

Family Fall Ties

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.

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Newsletter

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Working Together for Positive Outcomes

When Johnny (not real name) came to live with my family and me, he was six years old. Before Johnny came to live with us, he had lived a rather rough and tumble existence in his birth home. His mother was extremely passive and seldom intervened when Johnny's father took his frustrations out on Johnny. In many ways, Johnny was the parent to his two younger siblings. He especially doted on his three-year-old sister. He dressed her and even braided her long blonde hair. It was a role he assumed and his parents and grandparents thought he was "a really good big brother." His family was surprised and sad when Johnny repeated kindergarten. A move from one residence to another had proved to be a setback for him. In his new school, as part of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program, Johnny learned about the dangers involved with the misuse of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. Johnny knew his father drank alcohol and smoked cigarettes. On a day when school was released early, Johnny came home and found his father using and dealing drugs. Johnny's father got very angry when Johnny confronted him and his friends and told them, "drugs are not safe and you could die if you use them."

Worrying that his father was going to die made Johnny realize he had to have some help with this problem. He shared his concerns with the school D.A.R.E. instructor, who ultimately contacted DHHS. When DHHS approached his parents, Johnny got really scared. He knew his father would be angry and felt that his father would go to jail because of him. His mother, realizing that she would be held responsible for neglecting her children if she stayed with her husband, immediately went to court and filed for a separation. Johnny's fear intensified. He felt responsible not only for his father being arrested, but also for his family falling apart. He became suicidal. He ran out in front of a tractor-trailer truck hoping to be hit and die. When that attempt failed, he wrapped his head in a plastic bag. His mother discovered him and took him to the hospital by ambulance. Luckily, he did not sustain any long-term affects from the plastic bag as it was removed soon after he had made the threat. His mother, realizing that she could not keep him safe, insisted that he be admitted to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. The evaluation indicated that Johnny was at high risk for committing suicide if he returned to his home. His mother, at that time, agreed to have DHHS take custody of Johnny. His mother retained custody of Johnny's two siblings on the agreement that she would seek family counseling, parenting classes, and refrain from contact with her husband.

Johnny's mother and I met at the hospital. The hospital's Family Support Team supported us both. Johnny's mother and I discovered we had friends in common and that helped to reduce the tension. Brenda, Johnny's mother, was

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sad that her son would reside in foster care but was pleased to have him with someone with whom she felt comfortable. I was pleased that I would have first hand information from Johnny's family about his history and his likes and dislikes. I personally believe that children who must live away from their parents do better when the resource family and birth family get along well together. Communication between all the parties involved in the life of a child is essential to a positive outcome. When communication becomes the norm rather than the exception, things run more smoothly.

The initial plan was for Johnny to live with us for about six months. As a team, we met frequently at the hospital. Johnny's mother worked hard to pave the way for his return to her home. She took every class she could find on parenting and visited faithfully in my home to observe my parenting techniques, taking some of them on as her own. She had very little financial support, as she was now a single mother. Her husband, who had seldom provided financially for his family before, now claimed he was not able to support his family at all since he was facing a divorce and a possible fine for his involvement with drugs. Both parents were appointed attorneys by the court. Johnny also had an attorney acting on his behalf.

As weeks and months went by, Johnny's mother and siblings became stronger emotionally. At the six-month juncture in his placement, an effort was made to return him to Brenda. Johnny's mother had worked diligently, jumped through all the hoops, and fulfilled the court ordered agreement. With the support of her friends, her family, and my family, she had become a much stronger parent and a more self assured individual. The team was convinced that she and Johnny would be successful in their reunification.

Weekend visits, including over nights, had gone well. However, Johnny was not accustomed to his mother's newfound assertiveness and he wanted to return to his old role as the family leader. He challenged her repeatedly and ultimately sabotaged the reunification effort. Brenda was devastated that, after all her hard work, she was not able to maintain her son at home. She was so afraid that he would harm himself that she did not feel equipped to keep him. She spoke with the DHHS caseworker and told her that she did not want him to be anywhere other than with me. Johnny had to go by the rules in my home and was able to act like a child. The assumption from the onset of his placement was that I was the person in charge.

Brenda and I attended family therapy with Johnny together. The therapist helped us work out a system to support Johnny while teaching him how much his mother had grown and how he could trust her in the same way he trusted me. Together, Brenda and I spent hours playing with Johnny and his siblings. With guidance from Johnny's psychiatrist, I role modeled what we hoped would be a formula for success. The goal was for Johnny to trust Brenda as he did me and for Brenda to trust herself. A year later, we were still struggling to make a successful transition and ultimately the caseworker and support team members, as well as Brenda and I, agreed that long term foster care with me was in Johnny's best interest. Visits continued and Johnny spent all of his holidays and weekends with Brenda. Johnny did quite well in school and when he was home for no more than two days at a time did very well.

Johnny was a clever little boy and frequently played Brenda and me against one another. If he wanted an expensive toy, he would tell his mother that I said he could have it or visa versa. He would tell me his mother said he needed a different style of clothing or a fancier hairstyle or whatever he wanted. Luckily for Brenda, and for me, we spoke to each other on the phone nearly every day. We met at counseling sessions and we shared the transporting of him between the two homes. Brenda and I agreed that Johnny would not be allowed to manipulate us. Our united front made for a much more harmonious relationship and kept Johnny from becoming a very spoiled little boy. He still tried to manipulate us and would be angry with us

for joining forces. Now as a young adult, he laughs at the way he tried to get his way and at how clever his two moms were at making sure he did not get more than his fair share. I particularly remember one Christmas when Brenda shared that she had very little money to buy gifts for the holidays. I told her what Johnny had asked for Christmas. Johnny and one of my sons were nearly the same age and were in the same grade in school. They usually played with the same types of toys and games. They both wanted snowboards for Christmas. I purchased the snowboards and thought all was well until Johnny returned from spending Christmas with Brenda and the other children. He brought with him a much larger more expensive snowboard than the one I had bought for him and my son. It seems that Johnny not only asked his mother and I for a snowboard, but had also asked his maternal grandmother! Sometimes parents cannot cover all the bases. Johnny's two moms shared a special smile and learned a lesson on what to do next time.

I deliberately used the phrase "two moms" in the last paragraph to segue into another topic. Many foster parents and birth parents end up with hurt feelings over what the child or children call their foster parents. In my foster home, we established a relationship with parents early on in the placement. I let the birth parents know early on that I was not trying to take their place. If a child called me "Mom" it was their choice, not what I asked of them.

My most successful placements were the ones where the parents visited in my home. They were successful because the children saw us working together. They saw that my family was accepting of theirs and that made the kids feel better about themselves. The birth parents felt good because once they were told the ground rules for visiting in my home, they had free rein to take care of their own children and enjoy themselves. The ground rules were shared not as an authoritarian gesture, but as a way to make the family feel comfortable about what people could and could not do in my home. Foster families are often told to write the rules of the home down for the foster children. This is also a good way to establish boundaries with the parents. Everyone feels better and more accepted if they know what to expect. There are some situations where visits in the foster home may not work, but for the most part they can be made to be very safe and appropriate.

As resource parents, it is important to keep an open mind about the birth family members. Good communication between all the parents can be the best way to assist a child reunification and/or in moving towards some other form of permanency.

This article was written by a former foster parent

Halloween Safety Tips

- ♦ **Small children should always be accompanied by an adult**
- ♦ **Use flashlights, bright costumes or decorations to make trick or treaters more visible**
- ♦ **Try to frequent the same limited area each year or limit visits to friends and families**
- ♦ **Remind children not to eat candy until they are home and it has been safely inspected**
- ♦ **A safe costume should not block or restrict a child's vision or interfere with mobility. Make sure costumes are of a safe length so as not to trip the child.**



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.



Adoption Awareness Events this November

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program each November has the pleasure of celebrating Adoption Awareness month with the many amazing resource families across the state, as well as the Office of Children and Families Service, the Department of Health and Human Services and private agencies.

On November 1st AFFM will kick off Adoption Awareness month at the Blaine House in Augusta. The event will be filled with guest speakers, entertainment, treats and give aways! Also, John and Gail Neher will be honored as recipients for the Angels in Adoption award. November 16th OCFS will hold an awareness event in Augusta at the Hall of Flags. Guest speakers, agencies with information and activities as well as treats and give aways will be a part of this fun filled event.

Also in November, families who have recently legalized adoptions will have the opportunity to celebrate at the Bangor Children's Museum, Portland's Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine and Children's Discovery Museum in Augusta.

AFFM looks forward to celebrating adoption awareness month in November with all of you! Keep an eye out on www.affm.net, AFFM's email list serve, and newsletter for more information about each event.



Kinship Corner

On Sunday September 11th in honor of Grandparent's Day AFFM had the pleasure of partnering with restaurants in South Portland, Augusta, Orono and Presque Isle to host complimentary pizza parties.

In South Portland Uno's Pizzeria & Grill hosted 6 families, 21 guests in all. Families were able to create their own pizzas and have the opportunity to get a behind the scenes look in the kitchen and bake their pizzas! Pizza Hut in Augusta hosted 14 guests. Families enjoyed pizza as well as a special dessert. All were provided prizes and giveaways. In Orono 22 guests gathered at AFFM's office and enjoyed each others company while enjoying delicious pizza provided by Domino's. Door prizes and giveaways were given to all in attendance. As an extra bonus, guest had the chance to look through Orono's resource room! Presque Isle Domino's hosted 10 families, 37 guests in all! Families were delighted to have the opportunity to connect with other families raising their grandchildren. Domino's was kind enough to take the time and explain the steps of making pizza and gave some kids in attendance the chance to toss the pizza dough!

AFFM was honored to celebrate Grandparent's Day with so many amazing families! Thank you Uno's, Pizza Hut, and Domino's for the delicious pizza and great atmosphere. We hope to see you next year!



11th Annual 2016 Festival of “Fostering” Trees!

The *Festival of “Fostering” Trees* is back for another year continuing our mission of raising awareness and money for Maine foster kids while joining the entire community together by providing a beautiful festival of decorated Christmas Trees for you to enjoy and hopefully win!

Where: Foster’s Clambake 5 Axholme Road York, ME

When:

- ◇ Thursday December 1st from 10:00am – 8:00pm
- ◇ Friday December 2nd from 10:00am – 8:00pm
- ◇ Saturday December 3rd from 10:00am – 8:00pm
- ◇ Sunday December 4th from 10:00am – 8:00pm



Calls to winners will be placed on **Monday December 5th** from 6:00pm-9:00pm

Pick-up of **ALL** trees will be Tuesday, December 6th between 8:00am-Noon & 5:00pm-7:00pm

Admission is FREE: Voluntary donations of non-perishable food items and/or a monetary donation can be made at the door for the York Food Pantry. Come enjoy the “Spirit of the Season” without spending a penny. Purchasing raffle tickets is optional.

Raffle Tickets: 25 raffle tickets for only \$5.00, available to purchase at the Festival.

How can I participate? Donate a decorated artificial Christmas tree, any size, style or fashion, traditional or non-traditional, (be creative) using any type of materials and the tree will be raffled off at the end of the festival. All trees will be set-up and decorated by the participants. ***Please write your Confirmation # on your tree box.*** Extension cords are provided.

Can I donate something else instead of a tree? Monetary donations & gift certificates are great ways to participate in the Festival & **ALL** items will be used appropriately.

Who receives the proceeds? The Festival of “Fostering” Trees (FOFT) serves as the signature fundraising event for **A Place Called H.O.M.E. (LC3) – Having Opportunities Means Everything**, which exists to serve the multifaceted and critical needs of older youth (16-26) who are aging out or have aged out of Maine’s foster care system and find themselves in need of a support system.

How can I enter a tree? Email your **COMPLETED** Entry Form to Janalee @ janalee-moquin8@yahoo.com or mail to P.O. Box 72 York, ME 03909 by **Monday November 14th** call/text 423-4281 FMI.

***Please Note:** Due to the Festival’s extreme popularity, all Entry Forms will be accepted on an exclusive “FIRST COME-FIRST SERVED” basis & must be received by November 14th, only COMPLETED Entry Forms will receive a CONFIRMATION NUMBER!



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).

NEW Bangor – Kinship only /CC. Facilitated by AFFM staff. 2nd Tuesday of the month from 4:30-7:00 PM Location: TBA

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 107, 203 & 207), 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.

Lincolnvile— F/A/K/CC: 2nd Monday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at the Lincolnvile 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.

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

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

Statewide Calendar 2016-2017

* Indicates Extended Meeting Time

Aroostook-Caribou

(3rd Tuesday, 4:30-6:30 pm)

September 20 • October 18 • November 15 • December 20
January 17 • February 21 • March 21 • April 18 • May 16

All meetings are @ Caribou DHHS at 30 Skyway Drive

Aroostook-Houlton

(1st Thursday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 1 • October 6 • November 3 • December 1
January 5 • February 2 • March 2 • April 6 • May 4

All meetings are @ Houlton DHHS at 11 High Street

Augusta

(3rd Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 21* • October 19 • November 16 • December 21*
January 18 • February 15 • March 15 • April 19 • May 17*

All meetings are @ Augusta CHCS at 24 Stone Street, Suite 201

Bangor

(2nd Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 14* • October 12 • November 9 • December 14
January 11 • February 8 • March 8 • April 12 • May 10*

All meetings are @ Bangor DHHS at 396 Griffin Rd.

Biddeford

(1st Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 7* • October 5 • November 2 • December 7
January 4 • February 1 • March 1 • April 5 • May 3*

All meetings are @ Biddeford DHHS at 208 Graham Street



The Youth Leadership Advisory Team

YLAT is a youth & adult partnership committed to improving the short-term experiences and long-term outcomes for youth who are currently in foster care or have been in care.

Get connected!

With youth, former youth, and adult partners who want to improve the child welfare system.

Be heard!

We know you've heard it before...but we get asked for input all the time. Your voice is valuable!

Have fun!

Have good food, great friends, and amazing conversations.

Make a difference!

Your story about your experiences in foster care could impact other youth in care.

Challenge yourself and others!

YLAT challenges us all to keep learning about what it means to grow up in foster care ... and about how we all can contribute to the solutions.

Visit www.ylat.org or www.facebook.com/MaineYLAT for updates or changes to the calendar throughout the year!

Lewiston

(2nd Thursday, 3:45-5:45 pm)

September 8* • October 13 • November 10 • December 8*
January 12 • February 9 • March 9 • April 13 • May 11*

All meetings are @ Lewiston DHHS at 200 Main Street

Portland

(3rd Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 21* • October 19 • November 16 • December 21*
January 18 • February 15 • March 15 • April 19 May 17*

All meetings are @ Portland USM at 34 Bedford Street

Youth Justice League

(3rd Tuesday, 10a-12 pm)

September 20 • October 18 • November 15 • December 20

All meetings are @ Portland Public Library- 5 Monument Way
Open to youth who have or are experiencing homelessness
Contact Claire Schroeder (207) 523-0224 for more info

Rockland

(2nd Wednesday, 3:00-5:00 pm)

September 14 • October 12 • November 9 • December 14
January 11 • February 8 • March 8 • April 12 • May 10*

All meetings are @ Rockland DHHS at 91 Camden Street

Skowhegan

(1st Wednesday, 3:30-5:30 pm)

September 7* • October 5 • November 2 • December 7*
January 4 • February 1 • March 1 • April 5 • May 3*

All meetings are @ Skowhegan CHCS at 30 High Street

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.
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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

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

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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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