



News and Notes

Youth Alternatives Foster Care Program

Making Reading Count for Kids in Care

Every day, I see children in foster care, or recently adopted into new families, who are so desperately behind their grade-level standards for literacy it scares and angers me. While there are probably hundreds of reasons for the lack of reading skills in this population of children, one is particularly apparent in almost every case: family instability. Taking advantage of the relative stability of foster care families to improve reading skills is, in my opinion, one of the best long-term gifts we can offer these children. When a child has problems at home, reading skills are quick to suffer but slow to recover. For a child who is already struggling to learn basic skills, even a brief disruption in literacy learning can result in an illiterate adult. The National Research Council has found that if reading problems are addressed early enough, the numbers of teens and adults who struggle with reading can be drastically reduced. The foster child population was specifically mentioned in a 1998 report be-

cause this group has all the risk factors for reaching adulthood with low literacy levels. I have developed some specific protocols for families with a newly placed foster child. The foster care placement is indefinite—it can last for days or years—so the activities should be started as soon as the child is placed. Have lots of reading materials handy and available in the child's living areas—right from day one. You don't have to provide expensive classics or best-sellers—comic books, the sports section of the newspaper or age-appropriate magazines are all excellent at awakening a child's interest in reading. The number of different reading materials in your home will show that you place a high priority on reading, and the child will immediately realize that this is something important. Take new children to the library as soon as possible after placement. While at the library take a quick tour and explain how to

borrow a book, pointing out other activities such as story hours, playgroups, etc. Your library may also have special computers or reading clubs, make the child aware of all of these. It may take a few visits for a child to become familiar with everything your library has to offer. This is very important: Stress the care and treatment of library books and make the child responsible for her own books. Don't pack up the books and return them for the child, and if a book is damaged go with the child to arrange for payment. **Making Reading Routine** The next step is to give the child some time to acclimate and understand the importance that reading has in this new environment. Once she becomes more comfortable, talk to her about what kinds of books you enjoyed at her age, and suggest some books that she might enjoy. Then, make frequent family
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YA All Stars

- ☺ Sami G. was christened in early November.
- ☺ Thanks to Mike Daigle who answered questions for prospective foster parents at the Fall Pre-service Training.
- ☺ Congratulations to Coletta Sutton, a newly licensed YA Foster Parent.
- ☺ Congratulations to Michael William Riseman who was adopted by Jane and Walter Riseman!

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Training Corner

December Trainings

Trainings from YA:

To register for YA trainings email: registration@youthalternatives.org or call 874-1175.

- 12/6 CPR 9-12:30
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/6 CPR Challenge 12:30-1
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/6 First Aid 1-4
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/6 First Aid Challenge 4-4:30
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/20 First Aid 9-12:00
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/20 First Aid Challenge 12:00-12:30
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/20 CPR 1-4:30
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room
- 12/20 First Aid Challenge 4:30-5
YA 2nd Floor Conf Room

Trainings from other sources:

CWTI Trainings: FMI or to register contact Jeanine Brown at 626-5200 or jeanine.brown@maine.gov

- 12/3 (Saturday) Simple Strategies for Mini-Miracles 1-4
DHHS Biddeford

DHS Trainings: FMI or to register call 287-9355 or register online at www.maine.gov/dhs/setu/registrationprocedures.htm

- 12/14 Losses, Moves, and Attachment 9-4 pm Maple Hill Farm, Hallowell
- 12/14 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder 9-4 DHHS Augusta

Mainely Girls Trainings: FMI or to register call 230-0170 or me-girls@midcoast.com

12/2 Eating Disorders Treatment Conference. 8-5 Portland Museum of Art, Portland, ME

Upcoming Trainings:

4/11/2006 All Foster Parent Day

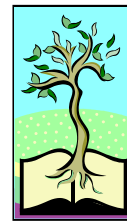
TCI 1-Day Refreshers

- January 13, 2006 9-4 YA
- March 10, 2006 9-4 YA
- May 11, 2006 (tentative date for Oxford Support Group)

Three Day Trainings:

March 8, 9, 10 (Wed-Fri) 9-5 at YA

For TCI trainings, sign up with Sarah Dowling at 874-1175, x255.



Maine Youth Opportunities Initiative

Maine Youth Opportunities Initiative is a program of USM's Muskie School of Public Service with a mission to help youth in Foster Care make successful transitions to Adulthood. They support a number of initiatives.

Currently they are in the second year of a two year grant funded by the Jim Casey Foundation called: Opportunity Passport. Its goals are to help youth leaving foster care become financially literate; gain experience with the banking system; amass assets for education, housing, and automobiles; and gain streamlined entry to educational training and vocational opportuni-

ties.

The Opportunity Passport has three distinct components:



- a personal debit account to be used to pay for short term expenses
- a matched savings account (also known as an Individual Development Account - IDA) to be used for assets building (up to \$1000 per year)

- door openers - a host of resources and opportunities to be developed on a local basis

For program eligibility youth must:

- be 14-23 years of age
- be currently in foster care OR have been in foster care at the age 14 or older
- complete financial literacy training
- live in Maine

For more information contact Maggie Vishneau at (207) 780-5469 or vishneau@usm.maine.edu

Reading (continued from page 1)

reading times and the keeping of a reading log or journal part of her routine.

To establish a family reading time, pick a five- or 10-minute window of time that doesn't interfere with other activities such as a favorite TV show or meal. Announce in advance that reading is scheduled for this specific time and date, and encourage all the children in the family to pick a book in advance.

When the reading time is at hand, have all the children sit quietly and read or look at their books. As everyone becomes more familiar with reading, one child can stand up and briefly tell about his book, or an adult can show a picture book that is being read by a toddler.

To avoid the danger that a child will come to see reading time as a boring obligation, it's important to limit the initial reading sessions to around 5 minutes. Kids will instinctively want more of an activity that they enjoyed, but didn't get enough time to complete.

Getting Into Details

When a child seems comfortable focusing on his reading, feel free to discuss the book in some depth. Some specific questions might focus on how the child identified with a particular character, or if he ever had a similar experience. For younger readers, ask what the character's

name was, or how the character felt in a specific scene.

If your child has a particular problem—such as shyness or a physical limitation—try to find books that feature a character with a similar problem.

The Arthur series by Marc Brown is a good one for younger kids. Arthur really blossoms and his personality develops as a result of being good at something, whether it is training his new puppy or taking care of his baby sister. This also happens to young readers who identify with a character and learn problem solving or coping skills from the story.

The Importance of Journal-Keeping

No child is too young to keep a reading journal. For very young readers, you might provide a list of simple questions, and help the child make a check mark to indicate yes or no. Or children may simply draw pictures about what they read. For an older child, the journal can be a simple log of books read, with just the title and author of the book and a couple of sentences about what he liked or disliked, or it can include several pages of discussion.

When discussing book likes and dislikes, encourage specific answers. If a child says that she didn't finish the book because it was boring, neither one of you has learned anything

about her reading tastes. Using examples like, "I need more adventure," or "There wasn't enough mystery," encourage her to think about what she might look for in future choices.

If the child has problems finding things to write in his reading journal, encourage him to write a letter to the author, or to someone who hasn't yet read the book. A special section in the journal where you and the child write notes back and forth about the book is also a favorite technique of mine.

One last tip for foster parents is to remember books when you think of gifts at holidays and birthdays. If a child expresses fondness for a particular book, think about purchasing that book as a present. This encourages children to think about book ownership and to continue reading—even after they leave your placement. Reading is truly one of the great levelers in the world—it can introduce dreams and ideas like no other medium. Anyone can read. You need not own a fancy car or live on the right side of the tracks or have the money to buy a book. Our public libraries are filled with people from all walks of life. For children, to see the importance of reading and feel the sense of accomplishment upon finishing that first really great book can be a transforming experience.

Written by Margaret Humadi Genisio, PhD and Sheri Wallace

Youth Alternatives Foster Care Book Club

Every YA foster child may participate in our monthly Book Club. Each child is allowed to order approximately \$8 worth of books each month. The order forms are mailed to parents around the first of the month. Foster parents should assist their children in choosing books and

completing the book order form. The Scholastic book catalog does include



items other than books; only books, however, should be ordered. **The forms should be returned to your case manager or to Youth Alternatives (c/o Jessica Gilman) by the 10th of each month.** The books will be ordered and will be delivered by the end of each month.

November is National Adoption Awareness Month

Notable Adoptees



Faith Hill, Singer
George Washington Carver, Inventor
Sarah McLachlan, singer
Jeff Bezos, Amazon.com founder
Malcom X, Civil Rights Leader
Rebecca de Mornay, Actress
Ray Liotta, Actor
Tim McGraw, Singer
Liz Phair, Singer
Priscilla Presley, Actor
Dave Thomas, Wendy's Founder
Jessie Jackson, Civil Rights Leader
Edgar Allan Poe, Author
Steve Jobs, Apple Co-Founder
John Lennon, Singer
Bobby Darin, Singer and Actor

*“Answering the call:
You don’t have to be
perfect to be the per-
fect parent.”*

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