the future holds. Once again, thank you everyone for all you do!

Respectfully,

Shawna Normand

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This is your Board of Directors

The following board members are not up for election this year:

Cathy Wiebe (South)

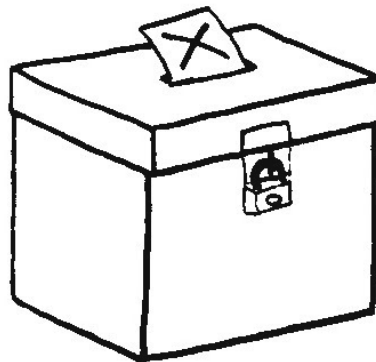
Linda Ens (South)

Marion Brading (North)

Danae McCullough (North)

With their experience combined, they bring:

- ◇ a commitment to work with and for foster parents,
- ◇ knowledge from each of their individual communities,
- ◇ respect and appreciation for other board members and their opinions,
- ◇ experience working with finances,
- ◇ the ability to monitor the budget,
- ◇ the ability to work with the staff of the Manitoba Foster Family Network and to treat them as very valued parts of the MFFN,
- ◇ experience creating respectful working relationships with Members of Parliament
- ◇ experience working with the Child Welfare Agencies and the Authorities in a mutually respectful way.



**The deadline to request your ballot is Friday, April 8th, 2016.
Ballots postmarked after April 29th, 2016 will not be accepted.**

Here is your board of directors! On the pages to follow you will find the biographies for your board members. The following people are running unopposed, and therefore will be elected by acclamation, but your opinion still matters. Please let us know if you feel they will be a good fit to our Board of Directors.

Douglas Gerrard (Winnipeg)

Sharon Joyal (South)

Norm Johnson (North)

Helene Gray (Winnipeg)

Patti Skirzyk (South)

Robyne Gilfillan (North)

Please call the office at 204-940-1280 or email manfost@mffn.ca to make arrangements to receive your ballot or if you have further questions about this process. Voting can be done by paper ballot, which will be sent with a self-addressed, stamped envelope to allow for easy return, or it can be done online, by having us send you a link.

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Helene Gray (Winnipeg)

I love being a foster parent! My grandson has been with me for 6 years. He had night terrors and couldn't sleep in the dark. I was so happy when after a few months he told me he no longer needed the light on and he has slept through the night ever since. My greatest moment was when he was chosen as one of two students in his school to attend Career Trek. Participants are nominated based on personality, willingness to learn, and most likely to attend university or college. Tyson gives up his Saturdays to attend (his choice).

I am a retired social worker who sat as Area 7 Director on the Board of the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU). I found it a rewarding as well as educational experience. I have sat on other boards as I volunteer in the school to keep my experience with children current. I have also counselled persons who were sexually abused as children.

By being on the Board of Directors, I hope to gain more knowledge of fostering itself. I hope to be a useful and cooperative member. We all bring different skills to the table which make a board efficient and we all learn from each other creating cohesiveness.

Douglas Gerrard (Winnipeg)

Hello, my name is Douglas Gerrard.

I was born on the Sagkeeng First Nation. At the age 9 years old, our family moved to the city of Winnipeg. I graduated from Kelvin high school in 1990 and will complete my Bachelor of Arts Degree in the fall of 2016. I was employed in 1991 with Sagkeeng Solvent Abuse Center as a Youth Treatment Worker/Cultural Worker for 5 years. Then, I moved back to Winnipeg where I started work at Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club. I was there for 3 years, and then spent 7 years at New Directions as a Youth Treatment Worker/Cultural Worker. Along the way, we tried our hand in fostering with Ma MaWi Wi Chi Itata centre in 1995. This will be our 21st year as foster parents.

Being foster parents has allowed us to be part of children's lives, guiding them through their struggles, celebrating their accomplishments, and helping them find their identity.

Passing knowledge of Aboriginal culture and traditions has been the foundation in my career as a Youth Treatment Worker/Cultural Worker and especially as a Foster Parent.

In 1978, I was introduced to the Ojibway culture and ever since I've attempted to share the history of Aboriginal people past, present, and future.

Cathy Wiebe (South)

Over the past 30+ years I have had the honor to assist in raising approximately 34 wonderful children. I am now the proud grandmother to 21 and great grandmother to 2. Although sometimes I questioned why I continue to care for the children and their families, there is always something that happens that reminds me that this is the most wonderful career I could have ever been thrown into. I did not choose this path, it chose me, and I am so glad it did.

Over the past 20 years I have served on many different types of boards and always enjoyed the learning curve that this created. Each volunteer position builds upon the last. I became interested in helping to restart an organization which would support the work that foster parents do on a daily basis for the children and families of our province. I was ready to take on a much more complicated role. I have had the honour of being a founding member of the Manitoba Foster Family Network. Over the time that I have been involved, I have served as the Treasurer and now the President.

I am an active member of my foster parent community and have an opportunity to hear and address with the board the issues of my area. As well as being the President of the Manitoba Foster Family Network, I have a role in working with the government and child welfare authorities to make positive changes for Manitoba foster families. I take pride in bringing the voice of foster families to the political table.

I also have been involved with the national organization, Canadian Foster Family Association, which gives me a national view of the issues facing foster parent from coast to coast and access to this wealth of knowledge.

Patti Skirzyk (South)

Fostering has been most rewarding in seeing hurt, lost, and confused children start to find themselves. Seeing children meet milestones and overcome everyday challenges with success is amazing. I have learned the importance of building relationships with biological families to whatever extent possible is always in the child's best interest. Loving these children is a reward, but with the love comes the pain they feel. We see their hurts and disappointments every day. Advocating for the children can be tiring. Foster parents take pleasure in hearing the children's laughter or watching their excitement when they make friends.

I have worked in the Child Welfare system for more than 6 years as a Clinical Case Manager for Macdonald Youth Services (MYS). I work closely with foster parents in the treatment foster care program. I understand the processes around licensing, finances, and working collaboratively within the system. In this role and other professional roles, I have supervised staff. As part of the leadership team at MYS, I am part of strategic planning. We meet quarterly to review and evaluate stages and steps of plan. I have served as the Vice President of the Landmark Parent Advisory Council for 2 years. In this role, I met on a regular basis with the school board, principals and parents. We did quite a bit of fundraising within our community. I was a teacher for several years in the public school system in Arizona. I have taught children from ages 5- 18 years old. I have created and presented much training for foster parents and colleagues. I am an active volunteer with Ronald McDonald House, Children's Hospital Foundation, and the Manitoba Foster Family Network Peer Support Program. In 2015, I was awarded Foster Parent of the Year by the Child Welfare League of Canada.

I would like to be a more active voice in the fostering community. Helping develop a stronger Network for the families is a priority. The Foster Family Network is a great resource to families. I believe we need to make it more known to people and network with other resources. I have unique experience in that I am a foster parent and I work in the system. I can see things from both sides.

Linda Ens (South)

The last 13 years have been incredible. Fostering has brought a mix of challenges and rewards, but I would have to say the rewards far outweigh the challenges. Being a foster parent has helped me to grow and stretch as a person and a parent. I think one of the biggest challenges for me has been knowing how to help the child who is struggling with why they are in care and all the emotions and questions that come with that. The greatest moments come from watching the children feel success, feel proud of who they are and what they can accomplish. It's watching the little ones score their first goal in hockey and having their teammates rally around them. It's watching the anxious child rise above her fears and play laser tag with her friends. It's that moment when your most challenging child tells you, when you are feeling like a complete failure, that you are the perfect person for them in that time. Those are the moments that keep me going.

I have been on the MFFN Board of Directors for the past few years in the position of Treasurer. I have also been a member of the Peer Support team of the MFFN for the past 4 1/2 years and have been a member of some committees as well.

Prior to volunteering with the MFFN, I spent several years on a community recreational committee as well as being Treasurer for my church.

Over the past few years that I have been a Director on the board, I have been given the privilege to work with a group of wonderful people who all strive to make the lives of foster families and children in care better. I've watched these dedicated individuals put in hours of hard work so that foster parents can access much needed support and education. I look forward to continuing to be part of this team and to work together to make a difference for foster families and ultimately enhance the lives of the precious children who are the reason we keep going every day.

Sharon Joyal (South)

I have fostered for over 20 years. I have three home grown children – three adopted children – and two step children. I have four foster children that have been in our family for many years. I have four grandchildren and soon one great grandson. As a foster parent, I have worked hard with workers, therapists and school staff to offer my children the best possible life they can have. As a foster parent, I have seen my foster children face their own challenges and I have worked to help them understand and work with their challenges as best as they can. My biggest challenge is other people who do not understand Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). As a result of this I have been a founding member of the Southeast Coalition for FASD. We have our first training on March 16th on FASD and the Justice System. I am very happy to be out there helping others to understand what it is like to be a child with FASD or to be the caregiver to these children.

I have been on the board of Fisher Bay Bible Camp, and we still make the drive up North so our children can attend camp. I am the Winnipeg Area Vice President of the Manitoba Foster Family Network. I am on the Policy committee, the Board Development & Nominating Committee, and the Peer Support committee. I was in the first group of foster parents trained as a Peer Support provider. I am also a part of the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team and a member of the Coalition for FASD.

As a member of the board I have proved my willingness to work as a part of the team, to put myself out there for the good of others and to improve things where ever I can. I feel honored to be a part of the Manitoba Foster Family Network, working with a great board and wonderful staff. I hope to be able to continue to work to improve things for foster parents and children.

Norm Johnson (North)

My wife Della and I have been fostering for over 16 years. First for the General Authority and after about 6 years we became a Macdonald Youth Services foster home. Approximately 6 years after that I opened a specialized foster home for teen boys, and have been doing that for 5 years now. During my fostering career I have dealt with a large variety of issues such as high medical needs, FASD, self-harming behaviours, suicide and a wide range of effects caused by separation anxiety. I have attended a large range of trainings that have been invaluable.

I have been serving on the Board of Manitoba Foster Family Network for approximately 5 or so years now and am currently The Vice President for the North region. I have truly enjoyed contributing to the fostering community in this capacity and look forward to continuing to do so.

Prior to coming to serve as a Director for Manitoba Foster Family Network I served on numerous boards and committees with organized labour as well as a wild rice co-op located in the north. I have found the experience I gained with my involvement in these groups have proved to be of great benefit to how I contribute to the MFFN board. As I continue my involvement with the board and fostering, I enjoy the experiences and the great people I continue meet and learn from. I look forward to what the future holds for me in this challenging but greatly rewarding world of fostering.

Marion Brading (North)

Children have always been a huge part of our home and life whether our own, adopted children, or the ones we have cared for for other families. When we sold our business ten years ago, we decided to become foster parents. We have had the same children, some for seven and some for ten years and they have become part of the family. One of the greatest moments for me was when they felt for themselves that they were a part of the family or when they succeed at a task and their faces beam with happiness. I feel rewarded and blessed to have them in my life. The challenges have sometimes been overwhelming, dealing with FASD, ADHD and ADD. Children love their parents no matter what and cannot understand the hurt they'll feel being taken into care. We as foster parents need to love and support them as they walk through all the inner pain they experience.

Prior to becoming a foster parent, I owned and operated a retail grocery store for twenty years in the community we live in. I was involved in the different clubs in the community. As I had worked in an accounting office for a few years before this, I was mostly involved in the financial area of these clubs. I would do the financial statements, apply for operating grants and other improvement grants, do budgets, and held the position of Treasurer for the Community Club, Figure Skating Club, Hockey Club, Homecoming Committee, and the Cemetery Committee. At present, I am the Director of the nursery school, and do the financial reports, budgets, payroll and financial statements.

As a board member I would like to see all foster parents have the support and training that would help them be better, stronger supports to the children in their homes. I appreciate and value the training I have received from the Manitoba Foster Family Network and want to see the training available to every foster family throughout Manitoba.

Danae McCullough (North)

In 2003 I completed my BSW at the University of Manitoba. I worked in the Child Welfare field for two years before experiencing burnout. I made a change and became a foster parent because I felt ineffective working in the Child Welfare System as a CFS Social Worker. I wanted to make a direct impact on the lives of the children in the system. I also wanted to be a part of the solution and make change in a struggling system. My experience includes an awareness of many policies and procedures, and the challenges of putting these into practice in a foster home.

I focus on teenagers in my home, trying to help them in the transition process. This is an area that frustrates me, as my region has very few resources available for youth who are transitioning. I have witnessed many positive successes with children in my home. I have a child living in my home that participated in a Tae-Kwon-Do tournament in Regina and won two gold medals in Sparring and Pattern. We are very proud of this accomplishment as he was involved with drugs and alcohol when he arrived in our home. His usage has decreased immensely over time.

I have a lot of knowledge in the area of FASD and other disabilities, and I was a member of another board which followed a Carver Model for four years. My hope is that by serving on the Board of Directors for Manitoba Foster Family Network I can be a part of decisions that directly affect policies for foster parents. I hope to be a part of creating policies and resources for foster parents who have similar challenges. I also hope to be a voice for foster parents in the Northern Region who struggle with various issues.

Robyne Gilfillan (North)

Currently I am a foster parent in Northern Manitoba. I have been a foster parent since 2008 and I am fostering four children at this time.

I take great pride in creating a warm, loving and safe environment for the children in my care. Something that always makes me happy is the moment when you get to see the happiness in a child's eyes when they are reunited with their biological families.

I have previous experience working in hunting and fishing lodges. My role there was to be a guide and a housekeeper. This role helped prepare me for living in the North and for taking care of others.

My goal for being a board member is to help the fostering community work together for our youth. My hope is to help facilitate change within the system and to ensure there is a solid foundation for foster parents to work with biological families to ensure the best possible futures for our children.



"Fostering Connections"

90 Terracon Place
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2J 4G7

Phone: 204-940-1280
Toll Free: 1-866-458-5650
Fax: 204-940-1283
E-mail: manfost@mffn.ca
Website: www.mffn.ca

Find the Manitoba Foster
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Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday, May 26th, 2016 from noon until 1:00 pm. It will be held at the Waterfront Centre in Gimli, MB, in the Johnson Room. This is open to ALL foster and kinship parents in Manitoba whether or not you register for the conference.

We look forward to seeing you there!

New Staff Email Addresses

Along with some of the other changes mentioned throughout the newsletter, staff email addresses have also recently changed. While the old ones will continue to work, please update your contact lists to include our new email address. Please note, the main office email address has not been changed.

Shawna Normand, Executive Director: Shawna.Normand@mffn.ca

Jennifer Karaim, Project Manager: Jennifer.Karaim@mffn.ca

Terri McNaughton-Wright, Education Coordinator: Terri.McNaughtonWright@mffn.ca

Lisa Moxam, Community Development Worker: Lisa.Moxam@mffn.ca

Brad Wright, Community Development Worker: Brad.Wright@mffn.ca

Charlotte Sauder, Community Development Worker, North: Charlotte.Sauder@mffn.ca

Chris Thompson, Community Development Worker, North: Chris.Thompson@mffn.ca

Ashley Préfontaine, Administrative Assistant: manfost@mffn.ca

Our Mission

To encourage, promote, assist, and educate foster and kinship homes to enhance the quality of life for children in care.