

Family Ties

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.

Volume 19 Number 9

Newsletter

September 2016



Ready Set Go To Learn!



Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine and the Kinship Program has had a very busy summer assisting resource families prepare for the upcoming school year. The Ready Set Go to Learn, Back to School Program kicked off in July and is just now coming to an end. This year AFFM was able to provide close to 500 backpack bundles to youth in care! The backpack bundles consisted of age appropriate school supplies, a back to school outfit and personal care items. AFFM was also able to provide brand new boots to many children, thanks to a grant received from JMG at Spruce Mountain High School in Jay, Maine.

As you can imagine this is not an easy feat preparing and delivering these backpacks. AFFM is a small staffed organization and relies heavily on volunteers to complete this huge task. AFFM can not thank the following individuals and businesses enough for the heart and dedication put into this program to make sure youth in care have a successful start to the school year. AFFM board members Tammy Cutchen and Meghan Painton, you are heroes! The Ready Set Go to Learn Program operated out of Meghan Painton's house and more often than not Meghan and Tammy were the ones filling backpack bundles or replenishing supplies that became low towards the end. AFFM could not do this program without you and we thank you for your dedication and time. You are so appreciated!

Thank you to Marie Barbieri for your amazing shopping skills! Thank you to Marlene Hensley at LL Bean for once again donating backpacks. Thank you to Janalee Moquin; Royal Ridge Church of God in Scarborough; Jenny Chaput and the American Legion Auxiliary Post 21 in Bath; Eagle Scout Zachary Morrell; Tracy Peck-Moad; MattressFirm Foster Kids Program; Heather Gendron of Bangor Savings Bank in Saco and the many other individuals who supported AFFM and this program!

Thank you to Maine Parent Federation; Gena Boucher at Portland DHHS; Abigail Sabourin and Leigh-Anne Bordas at Lewiston DHHS; Bill Labombarde and Waldoboro Police Department; Waldo County Sheriff's Department; Ellsworth and Machias DHHS; Caribou and Houlton DHHS; and Debbie Irish for helping coordinate with families on picking up their backpacks. AFFM is so appreciative of being able to partner with so many amazing individuals and organizations to help make this program successful!

AFFM wishes you all to have a safe and happy school year!

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New Social Security Policy Benefits Youth Leaving Foster Care

A new policy from the Social Security Administration (SSA) went into effect on August 1st to allow foster youth of all ages with disabilities to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits six months before they leave care. This policy will remain in effect for one year, after which SSA will evaluate its success and make any necessary modifications.

SSI is a federal needs-based program for children and adults with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older. Individuals who are eligible receive a monthly cash payment. The 2016 payment amount for an individual without any other income is \$733. Community Legal Services, Juvenile Law Center, and Homeless Advocacy Project created a special toolkit to help qualifying persons take immediate advantage of this new policy and get the urgent support they need to make successful transitions. The toolkit will help guide foster youth with disabilities who are preparing to transition out of foster care and is available at www.jlc.org/SSI or www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI.

“Providing stability for these vulnerable youth as they leave care requires thoughtful planning and coordination among many different agencies and actors,” said Community Legal Services attorney and Independence Foundation Fellow Claire Grandison. “We commend the Social Security Administration for taking a leadership role in this process by changing its policies to better meet the unique needs of youth with disabilities in foster care. With this change, SSA takes a leadership role in supporting youth leaving foster care. We appreciate how receptive Acting Commissioner Carolyn Colvin and her staff have been to the needs of this population and how hard they have worked to develop and implement this policy quickly.”

“We know that foster youth with disabilities face a tremendous uphill battle as they prepare for adulthood and independence,” said Karen Lindell, an attorney at Juvenile Law Center. “By allowing foster youth to apply for SSI benefits six months before they leave care, this new policy will help avoid destabilizing gaps in support during critical transition periods. This increased stability can have lifelong benefits, as it allows these vulnerable young adults to focus on finishing school, learning a trade, or developing life skills, rather than on finding a place to sleep at night.”

Research shows that youth who have been in foster care are more likely to experience negative outcomes that include homelessness, unemployment, incarceration, and lack of access to health care. Almost 40% of youth who “age out” of the foster care system become homeless or “couch surf” at some point during young adulthood. Additionally, up to 80% of children and adolescents enter foster care with a significant mental health need, and one third have a chronic medical condition. Youth with disabilities have an even greater challenge as they prepare for adulthood. SSI benefits provide a vital source of income for these vulnerable youth as they transition out of care and onto their next step in life.

“Homeless Advocacy Project has spent the last 7 years representing youth aging out of the foster care system in their SSI disability claims through our expedited claims project called ‘SOAR.’ We know firsthand how critical it is to start the claims process well before discharge in order to avoid youth homelessness,” said Homeless Advocacy Project attorney Laura Kolb.

This new policy can also help in reunifying families by providing an immediate source of additional financial support that many families need, thus reducing financial stresses. In some states, the rate of failed reunifications is more than 25%. This new policy means that families will have income from SSI in place more quickly after reunification, easing the transition and reducing financial strain. Community Legal Services, Juvenile Law Center, and Homeless Advocacy Project advocated for this policy change, which will provide vital income to vulnerable youth as they transition out of foster care and attempt to establish stability at home or elsewhere.

For more information about this policy change, please visit www.jlc.org/SSI or www.clsphila.org/FosterCareSSI.

Adoption Announcements!



Elizabeth and Victoria Morrell adopted Mariah Morrell age 12 Camrin Morrell age 10 and Lexyana Morrell age 5 all of Biddeford Maine in Dover-Foxcroft Maine at the Piscataquis county court house on July 26, 2016 after 4 years in foster care

Amber and Skip Young are pleased to announce the arrival of their youngest daughter Julie-Ann on August 11. She is welcomed by older siblings, Rick, A.J. and Jessica. Julie-Ann and her dog Shadow have found their forever home.



Have you recently legalized an adoption? Want to share the exciting news with others? AFFM would love to create an adoption announcement in the Family Ties newsletter. Send a write up and photo (if you wish) to meagan@affm.net. AFFM looks forward to hearing from you!

5K Family Walk/Race 2016



AFFM was fortunate to partner once again with District 5 DHHS and New Balance Factory Outlet Store in Skowhegan to bring about a highly successful event. The 5K is held annually to assist District 5 in their holiday party for children in out of home placements. This year over 70 participated in the actual race and several more registered but did not compete. The race is absolutely a family event and several parents participated with their children including those in strollers!

Thank you very much to Travis Bryant for organizing and fund raising for the event. Thank you also to Lee Caron, Adrian Phair, Ryan Smith, Erin Smith, Jennifer Poirier and numerous other staff from the DHHS offices in Skowhegan and Augusta. Special thanks to Suzanne Tilton and the many staff at New Balance who assisted in so many ways!

Thank you to numerous sponsors including but not limited to: New Balance, DHHS, AFFM, Bart Race Services, an anonymous donor who paid for the shirts and Patrick who funded the printing. I am sure there are many others who contributed as well. Please know that all are sincerely appreciated.



NACAC Conference 2016

I had the good fortune to once again attend the NACAC conference. This year it was held in Nashville TN. The 42nd Annual conference; **You are Not Alone; Building a Community to Support Parenting** was attended by over 800 adoptive, foster parents and professionals invested in furthering the message of hope and support for families and the children in their care.

The pre-conference was led in the morning by Elizabeth Warner PSY.D who spoke eloquently about the process of healing from early trauma. She utilized a model called **Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment** (SMART model). Participants were able to gain insight into how their behaviors often were triggers for both positive and sometimes not so positive responses from the children. The discussion was rich and I walked away thinking we need this type of therapist in Maine! I hope we can invite Dr. Warner to speak in Maine. Her practice is in Brookline MA., so could be a day trip!

In the afternoon portion of the pre-conference, Ken Huey Ph.D. and a survivor of early childhood trauma talked about what happens to the brain when traumatized. He included testing of participants using the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACES) model. He shared that a score of 1 or 2 indicated a relatively low adverse early childhood experience. Several in the room indicated a score of 7 including Ken himself. He drew upon the indicated findings showing by a show of hands how many in the room were now working within the child welfare system either as a social worker or a therapist. The response was considerable! It is obvious that many with early childhood trauma work through their issues and use the personal experiences to enhance their work. Ken's use of humor and telling of his personal journey lightened the intense topic and made it very understandable. Ken and Elizabeth are wonderful speakers who know their topics well!

Each day of the conference began with an excellent keynote presenter. Denise Goodman Ph.D. spoke passionately of the need for post adoption services. She integrated her incredible sense of humor, her own personal journey as a child protective worker, later her role as a foster parent to numerous and spirited teenagers and ultimately her work today to make a compelling and promising bid for services to adoptive families from the beginning of the process and throughout the child's life. She gave the message loud and clear that disillusion is not acceptable. Families need and deserve full support.

As always the young adult panel of former youth from care were remarkable and inspiring. Each told their story and how they are now either in college or using their degrees to, educate, protect and preserve children in the foster care system. They are amazing role models!

As the Adoption Subsidy Representative for Maine and a support group leader it is always a pleasure to be at national conferences to learn and bring back to Maine innovative concepts to share with the families we provide services to through AFFM. The other thing I love to do is share what Maine is doing in the child welfare arena. Without exception, Maine is a leader in training, supports and partnerships with DHHS and other child welfare related agencies and programs. As you struggle with the day to day frustrations that are inherent in adoption, foster care and kinship care, it is often hard to imagine that Maine is ahead of the curve, but trust me when I say; Maine is a national leader in child welfare! Many other states look to Maine to improve their own systems of care. It is true we have a long way to go to have a perfect system but there are caring people working to improve it daily!

Submitted by: Bette Hoxie, Executive Director of AFFM and the Kinship Program

Holiday Gift Giving Program

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine and the Kinship Program is gearing up for the Holiday Gift Giving Program! Resource families are invited to add their children's names, gender, clothing size and age to a wish list for holiday gifts. Once again, the amazing people from the Ogunquit Spirit of Giving Committee will work to provide holiday presents to kids in AFFM programs.

Give the office a call at 1-800-833-9786 and have your child's information and gift wish ready. ***We ask that you keep requests to under \$50.00 per child.*** Funds are limited for this program however if you find yourself struggling this holiday season feel free to contact us. Additionally, if your child is in foster care please contact your caseworker as they may have gifts available. The sooner AFFM has your information the more likely we are to fulfill the children's wishes.



Foster Care Tips—Dr. John DeGarmo

There are many factors as to why a child in foster care might have behavioral issues while in school. Perhaps he was never encouraged to behave in his own home, and has never been taught the importance of behaving in the classroom by his biological family members. The child may be lashing out in the classroom due to the emotional trauma he is facing. He might be frustrated due to the fact that he has been placed into the wrong classes after being placed into care. The foster student may suffer from physical and/or psychological problems that contribute to learning problems, causing further frustrations in him. Schools may contribute to his behavior problems by not implanting the proper school based behavior modification practices needed to best meet his needs. Teachers may also not be aware of the best teaching or behavioral modifications needed for his needs, either. Visitations and court appearances may also contribute to behavior issues while in school, as well. Peer pressure and the stigma or status of being a foster child may also lead to issues of behavior while in school, too. Along with this, the child may be embarrassed if personal and private information is released about his status and/or his family members, which might include mental illness, poverty, drug use and addictions, and criminal background and imprisonment. This type of embarrassment may also lead to behavior problems in the school, as his anxieties increase and relationships with his fellow students are threatened. Whatever the reason or reasons might be, children in foster care suffer from a number of behavioral related issues while in school, as they simply try to survive the trauma and challenges faced while being placed into foster care.

For more, contact Dr. John DeGarmo at drjohndegarmo@gmail.com, or at his website <http://drjohndegarmofoster-care.weebly.com>.

Kinship Corner

Legislation to Follow: The Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) is a historic bill pending in the United States Senate. The legislation (H.R. 5456/S. 3065) addresses long-standing barriers in federal policy by focusing federal resources on family-centered services to keep children safely with their families and prevent unnecessary placements in group care.

The Family First Prevention Services Act redirects federal funds to provide services to keep children safely with their families and out of foster care, and when foster care is needed allows federal reimbursement only for family-based settings and certain residential treatment programs for children with emotional and behavioral disturbance requiring special treatment.

For more information about this bill visit Generations United website at www.gu.org or AFFM's website at www.affm.net. To track the bill visit www.congress.gov and type in H.R. 5456.



Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine, Inc.

& The Kinship Program

State-Wide Resource Family Support Groups

At times meetings are cancelled due to weather and other unforeseen circumstances, cancellation notices are sent out via the AFFM email list serve and Facebook. Families are urged to call or email info@affm.net to be added to this service. For more Information and to RSVP for the support groups please call AFFM @ 1-800-833-9786 or 827-2331. AFFM asks families to RSVP 3-4 days in advance so the facilitator and childcare provider can plan accordingly.

Key: A= Adoptive, F=Foster, K= Kinship, CC= Child care is available upon request

Augusta – Kinship only/CC: 3rd Wednesday of the month from 5:30 – 8:00 pm at the Buker Community Center (22 Armory Drive Augusta) call Jan Partridge at 207-495-3864.

Augusta – A/F/K/CC: 1st Wednesday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm at Magic Years Center (25 Industrial Drive).

Biddeford – Kinship only/CC: 3rd Tuesday of the month from 10:00 – 11:30 @ J Richard Martin Community Center, 189 Alfred St.

Bridgton – A/F/K: 3rd Monday of the month from 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the Community Care (Behind Reny's) 15 Depot St. RSVP Vanessa Jones 647-2317

Brunswick – A/F/K/CC: Last Tuesday of the month from 5:30 – 7:00 pm at St Paul's Episcopal Church, 25 Pleasant St. Meetings are not held during Summer.

Caribou – A/F/K: 1st Thursday of the month from 5:30 at Caribou Adult Education Building on Bennett Drive in between Caribou Rec and the gas station.

Damariscotta— F/A/K: 1st Thursday of the month from 5:30-7:00 PM at the Skidompha Library (184 Main St).

Dover-Foxcroft – A/F/K/CC: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm at Mayo Regional Hospital, Borestone & Sebec rm.

Ellsworth – A/F/K/CC: 3rd Tuesday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Moore Community Center (133 State St.) RSVP Mindy Kane, CHCS 263-2014 or 461-8878

Farmington – A/F/K/CC: every 3rd Tuesday of the month from 6 – 7:30 pm @ Roberts Learning Center (room 201 & 205), UMF.

Houlton – A/F/K/CC: every 2nd Thursday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Houlton CHCS, 2 Water Street.

Lewiston – A/F/K/CC: every 4th Tuesday of the month from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at 200 Main Street Lewiston.

Lincoln – A/F/K/CC: 1st Thursday of the month from 6:00–7:30PM at the Community Evangel Temple, 124 River Rd.

Lincolntonville— F/A/K/CC: 2nd Monday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at the Lincolntonville Central School (523 Hope Rd.)

Machias – A/F/K/CC: 4th Thursday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm @ Rose M Gaffney Elementary School, 15 Rose Gaffney Rd

Orono – A/F/K/CC: 3rd Monday of the month from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at AFFM (34 Main Street Orono).

Portland— A/F/K/CC: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 5:30-7:30pm at 901 Washington Ave. Portland.

Presque Isle – A/F/K/CC: 3rd Tuesday of the month from 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Wesleyan Church (387 Centerline Rd.)

Rockland—A/F/K/CC: 3rd Monday of the month at 6:00PM-7:30PM at the Knox Center-Pen Bay Healthcare (6 White Street)

Saco—A/F/K/CC: 4th Wednesday of the month from 5:30PM-7:00PM at AFFM's Saco office (333 Lincoln Street).

Sherman – A/F/K: 1st Monday of the month at 7 Cow Team Road in Sherman. Please contact Debbie Irish at 365-7133 for more information. This group does not meet in the summer.

South Paris— A/F/K/CC: 1st Thursday of the month from 5:30-7:00PM at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (9 Olsson Road).

Skowhegan— A/F/K/CC: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at New Horizon Church (31 East Madison Road).

Please RSVP to Support Groups

*Just a
quick
reminder!*

It is very important for you to notify the support group facilitator before every support group meeting. Please let the support group facilitators know at least 3 days in advance (if possible) that you plan to attend a meeting. (We understand that unexpected changes happen). Notifying the leader of your support group, helps in the following ways: It helps ensure that there are enough childcare providers available. It helps invited speakers/guests preplan their agenda. It helps us decide the quantity of snacks, drinks, and handouts. It helps to ensure that we have a meeting space that meets everyone's needs. It also helps us to know who we should contact of an unexpected cancellation. The contact for each support group is listed on the Support group listing. The listing is sent out in the AFFM welcome packet, it is printed in the Family Ties Newsletter, and can be found online on AFFM's website at www.affm.net

Announcements

AFFM still has a limited amount of state park passes available. If you are a licensed home and did not receive a state park pass this year give AFFM a call at 1-800-833-9786 and we will send one your way. Don't miss out on this great opportunity! *When you call please have your six digit foster care license number on hand.*



New Discount added to AFFM's Discount Card Program!

Cathy's Treasures

"Best retail shop in Downeast Maine"

Owner: Mindy Kane

10 Station Road, Columbia

\$1.00 off each item purchased

461-8878

If you have a suggestion for a business or organization that AFFM can approach to participate in the Discount Card Program please contact AFFM. You can also print off and send a completed business application form to 34 Main Street Orono, Maine 04473. Application found at: www.affm.net/services/discount-card-program/

SAVE THE DATES

October 4 & 5, 9:00 am - 2:30 pm

Caring & Responding to Children Who Have Experienced Complex Trauma

**FREE two day intensive training
about the effects of traumatic stress
on children and how their experiences
impact you as their caregiver.**

Location

Franklin Memorial Hospital
Bass Room
111 Franklin Health Commons
Farmington, ME

For More Info

Contact: **Crystal Peaslee**
Phone: **624-7918**
Email: crystal.peaslee@maine.gov

Brought to you by:



Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.
34 Main Street, Orono, ME 04473

Phone: 1-800-833-9786 or (207) 827-2331
After Hour Emergency Support: (207) 745-4159
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E-Mail: info@affm.net

Affiliated With:
The North American Council on Adoptable Children
National Foster Parent Association
Generations United

Partnering With: Department of Health and Human Services

FAMILY TIES THE NEWSLETTER OF ADOPTIVE & FOSTER FAMILIES OF MAINE, INC PUBLISHED WITH
SUPPORT FROM THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES. PLEASE DIRECT

COMMENTS TO: EDITOR, FAMILY TIES, AT THE ADDRESS ABOVE.

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OLD TOWN, ME

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**Adoptive & Foster
Families of Maine, Inc.**
& The Kinship Program

New Resource Families Welcome! You are now receiving the Family Ties newsletter as part of your complimentary membership to AFFM! Learn more about AFFM and services offered by calling 1-800-833-9786 or visit www.affm.net

Locations: 34 Main Street, Orono, Maine

& 333 Lincoln Street, Saco, Maine

Phone: 1-800-833-9786

Email: info@affm.net

After Hour Emergency Support: 207-745-4159

Website: www.affm.net

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