

# FOSTER PARENT NEWS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Secretary's Message.....	1
Foster Parent Appreciation 2011.....	2
Foster Adoption Bills.....	4
Cost of Raising a Child.....	4
Helpful Information.....	5
Adoption Subsidy.....	6
Books for Foster Parents.....	7
Foster Parent Spotlight.....	8
From MFPA Outgoing President.....	9
Training.....	9
Message from MFPA President .....	10
Kudos.....	11
Words of Wisdom.....	11
Spotlight on Kids.....	12
Letter to Editor.....	13
You Known You Are a FP When.....	13



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## MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



Dear Resource Parents,

The Maryland Department of Human Resources provides vital services to Maryland's children and those who are most vulnerable among us. We simply could not do this work without partners like you. I am thrilled to be joining your ranks and grateful for the opportunity that Governor O'Malley has given me to work with you.

We just celebrated Foster Care Month, an opportunity to show our appreciation for all that you do. First Lady Katie O'Malley graciously hosted the 4th annual appreciation event at Government House to honor foster parents across the state who continue to be wonderful resources for children as well as leaders in the foster parent community. Governor O'Malley joined us for a portion of the celebration and added his personal thanks to our honorees for the great job they do. I was so very impressed to hear of the contributions made by those being honored. The celebration offered a snap-shot of the wonderful foster parents across the state that play a crucial role in providing safety, well-being and permanence for children in out-of-home care.

To help support your efforts, we are establishing a website where all of our foster care policies and other critical information for foster parents can easily be found in one place. We are also launching a regular survey which will let you tell us anonymously what you think of the supports you receive from the department. This feedback will show us where we are doing a good job and areas in which we can improve.

I hope you have the opportunity to enjoy these summer months and I look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,

Theodore Dallas,  
Secretary

# FOSTER PARENT APPRECIATION 2011

As we honor moms with Mother's Day and dads with Father's Day, we honor and appreciate foster parents during Foster Care Month in May. We express our gratitude and admiration through various local and state-wide activities for the sacrifices you make in order to love, nurture and provide care for the children in out-of-home placement.

President Obama issued a proclamation stating: "As a nation, we have the responsibility to remain persistent in the charge to provide the best care possible for children when they cannot remain in their own homes. During National Foster Care Month, we recognize the efforts of foster families, social workers, faith-based and community organizations, and others that are improving the lives of young people in foster care across the country, and I encourage all Americans to partake in efforts to serve these children in the year ahead."

Local departments in each jurisdiction hosted events that honored foster parents. The activities varied from dinners to family picnics, ball games to bowling, all unique and special in their own way to say a big THANK YOU for all that you do.

There was also a state-wide celebration held for the fourth consecutive year at Government House in Annapolis, the home of the O'Malley family. Mrs. Katie O'Malley happily and graciously hosted this event, with a special guest appearance this year by the governor. Secretary Ted Dallas of the Department of Human Resources welcomed all to the event on May 15th and thanked Governor and Mrs. O'Malley for their support of the foster care program in Maryland.

This year, each jurisdiction nominated foster parents who not only do a wonderful job in providing care, but are also leaders in the foster parent community. Although particular foster families were chosen and invited to Government House, those honored represent all foster parents across the state.

Honorees were called forward to receive a Governor's Citation honoring their service. They also received a special Star Award depicting that they are Place Matters Foster Parents of the Year 2011.



## Those honored included:



Allegany County  
**Lisa and Stan Nelson**

Anne Arundel County  
**Debra Williams**

Baltimore City  
**Donnea Adams**  
**Shynia Baldwin**  
**David and Hiyalidys Bradley**  
**Sam and Lisa Macer**  
**Marlyn and Robert Moses**

Baltimore County  
**Ken and Lois Sheeler-Duncan**

Calvert County  
**DaNeil and Tony Deller**

Caroline County  
**Elizabeth and Ronald Nichols**

Carroll County  
**Colleen and Rick Cardwell**

Cecil County  
**Christina Andrews**

Charles County  
**Alisa and Kirk Spells**

Dorchester County  
**DeLinda and Robert Milton**

Frederick County  
**Cindi and Tom Webb**

Garrett County  
**Diane and Sheldon Maust**

Harford County  
**Patricia Sadowski**

Howard County  
**Jennifer and Jason Hunter**

Kent County  
**Helen Nicholson**

Montgomery County  
**Migdalia and Thomas Goba**

Prince George's County  
**Edward Dickerson**

Queen Anne's County  
**Sharon and David Quinn**

St. Mary's County  
**Kimberly and Michael Myers**

Somerset County  
**Gale and Maurice Selby**

Talbot County  
**Audrey Hanson**

Washington County  
**Tina and Dan Hall**

Wicomico County  
**Melissa and Thomas Darling**

Worcester County  
**Anne and Rick Rambo**

## Foster Parents from the MFPA Executive Board were also honored:

St. Mary's County – **Michele Burnette and husband Guy**  
Baltimore City – **Sam Macer and wife Lisa**  
Harford County – **Doreen Hochlowski and husband Mike**  
Frederick County: – **Cathy Crone and husband Gene**  
Washington County – **Arnie Eby and wife Donna**  
Anne Arundel County – **Pauline Molder and husband Robert**  
Baltimore City – **Betty Brown**



*MFPA Advisor from Harford County DSS, Brenda Sponsky was honored, accompanied by husband, Wayne.*

In a ceremony at Nationals Park in DC on April 30, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and the Freddie Mac Foundation honored the following Maryland foster parents:

Frederick County  
**John and Lynn Taylor**

Montgomery County  
**Rick Wright**

Prince George's County  
**Vernice Moody**

## Foster care and adoption related bills passed from the Maryland 2011 Legislative Session

**HB 789 - Driver's License Application - Cosigners for Minors - Departments of Social Services:** This bill allows for the local director of a department of social services or the director's designee to be the cosigner of a driver's license application for a minor applicant who is committed to the custody or guardianship of a local department of social services.

**HB 1208 - Higher Education - Exemption from Tuition for Foster Care Recipients - Eligibility Age:** This bill amends current law to alter the age from 21 to 25 before which foster care youth must be enrolled at a Maryland public institution of higher education in order to be exempt from paying tuition. It also alters from 21 to 25 the age that a foster care youth must be enrolled as candidate for a specified degree in order to be exempt from paying the difference between their scholarship or grant award and the amount of tuition owed.

**HB 255 - Adoption Search, Contact, and Reunion - Siblings of Minors in Out of Home Placement:** This bill allows the Department to contact a sibling who is adopted and is 21 or older, on behalf of a younger sibling in foster care, in order to discuss the possibility of placement with the sibling or facilitating a family connection. This bill authorizes a director of a local department, acting on behalf of the minor, to authorize search, contact, and reunion services and prohibits a fee being charged in those cases.

## We Know It Takes a Village, But How Much Does it Cost to Raise a Child?

The Department of Agriculture released in June their annual report, Expenditures on Children by Families. The report reflects that caring for a child born in 2010 is estimated to cost about \$226,920 over the next 17 years. This includes food, shelter, medical, and other necessities. This is a 2 percent increase from last year based on higher costs for transportation, health care, education, and child care.

The report states that for last year, the monthly cost to raise a child ranged from \$990 to \$1153 for middle-income, two-parent families, depending on the age of the child. These estimates do not include the cost of higher education. This average per child cost does decrease when there is more than two children in the home. The full report can be found at [www.cnpp.usda.gov](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov).

When you consider that Maryland's foster care reimbursement averages between \$835 and \$850 a month for regular care; and, that medical, some child care, and some transportation are paid separately, Maryland hits the mark in reimbursing foster parents for the cost to raise a child.

## SOME HELPFUL INFORMATION



**Healthy Beginnings** is a resource that supports the development and learning of children from birth through three years of age. It helps parents nurture the potential for learning that every child has. This resource is made available by John Hopkins and the Maryland Department of Education, and includes developmentally appropriate activities that build youngster's skills and promote all kinds of learning. For more information, go to [www.marylandhealthybeginnings.org](http://www.marylandhealthybeginnings.org).



**Head Start** programs are for children ages three to five. Children in foster care are categorically eligible, regardless of family or foster family income. It is free for all enrolled children and families.

**Foster Youth Web Site** is a resource for Maryland's children in foster care. Check it out at [www.mdconnectmylife.org](http://www.mdconnectmylife.org).

**Bullying and the Child Welfare System** from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections provides information on bullying, including cyber-bullying and bullying of LGBTQ youth. This resource explores the characteristics of bullies and victims, and talks about why this is such a relevant topic for foster care. It offers suggestions for help and lists other places to get information. This document has been updated this year and can be found at [www.nrcpfc.org/is/bullying.pdf](http://www.nrcpfc.org/is/bullying.pdf).



**Direct Deposit/Electronic Funds Transfer** for monthly foster care reimbursement checks or adoption subsidy checks has been working well. If you would like to receive your checks in this manner, simply go to the following address: [http://compnet.comp.state.md.us/General\\_Accounting\\_Division/](http://compnet.comp.state.md.us/General_Accounting_Division/). On the left hand side under vendors, click on Electronic Funds Transfer. Go to the bottom of the page and click on Form X-10 (EFT Registration Request Form). Print, complete, then mail or fax as indicated. It takes about 30 days to process.



# A CLARIFICATION ABOUT ADOPTION SUBSIDY

There have been recent comments from resource parents that reflect some confusion about the adoption subsidy. Hopefully, this will shed some light on this matter.

Almost three quarters of the children adopted from foster care in Maryland are adopted by the families who have been providing foster care for them. This is a wonderful statistic: if a child cannot go home or be with relatives, the foster home can provide the ideal Forever Family. There is already a connection: the child has bonded to the family, and the family to the child. The state is grateful to foster parents or anyone who offers a child permanence through adoption.

It is important that the purpose of an adoption subsidy be understood by all parties involved; it is different in purpose than a foster care board rate. The foster care board rate is established when the state is acting “in loco parentis” for the child, and is therefore responsible for the child’s food, clothing, and shelter, as well as any expenses related to their special needs. Adoptive parents have a different role in a child’s life than the role of foster parents. Adoptive parents have the obligation to meet the basic care needs for the child as though that child had been born to them. **Adoption subsidy is intended to assist with the special needs expenses only.**



Adoption subsidy is not payment to provide care of a child, nor should it honestly be considered as an incentive to adopt. Subsidy is never guaranteed and automatic, but determined on a case-to-case basis depending on the special needs of the child. The amount of subsidy is negotiated based on the amount of expenses related to the child’s special needs and is agreed to by the family and the department. The amount of the assistance may be adjusted periodically with the concurrence of the adoptive parent(s) to reflect changing circumstances.

Many children adopted from foster care, have previously suffered trauma, and sometimes issues surface years later. The purpose of adoption subsidy is to help address these extraordinary needs. Adoption subsidy was never meant to provide for basic needs.

Adoptive parents are eligible to receive a one time subsidy to facilitate the adoption, adoption tax credit, and other tax deductions which do benefit you directly for adopting a child. We are very fortunate in Maryland to have so many of our children adopted from foster care and are appreciative of the foster parents who are willing to be the adoptive resource for these children.

## WICOMICO COUNTY FOSTER PARENT GET “BOOKS THAT BIND”

Former Wicomico County Foster Parent Association President, Maria Stewart, is pursuing her Master's of Social Work at Salisbury University. She and three fellow students, Melba Mallpass, Nikki Dyer, and Reginald Brice, had to come up with a project related to social work that could benefit the local community. Maria recalled how the local group of foster parents struggled to get funds, so that's how they identified the beneficiary of their project.

The quartet of college co-eds decided to raise money by selling educational children's books. Their project was entitled: “Books That Bind.” They felt by promoting reading, it was a secondary benefit to their venture. But the results were even more bountiful because when many found out the cause, they bought books and donated them to foster children. It was truly a win-win-win situation.

A check for \$765.00, as well as books for foster children, was presented to the Wicomico County Foster Parent Association at their monthly meeting in May. Maria Stewart (left) presented the check to Fran King, the current President (right) as the other three students assisted in the middle. John Bertulis, Foster Parent Ombudsman, thanked the students and wished them well in their social work careers on behalf of the Department of Human Resources. As far as the foster families were concerned, it was an A+ project!



## ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY FOSTER PARENT SPOT LIGHT



In addition to their regular foster parent association meeting, resource parents from Anne Arundel County shared in their annual survey with the local department of social services the need for a support group. This venue for support and networking was inaugurated in April. Onsite child-care and dinner is provided and the group meets the first Tuesday of each month.

The foster parent association recently had training at their regular meeting during which they learned how to use the on-line Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment Tool with their foster youth.

The local department is very busy supporting their resource families. Eleven parents earned CPR certification in March. A few weeks ago, there was a Placement Information Meeting during which attendees learned about the placement process, recent trends in placements, and had an opportunity to dialogue with the director. Their annual Foster Family Appreciation Event was held on June 18th at Six Flags.

## FROM THE COMPUTER OF THE OUTGOING MFPA PRESIDENT

*Michele Burnette*

Dear Fellow Resource Parents,

It is hard to believe that my two years as President of the Maryland Foster Parent Association (MFPA) is coming to a close. It has been an absolute pleasure to have served in this role and I look forward to working with the newly elected officers and the Board of MFPA in other ways.

A leader is as good as their supporting cast. I want to thank all who have worked with me, especially MFPA Board members. Besides the obligations of a resource parent, they have volunteered countless hours as leaders in the foster parent community. I also want to thank all of you who do the same at the local level. Individually we make a difference; together, we influence change.

I am excited to pass the baton to the new president, Sam Macer, a veteran education advocate and foster parent from Baltimore City. Sam has already hit the ground running and the next two years promises to be exciting for MFPA and the resource parents of Maryland.

One of my new priorities is to get the Maryland Resource Parent PTSA (Parent, Teacher, Student Association) off and running. As president of that group, I plan to lead the association in exploring avenues to better support our foster children in their educational placements. We have a web site, [www.mdrpta.org](http://www.mdrpta.org) – I invite you to check it out and become a friend on FaceBook.

Thank you for all that you do. I encourage you to get involved with MFPA, there is always room for more helping hands and happy hearts. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet other parents and to have your voice heard. Maryland Resource Parents, YOU ROCK!

## FOSTER PARENT TRAINING

Foster parent training is available through a partnership of the Maryland Department of Human Resources, the University of Maryland School of Social Work/the Ruth Young Center, and the Child Welfare Academy. Foster parents can be reimbursed for some of the expenses incurred for coming to these training sessions.

In conjunction with local Departments of Social Services, and the Maryland Foster Parent Association, two remaining regional Foster Parent Conferences are also being planned for 2011. Watch for further information.

For more information or the schedule of Foster Parent Training Sessions, go to: [www.family.umaryland.edu](http://www.family.umaryland.edu), or call Teri Benson at 410-706-0721.

## TEAM SUPPORT



It is often said “I wish I could do something to make a difference, something to help someone.” As resource parents we have found that special opportunity to make a difference. We have found that opportunity to help someone.

Every day, we provide for Maryland’s most at risk children from newborns to 21 year old. We provide the care, nurturing, guidance and mentoring needed for positive outcomes.

As resource parents, we should always keep in mind that we are not expected to support and raise the children in our care alone. When my wife and I cared for two sisters we had a support team of 24 members. The girls had 11 teachers, the school principal, their four medical health professionals, their worker, my worker, the pastor, their lawyer, the neighbors, my back up and the neighborhood policeman. Every member of the team played an important part in supporting the girls and our family.

One additional team member to consider is a fellow foster parent. Sometimes when you face a challenging period, it is a fellow foster parent who can provide advice, guidance and mentoring that could help stabilize the situation.

Finally, the Maryland Foster Parent Association can be a valuable member of your team. As an approved resource parent, you are automatically a member of the Maryland Foster Parent Association (MFPA). The Social Service Administration, that oversees foster care, has charged the MFPA with engaging and supporting all foster parents in Maryland. We are here to be a part of your team. We work with everyone from the US Department of Education, to the Governor’s office, to DHR/SSA, to the social workers, to the local Resource Parent Associations. We ask your opinion concerning proposed state policies, we provide training to you, act as a referral resource, and provide you with opportunities to sit on state level work groups and councils. It is all provided as a free service and comes with your free membership.

I encourage you to activate your free membership by contacting me directly at 410-298-5821 or at [sammacer@aol.com](mailto:sammacer@aol.com) or call the Maryland Foster Parent Association at 1 443-731-6372. Let us know you are interested in becoming a member and we will place you on the distribution list. You will receive valuable information and opportunities to become an informed and effective member of your resource parent team.

Sam Macer, President  
Maryland Foster Parent Association



### **Kudos and Way To Go Shout Outs to:**

- The mid-shore counties, **Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, and Talbot** for sponsoring, in conjunction with the University of Maryland Child Welfare Training Academy and the Maryland Foster Parent Association, a superb multi-faceted Foster Parent Conference in March. They put together a unique simulation during which foster parents were placed in the shoes of biological family members.
- **Baltimore, Cecil, and Harford Counties** for hosting a Regional Foster Parent Conference with the Maryland Foster Parent Association in May. It was a wonderful day, with the morning session focusing on bridging the gap between foster parents and workers to order to enhance their working relationships. A special thanks to the 30 workers who attended.
- **Montgomery County** for hosting a photographic exhibit of Montgomery County's "Waiting Children" in June. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn about the very special children waiting for a place to call home. There was also an arrangement of compelling portraits from the Freddie Mac Foundation Heart Gallery.
- **Prince George's County** for hosting a "King for a Day" Foster Father Event as well as a conference for foster parents and workers in conjunction with the Maryland Foster Parent Association, both in June.

## Words of Wisdom

A **"Bounce" dryer sheet does more than freshen clothes and eliminate static electricity, it also:**

- Repels yellow jackets (the stinging kind!), ants, mosquitoes, and even mice.
- Takes the odor out of books and photo albums that do not get opened too often.
- Dissolves soap scum from shower doors.
- Freshens the air in your homes - put one in each drawer or hang in closet.
- Cleans TV and computer screens.
- Prevents thread from tangling – run a threaded needle through a sheet of Bounce before beginning to sew.
- Freshens the air in your car – put one under the seat.
- Deodorizes foot ware – place a Bounce in your shoes or sneakers overnight.
- Eliminates odors in wastebaskets – place one in the bottom.
- Prevents musty suitcases, sleeping bags, etc.

*Submitted by Foster Parents in Allegany County*

# SPOTLIGHT ON KIDS

## THESE CHILDREN NEED FAMILIES LIKE YOURS

### *Forell and Ramaira*

Forell is a five and a half year old African American male with a beautiful smile and dimples on both cheeks. He has blossomed in the last year and doing well academically. He is reading and doing age appropriate math. He likes to share the things he has learned in school and from his foster family. He has recently expressed a great interest in plants and gardening. He is enjoying learning about plants, helping his foster father in the garden and learning about fruits and vegetables. He is very active and needs a high energy family that will help him continue to grow and learn new things. He could benefit by being engaged in sports to learn skills and age appropriate socialization. Forell enjoys riding a bike, special alone time with adults, reading and telling stories and jokes.

Ramaira is a four year old African American female with a warm smile and also has dimpled cheeks. Ramaira is very energetic, usually dancing and twirling around. She can spell her name, write her name, identify colors and count. She could benefit from an energetic family that will expose her to

various physical activities and keep her busy. She has recently started taking pride in getting “graded” for her behavior and loves to tell everyone when she gets an A+ for her behavior at daycare. She also enjoys doing homework from her daycare.

Forell and Ramaira have always been together. They need a two parent household and it would be best if they are the youngest children with older siblings or are the only children in the home. They are comfortable with both African American families and Caucasian families. Both children were fearful of animals when they first entered foster care but have been exposed to animals while in care. They enjoy going to respite with a family that has a small farm and many animals. Forell and Ramaira both recently had the first experience of riding a horse and talk about it often.

This is a risk placement. If you have any questions, you should contact your resource home worker and ask them to contact Penny Walters at Somerset County DSS.

### *Darren*



Darren is a 13-year-old African American boy who is looking for an adoptive family. Darren loves to play basketball, watch videos, play electronic games, listen to music and ride his bike. Darren was on the Honor Roll at school for the third quarter of the school year. He attends an after school recreational program where he can do homework, sports, or just relax.

Darren is currently placed in a therapeutic foster home due to his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and his mild retardation. Darren needs a family that is patient and loving that can provide a safe, structured, and stable permanent home for him. In addition, Darren would most benefit from a family that will support his educational and therapeutic needs.

If you think you could provide a loving home for this young man, please contact your resource home worker and ask them to contact Lori Weinstein at Montgomery County DHHS.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I finished reading “I Beat the Odds from Homelessness to the Blindside and Beyond” by Michael Oher. I was so impressed that I thought mentioning it in the Foster Parent Newsletter was a good idea.

In case you are not familiar with Mr. Oher, he is an offensive tackle with the Baltimore Ravens and the inspiration for the movie, “The Blindside.” He spent his childhood struggling with poverty, homelessness, and everything that comes with those things.

As a child, he was in and out of foster care. From an early age, he was determined to improve his life. Despite setbacks, he persevered. His message is pretty simple: If I can succeed, so can you. He does not define success by being a professional football player, but rather taking pride in what you do and supporting and nurturing your family.

Here’s an excerpt that I think summarizes the book: “There are a lot of things that you have to look out for. You have to keep an eye on your own conduct; you have to be careful about the friends you choose; you have to be on the lookout for mentors; you need to be ready to work hard; and, you need to be smart about money. It may sound like a lot to juggle, but as we break it down, I think you will see how it all comes back to your determination to make smart choices.”

As parents, we say the same things, but having Michael Oher reinforce this message is great. He is a wonderful role model for everyone, especially foster children.

Leah Hayes  
Baltimore County

## You Know You Are a Foster Parent When...

***“The driver’s education instructor gives you a group discount.”***

*Diana Martin, Resource Parent, Frederick County*

If you have any suggestions for “You Know You Are a Foster Family When...”, e-mail them to [Jbertuli@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:Jbertuli@dhr.state.md.us). Please be sure to put your name and the County/Jurisdiction in the e-mail.

Maybe your “You Know You Are a Foster Parent When...” will appear in the a future edition of Foster Parent News.



## **NEW FOSTER PARENT NEWSLETTER TAG**

This is the eleventh edition of this newsletter. It is distributed quarterly. This newsletter is published by The Maryland Department of Human Resources. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions about this publication, please contact John Bertulis, Foster Parent Ombudsman at 410-767-7561 or e-mail [Jbertuli@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:Jbertuli@dhr.state.md.us).

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