



"Fostering Connections"

Manitoba Foster Family Network

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Volume 15, Issue 3

Message from the Board

The summer is over, and now it's back to school. Over the summer, the Manitoba Foster Family Network has been working to increase opportunities for our foster and kinship parents.

There are many needs and challenges facing our families, children, youth, and foster and kinship homes. Sometimes, these challenges can be overwhelming for our foster/kinship homes, at which point they are brought to the attention of the Manitoba Foster Family Network.

We would like to recognize our partnerships with our government agencies, along with our First Nations agencies, in addition to many volunteers of the Manitoba Foster Family Network who service our children, youth, and foster/kinship parents to ensure that our children in care get the type of services and programs that they so desperately need.

The Manitoba Foster Family Network recognizes that every foster/kinship parent is coming from different starting points, however through the sharing of our experiences, culture, and knowledge, we can build a healthier, stronger, and brighter future for our children in care. Together we are making a significant difference for our children in areas of culture, social factors, economics, and so on.

We thank you for your on-going input into each of our programs and look forward to our continued working relationship with all.

Best regards from the Board of Directors,

Douglas Gerrard

Vice-President of the Winnipeg area

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Acting Executive Director's Report

Hello everyone,

I hope everyone had an enjoyable summer, and you were able to take in some of the beauty Manitoba has to offer. Being able to spend some time in nature is truly rejuvenating. Between work and family outings I was able to spend time in the North, South and Central parts of our province this summer and enjoyed my time in each equally. Our vast province has so much to offer. It's amazing that you can find huge lakes, fast flowing rivers, dense forest, and even desert like landscapes. My visits to these various locations did give me pause though. I could not help thinking of some of our children in care who have suddenly found themselves transported to live in a different part of Manitoba they may have never seen. If you were used to the rugged beauty of the Canadian Shield would a visit to the Spirit Sands be exciting? Or terrifying? Each case would likely be different but I think it is important to consider in what ways children have connected with this Earth, and be willing to help them nurture that connection.

As summer winds down I am pleased to report that this has been a busy, and productive time at The Network. We have not slowed down at all; instead we picked up the pace to be ready for a very busy fall. Our staff has been writing, planning, prepping, proofing and testing. The result of that hard work is we are excited to offer our most full training calendar ever. Please make sure you look at our website www.mffn.ca and check the calendar of events. We have training scheduled in the North, the South and Winnipeg. These are free training opportunities for you. Most importantly training offered by the Network is designed specifically for Foster Parents and it addresses what is often missed in training - how to parent through challenging issues.

We have also been busy preparing for our next conference which is coming very soon. The structure of our conference has changed recently. We now will host a one day FREE conference in each region, and will include a forum that allows foster parents to add their voice to the issues being discussed. This year The Manitoba Foster Family Network is partnering with the Office of the Children's Advocate to present their latest report, On the Edge Between Two Worlds: Community Narratives on the Vulnerability of Marginalized Indigenous Girls. The first presentation of this topic will be held in Swan River at the Elbert Chartrand Friendship Center, 1413 Main St E on October 5, 2016. The second presentation of this topic will take place in Winnipeg at the Lutheran Church of the Cross, 560 Arlington Street on January 17, 2017. The third presentation will take place in the Southern part of the province, date and location to be determined. A pamphlet with more information has been included with this newsletter. We look forward to seeing and hearing you there!

Jennifer Karaim

Acting Executive Director

Have a safe and happy return to school!



As I drove to work today I saw my first official reminder that fall is rapidly approaching. The geese have begun to gather. This is always a time of the year that I frantically try to cram in every summer activity I overlooked during the actual summer and begin to pull myself together toward the new starts that fall seems to bring.

We have all been working really hard on our fall training so please be sure to keep an eye on our calendar for the latest information.

We held one southern BBQ this year out in St Malo. It was a great day – and we made some great connections. Thank you to everyone that attended! It was really nice seeing you all there.

I wanted to share a personal story. This summer one of our young family members passed away. This was a child that was involved in the child welfare system. As I attended the funeral, some thoughts occurred to me. There had been a disconnect at some point between the biological family and the agency. This meant that, in their most heartbreaking and stressful time, neither the child's parents or the foster parents could rely on the other for support.

In our training we often discuss the need for the foster home and the biological home to come together as two essential parts of the child's team. I don't think I had fully appreciated what we were saying until that moment. There are definite challenges to forming and maintaining a respectful and supportive unit when sometimes the elements of that unit live with diverse experiences (both historically and contemporarily), but I believe there is a way. I have recently heard of a new pilot starting in September that helps children in care form permanent connections. Everyone in that child's circle is considered. In the end the child has support from all areas of their life, and to me that means all areas then find a way to support each other as well.

Lisa Moxam

Peer Support News

Sometimes we meet someone that comes into our life that we like immediately. Our Peer Support provider Christine Arndt was one of those people. Christine passed away this summer.

Christine began fostering at the age of 18. Family then was the core of her life. She really and truly believed a way could be found even when things were difficult. We loved that she was always trying to find innovative solutions for challenges as they presented; whether it was through the location of a resource or thinking outside the box for her children. She became an expert in specialized cooking and multi-tasking. Christine and her husband have had a busy life. Often with 4 high need children, the family has gone camping in Northern Manitoba, gone on adventures to parks and to the zoo. They went to Disneyland and each year they attended Rainbow stage. Christine strongly encouraged people to look past her children's limitations to see their potentials.

Christine started as a Peer Support provider in 2013 and volunteered countless hours through the Network in the support of foster parents. She always provided solid and accurate information based on research and personal experience. She was dedicated to her role as Peer Support provider and was the first to offer to cover a shift or reach out if one of the other providers needed help. Our team will not be the same without her. Her work will live on though in the responses, solutions and suggestions she made. Because of Christine's input, we have improved training for new Peer Support providers as well as the development of a recognized standard of practise.

Our Peer Support providers take calls live Monday to Friday from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm. They also answer messages left on the phone line and the MFFN website mailbox from 9:00 am - 9:00 pm on weekends and holidays.

I'm really going to miss hearing "hello – Christine here" and I'm going to miss her emails, her laugh and the humorous spin she would put on stories about raising some very high energy children. Christine was an amazing woman and a true inspiration. She demonstrated what it means to raise young people from other families in such a way that they are secure, happy, and connected.

Lisa Moxam

When Children in Care go back to school - tips for success

For many children in Northern Manitoba, going back to school can be an exciting time of year filled with anticipation of connecting with old acquaintances and meeting new friends. Students look forward to debuting newly purchased school supplies and clean shoes, sporting fresh haircuts and carefully chosen first-day outfits. For these children, fall marks a time of year for embarking on new beginnings that offer the promise of development, learning and achievement.

The reintroduction of class structure and enforced learning may also present an extreme source of anxiety and disruption for children who struggle with changes to routine, behavioral and emotional regulation, cognitive impairment, mental health, poverty, lack of access to resources, and trauma from abuse and neglect. For these children, the concept of going back to school may cause feelings of worry and fear over what time in the classroom might entail.

Foster parents in Northern Manitoba understand their children are painfully familiar with obstacles to learning such as those outlined above. In contrast to other students, foster children are frequently plagued by mental health and behavioral issues and more likely to have experienced recent trauma and separation. Complicating matters further, foster children may be living in an unknown community, enrolling in an entirely different school where they are surrounded by unfamiliar peers.

As foster parents, facilitating a successful return to the classroom is critical for beginning the school term on a positive note as this may increase the likelihood that the rest of the year will follow suit. Plenty of useful tips designed to help foster parents create a smooth transition for children returning to school can be obtained from a wide variety of online resources, some of which have been summarized below.

Tip #1: Being Proactive Helps. Begin talking with foster children weeks in advance about their eventual return to school. Answer questions to alleviate fears they might have, assist them in developing coping strategies for working through anxiety and fear while building excitement and anticipation about the enjoyment school can bring. From a behavioral perspective, it may be helpful to begin implementing bedtime and morning routines that more closely resemble those necessary during the school year, well ahead of time. This gives children the opportunity to become accustomed to altered schedules and get adequate rest, prior to the night before the first day of class.

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Tip #2: Establish Communication with the Child's School. Upon enrollment, foster parents may have several forms to fill out. It may be useful to go to the school, prepared with all necessary ID numbers, contact information and required records. Does the child have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special education, behavior, and/or speech classes? Foster parents regularly attend parent teacher meetings and conferences; however it is important to remain cautious about sharing private information and determine if you as a foster parent can sign permission slips for field trips and events.

Is your child's ability to learn impacted in ways that need to be communicated to school staff so they may best meet the child's needs? This may be the case in situations where a child suffers from cognitive impairment, FASD, ADHD or special medical needs that may require the intervention of school staff to ensure safety.

School may also represent an important opportunity to connect with the child's birth family. Although it may be necessary to ask if the child's birth family can attend parent-teacher meetings, this is an excellent way for foster parents to mentor birth families by modeling appropriate ways to ask questions and advocate for their child. If birth parents are not permitted to attend meetings, foster

Tip #3: Stay Involved. Foster parents may be of great benefit by playing an active role in the child's experience at school throughout the entire year. In addition to reviewing and signing off on progress reports, it may help to request information from the teacher about how a child is doing in the class as time progresses. It is in the child's best interest for foster parents to remain aware of potential hurdles their child is facing as this information may be used by the fostering agency to attain additional funding, write referrals for specialists and determine diagnoses or required assistance.

parents may benefit their child by taking steps to include them by sharing school information.

In Northern Manitoba, fall is a season filled with the rich smell of harvest and the vibrant color of leaves. It is a time of year when children return to school to reconnect with old acquaintances, meet new friends and engage in healthy routine. Although foster children face a variety of unique challenges that impact their experience at school, there are a variety of important ways foster parents can help their child navigate the classroom environment, such as being proactive, establishing a conversation with the school and maintaining communication throughout the year. These helpful tips (and many more) can be located online using a simple internet search and may make the difference between a successful or difficult transition into the school year.

Christopher Thompson

(Source: <http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/5-foster-parents-tips-to-prepare-for-back>)

Skills for Life

We are often asked if our Skills for Life workshops can be attended by a kinship or foster parent who is caring for a young child. Is the training only for older adolescents who are preparing to transition out of care?

Skills for Life is not just a workshop for adolescents preparing for independence. The material, thoughts and ideas we offer and discuss in the workshop are for all care providers. Our intent is to assist a care provider to teach clear defined steps for life skills which are concrete and operational. Then confidently report what are the individuals demonstrated strengths and challenges with various concrete and operational life skills. Therefore it is beneficial to start such a process as early as possible.

For years, actually decades, it has been known that adolescents in care, are not being adequately prepared to transition into their adult community. Some solutions explored have been extending the time available for an adolescent to remain in care or developing contractual relationships committed to providing extended support with known resources once the adolescent has transitioned out of care

Skills for Life takes a different approach. It focuses upon the what, when and how of the life skills teaching steps being provided. This approach holds us all accountable to what the strengths and challenges in the care currently being provided, and how we can improve to create better outcomes.

There are three different kinship/foster care training workshops we are providing during the fall of 2016. they are being offered in the Brandon and Winnipeg regions. The underlying theme in these training is skill development. The specific skill development we focus on is parenting skill development. While there are many hats a kinship or foster parent may wear the parenting hat is certainly one of the most important, if not the most important.

Brad Wright

Please call the office at 204-940-1280 to register for one of the following:

Family Fun Night in Swan River on October 4

Fostering Connections Forum in Swan River on October 5

Writing your Parenting Milieu in Brandon on October 5, 12, and 19

Skills for Life in Brandon on October 6, 13, 20

Writing your Parenting Milieu in Steinbach on October 11, 18, and 25

Guiding Behaviours in Winnipeg on November 3, 10, and 17

Resources

The Manitoba Foster Family Network has been asked to share the following list of events, apps, websites, and other useful information for kinship and foster parents:

- ◇ The Connect group is being offered at the Parenting Centre, and is FREE. This is the first time this program will have been offered in Manitoba and we are proud to be hosting it. Connect is an attachment focused program for those who foster older children. It is culturally safe and heavily researched and Canadian! It comes out of Dr. Marlene Moretti in Simon Fraser University and has been offered all over BC and Alberta and a few other spots. We are offering a Monday night and a Tuesday night group. Feel free to call it a training or a therapy because it will be a little and a lot of both. Those interested can contact our admin, Samara Mondor at samara.mondor@newdirections.mb.ca or at 204-786-7051 ext 2524 to register.
- ◇ Dr. Mary Claire Heffron is a world leader in caring for a child with complications, which might include FASD, birth complications, colic, or other trauma. She has been working with families for decades who have “fussy babies”, and how to offset the sometimes difficult trajectory their care takes the family in. The conference would be suitable for those who support these families, but also for foster parents. We are also offering a FREE parent night with Dr. Heffron at the SSCY building 1155 Notre Dame Ave, at Sunday, Oct 22 from 6-8pm. Those interested can email us at attachmentnetwork@shaw.ca.
- ◇ www.attachmentnetwork.ca: where all attachment-related resources are listed
- ◇ CerebralPalsyGuidance.com: a comprehensive informational website on cerebral palsy
- ◇ Apps for your smartphone:
 - * Child Vaccination Schedule: track vaccination schedule
 - * Cozi Family Organizer: shared calendar, to-do lists, and more
 - * Family Timetable: timetables for kids and parents with multiple schedules
 - * FOCUS on Foster Families: explore insightful videos and practical resourced for foster youth and caregivers
 - * Our Groceries Shopping List: keeps your family's grocery list in sync on every family member's phone or web browser
 - * Tippy Talk: improved communication between those with verbal disabilities and their caregivers
 - * Voices Manitoba: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network provides support, encouragement, and advocacy to youths

As always a complete list of the trainings offered directly through the Manitoba Foster Family Network can be found on our website at www.mffn.ca or by calling the office at 204-940-1280 for more information.



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Our Mission

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



Terri McNaughton-Wright, Education Coordinator, and Jennifer Karaim, Project Manager, making cotton candy at a picnic for kids in care.

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 Winnipeg region and elections will be held for terms in all regions at our AGM in 2017. The deadline for name submissions to be considered for term positions is February 1st, 2017.

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



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