

September 2015

▶ Volume 14, Issue 3

The Networker



"Fostering Connections"

Message from the Board

What a wonderful day, its hard to believe it's already fall.

Next week Cathy and I will be in beautiful Niagara Falls. We are attending the Canadian Foster Family Association national fall conference. The C.F.F.A. is a non profit organization that works for all foster parents across Canada. The president, Sheila Durnford, works hard to improve standards for foster parents. Each province sends a delegate and it is a week of meetings and special speakers. It is really interesting to meet and talk to foster parents from all over Canada. To find the many differences or the many things that are the same. Examples of these include difficulties with agencies, what is paid for and what is not, and many other issues. As a non profit organization we are grateful to all who purchase the Personal Membership. Without that support, we would not be able to continue the wonderful work that is done each year for all foster parents. A Personal Membership is \$20.00 and with that you receive a Newsletter with information from each province.

If you are interested in getting more information about becoming a member of the Canadian Foster Family Association, please refer to their website at <http://www.canadianfosterfamilyassociation.ca>.

Hope you are enjoying the children being back at school and taking time for yourself. Have a great day!

Sharon Joyal

Vice President Winnipeg

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Executive Director's Message

As always in September, we are all busy in both our personal lives, as we get children back to school, and at work as we prepare for another year of programming.

Even though we all like to think about summer being a little slower, we have discovered that at the office, it isn't necessarily true! Over the past two

It takes a special skill, a high level of professionalism, incredible strength, and an amazing sense of humor to do what you do...and what you do is making a difference.

months we have been busy working on new initiatives for foster parent education and have generated two reports from forums held this spring. The youth forums were sponsored by the Tomas Sill foundation and were held across the province with youth who had recently transitioned from care. We gave them all an opportunity to speak about their experiences with their transition journey. From these conversations, the youth were able to help us make recommendations around changes that could be made to ensure success for our young adults. We also held a foster parent forum at our conference in The Pas, Manitoba where foster parents and frontline staff were able to share their thoughts about the transitioning process. Both of these can be found on our website or emailed directly to you if you are on our email list. If you are not part of our emailing list and would like to be, please contact Ashley at 204-940-1280 or toll-free at 1-866-458-5650.

This year we are planning for many changes, not the least of which will be a new method for voting in our board members. Watch for our March newsletter which will include the biographies of all potential board members and a method of voting either by mail or online. This is an excellent opportunity for you to have a say in who is representing your community and region at our board table. If you or someone you know is interested in a position on our board, make sure to read the December newsletter! It will contain the instructions needed to put your name forward.

Another big change coming in our next fiscal year is a change to how we are planning our conferences. This coming year will see our conference in each of the three regions: South, North and Winnipeg! The conference will be a one-day event with a foster family event hosted by us in the evening where all foster and kinship families are welcome, regardless of conference registration. More information regarding each of the conferences will be forthcoming in future editions of the newsletter.

As always, we rely on the kindness of our volunteers to support our programming. Our volunteers work in many different areas including peer support, committee work and event management. The opportunities to get involved really are endless. If you are interested in learning more about our volunteer program, please contact our office at the above numbers and ask for Jennifer.

On an even more important note, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the fostering community for all you do every day. You play such a vital role in the safety and well-being of our youth! I'd like to leave you with this thought: It takes a special skill, a high level of professionalism, incredible strength, and an amazing sense of humor to do what you do...and what you do is making a difference.

Shawna Normand

Do you believe foster parents should have a strong voice in the Child Welfare System?

If so, have you considered applying for a position on the Manitoba Foster Family Network's Board of Directors?

Joining the board of directors would allow you the opportunity to:

- work with fellow foster parents to grow your Network.
- bring forth relevant information to guide programming.
- work with a dynamic and energetic group of people.
- grow and develop new skills.
- contribute your time in a meaningful and rewarding way.

There are currently open seats in the Southern region, and elections will be held for terms in all regions at our AGM in May. The deadline for name submissions to be considered for term positions is February 15th, 2016.



If you would like more information, please contact us at 204-940-1280 or manfost@mffn.ca.

Peer Support News

Right now the Network has 11 Peer Support providers that answer your calls each day. This is a group of some of the most dedicated people I have ever met. They provide information and support to the many calls that come into the office every day. They also support and talk with each other when one is having difficulties.

We are looking to increase our numbers, so we can meet the needs of the province more effectively. For anyone interested in becoming a peer support provider, we are holding some orientation sessions:

- in our **Winnipeg** office, on **October 14th** from **9:30 am-11:30 am** and **1:00 pm-3:00 pm**
- in **Swan River**, on **October 15th** from **1:00 pm-3:00 pm**

Please contact Ashley in our office for more details.

Lisa Moxam

Trends in Fostering

This fall is going to be one of huge growth for us at the Network. We are working hard to put together some really exciting training for foster parents.

In meeting with various agencies, one of the most common questions is: "What are some of the trends you see in fostering?" There is a trend for agencies to want foster parents to help children to be connected to their roots. At the same time, the foster parents are not encouraged to have a connection to the biological family.

One of the big issues we talk about is the principal of addition and subtraction in a foster home. Agencies tell foster parents to love the children in their home; to treat them as integral parts of the core family. This expectation can set people up to think the child by default becomes theirs. We then hear comments from foster parents like "Yahoo! Our foster child just went permanent and he is now ours!" This is the principal of subtraction. It is taking one family away so another can take its place. The next time we hear from that family unfortunately might be when either the child decides he wants to return to his biological family, or when the agency makes the decision to place that child back in his community. The foster parents are left bewildered and feeling like they were set up for heartache. Fostering is at its healthiest when it is using the principal of addition. The foster home is not ever a substitute for the child's biological family; it is meant to provide a bridge between a difficult situation and a path toward a healthier one. Workers in child welfare know the children in care will at some point in their life seek out their roots regardless of how loved they felt

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in their foster placements. It then becomes a responsibility for us that work within this system to keep alive the children's connection to the families and their cultures even when the families are not able to respond in a way that we would hope for the children in our care. Sometimes it takes some inventive thinking to form a relationship with a family that sees you as a threat.

When I worked in my last job, one of my favorite people was a solvent using Mummy. She had a little boy that had some serious medical difficulties and who would remain in foster care for his entire life. Mummy was difficult to connect with because of her use patterns. She was often cranky towards the foster mother and with the social workers involved in her child's life. The foster mother would write Mummy love letters from her child. They would start with something like "Dear Mummy, today I thought of you when I was putting on my jacket to play outside.." the letter would go on to talk a bit about his day, balancing joyous moments with some of his challenges and the ways those challenges were being met. The letter would often include pictures. Sometimes the letter would be tucked away inside the child's bag for Mummy to find when they visited and sometimes when Mummy was not able to visit, the letters were sent to a local organization that Mummy would access in her daily travels. Mummy would get her mail and visit me so I could read the letter to her and copy the pictures. She would then take the pictures and give them to everyone she met so they could see what a wonderful child she had. By the end of a short time the pictures would be gone – shared with her community - and the letter would have been read by everyone she encountered until it finally fell apart. These letters nurtured Mummy and held her as part of her child's life. I believe Mummy eventually stopped visiting and the letters tapered off. In time though, when her son is ready to meet her again, there will be a connection and the foundation for a relationship that will allow him to remain connected to his roots while also connected to the wings his foster home provided.

The principal of addition happens in all aspects of our lives through changes in marital status, changes in location and changes in lifestyle. We end up belonging to a series of people and cultures and circumstances. They all have a place in contributing to our sense of who we are and how we fit in this world. None is exclusive.

As we develop and refine our training for foster parents in this ever-changing time, we want to hear from you. Please call us with your thoughts, your stories and your experiences so we can add to and improve upon the information we currently have.

Lisa Moxam

Greetings from The North :)

What is happening in The North?

We had a super time at Bell Lake for the CFS Sapatoweyak family camp where families, community members and friends gathered to support each other. The camp was full of fun; magicians, storytelling, games, powwow, food, and of course lots of laughter.



Keep tuned to our Facebook page to see when we will be in your community.

The Network is looking for **Peer Support Volunteers** throughout the North. If you are interested, come out to the information session being held at ***The Super 8, October 15th, in Swan River, starting at 1:00 pm***. If you would like us to come to your community, please call 204-940-1280. We would love to come out and see you!!

Here's a great idea to do with your empty 2L pop bottles!! Save them up and build yourself a greenhouse :)



This greenhouse took 1500 2L bottles, 2x2's and 4x4's, screws, staples, hinges, and elbow grease :). What a great way to recycle your pop bottles and enjoy some fresh, home-grown food. Happy building!!

Charlotte Sauder

Strong and Healthy Respite

Respite is defined as an interval of relief. Everyone can benefit from respite during times of extraordinary stress, during sickness, or just for time to collect themselves. In caring professions, it is understood that strong and healthy respite often makes a difference towards maintaining a consistent level of quality care. Respite can allow a kinship or foster parent to take time to care for themselves and their own family members. But what is involved in strong and healthy respite? It is important that kinship and foster parents consider for themselves what this should look like. Here are a couple of thoughts about assessing what is strong and healthy respite in your home.

First, the respite person must understand and follow the parenting strategies you follow within your home. Of course, this means a kinship or foster parent must have clarity about what their parenting strategies are so they can be transferred. When a person provides respite but changes the parenting strategies within the kinship or foster home the result will be increased stress when the primary parents return. This kind of respite adds to the stress of parenting and often falls short of truly providing relief.

Using the same person for respite is important in kinship and foster care. While this is not always possible, the introduction of multiple respite people into a home often creates challenges of connection for children and youth who have already experienced multiple caregivers in their short lives. This is all the more important for children and youth who have sensory processing challenges.

Foster and kinship homes are most successful when they follow consistent predictable patterns for the benefit of those they care for. Therefore, **individuals who offer them respite must be consistent and predictable.** They must be on time for the support they offer. They must follow the parenting approach and style, as best as they can, of the parents they are providing relief for. They must demonstrate the same level of caring and nurturing as those parents.

A person offering respite must have effective communication skills for the transfer of information. That means strong listening skills and clear information relaying skills. There should be no gaps in information which requires the parents to seek out what went on during their time away. When gaps exist the parent must pursue the missed information and that diminishes the sense of relief they were hoping to find.

The best relief for a kinship or foster home is when the parents can leave those they care for with a respite person with whom they trust will act as they would, care as they do and hand back their home in the same state that they left it in. That sounds simple but anyone who has been providing care for others, from their home, for an extended period of time, has experienced how difficult it can be to find such strong and healthy respite.

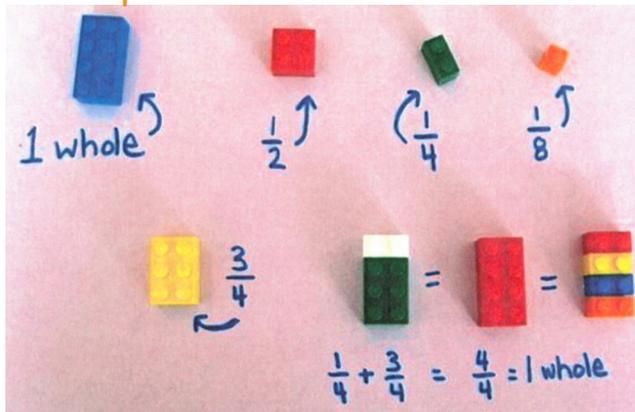
Did you know?

The Manitoba Foster Family Network keeps a list of people that have expressed their interest in providing respite. If you or anybody you know would like to be added to this list or if you would like an updated version of this list, please call the office at 204-940-1280.

If you have any further thoughts about what creates strong and healthy respite providers or if you have strategies for finding respite providers let us know here at the Manitoba Foster Family Network and we will pass on your wisdom.

Terri McNaughton-Wright

Back to School Tips and Tricks



Lego Fractions

For a more hands-on approach to math, use Lego pieces to help kids learn fractions. Lego pieces can also be used to help kids learn to count.

Weekly Menu Planners and Planning Calendars

The most consistent message foster and kinship parents hear is children or youth with sensory processing challenges require predictable patterns in their environment. It is increasingly being understood that temporary or long term sensory processing challenges can arise from a variety of factors. These factors can range from brain differences to short term traumatic experiences. Researchers are still learning how our ability to interpret and process sensory information is affected by events in our lives.

Learning is greatly enhanced for most individuals when they can make sense of the world around them and this is even more important for children and youth in care who have experienced trauma and too many homes in their short lives.

September means the start of a new school year. In kinship and foster care, the return to school usually means back to routines and patterns. This is a wonderful time to introduce parenting tools which can help every member of the household know what is happening and when it will happen. Weekly Menu Planners and Planning Calendars are examples of such parenting tools.



Weekly Menu Planners help remove concern and confusion around what is for meals. They are key to teaching many life skills. When a menu is made, a shopping list can be developed. A shopping list is an important part of budget creation as having a list can reduce impulse buying. A weekly menu demonstrates a predictable pattern around food and seeing a menu which is followed reassures individuals who have experienced uncertainty around food.

The Planning Calendars we have designed are intended for an individual to create their plans and see their accomplishments. The individual learns to journal their daily events and create "to-do" lists. This is a very hands-on parenting tool which offers tremendous opportunities to teach life skills. A planning calendar can be used to show a birth parent what is happening in a child's life. It provides a reference to everyone interested in what is being planned and being accomplished with a person. When the calendar is filled and all the months are finished, it can become one piece which records the journey a person experienced while living in a kinship or foster home. The calendar is the persons own journal of their experience.



Of course such parenting tools have two sides to them. They can clearly demonstrate an aspect of the quality of care being offered for the children in a kinship or foster home. They can be seen as parenting tools of accountability. Using such tools can demonstrate to others the planning and follow-through which occurs in a home. This can be a very helpful piece when questions of kinship or foster care skill levels are asked.

Planning Calendars and Weekly Menus are available for purchase, please contact the office at 204-940-1280 for more information.

Brad Wright



"Fostering Connections"

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Find the Manitoba Foster
Family Network on Facebook!

Check out our calendar on the www.mffn.ca
website for training dates and other events
to be announced.

Our Mission

The Manitoba Foster Family Network encourages, promotes, and
assists in the development of healthy foster homes to improve
the quality of life for the children in care.

Do you believe in foster parents supporting the fostering community?

The Manitoba Foster Family Network is looking to expand our team of volunteer
Peer Support Providers throughout Manitoba.

We offer:

- extensive training on fostering related issues.
- a supportive environment that will allow you to continually develop your skills.
- the chance to make a positive impact on other lives.
- the flexibility to provide service from your home.
- opportunities to connect with other foster parents.

We require:

- you to be a licensed foster parent in good standing with your agency or to have fostered in the past.

Information sessions will take place in Winnipeg on:

Wednesday, October 14th, 2015

9:30 am - 1:30 am or 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm

The were also be an information session in Swan River on:

Thursday, October 15th, 2015

1:00pm - 3:00pm

**For more information or to register call 204-940-1280
or email manfost@mffn.ca.**



"Fostering Connections"