



familymatters

a newsletter for foster and adoptive families

Published by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services

The Foster Family Foundation: What Will It Mean for You?

In August, First Lady Mary Perdue announced that a new organization, the Foster Family Foundation of Georgia, will take over the job of recruiting, training and supporting both foster and adoptive families. The transition is expected to take place by the fall of 2006.

The Foster Family Foundation will be an independent, not-for-profit organization that serves the entire state. Its goal is to increase the number of available foster parents by targeting recruitment to local needs; revising recruitment standards; and making training more consistent throughout the state. It will adopt strategies such as new fingerprinting technology to shorten the time families wait for approval from several weeks to a matter of hours. The foundation will also encourage parents to remain in the foster care system by improving support for foster parents through new partnerships and policies.

The foundation is a response to a serious shortage of foster homes in Georgia. Only 4,100 DFCS homes are available to care for 15,800 foster children. Last year, 656 new homes were approved for foster care, but 523 current homes were closed either voluntarily or involuntarily. In addition, fewer than one in five of the families trained for foster parenting were finally approved. This situation increases pressure on the parents who stay in the system, and limits options for the children.

"Georgia needs more foster and adoptive parents so children can grow up in safe, loving homes. Thanks to First Lady Mary Perdue's leadership, we are putting in place a statewide strategy to address the challenges of recruitment," said Department of Human Resources Commissioner B.J. Walker. "The Foster Family Foundation is a tremendous step forward in helping us find more families that are willing and able to give children a good home."

Policy News

More Information About Foster Care Per Diem

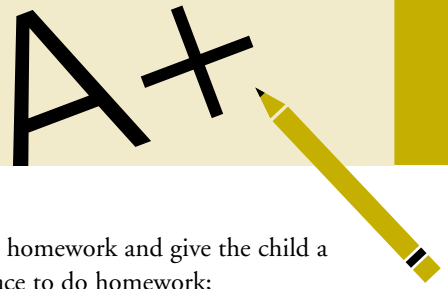
Each year foster parents may use five days of respite services between July and June of that year. Unused days are lost.

The policy on per diem reimbursement for foster parents while children are in respite care has changed. Respite care starts the day the child leaves the regular foster home. No matter what time of day or night the child leaves the regular foster home, a day of respite is used. On that day and while the child remains in respite care, the regular foster parents use days from their respite balance in order to continue to receive the per diem. The respite provider is paid the foster care per diem. On the day the child returns to the regular foster home, regardless of the hour, the foster parent will again be paid the regular foster care per diem and the respite home will receive no reimbursement.

For example: The Jones family takes Miguel to the Smiths' home at 8 p.m. on Saturday to begin their respite. Saturday would be counted as day one of their respite. They now have four days remaining. The Smiths are paid a full day of per diem for care of Miguel. The Joneses return and pick up Miguel on Wednesday at 6 p.m. The Joneses have saved a day of their respite balance because Miguel will be returning to their home that day. The Smiths will not be paid for Wednesday.



School Days



Children in foster care need to carry on with their education in spite of all the challenges in their lives. It's important for them to do well in school and get as much education as they can, so they can succeed as adults. Like any parent, you're responsible for seeing that the child in your care goes to school.

One difference for foster parents is that the child's case manager will help if there are problems. The case manager will give you information about the child's educational strengths and needs, to help you help the child. Also, the case manager will meet with the child's teacher and/or counselor shortly after placement or when the child starts school and may invite you to attend the meeting.

You are expected to:

- Enroll the child in school within two days after placement in your home. The case manager will give you information and documents you'll need for this, such as a birth certificate and immunization report. If you can't enroll the child yourself, the case manager can do this;
- Make sure the child goes to school all year, and notify the case manager about any absences or tardiness;
- Help the child with homework and give the child a regular time and place to do homework;
- Sign report cards and other documents requested by the school;
- Go to parent/teacher conferences;
- Participate in PTA meetings and other school activities;
- Keep a list of the child's school expenses and receipts to turn in with your invoice to DFCS;
- Serve as the child's advocate to see that his or her educational needs are met.

Children in foster care must attend the local public school unless school officials say it cannot meet the child's needs. In that case, the school system will provide an alternative in the same community. In some cases a child over age 16 may attend an approved GED program, if the case manager, the foster parent, the Independent Living coordinator and the child agree that it's in the child's best interest.

If the child has problems such as truancy, emotional problems or special education needs, discuss these with the case manager and school staff. If the child is suspended or expelled from school, the case manager will work with you to find an agency that can provide alternative educational services.

Report Abuse

If you think any child may have been abused, you must report this to your county DFCS office. You don't have to prove the abuse occurred; DFCS will investigate.

Foster parents are "mandated reporters," according to Georgia law (O.C.G.A. 19-7-5.(c)(2)(D),(E).) This means that if you *don't* report suspected abuse of a child you are guilty of a misdemeanor. You may also be liable if the abuse occurs again.

Anyone may report suspected child abuse or neglect, whether or not they are required to do so by law. The name of the person making the report will be confidential.

If you have any questions about your responsibilities as a mandated reporter,

or about how to detect signs of abuse, ask the Child Protective Services staff at your county DFCS office. You can also visit www.dhr.Georgia.gov, go to "How Do I" in the upper right hand corner and click on "report child abuse" for more information.

PLEASE SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Family Matters reaches over 10,000 foster and adoptive parents. We are proud that we can provide you with this information. *However, printing and postage costs are high.*

Please help us cut costs and send Family Matters to you faster.

If you send your **name, zip code and email address** to familymatters@dhr.state.ga.us we will email you future issues. Also, at any time, anyone can read the newsletter on the Web at dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/familymatters.



Inspiration and Perspiration: Looking Forward to High School Graduation Day

By Wendy Haus Hanevold Ph.D., Consultant, DFCS Treatment Services Unit

Recent media stories reported on the challenge of guiding our children and youth in foster care to the pride of achieving a high school diploma and the joyful celebration of graduation day. Foster parents' **inspiration** and **perspiration** are essential to lead our youth to success.

Inspiration: Our children and youth need many skills in order to graduate. At the very least, they need to learn to like learning. They need to discover hope in their future. They need to gain patience, organization skills, and people skills. They also have to learn to tolerate some boredom, because learning is not always fun.

Families should turn off the television and read. There should be zero television and video games on school nights. Dinner times should be filled with conversation about daily activities and ideas. We are models for our children. Read books, read newspapers, read articles. Read to your children and have your children read to you. Library visits should be a family event.

Activities that build brain power should fill our children's and youths' lives. Playing a musical instrument builds brain power. Completing a puzzle sharpens brain cells. Sports build mind and body power. Hobbies (model building, knitting) build mind and motor skills. Fishing builds patience.

Perspiration: It is hard work to be a foster parent. We have to advocate for our children's educational needs. If the children have changed schools often, many of their educational challenges may have not been identified. You must become familiar with your foster children's educational history. Ask the children's caseworker and therapist: Have they been retained in school? Do they have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or Educational Intervention Plan (EIP)? Have modifications been set in place for classroom behaviors?

Screen your children's reading ability by asking them to read out loud. Ask middle and high school students to read from a variety of school subjects. Can they read smoothly or do they struggle with

individual words? Can they share the main idea after they finish reading? Review their math homework. Have they grasped the basics at a level appropriate to their age (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division)? Can they count change, tell time, and use math in everyday life? If not, call your caseworker and insist on a school conference to determine if the school has evaluated your child's skill levels and educational needs.

All human beings can learn, but we learn at our own pace. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences teaches that we have different learning profiles. Gardner believes that human beings have at least eight "frames of intelligence" (musical, language, logical/math, spatial/mechanical, kinesthetic/sport, interpersonal {self knowledge}, intrapersonal {people skills} and naturalist). Learning is best directed to reach each of us through our strongest frame of intelligence.

Imagine a high school English class studying Hamlet by Shakespeare. A child who struggles with writing may be a gifted artist. This youth could be asked to design stage sets for important scenes in Hamlet, capturing the scenes' actions and moods. Another child may be asked to write background music for the same key scenes. Another child may be permitted to draw Hamlet as a graphic novel (comic book).

Many of our children and youth have been diagnosed with learning challenges. They may have learning disorders, or serious behavior and emotional symptoms. As a result, they may be struggling to pay attention and remain focused. Foster parents have to educate themselves about any diagnosed learning challenge so they can learn how to help their child or teen at school and at home. Ask about the children's strengths as well as their problems, so you can identify detours to help them reach their goals.

This is hard work, but our pride and tears of joy as our teens walk up to the podium to receive their diploma will be our reward.

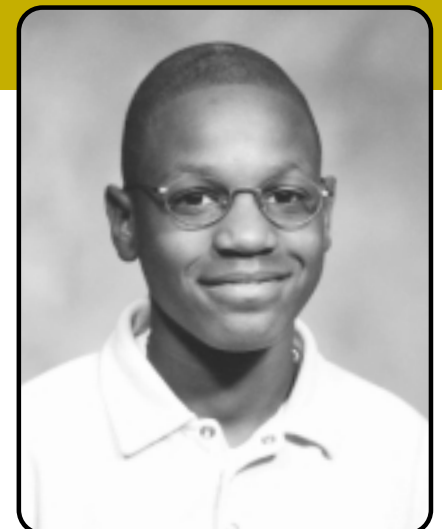
Help find Kenneth a Home

Kenneth, born April 1993, is a sweet and outgoing child who genuinely cares for those around him. Kenneth loves outdoor activities, particularly rollerblading. When inside, he plays video games and watches television. Kenneth is a great helper and enjoys compliments. He loves to eat, especially pizza, strawberries

and grapes. Because he has diabetes, his diet and insulin injections must be closely monitored. Enrolled in regular education classes, Kenneth excels academically and consistently makes the honor roll. Kenneth loves all his classes, but he particularly enjoys spelling.

Kenneth needs a very loving, supportive and committed

family, one that will provide him with a stable home, assist him with his medical needs and help him develop in a positive way. If you would like to know more about Kenneth, please call My Turn Now at 800-603-1322 and speak with the regional adoption coordinator for your area.



Helping Families Get Together: Visitation Centers

DFCS believes that when possible, maintaining ties with their birth families can be good for children in foster care. After all, most of the children – 85 percent – return to their birth families. Those families also need to be ready to provide for their children's needs when that happens. One way to smooth the path to reunification is to make visits between the children and their birth parents as easy and comfortable as possible.

Your case manager may tell you about a “visitation center” near you. Twenty-five of these community-based centers operate in Georgia, funded by a federal grant and coordinated by DFCS’ Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program. They may be located in schools, churches, or family resource centers.

Another group of visitation centers called Safe Havens, staffed by volunteers, has been started up as a collaboration among DFCS, the Juvenile Courts, and the Georgia Presbyteries (see article in *Family Matters* Vol. 1, issue 1).

If children placed in your home can be served by a visitation center, you are in luck. The centers provide a neutral, supervised

and convenient place for families to get together, including times such as evenings and weekends when the DFCS offices are closed. They also provide transportation if necessary for the biological parent. Other people important to the child can come too, such as family friends and other relatives, especially siblings. Even pets are welcome.

Who comes and what happens during the visit is planned in advance by the child's family, the case manager, and the child if old enough. The families can cook together, play games, celebrate birthdays, do crafts, or just talk. Some centers offer parenting coaches. Each center has slightly different facilities, but all are family-friendly and accessible.

During the visit, the supervising staff

member takes notes on how the parents and children are getting along, to help DFCS and the courts decide when and if reunification can take place. Staff can also step in if the visit becomes uncomfortable for the child. The level of supervision will depend on each child's needs. Foster parents are not present during the visit.

To find out if there is a visitation center in your area, ask your DFCS case manager or see the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Resource Guide at www.pssfnet.com.



Serving Healthy Snacks

Overweight and obesity in Georgia's children are increasing at an alarming rate. This can set them up for diabetes and other serious health problems later on. It is important to make sure all the children you care for get daily exercise and eat a healthy diet.

Unlike adults, children have small stomachs. They are unable to eat enough at mealtime to get all the nutrients they need and may get hungry every two to three hours. Scheduling smart snacks at least two hours before meals can help fill the gap.

Avoid giving children drinks and snacks that contain caffeine or a lot of fat and sugar. Look for low-fat, low-sugar snacks made with whole grains, fruit, and vegetables. A piece of fresh fruit, whole-wheat crackers, or a small bag of nuts* are ideal for most children.

Here are some other ideas:

- Little pizzas made from whole-wheat English muffins or pita bread topped with tomato sauce, a small amount of cheese, and pineapple, mushrooms, or other vegetables
- Baked potatoes topped with chili beans or broccoli and cheese
- Waffles topped with fresh fruit
- Tortilla and beans or cheese

- Yogurt and fruit with granola
- Raw vegetables or fruit – such as carrot sticks* or apple slices – with a yogurt dip (for extra flavor, try adding a dry salad dressing mix to plain yogurt)
- Graham crackers or whole-wheat bread with peanut butter*
- “Trail mix” made with several types of cereal, dried fruit and nuts or sunflower seeds*

Healthy planned snacks can satisfy children's appetites throughout the day. They can also help them learn to like the foods they need to grow healthy and strong. Serve snacks at the table with the TV off and enjoy a relaxed, happy snack time!

* **Warning:** Children under four years old can choke on some foods such as nuts, seeds, raw carrots, peanut butter, popcorn, grapes, raisins, hotdogs and sausage links. Make sure you are nearby during snack and meal times so you can help if the child starts to choke. Also, check with a healthcare provider to be sure the child is not allergic to any foods.

Regina Merrell, RD, LD

DHR Division of Public Health, Nutrition Section



Taking Another Look at Your Home

If you are providing foster care it's helpful to bear in mind that your home will be re-evaluated periodically, and know what to expect. DFCS usually approves a foster home for one year. Near the end of the approved period, a case manager will schedule a time to meet with you at your home. The approval period can be shorter in certain situations, such as if you're planning to move to another house; if DFCS finds that you have violated foster care policy; or if there is a major change in your household – for example, you are getting married or divorced, or other family members are moving in with you.

The re-evaluation will consist of you and the case manager working together to review the successes and challenges you have

experienced over the past year. The case manager needs to make sure that you have been providing good care to the child or children in your care and meeting the standards set by DFCS for foster homes.

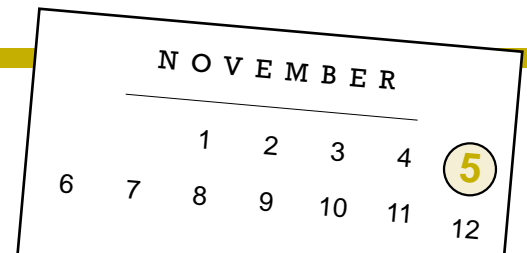
The case manager will also gather feedback on the impact of fostering on your own family. You will be able to talk to the case manager about your experiences as a foster parent and what supports you need to help you do a good job. You will also be asked to fill out part of the re-evaluation written report.

Certain records about you and your family need to be up to date. Criminal record checks are required every five years for all members of your household over age 18, and on anyone in your household who turns

18 years old during the re-evaluation period. Medical reports are generally due every five years. If you are over age 65 or have a health problem that affects your parenting, you need to submit an annual health statement. See your manual for details.

After the re-evaluation, you and DFCS will make a decision together about keeping your household on active status as a foster home. Usually approvals are extended for another year if the re-evaluation is positive and you decide to continue offering care. DFCS is working hard to find ways to make this decision an easy one for you, because so many children in crisis need your love and support.

Celebrating Adoption



Governor Sonny Perdue has proclaimed November Adoption Month in Georgia. It is also National Adoption Awareness Month. Many communities in Georgia will celebrate with activities that carry out this year's theme: "Answering the call," including gospel festivals, adoptive family picnics, library displays, and events sponsored by "One Church, One Child." These activities recognize the thousands of children who have found their "forever families" during the past year, and the thousands of children who continue to wait for a place to call home.

On Saturday, November 5 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. your family is invited to the Ford Pavillion of Zoo Atlanta for the annual "Celebrating Adoption" festival. There will be crafts for children,

Zoo Atlanta exhibitors, clowns, music and food. In addition, you will find adoption information, educational resources, and information about children waiting for adoption.

If you're one of the first 1,000 people to arrive and have with you the official "Celebrating Adoption" flyer you will be admitted free (but only two adults will be admitted free per family). To request an official flier or for more information about "Celebrating Adoption" at the zoo, call Cheryl Williams at 404-657-3559. The celebration is sponsored by the Georgia Association of Licensed Adoption Agencies, the DFCS Adoption Unit, and My Turn Now, Inc.

To find out what is happening in your area call My Turn Now at 1-800-603-1322.

November 5 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
your family is invited to the Ford Pavillion of Zoo Atlanta



DHR OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
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Join the ATeam

Even the happiest and best-adjusted adopted teenager may still need help dealing with the effects of early life experiences. If you have an adopted child in 6-12th grade, you may want to encourage your child to enroll in the Adopted Teen Empowerment and Mentoring program (ATEAM). The ATEAM brings adopted teens together in supervised support groups of up to 30 members each. Some of the ATEAM locations also offer educational meetings for the teens' adoptive parents.

The teens have fun, socialize, and learn to express themselves and deal with their feelings, in a safe environment. They take field trips and do things together, such as games,

role playing, and team building activities.

This helps them learn social skills, decision making and leadership skills to help them become successful adults.

ATEAM groups meet on public and private college campuses, usually from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. one day each month. Members can attend two weekend retreats each year, held at college campuses and retreat facilities throughout the state. The ATEAM also offers education resources and training materials for adoptive parents.

The ATEAM program is provided by Family Matters Consulting, Inc. (no relation to this newsletter), in partnership with the Georgia

Department of Human Resources Office of Adoptions. Currently, 13 groups meet in locations throughout the state and several have room for more members. Teens are eligible if they have been in the custody of a state agency and are either adopted or in an adoptive placement. They must agree to abide by the ATEAM Code of Conduct. The program may not be well suited for teens who are uncomfortable in large group settings.

ATEAM groups meet in Athens, Atlanta (two), Augusta, Carrollton, Columbus, Dublin, Gainesville, Milledgeville, Rome, Savannah, Thomasville, and Valdosta. For more information, contact 770-965-9336.

The purpose of *Family Matters* is to strengthen the relationship between resource parents and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR); supplement foster and adoptive parents' training; and keep parents up to date about

new policies and services. It is published by the Division of Family and Children Services

Please send us your comments and ideas for articles you would like to see in *Family Matters* to Barbara Joye, DHR Office of Communications,

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Please also let us know if you do NOT want to receive future issues.