

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MAY 2005



UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



In This Issue

3 When I Ask You...

By: Vickie Steffey, LCSW

The importance of listening.

4 A Constantly Shifting Kaleidoscope

By: Kaleena Kartchner

First hand account of adoption in the home.

6 UFoster Success

By: Barbara Feaster

The Resilient Child: Creating the space for healing.

9 Child Care Resource and Referral

Agency information for people interested in child care throughout Utah.

10 The Myth of the Damaged Foster Child

By: Leroy Franke, LCSW

Overcoming the stereotype and labels that foster children are damaged.

May 2005

Kathy Searle, Editor

Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

To submit articles or for distribution, or a subscription, call (801) 265-0444 or toll free outside Salt Lake County call (866) 872-7212.

This publication is funded by the State of Utah, Division of Child and Family Services. The Adoption Exchange prepares and prints the newsletter and the Division of Child and Family Services mails the publication. The mailing list is kept confidential. One can be removed from the mailing list by calling: (866) 872-7212 or 265-0444 within Salt Lake County.

WHEN I ASK YOU...

By: Vickie Steffey, LCSW

*When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

*When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

*When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

LISTEN!!! All I asked, was that you listen. Not to talk or do – just hear me!

*When you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and get about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.

*And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

*Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

So PLEASE, listen and just hear me. And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn; and then I'll listen to you. -Unknown Author

Listening, really listening, is one of the best (and easiest) relationship building skills you can have. This unknown author essentially asks parents to NOT give advice, NOT tell kids how they should feel, and NOT solve kids' problems!

Here are some ideas of what to do instead:

1. Tentatively state your guess at what the child is saying. "I wonder if you're feeling confused because you don't know what to do."
2. Let your eyes and body language show he has your full attention. Turn the television off, stop putting the dishes in the dishwasher, sit down and listen.
3. Reflect, or repeat back to the child, both feelings and content. "You're feeling upset and angry right now because the teacher lost your homework paper."
4. Notice what your child's body language is telling you, as well as listening to his words. When he comes in from school, throws his books down and has an angry look on his face, maybe it is time to ask if something happened at school, on the way home from school, etc.
5. If you accept your child's irrational feelings, he can quit trying to convince you of how true they are. "You believe the judge and DCFS did not give your birth mother a fair chance." Remember, this is the child's belief and you don't have to agree with it nor solve the problem.



A Constantly Shifting Kaleidoscope

Living in America is near the top of my list of blessings, right alongside it, my family. If one hears a passerby mention a well-known family, describing them as “All American,” instantly most of our minds may be filled with similar words. Perfect, happy, healthy, and well off may be among them. Although these words might frequently be connected with “The All American Family,” I don’t think there is one specific definition. Every family could be placed under that category in their own light; it just depends on their viewpoints and personal definitions. The following is what makes my family “All American” in my eyes.

Many events have taken place in the past five years of my life to alter my feelings and change the consistency of my family’s way of living. The one that stands out to me most is becoming a foster family and adopting five new members into the family. Which has formed intricate new patterns in my life and the life of my family that will never again be the same.

The move my family decided on after twelve years of residence landed us in our current home in Stansbury Park, Utah. This abrupt change onto a road less traveled greatly affected everyone individually: social lives, school opportunities, and most important family life. Our relocation began bringing many of us closer

together, helping us to strive and develop qualities such as friendship, and empathy. Mom decided to use the opportunity of our move as a chance to serve. To reach out and help the lives of those truly in need as she so often did. Victims of her helping hand: abused and neglected children. At this point I could see a definite shift in the kaleidoscope shaping my life. The pattern was a whole new cluster of shapes and colors I hadn’t known existed.

After consulting us, their children, my parents made the final decision of carefully stepping through the beat up door of becoming a foster family. We all knew it would greatly affect each of us, especially those still living at home. Our house was sufficient enough for the cause, two stories, eight bedrooms, four bathrooms, and only seven of us kids still living at home. Through growing thoughtfulness and desires to be helpful and giving, we knew that we could definitely allow some temporary members in the family. Certainly there was much love to go around.

Being young and naïve at the age of twelve, only wanting to help, I happily volunteered to be the roommate of our first three-year old foster sister! She was a beautiful little biracial girl with flashy dark eyes and pouty lips. Her hair soft, but with that tight curl that instantly springs back up when gently tugged at, with a mind of its own.

*Karen and I got along quite well. I love little kids and I was grateful to be able to comfort, befriend and be a sister to this little girl. She loved being read to, and talking to me, even though I frequently had to strain my ears to get past her three year old dialect and her pronunciation of S's, or lack there of. I grew to love Karen very much. She pulled me into a new world, opening my eyes to some of our defiled surroundings and how I could be an aid to help cancel out some of the filth. Another quality attained was an awareness and concern for others.

As the days went by, problems began to erupt. Karen was a three year old little girl on the surface, but beneath the top layer she'd seen and heard things most people are privileged not to be introduced to in a lifetime. The first time Karen had a major tantrum reflecting her status, I cried. She tore apart my whole room, ranting and raving, screaming, letting out her anger in the only way she knew how. I didn't cry because of the destruction of my personal space, I cried because I knew I couldn't relate to her suffering, and I wanted to be a comfort. I struggled with trying to understand why certain people, especially innocent little children, have to be tormented in their lives to a point that they can't control their actions and don't know which way to turn. Sympathy and pure love slipped onto the list of qualities.

I remember one specific occasion my foster sister was having a tantrum. Clenching her jaw, she was ripping blankets and sheets off her bed, and trying to mutilate the mattress; grabbing and throwing anything she could get her hands on. I entered the room;

my twelve-year old mind could not come up with a solution. Tears stung the corners of my eyes instantly. Her eyes softened momentarily in a scared sort of way, gaping up at me, jaw still tight, frightened, because she realized what she was doing, and along with me, she didn't know why. As she was about to continue her charade I quickly stepped forward, firmly but gently grabbing her narrow shoulders. The tears were spilling from both of our eyes as we looked at one another, wondering what was going to happen next. I pulled her small struggling body toward me bringing her into cradle position, holding her closer all the while, thinking I could make everything okay by hugging her close and letting her know I care. How I longed to be able to reach deep within her and suck out all of the horrible things that may have happened in her life.

Karen and her sister were only the beginning of our small stream of foster kids. I share this specific story with you to give you a visual of how much a part of my family's lives these children became. Their struggles and pasts were swiftly introduced to us and became partly ours. Knowledge, grief, and a deeper love and appreciation for our blessings now added to our list.

It wasn't until three years later that adoption was a more commonly used word in my parents' vocabulary. Making the decision to adopt would not only affect our present lives but our future, and forever. Knowing that we would have to deal with cases similar to, and maybe worse than Karen's on a day to day basis for the rest of our lives, making it work, so that our family would still function, we took on the chal-

lenge. This decision helped us unveil even more qualities: patience, kindness, tolerance, and understanding, shaping us individually and as a family. The kaleidoscope slightly shifted again, but this time still having some familiar shapes and colors remaining.

We are now leading up to the two and a half-year mark of our first adoptions. It's been a struggle and growing experience for us all. We've had to endure things far more crucial than with the foster children because these new members of our family aren't temporary. They're a permanent addition. The continuous list of qualities now definitely reads: acceptance, selflessness and the ability to consider a variety of viewpoints.

According to today's society my family would most likely not fall under the category of "The All American Family." Now containing a total of sixteen members, thirteen of which are currently living at home, we share a life not common among many. I am deeply grateful for the trials and blessings that have been placed before my family and me. The qualities I shared that my family developed together throughout some of our experiences are what make our family unique and "All American," pushing us closer together, and helping me personally know and prepare for the constantly shifting kaleidoscope.

~Kaleena Kartchner

*named changed to protect identity

U F O S T E R

By: Barbara
bfeaster@uFOS

ABOUT UFOSTER SUCCESS:

U: Slang for “You” either as a foster care youth, alumni, or “You” as a foster care professional.

FOSTER: Affording, receiving, or sharing nurture or parental care though not related by blood or legal ties; to promote the growth or development.

SUCCESS: To strive to make a positive contribution to society and to decide for oneself what that contribution will be.

UFOSTERSUCCESS is dedicated to improving the lives of our family in foster care

The name uFOSTERsuccess comes from our living testament that through perseverance and responsibility foster alumni and youth can be successful with the key ingredient being that you-foster-success.

Our group believes that one of the most effective ways of assisting youth is to educate the public regarding foster care issues. Foster care can be an ugly word for some and it generally deals with very tough issues that derive from families. This makes it a very controversial issue that most people would rather avoid.

The focus of our group is not to determine when youth should or should not be removed from a home. However, our group is actively involved in what happens once youth arrive in the foster care “system.” If we as a society are going to remove youth from their homes then we as a society do everything possible to make sure we bring them into a better environment than from where they came.

You will find that we are a diverse group of people with diverse opinions but united in our purpose of improving the lives of our family in foster care.

THE RESILIENT CHILD: CREATING THE SPACE FOR HEALING

My objective is to teach and lead a discussion on the below concepts from the perspective of a child abuse survivor:

1. HEALING IS MESSY!

- All children are going to struggle as they go through the healing process. Children who have been abused are skilled at hiding behind facades.
- Distrust in children who have been abused is a “normal” reaction to the betrayals they have experienced. Children demonstrate their distrust as they begin to heal through many different facades (i.e. superiority, inferiority, extreme detachment, extreme attachment, super-human strength pretense, playing the role of victim, perfectionism, people pleasing, aggressiveness...)

2. RESILIENCY IS IN ALL CHILDREN!

- Every child has the potential to heal, even when they are hiding it. Children who have suffered abuse often hide their resiliency because to reveal one’s abilities is vulnerable. We must see through their facades!
- All self-destructive behaviors are a façade! Remembering that the difficult behaviors of abused children are facades helps us to not take them personally. Even when a child acts like it is personal, it is NOT personal! Oftentimes a hurt child will attempt to reject you first before you have a chance to reject him/her.
- Resiliency does not mean cure! Resiliency is a lifestyle like physical fitness that needs to be practiced and reinforced everyday (discuss 12 ways to create the space for healing).

3. YOU DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

- Foster parents, caseworkers, and other caring adults DO make a difference! Do not underestimate your importance in the life of a struggling child!
- You cannot always determine whether or not you are connecting with a child based on that child’s behavior! Love can be very scary for a child that has suffered abuse. These children often pretend not to respond to affection on the outside, but inside your efforts really do matter to them!
- Remember to rejuvenate yourself daily! You are so important in the lives of children that you must recognize yourself for your efforts and value daily!

S U C C E S S

OUR 12 CHOICES TO CREATE THE SPACE FOR HEALING ARE:

- 1- **WE LISTEN TO THE YOUTH** – This means we choose to put ourselves in their world. We do this by putting our opinions aside for a moment while listening to the youth’s point of view. We listen for ideas that we can support and promote. We listen to understand where the youth are coming from. We listen for ways that we can be an ally to the youth in seeing their ideas become reality! We search in our listening for opportunities to support the youth in achieving their goals. We listen to find ways to empower the youth in making their vision for their life come alive and become real!
- 2- **WE BECOME THE YOUTH’S ALLY** – We engage with the youth as an ally and we root for their success. Again, we look for ways to build the youth up and promote their ideas. We look for ways to create opportunities for the youth to accomplish a goal that is important to them. We find out what great accomplishments the youth want and become their ally in empowering them to achieve those goals. As the youth get that we are rooting for their success and looking for ways to build them up, we will create the opportunity to earn their trust!
- 3- **WE HAVE FAITH IN EVERY YOUTH** – To do this we refuse to buy into the facades that some youth may act out. We choose to relate to all destructive behaviors of the youth as facades. We hold youth accountable for destructive behavior but also recognize that their facades do not define who they are to us. We choose to see through facades and build on strengths. Our faith in every youth creates the space for the youth to have faith in themselves. We realize that some youth may be looking for an excuse for why they aren’t capable and can’t make a difference. We realize that if we don’t have faith in the youth, the youth may use that as an excuse to not have faith in themselves. We remember that we do not need a reason to have faith in a youth’s potential. We get to have faith in a youth’s potential no matter what, simply because having faith is what we choose!
- 4- **WE HONOR OUR WORDS TO THE YOUTH** - We do this by meaning what we say and saying what we mean! As a result, our words match our actions and the youth learn that they can count on us to do what we say. We invite the youth to hold us accountable for what we say and in return we hold the youth accountable for what they say. By being accountable for what we say we are an example of integrity for the youth. We aren’t perfect and that is why we invite the youth to hold us to our word and we do the same for them. We create a safe environment for accountability. When we break our word with each other we clean it up. We create the space for honesty with each other and forgiveness for mistakes!
- 5- **WE FORGIVE THE YOUTH AND OURSELVES** – We create a relationship where we forgive the youth and ourselves. By doing so we allow for our humanity and create the room to make and learn from our mistakes. We hold ourselves and the youth accountable for mistakes but then we choose forgiveness. We do not tear ourselves or the youth down for being human and making mistakes but we do not let ourselves and the youth off the hook either. We take accountability cleaning up our mistakes and then we move on through forgiveness. Forgiveness creates the space for our growth and healing!
- 6- **WE ACCEPT THAT THE YOUTH’S CHOICES ARE NOT ABOUT US**– We recognize that the youth will make choices and that the choices they make are not a reflection of us. Just like the choices we make are not reflections of the youth. By recognizing this we refuse to take the youth’s choices personally. We also do not support the youth taking our choices personally. We remind the youth that they own their own choices just like we own ours. As a result, we promote accountability in ourselves and the youth!

7- WE OPEN DOORS FOR THE YOUTH – In other words we are constantly looking for opportunities for our youth to rise to the occasion and achieve success. We recognize that our youth will not have the chance to succeed if all doors are closed to them. We know that opening doors for the youth is a risk and we do so responsibly. We empower youth to look for open doors of opportunity to walk through and to use the chances they are given to achieve positive goals!

8- WE CREATE LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUTH – We recognize that by creating leadership opportunities for the youth we are preparing them for success as adults. By giving youth the chance to lead we are creating opportunities for the youth to gain confidence in their abilities. We choose to be a part of reinforcing the youth in identifying with themselves as leaders by allowing them to lead us whenever possible. By empowering the youth to lead us we give them the opportunity to learn that they can be trusted in and counted on by others. We also empower the youth to create a vision for their future and take the lead in making that vision happen!

9- WE EMPOWER THE YOUTH TO BE CONNECTED – We do this by choosing to be in the youth's world. We find ways to identify with the youth and relate to their world. We are an ally in supporting the youth in maintaining and developing positive relationships with family, mentors, and friends. We recognize that when we support the youth's desire to develop and maintain positive relationships with friends and family we are creating a deeper connection with them ourselves. We empower the youth to create a network of lifelong connections with many people that are important to them and we look for positive opportunities to promote the relationships the youth want! As a result, our relationship with the youth is strengthened!

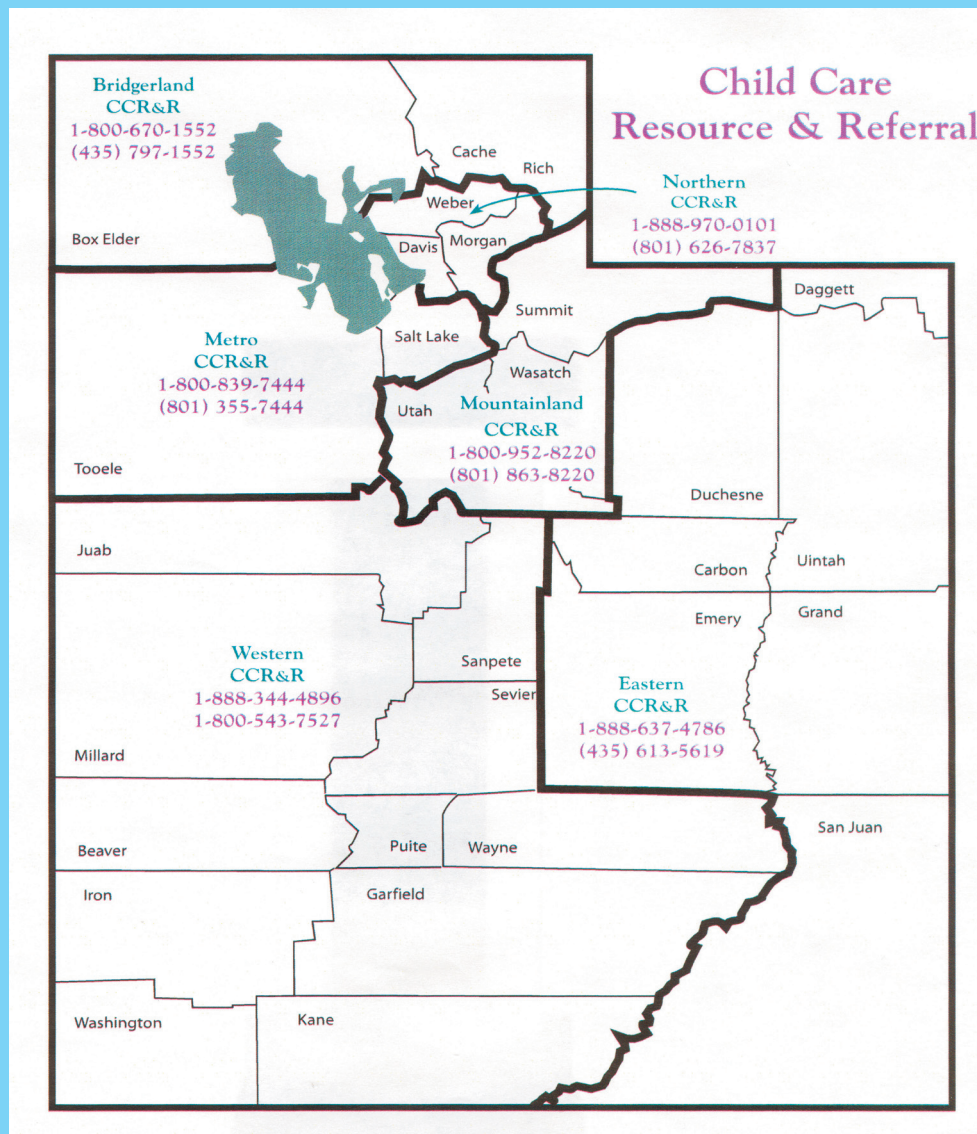
10- WE EMPOWER THE YOUTH TO BE RESOURCEFUL – We empower the youth to be resourceful by giving them opportunities to ask for contributions on behalf of themselves in a way that is empowering to them. We can be an example of being resourceful ourselves by asking the youth and others for their valuable contributions. By being an example of requesting contributions we can show the youth that we too desire and deserve to receive an abundance of resources in our life. We can remind the youth and ourselves that successful people ask for contributions on behalf of themselves all the time because they realize that they are worthy of unlimited abundance!

11- WE EMPOWER THE YOUTH TO BE INDEPENDENT – We give the youth opportunities to complete tasks and make choices independently. By promoting the youth's independence we are creating the opportunity for them to discover their capabilities. As the youth discover and develop new capabilities their confidence begins to grow. By empowering youth to be independent we are also creating the opportunity for them to be responsible. By giving the youth chances to complete tasks and make choices independently we are reinforcing that they are responsible for their own actions and their own futures. We recognize employers are looking for individuals who have the confidence to make choices and complete tasks independently when needed, which means by empowering independence in the youth we are promoting the development of the valuable skills they are going to need in the work force!

12- WE RECOGNIZE AND REINFORCE THE YOUTH'S RESILIENCY! – We accomplish this by refusing to buy into the youth's facades. We accomplish this by refusing to buy into stigmas. We may find that some youth may be living into an identity that they have of themselves that is based on self-doubt and stigmas. We refuse to reinforce any destructive identity the youth have of themselves. We recognize and reinforce instead the youth's resiliency. We recognize all youth have resiliency characteristics even when they are hiding them. We choose to see youth as resilient regardless of how they are acting. We refuse to allow any facades the youth may be demonstrating to cloud our vision and our choice to see the youth's resiliency. We are committed that no resiliency characteristic will go unnoticed by us as we relate to the youth. We choose to build on and reinforce the resiliency of all youth!

Do Your Children Need Something To Do Over The Summer?

If you are looking for something fun for your children to do while they are out of school, contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral agency near you for a copy of their summer activity guide.



Child Care Resource and Referral Services offer the following services to parents:

- free referrals for child care, tailored to meet your family's specific child care needs.
- free information on child care programs in your area.
- free information on how to choose quality child care.



The Myth of the Damaged Foster Child

By: LeRoy Franke, LCSW

who have already had to bear so much hurt, pain, grief and loss in their lives, would also have to wear a label of being “damaged goods.”

I then reflected on my own life, including: the brief sexual contact I had at age 8 from a couple of older neighborhood boys (which most of my life I thought was normal preadolescent horseplay, until I learned later in life I had been abused and should be deeply wounded and upset by it); the bloody mess and trip to the doctor at age 5 when my mom accidentally spanked me with a plaster lath board that had an old rusty 2” nail in it and I suffered four deep puncture wounds in my buttocks and leg; ongoing parental conflict at home; verbally abusive older sisters (they would argue it was the other way around); parental divorce at age 12; being a “latch key” kid from 12 to 18.....; displaying significant symptoms of ADHD; bouncing back and forth between my parents’ homes because of an abusive stepmom and an alcoholic stepfather (events often precipitated by an oppositional teen-me); poor school attendance and sub-par grades - although passing, they were not “at the level I was capable of achieving! (duh).”

Man... it is obvious from that history that I was so “damaged” by this “broken family” by the time I was 18, there was little hope.... A psychologist today would have no problem listing a number of DSM IV diagnostic categories that would make me appear quite “damaged.” They might also identify a number of psychotropic medications I really should be taking (a number of my colleagues probably would agree).

Luckily, I did not end up in foster care to be adopted, because my “warning label” would have given the

I recently attended a conference where a single mom was presenting. She had adopted a nine year old boy from the foster care system a year earlier. She described the obstacles that she had faced in adopting this boy because the worker had told her that this child was too “damaged” for her to manage as a single mother. In trying to discourage the adoption, the worker went through the list of events in this boy’s life and resulting behavioral problems that were documented in the record to justify why this child was going to be too difficult for her to manage. However, the mother prevailed and the adoption was finalized. She then went on to describe the joy she and her son have found in their relationship as they have faced their life challenges together since the adoption. They were both grateful that she did not let that worker’s negative view stop them from becoming a family.

As I listened to this story, I couldn’t help but draw a parallel to the most recent parcel post shipment I had received. The billing had a note that instructed me to inspect the carton for damage. If it were damaged I was instructed, “Do not accept delivery, but instead return it to the shipping agent.” I then thought, what a disservice to label any human being as “damaged.” I was especially disheartened that children in foster care

prospective family a real liberal “damage return policy.”

However, I did not know how “damaged” I was because no one told me or treated me that way. Therefore, I went on to serve honorably in the military, went on a two and a half year mission for my church, married a beautiful woman, had six great kids (and now have 9 fantastic grandkids), got a master’s degree in social work, have conducted marriage and family seminars with my wife for over 33 years, retired from the Utah Department of Human Services after a wonderful 32 year career, and am still working to promote adoptions through The Adoption Exchange. I wish someone had told me earlier how damaged I was so I would have had an excuse to slack off a bit.

I believe that my brief story is more like everyone else’s than it is different. In fact, most of us had significant challenges, losses, abuses and other difficulties to overcome in our lives. So why do we think foster children and their biological families are so different?

Our peers who work in services to individuals with limitations in their physical and mental capabilities moved far ahead of the child welfare profession years ago by changing their practice to focus and build on individuals’ strengths and abilities, no longer getting hung up in their diagnosed limitations and resulting labels. It is time for us to catch up.

While working for the State of Utah, in 2003 I had the opportu-

nity as the State Independent Living Coordinator to bring together for two days 75 of our foster children, ages 16-18, which were transitioning to independent living. We spent time just listening to them to understand what they felt they needed most to be successful as adults.

Interestingly, the number one thing they told us was, “Stop labeling and treating us like ‘foster kids.’ We are just kids just like any other kid. We just happen to be in foster care. Everyone, parents, foster parents, teachers, social workers, everyone needs to stop discriminating against us and treating us as though we are somehow different because of our circumstances.” The second thing they told us was, “Stop criticizing and ‘putting down’ our parents and families. We love our families. Our families are no different than yours.” Finally they pleaded, “Give us more control over our lives and more control over when and where we have contact with our families. Let us feel like, live like, and be treated like any other kid.” These young people simply don’t want us to think of them, or react anymore to them as, “those poor deprived, abused, neglected, ADHD, attachment disordered, bi-polar, post traumatic stress disordered, foster kids from abusive, dysfunctional families who need structured foster or residential care.”

I ask all of us, child care professionals, foster parents, psychologists and educators, anyone who has contact with these children,

to re-think how we view and treat these young people. They are incredibly resilient, and will be able to overcome many of the events that have caused deep loss, pain and suffering in their lives if at their core they believe and understand how precious, valued and capable they are. Yes, they have been hurt, often suffering deep wounds. They may have physical and emotional scars from horrific life experiences. Their road to healing may be difficult and challenging for them and their caregivers.

They do deserve all the short and long term support we can give them. But, we can best help them by focusing on and building on their strengths. We need to strengthen their self esteem, confidence and faith in themselves to the point where they honestly believe that they can face life successfully. Not one of them represents “damaged goods” that we should consider “returning” or “recycling.”

Finally, I talked to one colleague who felt I was just “playing a semantic game” when we discussed this issue. He maintains that the word “damaged” and “wounded” are synonyms and I’m just off on another one of my tangents. Perhaps that is true. I don’t know. I’ve just never seen a damaged computer cry...only the operator.

I would hope we can all think more carefully about our labels and our treatment of children who happen to end up in foster care (and their families) and realize how much more they are like the rest of us, than different. They deserve that.



Utah!
Where Ideas connect!
Utah State Division of
Child and Family Services

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
P A I D
SLC UTAH
PERMIT 4621

302 West 5400 South Ste, 208
Murray, UT 84107

CALL YOUR POST-ADOPTION SPECIALIST

Northern Region:

Aubrey Myers (801) 629-5816

Salt Lake Region:

Vickie Steffey (801) 264-7500

Western Region:

Louise Brown (801) 374-7005

Southwest Region:

John Worthington (435) 867-2760

Eastern Region:

Blanding /Moab Steve Shafer (435) 678-1491
Price/Castledale Greg Daniels (435) 636-2360
Vernal/Roosevelt Fred Butterfield (435) 722-655

**NACAC CONFERENCE
AUGUST 3-6, 2005
PITTSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA**

A FULL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION BOOKLET—WITH MORE INFORMATION ABOUT REGISTRATION, WORKSHOPS, CHILDCARE, TEEN PROGRAM, PRE-CONFERENCE SESSIONS, AND ALL ASPECTS OF THE CONFERENCE—WILL BE PUBLISHED IN APRIL. TO RECEIVE A REGISTRATION BOOKLET, PLEASE SEND A REQUEST TO INFO@NACAC.ORG WITH YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS AND REGISTRATION BOOKLET REQUEST AS THE SUBJECT.