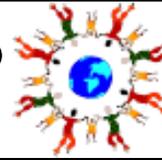




FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES UNITED

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER: WINTER 2014



WELCOME TO OUR COMMUNITY

There is an entire community and network of people who have had experience either as a child, teen or young adult in the foster care system, or a birth, foster or adoptive parent. Our points of view are specific.

Among us, there is a shared fellowship. We at Families and Communities United (FCU), have had some similar experiences and our passion on matters of child welfare and parenting often times run high.

What you should know is that we are here for each other. As a community, we can lead you to resources such as Family Centers in Pennsylvania. We can provide you with Parent Handbooks that address questions when your child is living in an out-of-home placement. You can read about our personal Family Journeys. For youth, we have a 'Know

Your rights' handbook, an annual youth retreat, and a Youth Advisory Board.

We rely on each other to learn and grow!

For further information or with questions about Families and Communities United (FCU), please feel free to contact Denise Hoffman, Parent Ambassador at the PA Child Welfare Resource Center at (717)795-9048 or dmh104@pitt.edu.

Thank you for being part of our community!

Written by: Margie Chachkin, Adoptive Mom & FCU Member

Holiday Tips for Children/Youth in Care

- Have pictures taken of the children/youth or the whole birth family together for Christmas.
- Talk to the birth parents about their culture and what traditions they have for the holidays. Make sure to include those traditions.
- Have special ornaments for the children/youth that connects them to their birth family.
- Bake and decorate cookies with the children/youth and wrap an assortment in a box to give to birth parents, grandparents, siblings in other homes, etc. Take pictures while making the cookies.
- Get a special ornament with the child/youth's first name engraved in it or an ornament that represents the child/youth (i.e. basketball ornament for a child who loves basketball, etc.). The child/youth can make a wish and hang the ornament on the Christmas tree.
- Encourage child/youth to make cards and additional phone calls to their birth parents and other family members during the holidays.



CELEBRATE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

There's something about the holidays that encourages people to spread a little cheer. Maybe it's all the shiny ornaments and decorations or the sugar highs of the candy and cookies or maybe it's the eggnog. Maybe it's knowing how fortunate we are or recognizing how unfortunate others are. Whatever the reason, it gets many people thinking about how we can help those that are in need.

So if you're feeling particularly charitable during the holidays, there are plenty of places that

need your help. Start by thinking about your skills and interests and what organizations would benefit from those talents. Think about the needs in your community:

- ◆ Start a coat and/or blanket drive and donate to local shelters.
- ◆ Provide a meal at your local church with the help of the congregation.
- ◆ Collect food and donate to the local food bank.
- ◆ Collect DVDs, stuffed

animals, toys and books and donate to local hospitals and/or shelters.

- ◆ Organize a clean-up in an area in your community.

Whatever you decide to do, know that you can make a difference in your community and the lives of those that are less fortunate.

Written by: Denise Hoffman, FCU Member

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WHY IS SCHOOL SCARY?

As the school year is moving into full gear, we parents are reminded of the difficulty schools often have in dealing with behaviors exhibited by our children. The behaviors our children are exhibiting may be due to their histories of trauma experienced a month ago, a year ago, or even many years ago. My recent experience, however, has renewed my belief that schools can and will listen when parents advocate.

This school year has started with some challenges for my 9 year old son, Ian. His para-educator for the past 2 years, Mrs. S., was reassigned, he was diagnosed with a medical condition, and he developed some complications with his vision. Not to mention, he has a diagnosis of Down Syndrome.

Ian was feeling nervous, and jittery, and his eyes were having trouble focusing but overall he was functioning OK. His new para-educator was diligent in her efforts to help him. She was attentive and involved and wanted to support him in any way that she could. So why then was Ian failing to engage in his academics, running out of class and out of the building? The why was fear.

The district has long known my stance on Functional Behavioral Analysis. My stance is, "no thank you." The reason is because a purely behavioral approach ignores the most powerful contributor to behavior for our children and that is emotion, especially fear. A sticker, a snack, moving of the clothes pin, or a chance for extra recess will not help our children stop being afraid.

I received a phone call that Ian had once again run out of the building. The principal, the learning support teacher, and a para-educator were all trying to get him to come in and get ready for the bus to go home. He was not listening. I needed to come and pick him up.

I arrived at the school and asked that the principal and the teacher join me in addressing Ian. I could see that Ian was still agitated and nervous, especially now that he found out they called mommy! "I am NOT angry. I am afraid that you made choices that were not safe," I said as I knelt down before him. "I care for you and do not want you to get hurt." I waited patiently and I could see his body relax. He said, "I sorry."

Despite Ian's concern that I had arrived and most likely was not happy, he understood I was a safe person. We had a relationship that I could rely on. I also was attuned to his fear, and worked to calm him by removing anger or disapproval from our relationship at that moment.

Removing anger and disapproval does not imply what he did was OK. Ian had to learn that his behavior impacted me, but if he was afraid or anxious he would not be able to understand. Once he was calm, he understood that I was afraid because I

cared about him. Once he was calm, he understood the impact he had on me, and others, and was able to be remorseful for his actions.

After observing my interaction with Ian, the principal, learning support teacher and I discussed a few other ways to address behavior from a trauma informed perspective. When Ian exhibits behaviors such as moving away from the learning area, running from the room, or moving and piling things in the classroom:

1. One person must engage him, and it should be a person that has developed a relationship with him, and that he considers a safe person. More than one person chasing him or attempting to surround him will increase his fear.
2. Take a long, slow, deep breath and be mindful of your own internal feelings. Ian needs someone that is bigger, stronger, wiser, and calm. Use a calm, quiet tone of voice, slow movements, and an open body posture.
3. Affirm that he is having feelings. You do not need to name the feelings, all you need to do in this moment is to let him know that you know he is having feelings.
4. Tell him you want to help him, and that running and piling is NOT OK.
5. Attune to his level of fear, notice his movements and facial expressions.
6. Tell him that it is OK if he needs a break, or needs help to manage his feelings but he must ask first. Offer Ian the opportunity to ask in the correct way.



(continued on page 3)



WHY IS SCHOOL SCARY? (con't.)

7. Maintain predictable expectations. If Ian does not have a time on his schedule to move and pile things any other day, do not allow him to do it today. The more expectations cannot be predicted, the more fear increases. Predictable expectations that Ian must meet are not the same as the expectation of behavioral compliance. It is a subtle, but important distinction and has to do with the child's ability to be motivated internally by the value of relationships, or being motivated externally by rewards and consequences.

8. If Ian asks correctly, allow him a time-limited break of only 1 minute and then he must return to the task at hand.

9. Reconnect in relationship with Ian once he is back on track. Praise him for his ability to manage his feelings, and his ability to ask correctly. Remind him that you are always available to help him. That day ended and Ian and I returned home.

The next day I receive another phone call. This time it is not because I have to come and pick Ian up from school. The call is from the learning support teacher who wants to share something that happened that day.

Ian once again ran out of the classroom and out the door to the playground. The teacher followed, timer in hand. She

affirmed Ian's feelings, and identified running was NOT OK. She told him he could have a break on the playground but needed to come back and ask. Ian walked to her side and said, "Playground please." Ian was told he could play for one minute, and had to come in when the timer rang. Ian took the teacher by the hand, they climbed the ladder together and each slid down the slide. Ian promptly walked back into the building, to the classroom and sat down to work long before the 1 minute timer even rang.

Today, Ian remains engaged in learning tasks, has not run out of the building since, and shares quiet, peaceful moments with his teacher. The setting of limits in an attuned, empathetic manner builds relationships that open a child up to learning and understanding the people and the world around him.

Parents, continue to advocate for a trauma-informed and relationship-based approach to dealing with challenging behaviors. Hopefully, as in our case, the educators will begin to experience the positive impact they can have on each and every child when that child is hurting and vulnerable.

Written by: Rosie Mann, Foster & Adoptive Mom, and FCU Member

HOW TO MAKE SALT DOUGH ORNAMENTS

Ingredients:

- 4 cups of flour
- 1 cup of table salt
- 1½ cups of warm water

Directions:

- ⇒ Preheat oven to 300 degrees
- ⇒ Mix flour and salt well. Gradually add water, stirring with a large spoon. Finish mixing with hands. Knead until soft and pliable.
- ⇒ Roll out on floured surface about ¼ inch thick. Cut shapes with cookie cutters.
- ⇒ Place on cookie sheets. With a toothpick or straw, make a hole in the top of the ornament for threading string or ribbon to hang.
- ⇒ Bake at 300 degrees until hard, about 1¼ hours.
- ⇒ Decorate with paint, markers, or glue and glitter.
- ⇒ Makes approximately 15 ornaments.
- ⇒ These are not edible!



Great, easy recipe. The kids will have such fun making these. They look great on the tree.



THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

For many of us, the spirit of Christmas is in the air, but others are not feeling so enthused for Christmas. For families that are struggling to just pay their monthly bills and to put food on the table, this is not the happiest time of the year. So, how do families not ruin the idea of Santa Claus for their children who believe in Santa Claus, despite having difficult economic times? Telling their believing children that Santa Claus doesn't exist is not a good option. For children that believe, it's a magical time for them.

The fact that things are tough this year makes it all the more important to keep this magic alive. Parents can explain that Santa wasn't able to bring them exactly what they asked for because he had a lot of needy children to give presents to this year. Parents should not emphasize gift-giving, but should instead focus on the real importance of the holiday like spending time with family and friends. Children remember the quality time that they spend with their parents rather than the gifts they receive. Children are probably too young to understand the nature of the economy right now, so it's hard to explain to young children the realities of the economic downturn.

Parents should be careful to keep our own guilt in check. It's so easy as parents to find ourselves in debt come January, or without enough money to pay the bills. Don't spend money you don't have. Keep your priorities in check. Usually children who have less will appreciate Christmas more for the small things.

When growing up, I didn't receive many presents and the ones I did certainly were not expensive. But what stands out for me is time I spent with family. I remember running around the house with my cousins and playing games. At the time I didn't realize that we were poor. We had a meal together and we spent time together. What more did I need?

It's better for parents to place attention on what they can give to their children, rather than what they cannot. Remember the family connection gained during the holidays. Family connection plays a key role in a child's development. Parents can encourage children to create their own ideas about the holidays.

In a way, Santa Claus is a part of the folklore of our culture. It allows children to create their own ideas about the holiday after discussing it with their parents. To continue the gift-giving tradition of Santa Claus, parents can create 'family-time' coupons for their children: Parents can give their children a coupon that entitles them to family time. If a child likes to read, the coupon will entitle the parent to take time out of the day to read the child a book. It's very simple and yet great one-on-one time.

Besides coupons for family time, parents can take their children to homeless shelters to help them realize the true meaning of Christmas. Parents can take their children to a shelter and have their children offer one of their toys to those at the shelter. From this visit, the children will realize that they have more than most do.

Realizing the true meaning of Christmas is something that everyone should take into account. Therefore, parents and children need to nurture each other and not focus on gifts. During lean financial times children may think that their gifts are fewer because they've been 'naughty'. It's important for parents to emotionally prepare children for receiving fewer gifts by focusing on gratitude for what they already have and by giving to others.

There are organizations such as local churches, the Salvation Army and the Toys For Tots program, that help families in need. There are also organizations such as Goodwill and Community Aid where parents can find gently used items for sale without spending too much money.

Remember that this is temporary and that nothing is perfect. The sooner one can embrace themselves —flaws and all— the faster we can accept and embrace what's really important during the Christmas holiday.

As a parent who has struggled financially and was once a youth in the system, I've made sure to create family traditions that my children will take with them and will pass on to their children. It can be something simple but, the memories will last a lifetime.

Written by: Denise Hoffman, FCU Member





LOLLIPOP COOKIES

Preparation: 25 minutes—Cooking: 90 minutes

Makes 16 cookies

Ingredients

1¼ cups all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled

¾ teaspoon baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

1 cup granulated sugar

1 large egg

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1¾ cups confectioners' sugar (10x)

food coloring

For decorating: mini jelly beans, colored sprinkles

Also need: approximately 14, 6-8 inch lollipop or ice-pop sticks (found in craft stores or Walmart)



These whimsical treats can be decorated to suit any holiday or occasion and make a perfect activity for kids.

Directions:

- ⇒ Heat oven to 350° F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt; set aside.
- ⇒ With an electric mixer, beat the butter and granulated sugar at medium speed until creamy, about 3 minutes. Add the egg and vanilla extract and mix until combined. Reduce the mixer speed to low and gradually mix in the flour mixture just until combined (do not over mix).
- ⇒ Drop mounds of the dough (about 2 tablespoons each) onto the prepared baking sheets, spacing them 4 inches apart. Insert one end of a lollipop stick into each and flatten the dough slightly with your fingers. Bake the cookies, rotating the baking sheets halfway through, until golden, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool 5 minutes on the baking sheets, then transfer to wire racks to cool completely.
- ⇒ In a small bowl, mix together the confectioners' sugar, 2 tablespoons water, and 1 to 2 drops food coloring. Drizzle the cookies with the icing and sprinkle with the candies and sprinkles. Let dry for at least 30 minutes.
- ⇒ Storage suggestion: Keep at room temperature, between sheets of wax paper in an airtight container, for up to 1 week. (Alternatively, wrap in a non-sealing plastic sandwich bag or cellophane bag and close with a twist tie or a ribbon.)

Shortcut method:

- ⇒ Use refrigerated cookie dough purchased at your local grocery store. Slice the dough per instructions.
- ⇒ Insert one end of a lollipop stick into each and flatten the dough slightly with your fingers. Bake the cookies, rotating the baking sheets halfway through, until golden, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool 5 minutes on the baking sheets, then transfer to wire racks to cool completely.
- ⇒ In a small bowl, mix together the confectioners' sugar, 2 tablespoons water, and 1 to 2 drops food coloring. Drizzle the cookies with the icing and sprinkle with the candies and sprinkles. Let dry for at least 30 minutes.

www.realsimple.com/food-recipes

Families and Communities United (FCU)

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VISIT US ON THE WEB
WWW.FCU.PITT.EDU

FCU meetings are held bi-monthly on the last Thursday of the month at the Child Welfare Resource Center located in Mechanicsburg, PA.

Contact Denise Hoffman at dmh104@pitt.edu and learn how you can be part of FCU.

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, you and families involved in the child welfare system and impact positive change within the child welfare system.

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

2015 PCYA Meetings:

- 1/20/15 – 1/23/15, Nittany Lion Inn State College, PA
- 3/17/15 – 3/20/15, Nittany Lion Inn State College, PA
- 6/23/15 – 6/26/15, Double Tree Resort, Lancaster / Willow Valley
- 10/20/15 – 10/23/15, Nittany Lion Inn State College, PA

2015 SWAN Winter Statewide:

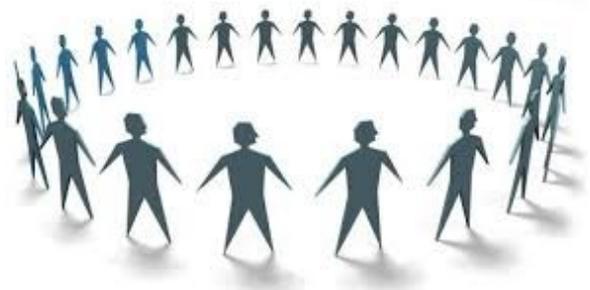
- 1/21/15 – 1/22/15, Harrisburg

Families and Communities United (FCU) Meeting:

- January 27, 2015—3:30—4:30 pm—Child Welfare Resource Center, 403 E. Winding Hill Road, Mechanicsburg, PA

2015 SWAN Spring Quarterlies:

- 4/1/15, Scranton
- 4/14/15, Monroeville
- 4/15/15, Clarion
- 4/22/15, Philadelphia
- 4/23/15, Fort Washington
- 4/28/15, Enola



2015 SWAN Summer Statewide:

- 6/23/15 – 6/26/15, Lancaster

2015 YAB Youth Summit:

- 6/17/15 – 6/18/15, Child Welfare Resource Center

Poverty Resource Forum:

- Every 2nd Thursday of the month—City Line Diner, Derry Street, Harrisburg, PA

Diversity Resource Forum:

- Every 3rd Thursday of the month—Case Management Office, 1100 Cameron Street, Harrisburg, PA