

# FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES UNITED NEWSLETTER



## SEPARATED YET STILL TOGETHER

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

BRAIN TO BRAIN COMMUNICATION 2

TELLING A STORY 2

MOTHER'S DAY IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM 3

MAKE A PRINGLE BUNNY FOR EASTER 4

### Upcoming FCU Meetings:

Advisory Board Meeting—  
March 27, 3:30 pm—4:30 pm

Sponsor Team Meeting—May  
21, 1:30 pm—2:30 pm

Advisory Board—Professional  
Development Day—May 29,  
10 :00 am—2:00 pm

When living under the same roof, brothers and sisters may take for granted that they are there for one another. But children living in a foster care home with little or no contact with immediate family can realize a significant loss when they are separated from a sibling(s). Many would consider this an unnatural break in a family's dynamic.

I'd like to suggest that young people who find themselves in this situation can maintain a close bond and continue to be a force in each other's lives.

Foster parents of siblings who are separated can help support these efforts, and are encouraged to do so when it is in the best interest of the child's healthy development.

Some ways to keep in touch are through letter writing and social media. Special days such as birthdays, should be remembered and celebrated by a phone call or card. Other holidays that are shared among peers, like Halloween and Valentine's Day, offer an opportunity for sibling fun even if from afar. As practical and common-sense as these suggestions are, for various reasons there may be blocks that keep sibling relationships from continuing on their natural path when living in separate homes.

One goal in any relationship is to build positive memories. Children do not have the power to turn the clock back, however they do have the ability to have a memorable presence in their



Celebrate National Sibling Day  
April 10, 2014

siblings lives today.

Foster parents, social workers, and anyone involved in the case of a child who is separated from a brother or sister can make a difference in the short and long-term, by providing guidance and focusing on 'Still Together.'

*Submitted by: Margie Chachkin  
Adoptive Mom and FCU Member*

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

- ◆ SWAN Spring Quarterlies—March 27th, April 2, 3, 9, 10 and 24th  
([www.diakonwan.org/news/View Event](http://www.diakonwan.org/news/View Event))
- ◆ Family Group Decision Making Statewide Event—April 22 & 23—at the Hershey Lodge
- ◆ SWAN Summer Statewide and Permanency Conference—July 8 to July 11
- ◆ 2014 Youth Retreat—August 11 to August 15 at UPJ



## BRAIN TO BRAIN COMMUNICATION

When we think about communication, we focus most often on communicating with words; communication through the spoken word, or through the written word.

Communication is the foundation of all relationships. It is how we let another person know what we think and how we feel. It is also how we learn what another person is thinking and feeling. Without this mutual exchange, we can never really understand and share another person's experiences.

How then can we communicate with, understand, and share the experiences of a young child? Are we communicating even when we are not using words? The answer is yes. Let's look at the interaction between a mother and her young infant. A mother's soothing touch, soft voice, and joyful smile are communicating safety, and delight to the young infant. The infant's relaxed body, and slow and steady breathing are communicating trust and comfort to the mother.

This type of communication occurs in the parts of our brain that

process emotions, and motivations which is called the limbic system. The limbic system of the brain receives messages without words.

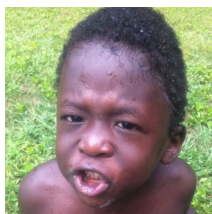
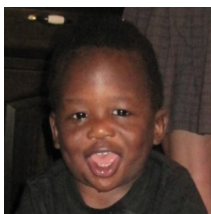
Take a look at the pictures. We can understand which one reflects feelings of happiness, which one anger and which one fear or sadness. We understand the emotions based on the facial expressions in each picture, no words required.

Are we looking closely at our young children's faces, are we hearing the tone in their voices? Really seeing and experiencing our children's feelings with them builds our relationships and our connections.

How about our own facial expression and tone of voice? What are we communicating without words? Our tone of voice and facial expression reach a child's brain in ways that words cannot.

What do you want your message to be?

*Submitted by: Rosemarie Mann, FCU Member*



## TELLING A STORY



Sharing our personal stories can have an impact on someone else. Depending on what the story is about, it can be used as a teaching or learning moment. That's what I use my story for. My story of coming from a home of abuse and neglect. Being part of the foster care system as a teen. Reconnecting with my mother later on and now having a great and loving relationship.

I'm hoping that by telling my story, I can make a difference in someone else's life. To let them know that there are others who have experienced similar circumstances and have come out of it, ok. People do change.

Sometimes they just need a helping hand. Someone to show them how to do things different than what they had previously learned.

When choosing how to tell your story, you need to take the time to choose which part of your story to tell. Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

When thinking of your story and how and what to tell, it may be emotional. You may feel vulnerable. You will be reliving those memories you are selecting to tell in your story.

You want to connect with your

audience. Know who your audience is. Be prepared and clarify your purpose for telling your story. Be honest. Don't share what you don't want others to know. Once it's out there, it's out there.

Be sure to take care of yourself when sharing your story. Don't answer questions you don't want to. It's ok to decline to help you decompress afterwards.

Our stories can be impacting on our audience. We can use it to make positive changes.

*Submitted by: Denise Hoffman, FCU Member*

## MOTHER'S DAY IN THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

Traditionally, Mother's Day is a day to honor our mothers and tell them how thankful we are to have them in our lives. For many people, this scenario will happen. For many foster children and birth moms, it will not. This is usually a very difficult day for many of the children in our foster care system and for their biological moms that still yearn to hold them and to have them home again. Some children do not have any contact with their biological mothers while others have minimal contact through visitation. Whatever the case may be, Mother's Day can be a difficult day.

No mom sets out to have her child or children removed from her care. I believe whole heartedly that all moms love their children. Sometimes for whatever reason, they just can't take care of them or provide for them. Maybe they don't have the support of family or friends. Maybe they had a difficult childhood themselves and haven't learned how to properly parent a child or perhaps they have been victims of domestic violence.

On days like Mother's Day, some of these children often continue to idealize their mothers. They forget about the bruises, the hunger, the drugs and alcohol. Instead they remember how soft their mother's hair was, or how good she smelled. They will remember the time she took them for ice cream for no special reason. For some children it may be hearing a song on the radio that reminds them of something special. This can be a very confusing and difficult time for children.

The week leading up to Mother's Day is usually time spent at school creating a special card or clay object to take home to mom for her special day. For children that have no contact with their biological mom, this will be extremely difficult. It's very important for teachers at school to be sensitive to these children during this time. Here are some suggestions:

1. Make a little speech to the class about how there are different kinds of mothers. Including foster mothers or even fathers who are raising their children alone. There are adoptive mothers. There are grandparents or other relatives that are raising the children. There are homes with two mothers or two fathers.
2. Point out that anyone special who has cared for a child can be remembered on Mother's Day. This will help all children to feel included during this special holiday.



As foster parents, there are some simple steps you can take to ease the emotional pain that a foster child may feel on Mother's Day.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Foster parents need to put aside their own feelings about how the child was treated by his or her mother. Research shows that foster children still psychologically carry with them the hope of returning to live with their parents despite what has happened. Loyalty is strong.
2. Ask the child or children to make a card for his/her biological mother. Of course it's their decision to do so or not. If they make the card, offer the child to sleep with it under his or her pillow that night. This could be a way for them to feel close to their birth mothers even though they are not physically present.
3. If the child has a picture of his or her mother, let the child carry it with him/her on mother's day (if they choose to). If the child does not have a picture, he or she could draw a picture of what the two would be doing together.
4. Do not push the child to do anything if they do not want too. Pushing will only create resentment.
5. If the child or children still have visitation with the mother, offer to have an extra visit on Mother's Day if possible. Check with the caseworker and agency first.
6. If spending time with the biological mother is not possible, offer to have a visit with a sibling if there are siblings not placed together or other relative that they have contact with. As long as it's not going to be too upsetting for them.
7. Spend some special time with the child or children. Let them know that they are loved and that they are special.

It's very important to make foster children feel loved, especially during Mother's Day. On a day which can be extremely difficult, it is important to give these children a means of expressing appreciation for the person who is caring for them. It is very important to make these children feel included in special activities, regardless of their status.

For foster mothers, please remember that if you do harbor feelings of resentment towards your foster child's mother, she did one thing right. She created the wonderful child that you are now taking care of.

For the biological mothers, it's not the fault of the foster mother that your child is in their care. Be thankful that they are there to care for your child while you are not able to.

*Submitted by: Denise Hoffman, FCU Member*

**Families and  
Communities United (FCU)**

Families and Communities United  
Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center  
403 E. Winding Hill Road  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

For more information contact Denise Hoffman

Phone: 717-795-9048  
Fax: 717-795-8013  
E-mail: [dmh104@pitt.edu](mailto:dmh104@pitt.edu)

---

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.fcu.pitt.edu](http://www.fcu.pitt.edu)

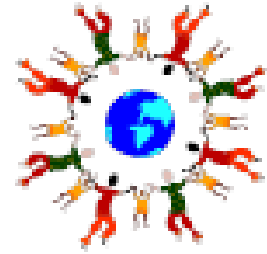
---

**Supporting Family Engagement**

---

Families and Communities United (FCU) advocates, educates, supports and empowers individuals involved with family service systems to be resources for themselves and their communities.

Families and Communities United (FCU) is a passionate group of family members and professionals working together to improve the lives of children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system and impact positive change within the child welfare system.



**HAPPY EASTER  
EASTER IS ON APRIL 20 THIS YEAR (2014)**

**MAKE A PRINGLE BUNNY FOR EASTER**



**Pringle Bunny**

**MATERIAL:**

- Small Potato Chip can (Pringles)
- Construction paper (color of choice)
- Novelty eyes
- 3 pompoms for nose
- 2 pipe cleaners (chenille stems)
- Craft Glue
- Scissors

**HOW TO:**

Here is a quick and easy little basket that the kids can make. The required supplies are few

and the cost is minimal.

For small children, you will need to cut the paper for them, but older kids should be able to manage on their own.

Cut a piece of paper to fit the outside of the can you are using. Cut 2 ear shapes and 2 bunny feet, all from the same color. Using another color of paper, cut out the centers of the bunny's ears.

Referring to the photo, glue the paper around the can to cover any markings on the can. Glue the ears to front, feet to the bottom, ear centers and eyes to the face area.

Glue 2 pompoms, side by side and a third smaller pompom to center bottom of the first 2 pompoms.

The handle is made using 2 chenille stems (1 blue and 1 white), twisted together. To attach the handle, punch a hole through the sides of the can and twist the ends of the stems to secure.

Happy Easter!

*Submitted by: Denise Hoffman,  
FCU Member*

[www.craftathome.com](http://www.craftathome.com)

