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Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. is a non-profit adoption support group composed of adoptive families, foster-adopt, adoptees, adoption professionals and other interested in adoption.

TAPROOT is a quarterly publication of Together as Adoptive Parents Inc.
478 Moyer Road
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(215) 256-0669

We urge you to send us any information that you feel may be of interest to our readers.

OUR MISSION

To provide a support network among parents in the greater Philadelphia area, to disseminate available services and information to members and to implement programs and activities which promote the well being of children, foster and adoptive families.

Have any comments,
suggestions
or gripes?

E-mail us at

taplink@COMCAST.NET

or call us at

(215) 256-0669

MEMBERSHIPS

**North American Council on
Adoptable Children
Winner of the Angels in Adoption
Award
United Way**

www.taplink.org

Presidents Corner

Phyllis Stevens

Don't you just love Spring? I do, for me it marks the end of shoving snow from my walk, scraping ice from my car and chasing down my cat to throw him outside because he does not want to go out in the cold. The downside is that the coats come off and everyone sees how much weight we have gained over the winter. Oh well, we can't have everything.



We have had some wonderful parent group meetings. Kathy Boyd and Sandi Bonam from Chester County Children and Youth presented workshops for us. Kathy spoke on "Parenting the Difficult Child" and Sandi spoke on "Split Loyalties". Our families really learned a lot and had a great time in the process.

Last years Christmas Party was probably the best one that we have ever had. Close to 80 people attended and thanks to Midge and Donna every child, and every family took home more than one gift. All the teenagers received a "hoody" sweatshirt from Aeropostale, all the families received a beautiful fresh Poinsettia Plant (during the party we used them as center pieces) and other gifts. The kids received so much "stuff" that I'm sure that they thought that they had died and gone to heaven. A really BIG thank you to everyone who help to make it a success!

Keep the following dates in mind;

- .. June 25th - meeting will be on **Stress**
- . July 23rd - will be the swim/picnic (my house)
- . August - No meeting for TAP but the NACAC conference will be the 3rd - 6th in Pittsburg
- . September 24th - A Surprise Meeting!!!!
- . October 22nd - Chat and Chew meeting
- . November 5th - Conference
- . December 10th - Christmas Party

We held our 2nd annual yard sale on the 22nd of May. It was a lot of fun (and work) but we raised over \$500 for Tap.

TAP has received a small government grant (see inside) to add new information and updates our web site www.taplink.org. We are looking to hire someone part time (very part time 10 to 15 hours a week) who has a computer at home (and knows how to use it) and the person "must love" to talk on the telephone. If you are interested please call 215/256.0669.

As most of you already know that Caroline Johnson retired from the National Adoption Center in Philadelphia. I did not get a chance to say good-bye and thank you to Caroline before she left so I will do it now. Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. is 16 years old and I have known Caroline for most of those 16 years. She has always been there to help TAP whenever possible. I will miss you very much Caroline.

Things kids wished their adoptive parents knew

1. “I need to know the truth about my conception and family history.”

At an early age introduce information about your child’s birth family. Give him appropriate information. As your child matures, give him details he can understand. Birthmother and birthfather should not be strange terms.

2. “Please respect my privacy regarding my adoption. Don’t tell other people without my consent.”

While openness is a healthy foundation in adoption, your child needs to know that you will not reveal her adoptive status indiscriminately. Give your child the power to control the sharing this information where possible.

3. “Please don’t say I look or act just like you, to the exclusion of acknowledging and celebrating our differences.”

Parents need to affirm the contribution of genetic gifts without, however, overemphasizing differences.

4. “I may appear more whole than I actually am. I need your help to uncover the parts of myself that I keep hidden so I can integrate all the elements of my identity.”

The three most important responsibilities for parents are to show unconditional support and openness, encourage self-disclosure, and to give unconditional love.

5. “Just because I do not talk to my birth family doesn’t mean I don’t think about them.”

An adoptee’s fantasies about being adopted may be both positive and negative. Be alert to your child’s day-dreaming and ask questions such as, “if you could ask me anything, what would it be?” You may be able to go to that fantasy with your child and fill the legitimate need behind the fantasy.

6. “I’m afraid you will abandon me.”

For most adult adoptees the fear of abandonment has been a lifelong emotional battle. Demonstrate empathy by identifying feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of your child. Empower him.

7. “I suffered a loss before I was adopted. You are not responsible.”

It is painful to enter into your child’s suffering. It is so much easier to assume that all is well inside your child, especially if she does not show any obvious needs. Every adopted child has been wounded because of the loss of a birth family before being embraced by you as the new family. The first thing your child wants you to know is this: On some level I grieve, I came to you because of the loss – one that was not your fault and one that you cannot erase.

8. If I don’t grieve my loss, my ability to receive love from you and other will be hindered.”

Grieving is necessary, for it is a natural response to loss. If you can help your child grieve the original loss from day one, his ability to grieve future losses will be greatly enhanced. Successful resolution of grief makes room for love to grow.

9. “Birthdays may be difficult for me.”

This day reminds your child of the wrenching –apart day. Recognize distress signals, establish special birthday rituals, ask questions, and give your child extra attention. Respect her grief.

10. “Should I decide as an adult to search for my birth family, you will always be my parents.”

To free your child from worrying about your feelings, openly discuss the birth family and give her assurance your love will not change.

ATTENTION-PARENTS!!

(Or Grandparents, Stepparents, Foster Parents and Care Takers)

How does your teenage child's behavior need changing?

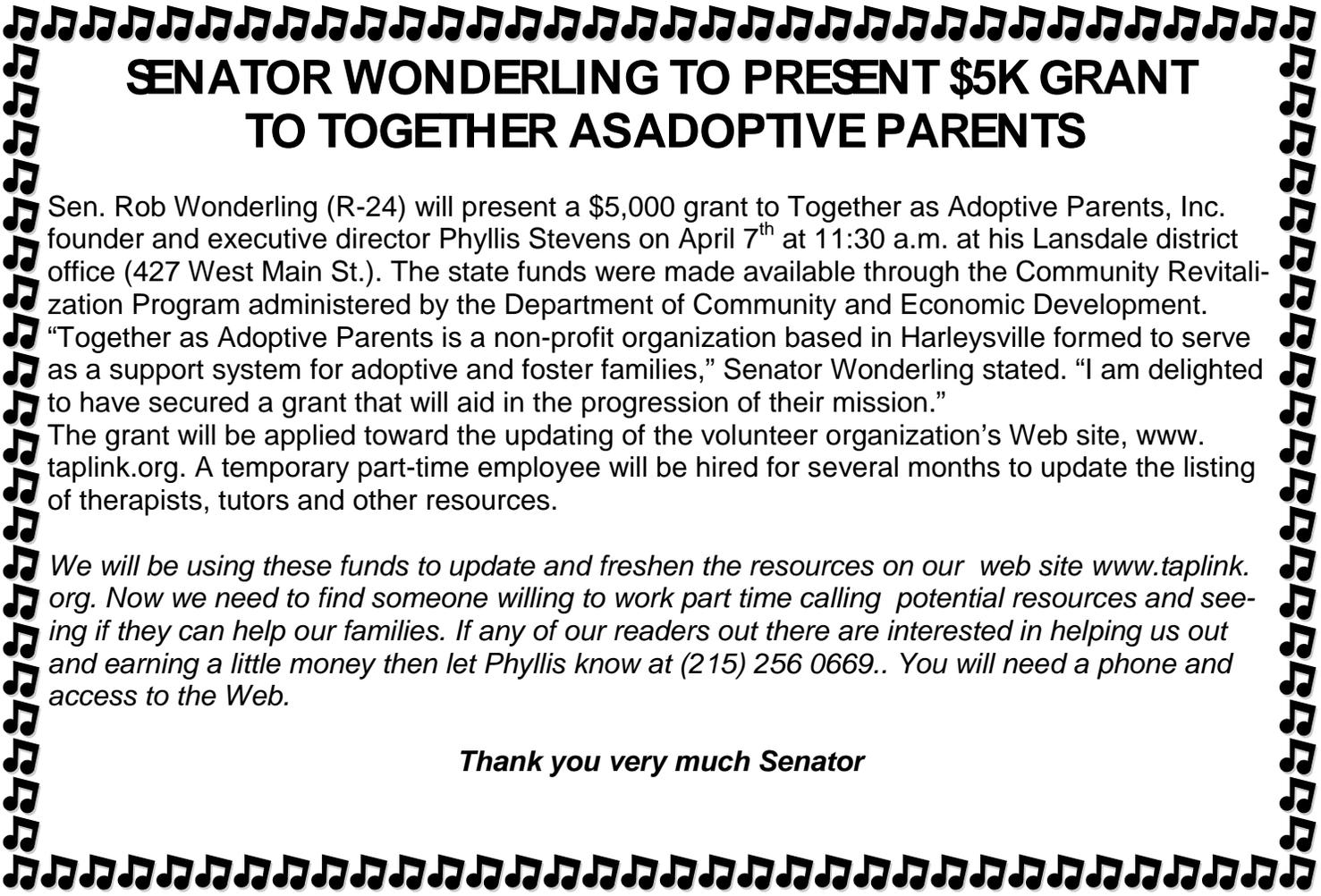
Join us in the Family Court Parent Project® at Workshop. We can help you deal with behavior problems, truancy, failing grades, drug/alcohol use and gang involvement.

If your child is age 10 or older and "out of control" - we can help. Our 10-12 week course will provide adults with the skills needed to cope with these scary times. Enrollment is open to all Philadelphia residents who are worried about their child's behavior.

Saturday, June 4, 2005
Family Court Building
At 1801 Vine Street
From 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Call 215-686-8328 to Register

Free Refreshments for Participants



SENATOR WONDERLING TO PRESENT \$5K GRANT TO TOGETHER ASADOPTIVE PARENTS

Sen. Rob Wonderling (R-24) will present a \$5,000 grant to Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc. founder and executive director Phyllis Stevens on April 7th at 11:30 a.m. at his Lansdale district office (427 West Main St.). The state funds were made available through the Community Revitalization Program administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development.

"Together as Adoptive Parents is a non-profit organization based in Harleysville formed to serve as a support system for adoptive and foster families," Senator Wonderling stated. "I am delighted to have secured a grant that will aid in the progression of their mission."

The grant will be applied toward the updating of the volunteer organization's Web site, www.taplink.org. A temporary part-time employee will be hired for several months to update the listing of therapists, tutors and other resources.

We will be using these funds to update and freshen the resources on our web site www.taplink.org. Now we need to find someone willing to work part time calling potential resources and seeing if they can help our families. If any of our readers out there are interested in helping us out and earning a little money then let Phyllis know at (215) 256 0669.. You will need a phone and access to the Web.

Thank you very much Senator

Who Are We?

We are the unjustly placed or abused, neglected, abandoned or relinquished at birth.

We are bounced from place to place, with memories that walk the night alone, nor is the love ours that we must embrace. We sometimes slip through the cracks and get shuffled around unnoticed and forgotten.



We are always living on the outside looking in. We think when we are little everyone is the same; only to find out we are treated different, not because of who we are but rather what we are.

We live in a world of never knowing; where we will live, who will take care of us, where we will go to school, We never know if we will ever be secure again, where home is or where we belong.

We have no friends as we are never in one place long enough to make them. We don't know what it feels like to attend the same school more than a year or so.

We are always movable once we have no home to call our own. A home is not just a place to lay our head. A home is where we can stay, where we can be comfortable, where we know we will always be safe and secure.

Once we get used to all the moving and different schools we somehow find within ourselves a space to furnish as we would our room, finding scraps of things we can embrace.

Then we can at least become comfortable knowing we are alone, knowing we are the only one who is going to look out for us. We become known as a loner. We depend on nobody but ourselves, yet this causes more problems.

We build up brick walls and don't let anyone in. Once the walls are in place it takes so much to take them down. If they start to come down and something happens we put them back up higher than they were before. Each time we get hurt the walls get higher and higher. We can lose so much time keeping those walls up high and strong.

We trust no one, build bond with no one; this makes it hard to build a relationship with anyone. If we are lucky enough to find someone who is willing to fight for us, we still can not totally depend on them, which hurts them. We see the hurt in their eyes, which in return hurts us even more. The hurt only causes more pain and starts the walls going back up or we run and keep on running, from one relationship to another.

Our childhood is almost impossible to trace.

Our losses etched upon our face and within our eyes, pain for which no penance can atone. How can we be forced to move and move from place to place, surrendering the love we must embrace?

We are enigma tangled up in a mystery. We are the lost puzzle pieces swept under the rug. We are a missing link in a chain of life. We have no roots. We are tumbleweed blown in the wind calling home where ever the breeze takes us. We are a chameleon changing colors to blend into our surroundings.

At some point we may be declared "legal orphans" waiting for special people to remove us from the merry go round our lives have been forced to continually circle.

At eighteen we are moved once again; basically thrown out on the streets as the system "washes their

hands of us" whether we have gained a support system or not. Even those who get some assistance, usually get it in the form of being taught how to survive at the minimum level. There's no emphasis on breaking the cycle of poverty, getting an education, doing something with our lives.

The system let us raise ourselves; a few of us get lucky, have people that care and help us along the way. The difference between those who make it and those who don't can be as simple as one encouraging word at the right time.

Yet, somehow despite what we have been through, some of us survive with a peculiar grace, even though our hearts should turn to stone as we are moved about from place to place. Many do not!

Who are we?

We are foster children!

This is our lives!

Today over 500,000 of us reside in some form of foster care. Thousands of us have already been declared "legal orphans" but no one comes forward to have us as your son or daughter. Many of us will one day be cast into the streets to make it on our own.

Is there anyone out there to stop the merry go round? Is there anyone out there who will give us a forever home? Is there anyone out there who will help us break down the walls surrounding us? Is there anyone out there that will love and care for us and allow us to call you "Mom and Dad?"

We are foster children waiting! We are "nobody's" children!

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Postscript:

Lawrence P. Adams is a former foster child. He wrote the poignant book of life through the eyes of a throw away child entitled: "Lost Son? A Bastard Child's Journey of Hope, Search, Discovery and Healing" released in 2004.

I looked all around at all the children suffering in the world.

I saw the abuse, the neglect, the pain.

I looked up to heaven and say, "why?"

"Why don't you do something to help these children?"

The reply came back: "I did do something.

I created you!"

(author unknown)

[reprinted from Jewish Children's Adoption Network (JCAN), newsletter, spring, 04]

CHILDREN'S ELIGIBILITY FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

Children with disabilities who apply for Medical Assistance (MA) will no longer be rejected on the basis of their receipt of Social Security Disability Benefits (benefits that they receive as a result of the death, disability or retirement of a parent).

In Pennsylvania, children with disabilities have been enrolled in Medical Assistance (MA) without regard to the amount of their parent's income for many years. Income in a child with a disability lost a working parent (or the parent become disabled or retired), and as a result the child began to receive benefits in their own name under their parent's social security account, the child would become ineligible for MA. This was a serious problem for children who lost the income of a parent and had major uncovered medical expenses.

As a result of concerns about this, raised by Disability Law Project- PA (DLP), the Pennsylvania Health Law Project, and others, the Department of Welfare (DPW) has issued a new rule that children currently on MA and those applying for MA in the "Disabled Child" category will not have SSDI payments count against them.

There continues to be some questions of whether the "Disabled Child" category includes people between the ages of 18 and 21. If you know a young person with a disability between those ages who is unable to get MA as a result of SSDI benefits, please contact PA Protection and Advocacy at: (800)-692-7443 x 100.

ADHD in Girls

ADHD in girls can be hard to decipher, which is why it's often overlooked and underreported by teachers. The following behaviors, occurring frequently and in various combinations, may indicate ADHD.

- Daydreaming quietly in class
- Looking out the window while twirling her hair
- Picking at her cuticles often
- Feeling anxious and depressed (but not meeting the criteria of any diagnosable disorder)
- Talking incessantly or hyperactively
- Appearing to be silly, a show-off, or boy-crazy
- Seeming to fade into the background: acting shy and inattentive
- Having trouble maintaining friendships
- Putting in extra effort to hyperfocus in order to compensate for inattentiveness (and feeling anxious and self-critical as a result).

Find the ADHD Self-Rating Scale for Girls, a comprehensive checklist your daughter can review herself at www.addvance.com/resrouces/articles/checklist.htm.

(From ADDitute, September 2004)

Requesting New Social Security Number When You Adopt

Most children adopted from foster care have Social Security numbers. Unfortunately, a child who keeps his or her old number can be tracked by anyone who knows the number, and may be declared as a dependent on birth parents' taxes – setting up adoptive parents, who also claim the child, for possible tax fraud charges.

To avoid problems and protect children from unwanted contact with past abuser, parents should request new Social Security numbers upon finalization. The new number should reflect the child's new name and family connection, and there should be nothing in the child's Social Security record tied to the original name and number.

To request a new Social Security number for your adopted child, visit your local Social Security office and complete Form SS-5 (application for a Social Security Card). The child's adoption record, or new birth certificate, can serve as identification. You can also obtain Form SS-5 by calling 800-772-1213 or visiting www.ssa.gov/ssnumber.

Reprinted from the Spring issue of Adoptalk, a publication of the North American Council on Adoptable Children (www.nacac.org; 651-64-3036).

New PSFPA President

Newly-elected Pennsylvania State Foster Association (PSFPA) President Wilhelmina Cockcroft has focused her career on supporting families. As the world of child and family services continues to embrace broader definitions of what families can be, she looks forward to supporting even more of Pennsylvania's foster families in new ways.

Wilhelmina is president of ***Kids Come First***, a non-profit organization she and her niece started in 1996 to support the need of foster children and their families. Kids Come First offers pre-school/ after-school care, therapeutic summer camps, independent living preparation for teens, a parent support group and respite service. Among her many community involvements, she serves on the Black Parenting Advisory Board, the family-to-family Advisory Board and is a Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Wilhelmina and her husband Karl have been married for 35 years and make their home in West Philadelphia. They have 2 biological children and one granddaughter. Since becoming foster parents 15 years ago, they have cared for a total of 12 children, including 21-year old and a 16-year old foster sons who live with them now.

Wilhelmina's commitment to families began with the decision to expand her own family through foster parenting. Before entering the world of foster parenting and support, she'd already built a successful career in the real estate business. Fifteen years ago, she was recruited and encouraged in foster parenting by a close friend who was a foster parent. With her own two children successfully grown up and gone, she felt she could make a difference in children's lives- and help keep families together by being a supportive part of the reunification process. As Wilhelmina takes on her own two-year-term, she looks forward to seeking new ways for the PSFPA to play even more of a supportive role for families. "I would like to hear more from the families, learn more about how we can retain them as parents and be able to respond to their needs," she said. While she personally and professionally remains strongly committed to supporting reunification, she also sees the notion of family support as embracing a broader definition of families that includes foster, kinship, biological, and adoptive parents.

Some of the changes begin by changing the language. As one example, Wilhelmina notes that within the last year, the Foster Parent Support Group at Kids Come First has changed its name to Resource Families Support Group. She looks forward to continuing the collaborative efforts with Swan to find and nurture more families to meet the many different needs of children in the system.

A Gift Only Adoptees Can Give

By Sherrie Eldridge

I'll never forget sitting next to an adoptive mom at an adoption carnival where I was speaking. At the end of the day, the children gathered on stage to show their parents an adoption art project they had been creating.

When all the kids were in place, one therapist yelled, "Who's adopted here?"

Everyone's hand flew up and squeals of delight burst forth from the little ones. "Me!" they yelled in unison.

The mom leaned over and said, "I've never seen that expression on my daughter's face. Look at her! When she said 'me!' her face absolutely glowed!"

What caused such happiness? The excitement of being with other kids? Pride in her artwork? Love of the spotlight.

I don't believe so.

I believe the little girl positively glowed because she had been given a brand new beautiful gift – the gift of fellow adoptees. We are a gift to one another! As adoption experts David Brodzinsky and Marshall Schechter put it, for adoptees, these connections "are like food to a starving man."

Many adoptees are starving for a sense of belonging akin to the bonds shared in close-knit birth families. Fortunately,

*Sherrie Eldridge is President of Jewel Among Jewels, Adoption Network, Inc. (online at www.adoptionjewels.org ; e-mail: mail@adoptionjewels.org) and the author of *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*. Her latest book, *Twenty Life Transforming Choice Adoptees Need to Make* is in bookstores now.*

Fixing Foster Care

THE FOSTER-CARE system is in abysmal shape. On average, children entering foster care languish in the system for three years, shuttled through three different placements. The federal government recently completed its final reviews of state child-protection systems; every state failed, and one of the biggest problems was states' slowness in getting foster-care children back to their homes or into adoptive families. After a year-long study, the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care recently issued a set of thoughtful prescriptions for reform designed to prevent unnecessary placements and to speed the movement of children out of foster care.

The commission would like to fix a federal system that creates perverse financial incentives for states to place and leave children in foster care rather than preventing them from entering the system or enabling them to exit more quickly. One permanent pool of federal funding, close to \$5 billion this year, goes to reimburse states for part of the cost of foster care. A far smaller amount of federal funding, less than \$700 million in 2004 and at the mercy of annual appropriations, can be used for broader purposes such as family preservation services or adoption promotion and support. There should be more leeway for states to shift their foster-care payments to other child welfare uses. States that reduce their use of foster care wouldn't lose that part of the federal grant, as they do now, but would be able to put the "savings" to other uses as long as they matched the federal funds with money of their own.

Other logical fixes would make federal adoption assistance available for all children; currently help is only available based on the income of the child's birth parents, a distinction that makes little sense and imposes needless work on states to determine eligibility. Another sensible change would be to make federal subsidies available for guardians, as they are for adoptive parents; this would help, among others, grandparents who aren't in a position to become adoptive parents but would benefit from the additional legal authority bestowed by guardianship.

Some child advocates have warned that combining much of the current funding into a flexible grant could backfire, letting the costs of foster care consume all available funds. Another criticism is that the Pew recommendations don't give states enough of a push to reduce reliance on foster care. But the commission's executive director, Carol Emig, argues that the recommendations offer a balance of incentives to reduce reliance on foster care while still providing guaranteed funding in case foster-care rolls swell suddenly, as they did during the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s.

It's clear that the current system is poorly designed, and that children are the losers. The Bush administration has proposed an optional five-year block grant that also would give states more latitude on spending, and Rep. Wally Herger (R-Calif.) has held hearings on the issue. If the Pew report can help jump-start a serious effort to fix a broken system, that in itself will be a worthy achievement.

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“Even though not esteemed as an organizational body of change, foster/ adoptive families are empowered with the truths of permanency, its successes and its failures. No other organization eats supper with its clients... We must seek every opportunity to collaborate with them on issues for and about children. We must remember they are the experts; we are their students.”

Karen Oldham, Director, Statewide Adoption Network – SWAN of Pennsylvania HelpLine.



State Agrees to Prompt Enrollment Of Foster Children In School

For the past several years, foster care parent organizations and EIC have been working to get the state to agree that children who change foster homes also often need to change schools –and that the process should be quick and easy.

There are approximately 21,000 school-aged children in foster care in Pennsylvania.

New regulation, promoted by ELC, have now taken effect requiring school districts to make sure foster children are enrolled in and attending school in their new districts within five days.

Everyone's goal should be to get these kids in school and learning as quickly as possible. These children have already put up with enough.

In the past, some school districts required piles of records before they would consider enrolling the child, such as court documents, school files, psychiatric evaluation and details of why the child is in foster care. While all these papers were being sought and copied, the child remained at home with no schooling at all.

Under the old rules, each of Pennsylvania's 501 districts set its own rules and timetables. Now, a standardized procedure is in place that allows a school district to only delay a child's enrollment if it hasn't received proof of the student's age and place or residence, or immunization records.

The state's new rules also stop school officials from asking families about their immigration status or demanding to see immigration papers.

Foreign-born children living in the United States are allowed by law to attend public school here, even if they entered the country illegally or stayed longer than their visa allowed.

"This was just another method used to intimidate and delay," said Janet Stotland, Esq., Co-Director of ELC. "Everyone's goal should be to get these kids in school and learning as quickly as possible. These children have already put up with enough."

For more information, and for copies of the Basic Education Circular (BEC) issued by the Department of Education and the Bulletin issued by DPW to ensure the process is implemented quickly, go to ELC's web site at www.elc-pa.org.

A Daughter's Letter

A mother enters her daughter's bedroom and sees a letter over the bed. With the worst premonition, she reads it, with trembling hands:

It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm telling you that I eloped with my new boyfriend. I found real passion and he is so nice, with all his piercing and tattoos and his big motorcycle. But is not only that mom, I am pregnant and Ahmed said that we would be very happy in his trailer in the woods. He wants to have many more children with me and that's one of my dreams. I've learned that marijuana doesn't hurt anyone and we'll be growing it for us and his friends, who are providing us with all the cocaine and ecstasy we may want. In the meantime, we'll pray for the science to find the AIDS cure, for Ahmed to get better, he deserves it. Don't worry mom, I'm 15 years old now and I know how to take care of myself. Some day I'll visit for you to show you your grandchildren.

Your Daughter,
Judith

PS: Mom, it's not true. I'm at the neighbor's house. I just wanted to show you that there are worst things in life than the school's report card that's in my desk's drawer... I love you!

Appellate Courts Favor Bonding

Bonding outweighs kinship. Pennsylvania was among seven recent appellate court decisions stating that significant long term relationships matter more than blood ties in disputed adoption petitions. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in favor of foster parents adopting a child instead of placement with the biological grandparents. The child was "failure to thrive" when she entered foster care and made dramatic gains while with the foster family. The court reasoned that the risks in moving the child from the foster home where she was secure and attached were too great.

For a court to decide if bonding is critical it must first be able to recognize bonding when it occurs. The court needs to know when and how bonding occurs and what happens when it is interrupted.

Bonding is a significant reciprocal attachment which both parties want and expect to continue and which is interrupted or terminated at considerable peril to the parties involved. Interrupting bonded relationships takes a heavy toll on human health and well being. Interrupted bonding has long been commonly listed as a major or contributing cause to psychiatric disorders in children. These include Reactive Attachment Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Adjustment Disorders, Learning Disorders and Developmental Delay

Bonding guidelines:

- Does the child identify him or herself with the foster family?
- Is the child perceived as a member of the foster family by the community at school, and among friends, neighbors and extended family?
- Has the child developed self-reliance and a trust of the foster family?
- Does the child make a significant attempt to attach to another family, including the birth family?

Bonds are meant to be permanent. Permanency is in the best interest of children.

(reprinted from Fostering Families Today, May-June 2004). Other courts with similar rulings were Missouri, Maine, Alaska, Kansas, Tennessee, and Indiana

Things You Can Do To Help A Foster Family

Our children need you. And, so do our foster parents! If you're at a loss as to how you can assist a foster family, here are a few ideas. Any one of them will assure your place in their hearts as a "friend indeed!"

- Offer to pick up items for the foster family when you're going to the supermarket.
- Provide a couple of afternoons of homework help, or just sit and read with a child.
- Cook a meal or make a dessert for the foster family.
- Volunteer to do minor household chores—such as laundry or ironing that are something hard to do with little children underfoot.
- Offer to braid or cut hair, or take children to the barbershop or hairdresser.
- Keep an eye out for community or church activities that the children might enjoy and volunteer to provide transportation. Be available for emergency transportation whenever you can.
- Volunteer to get agency clearance so you can provide on going, back up support for the foster parent or be a mentor to youth in foster care.
- If you want to contribute to a good cause, remember the children - - - family memberships to the Zoo or cultural facility, a used computer, nice clothes or toys that your own children have outgrown are always appreciated.
- Remember to be a friend to the foster parent!

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