Caregiver Connection

June 2011

A monthly publication for Washington state foster and adoptive families and relative caregivers.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION

On June 17, Timberline High School senior Ryan Cummings will walk across a stage like thousands of other young people in the state and receive his high school diploma.

But when Cummings, a youth in foster care in Lacey, is asked whether he thought that day would ever come, his answer was swift and unequivocal: "absolutely not."

Not only is Ryan graduating from high school, he has been accepted into Pacific Lutheran University, where he plans to study pre-law and psychology. Until recent years, his life experience led him to believe his future would not include educational success.

"I never even dreamed I would graduate from high school, let alone go to college," he said between classes recently. "I was just too busy concentrating on day-to-day survival to think much about that."

Statistics show that Washington State is improving the rate of graduation among its foster youth. An October 2010 study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, said the state is making progress in seeing foster youth graduate. The foster care graduation rate in 2009, (the latest year figures are available) showed about 44 percent of foster youth graduated. That figure has been climbing, but the report noted the rates still have a long way to go.

"For students in foster care, graduation rates vary between 32-44 percent," the report stated. "While these rates are significantly below other students, graduation rates for foster youth have improved in each of the last three years. However, graduation levels for foster youth also lag behind other disadvantaged youth, such as low-income, special education and migrant students."

So how did Ryan beat the odds? "You need a good support system, people who are there for you, who can help you make sure you get done what needs to be done," he said. In Ryan's case, a key advocate, Lynne Welton, was his mentor. Lynne was featured in the January Caregiver Connection. Ryan shared that he almost certainly would not have made it to graduation and into college without her constant support, encouragement and prodding.

A number of educational opportunities have become available for youth in care in recent years. (Links to guide you are listed below).

At the sibling reunification camp, Camp To Belong, campers 14 years and older participate in a "Life Seminar" where they spend several hours learning about those opportunities. In watching them learn how the door to their future can open, you can almost see the light bulb go off as they realize there are opportunities they never imagined to get an education and improve their lives.

Former Governor Gary Locke frequently said, "Education is the great equalizer."

June is a time to celebrate the success of those who will walk across those stages, applaud the caregivers and other important adults in the lives of those young people who helped lead them to those stages and recommit to the goal of giving our kids hope for a brighter future through the gift of education.

To learn more about educational and other opportunities for youth in care:
www.independence.wa.gov
http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/
http://www.treehouseforkids.org/?gclid=COSRp8mh9KgCFQ12gwodBmS4UQ
www.hecb.wa.gov *(click on the various options on the left hand side of this home page).*

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Transition planning for youth

As foster youth prepare for adulthood, it is important for Children's Administration (CA) and caregivers to help them plan for this important transition that occurs at age 18. CA has established policy and procedures to ensure all youth in foster care have a shared staffing meeting between ages 17 and 17.5 to develop a safe and viable transition plan. This meeting is organized by the social worker, yet should be youth focused and youth driven. This staffing should be all about the youth and what he or she wants. Youth should identify key people in their life they would like at this important meeting, as there is a lot of planning to be done. Youth need a place to live, a job, money, medical and dental care, a postsecondary education plan, personal records, an adult or adults to turn to for help over time, information about how to accomplish their short and long-term goals for the future, etc. This is a lot for any young person to absorb. These shared staffings are a great opportunity for you and the youth to learn about the array of resources and supports available when on this journey. Once the youth has developed this transition plan, the social worker will review and update the plan monthly until the youth has left care. We all want our youth to be successful in adulthood and having an identified transition plan plays a vital part in this happening. To learn more about developing a transition plan for youth exiting care, please contact the youth's assigned Children's Administration social worker.

Free state park passes

Free access to state parks is available again this year to licensed foster parents and relatives taking care of children who have an open case with the Department of Social and Health Service's Children's Administration (CA). While a charge for using the park during the day (day use charge) is new this year for Washington State parks, licensed foster parents and relatives taking care of children with an open CA case do NOT have to pay this fee, just as they are not required to pay for overnight camping.

Caregivers must present proof of eligibility for the no charge use:

1) OVERNIGHT CAMPING:

a. Relative caregivers with a child or children who have an open CA case must present a CA-issued identification card and picture identification (like a driver's license). Contact Bob Partlow at 360-902-8063 or via email at bob.partlow@dshs.wa.gov for a card if you do not already have one. It's about the size of a business card. He will need your name and address before issuing you a card.

b. Licensed foster parents may present their foster care license or their CA-issued identification card, along with picture identification (like a driver's license). Your licensor can issue you the identification card if you have misplaced yours.

2) DAY USE:

All caregivers should place their CA issued identification card on the dash board of your car so park rangers can see it if you are not by your vehicle.

Please contact Bob Partlow at pbob300@dshs.wa.gov or call 360-902-8063 if you have any questions.

Information about policy issues regarding children in care

ELECTRONIC/SOCIAL MEDIA ISSUES

Children in foster care have the right to privacy about their status in foster care and also should have reasonable access to uncensored communication with others. It can be challenging to meet both of these expectations in the era of social networking sites such as Facebook, My Space and rapid electronic communication such as Twitter. There are also many questions about what caregivers can post about foster children in their homes. The following is the Children's Administration policy on communication for children in foster care:

- Social workers and foster parents should discuss foster children's use and access to electronic communications (social networking sites, email, cell phones, etc), as part of the child's case plan in monthly meetings with the foster parent. Use and access to electronic communications is based on reasonable discretion related to the specific child.
- Foster parents can have pictures of foster children on social networking sites as long as information about children in out-of-home care does not include:

1. Child's name
2. Identify the child as being a foster child
3. Discussion about case specific information about the child or the child's family

If there are safety concerns about posting a picture of a foster child on a social networking site, it is the social worker's responsibility to inform caregivers why unidentified photos may not be posted on the caregiver's social networking site(s).

BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR THOSE IN A FOSTER HOME ON A REGULAR BASIS

This information stresses the importance of background clearances for those visiting the home or spending the night on a regular basis – especially if someone (a significant other) is moving into the home or staying at the home. Regarding licensed caregivers the following applies:

(1) Anyone spending the night or having unsupervised access to children on a regular basis should have a background clearance. State law requires "written verification for each… individuals who may have unsupervised access to children in care", and

(2) (licensed caregivers) "…must send a completed background check form to your licensor on anyone on the premises having unsupervised access to children…"

When a background comes back with disqualifying information it can jeopardize both the safety of a child and the licensed home.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender month

Words and actions can hurt

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender youth bullying and our role as caregivers

Many of us have heard groups of teenagers engaged in playful banter, saying things like "that's so gay." It's no big deal, right? Kids will be kids, right? The reality is this the kind of joking that includes anti-gay slurs can have unintended consequences, sometimes deadly consequences. In September 2010 alone, six cases of gay teens suicides due to bullying made national headlines. Not a single young person should have to die because of who they are.

No matter what our spiritual convictions or political ideologies may be, we all became involved in child welfare because we care about children. The last thing any of us want to do is to directly or unintentionally inflict more harm on a child who has already endured more than his or her fair share of hurt.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (GLBTQ) youth come into the child welfare system at much higher rates than other children and youth, often because of gender non-conformity and sexual orientation variance. Once in care, further abuse sometimes is perpetrated by both caregivers and other children in the home (Berberet, 2004).

Homosexuality, bisexuality, and being transgender are not choices, they are not bad behaviors or rebellion, they are not likely to be phases, they cannot be reversed or "cured" (American Psychiatric Association). Saying things to a less masculine boy like, "buck up, be a man," or "stop being such a sissy," can cause lasting harm to a young person. Sitting idly by and allowing peers to say similar things can also do harm. It gives young people the message that they deserve to be taunted or hurt.

As caregivers, it is not enough to change our own behavior if we are acting in ways that cause homosexual or transgender youth to feel "less than," we must intercede when we learn that a young person is being bullied by other youth living in the home or by schoolmates. There are some startling facts about the relentless nature of anti GLBTQ bullying:

- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender students hear anti-gay slurs about 26 times a day or every 14 minutes (National Mental Health Association, 2002).
- Homophobic bullying is often aimed at children and youth who do not conform to traditional gender roles or gender expression even if they are not GLBTQ.
- An estimated 160,000 children miss school every day out of fear of attack or intimidation by other students (National Education Association 1995).

GLBTQ students, who report much higher rates of school violence and harassment than heterosexual students, are more than twice as likely as their peers to skip school because they don't feel safe (Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2001).

A child's life literally depends on whether or not they feel loved, accepted, and affirmed in the places where they live and learn. Be the one to let a GLBTQ young person know that they are valued, loved, and that their maltreatment will not be tolerated in your home or on your watch.

For more information about caring for GLBT youth and caring for yourself in the process, you may contact Marianne K. Ozmun, Children's Administration Communications Manager for resources and information. 360-902-7928. Email: Mariane.Ozmun@dshs.wa.gov

Here are some Dos and Don'ts for caring for GLBTQ children and youth.

Do: Be affirming and accepting.

Do: Examine your own homophobia and transphobia and get educated.

Do: Display signs that show your home is a safe and affirming place for GLBTQ people.

Do: Know resources for GLBTQ children and youth in your community.

Do: Get support for yourself if this topic is challenging for you.

Do: Intervene if other children and youth in your home are harassing a GLBT child placed with you.

Do: Talk to a child's school and advocate to make certain a GLBT child in your care is safe in their school, as well.

Don't: Hit or otherwise abuse a child or youth for being or appearing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Don't: Call a GLBTQ child or youth insulting names or tell them to dress or behave in a more feminine or masculine manner. Don't say things like, "be a man," or "act like a lady."

Don't: Tell a young person that they are going to Hell or are sinning because they are GLBTQ. Do not request that they pray to be made straight or tell them you will pray for them to become straight.

Don't: Take any young person to a church, minister, or therapist who claims they can reverse homosexuality, bisexuality, or transgenderism. Transformational ministrations and conversion or reparative therapies have been shown to cause lasting trauma.

Don't: Stand idly by and allow a young person to be harmed by others in your home or at their school because they do not conform to gender stereotypes.

Don't: Blame a GLBTQ victim of bullying by saying things like, "well they wouldn't beat up on you if you didn't act so gay."

Don't: Be too hard on yourself if this is hard for you. Sometimes acceptance takes time. Protect the child and take care of yourself in the process.

GLBTQ Resources

It's important to know about resources for GLBTQ youth and for yourself as caregivers. This list of national resources is a starting place. Many of these will help you to find resources in your local communities. A great place to start is with PFLAG, they can support you in supporting your family members.

To view an award winning locally produced video featuring our own Washington state foster youth, go to: http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/onGoingVid.asp and scroll down to find the video We Are...GLBTQ and an accompanying study guide.

Child Welfare League of America
http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtq.htm

Family Acceptance Project
http://familyproject.sfsu.edu

Ingersoll Gender Center
http://ingersollcenter.org/

It Gets Better Project
http://www.itgetsbetter.org/

Lambda legal poster
http://data.lambdalegal.org/pdf/117.pdf

National Center for Lesbian Rights
http://www.nclrights.org/site/PageServer

Northwest Gender Alliance
http://nwgenderalliance.org/

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, PFLAG
http://community.pflag.org

Safe Schools Coalition
http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/safe.html

The Human Rights Campaign
https://www.hrc.org/index.htm

The Trevor Project, GLBTQ youth suicide prevention
http://www.thetrevorproject.org/

The We Give a Damn Campaign for straight allies of GLBT youth
http://www.wegiveadamn.org/

Important numbers to know when you take care of children in out-of-home care

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

ON-GOING AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Under contracts with the state, three private agencies are working to build supports for you within the foster care community. Supports include hubs, support groups, and matching new foster parents with veteran foster parents. To get connected:

- If you live in Eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula down through Pacific County or from Thurston County to Clark County, call 1-888-794-1794.
- If you live in King County or any counties north of King County, call 206-605-0664.
- If you live in Pierce or Kitsap counties, call 253-473-9252.
- If you live in King County, the Friends of Youth CARE program provides short-term counseling, education and support to help you care for your most difficult children. 1-888-263-3457 or 206-915-0459.

Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE or www.parenttrust.org. The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington state. Last year, the Family Help Line received more than 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect: Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team (FIRST) 253-219-6782. Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

Mental Health Crisis Line Information: The crisis line telephone number for your county or region is available on the DSHS Mental Health Division website at: http://www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/crisis.shtml.

GENERAL FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

FPAWS: Foster Parent Association of Washington State is an all volunteer non-profit association. It is led by experienced caregivers who provide support and helpful services to all caregivers (foster, adoptive, and kinship) in Washington State. In addition, FPAWS advocates for caregivers with Washington's legislative officials, all levels of Children's Administration staff and other community service providers to enhance the child welfare system. Contact FPAWS at fpaws.org or 1-800-391-CARE (2273).

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: Foster Care Resource Network, 253-473-9252. Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

RESOURCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

Get connected to information on resources in your area by calling 211 – a toll free number.

Girl Scouts of Western Washington: Fostering a Future: MeccaYS@girlscouts.org

Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC): http://www.parenthelp123.org/resources/food-resources

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website: http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/

Children's Administration Foster Parent Training Website – Trainings are open to all licensed foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and unlicensed caregivers. For information about foster parent and caregiver training, check out: http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp

CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION FOSTER CARE LISTSERV

Join the 2,200 people who have subscribed to the List Serve http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1 for updated information on resources for the work you do in caring for children.

Family Planning Services are designed to help avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancy and are available through your local Community Service Office (CSO). Each CSO has a full time Family Planning Nurse to help provide services to Medicaid eligible clients. There is also a Family Planning hotline number 1-800-770-4334.

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
CA Children's Administration

Oh brother (and sister) where are thou?

A 10-year-old boy attending Camp To Belong in 2009 conveyed the depth of feeling brothers and sisters often have for each other when he told campers and counselors, "If I had the choice to spend a year in Hawaii or 45 seconds with my brother, I would choose my brother." He expressed what those who take care of children know - the strength of the sibling bond and the importance of keeping children together when they are placed in out-of-home care and keeping them connected when that is not possible.

To help track sibling contacts a tip card "Keeping Brother and Sisters Connected" was created. The card provides helpful tips for both caregivers and social workers to help keep brothers and sisters connected. It emphasizes the need for visits at least twice a month. It provides space for sibling contact information, an easy way to track when visits have occurred, who attended and scheduling for next time. Kids can write their own comments to pass on to their social worker. Caregivers will share this card with the social worker during their monthly visit.

The Keeping Brothers and Sister Connected Tip Card is available through your social worker or on line at:

ENGLISH VERSION
http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/Publications/22-1455.pdf

SPANISH VERSION
http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/ForeignLang/22-1455SP.pdf

We hope you will join in the effort to keep brothers and sister connected!

Health care questions

The new Fostering Well-Being Care Coordination Unit can help answer health-related questions or help you work on health-related issues with children in your care.

This is their contact information:
(360) 725-2626 or 1-800-422-3263
(8am-4:30pm)
Email: dhsfwbccu@dshs.wa.gov
Blake Office Park West
4450 10th Ave. S.E.,
Lacey, WA 98503
Mailstop: 45600