

Caregiver Connection

July 2009

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

The value of

Play

► Ask any adult to think of a happy childhood memory and most likely it will involve play. But many adults do not view children's play as important. They do not see the connection between playing and learning.



Play is an extremely important element of children's healthy development. Yet, during the past several decades, free-play has drastically been reduced. Creative, open-ended, free-play is rapidly disappearing from our homes, our schools, and our communities. The causes include pop culture, changes in family structure, hurried lifestyles, unsafe neighborhoods, technology, and an increased focus on student achievement. Over the last two decades children have lost eight hours of unstructured, spontaneous free-play a week, and more than 30,000 schools have eliminated recess to make more time for academics. From 1997 to 2003, the time children spent outdoors fell 50 percent.

Play in the 19th century typically consisted of physical activity and the use of imagination. Today, children are playing with toys that have pre-planned purposes. Essentially, instead of playing with cardboard boxes, creating make-believe cars, children are riding in miniature electric vehicles that resemble mom's SUV. This is reducing children's creative aptitude. Diane Levin, a child development expert at Wheelock College in Boston states that "Developing imagination and creativity is essential for children to develop problem-solving skills." She believes that as a result of free-play reduction, children are developing a "problem-solving deficit disorder".

Psychologists believe that changes in children's play have negatively impacted cognitive and emotional development. Because children's activities are now more regulated by adults, children are not able to practice regulating them. Self-regulation is a crucial developmental task. Developmental neuroscience research provides evidence that free-play actually helps children develop a critical cognitive skill called executive function. The brain's executive function has many features, the central one being the ability to self-regulate. Children who have good self-regulation are able to control their emotions and behavior, resist impulses, and exert self-control and self-discipline. A poorly developed executive function is associated with high dropout rates, drug use and crime.

According to Laura E. Berk, of Illinois State University, one reason make-believe play is such

1624 Statewide Regional Foster Parent Representatives

REGION 1

Cynthia Gardner (alternate)
rc.gardner@comcast.net
home 509-482-2033
cell 509-714-6961

Ginger Schutt
fosmom09@comcast.net
509-535-3398

REGION 2

Mary-Jeanne Smith
smithhomes@hotmail.com
509-876-6245

REGION 3

Debra Ellsworth
dkfoster3@verizon.net
360-755-0608

Shala Crow
fosterhearts@hotmail.com
360-220-3785

REGION 4

Tess Thomas
TMT3000@aol.com

Talya Miller
mytie5683@aol.com
206-786-1491

REGION 5

Debra Converse
president@kitsapfostercare.org
360-692-1927

Debra Van Cleaves
deborahac@aol.com
253-473-9252

REGION 6

Amy Gardner
michaelamy52@msn.com
360-200-2102

Marci Miess
marcimiess@hotmail.com
360-880-5330

This month we are taking the opportunity to honor the accomplishments of some of our kids who are graduating and moving on to new life challenges.

Robert Taylor

In this remarkable group of foster youth graduating from high school this year, this is the story of one remarkable young man. His name is Robert Taylor and he is graduating from Franklin Pierce High School in Tacoma.

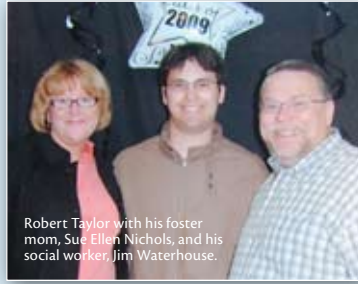
Robert will be heading to Central Washington University in the fall to pursue a degree in electronic engineering. His goal is to design computer hardware. He will be heading there with several scholarships in hand – the Governor’s Scholarship, a “Wildcat Waiver” from CWU, a Distinguished Navigator award from CWU, plus Education and Training Voucher and Passport to College resources – and a respectable 3.5 grade point average. He also is applying to the Foster Care to 21 program, which allows him to return to the home of his current foster family on school breaks and summer vacation.

All of this is especially remarkable considering that Robert spent most of his school years in special education. Lots of missed school while in his mother’s care and the challenges of Aspergers Syndrome (an Autism Spectrum Disorder) limited Robert’s early school success. Amazingly, with the help and support of his foster family and his special education teachers, he overcame his difficulties and “graduated” from special ed. At that point he not only took on the regular high school curriculum, but tackled his first Advanced Placement class! His foster mother, Sue Nichols, who was also his special education teacher, says she has never known anyone to make the kind of progress that he has. Robert says these are the accomplishments he is most proud of!

Robert and his brother first came into foster care when he was 10 years old. He describes himself as having three families – Sue and Steve Nichols, with whom he currently lives; Shirley and Lennard Taylor, his previous foster parents where his brother still lives and he visits; and his birth mother, who is now in recovery from drug use and with whom he recently reconnected.

In addition to the hard work he has done at school, Robert has involved himself in other activities. He sees his ability to focus on an interest as one of his greatest strengths. Computer technology is his love and he has found several ways to use those skills. On Saturdays, he volunteers his time with a computer recycling center in Olympia, restoring and rebuilding computers. He has worked in the summer at his school in the IT department. In addition, he enjoys his independent living classes at Pierce County Alliance and he is involved in the Mockingbird Society. He takes pride in having voted for first time in the national election and testifying during this year’s legislative session in favor of the Foster Care to 21 program.

His foster parents, Sue Ellen and Steve Nichols have watched him face his challenges. They comment on how hard it is for him to understand some of the simple tasks of life because of this disability. But “with the support that Robert has received from DSHS, Catholic Community Services, and his family, along with the ILS programs, He has become a foster care success!” They are very proud to be his foster parents!



Robert Taylor with his foster mom, Sue Ellen Nichols, and his social worker, Jim Waterhouse.

Jessica Asmus

Here is another of our remarkable 2009 grads who has experienced great hardship and is moving on from foster care with great promise. The Cathlamet Daily News recognized her achievements and shares her story with us, highlighting a meaningful project she took on a couple of years ago to create a significant event in her school and community.

Jessica Asmus scanned the bleachers and saw blank stares. It was the 2007 annual Veterans Day assembly at Wahkiakum High School. Students were there to honor those who served in the military, but most were just wishing the ceremony would end.

Then a junior, Jessica vowed to make the event more meaningful the next time around. So she worked with Principal Loren Davis to track down the names of all the veterans from the area. Then, at last November’s assembly, students lit a candle for each veteran as their names were read aloud. By the end of the ceremony, the gym was lit up with candles, and nearly every student had lit one.

The assembly was a hit with local veterans, many of whom attended the event.

“They loved it,” Davis said. “We got a lot of good feedback. It was really nice to honor the specific veterans.”

Revamping the Veterans Day assembly illustrates the determination and creativity that have characterized Jessica’s three years at Wahkiakum High School.

Jessica is graduating sixth in her class with a 3.67 grade point average, and this fall she’ll attend Whitman College, the prestigious school in Walla Walla. She has earned about \$45,000 a year in scholarships.

“She has an inquiring mind,” said Audrey Petterson, who teaches English at the high school and is Jessica’s Knowledge Bowl coach. “She looks for different angles on things.”

Life has given her some sharp angles of its own.

Her mother died of a heart attack when Jessica was in fourth grade. She lived briefly with her father, then bounced around from relative to relative and two foster homes before landing in Cathlamet with foster parents Dennis and Jennifer Emery.

She started attending Wahkiakum High School her sophomore year.

Jessica said the Emerys make sure she has what she needs to be successful in school and get her homework done, even if it means late-night trips into Longview for supplies.

“It’s not like being in foster care with them,” she said.

Jessica runs track and cross country for the Mules. She’s also on the Knowledge Bowl team and is a member of the German Club.

She plans to study genetics in college and hopes to continue on to medical school, hoping for Harvard.

“You see people who come from adversity and it’s not an easy road,” Petterson said. “She’s taken every advantage she’s been given.”

a powerful tool for building self-discipline is because during make-believe, children engage in what is called private speech. Children talk to themselves about what they are going to do and how they are going to do it. "In fact, if we compare preschoolers' activities and the amount of private speech that occurs across them, we find that this self-regulating language is highest during make-believe play," Berk says. "And this type of self-regulating language... has been shown in many studies to be predictive of executive functions." Berk explains that private speech is used to overcome obstacles, to master cognitive and social skills, and to manage emotions. Unfortunately, the more structured the play, the less private speech children exhibit.

Many early childhood programs and parents have good intentions in structuring play but these good intentions may be having the opposite effect. According to Anne



Haas Dyson, a University of Illinois professor who studies childhood learning and literacy development, "Parents and educators who favor traditional classroom-style learning over free, unstructured playtime in preschool and kindergarten may actually be stunting a child's development instead of enhancing it". Studies that compared the performance of children attending academic preschools with those attending play-based preschools showed no advantage in reading and math achievement for children attending academic preschools. However, evidence did suggest that children attending academic preschools had higher levels of test anxiety, were less creative, and had more negative attitudes toward school than did the children attending play-based preschool.

Our society needs to consider play as having value in child development. Children need more free-play opportunities; and parents and educators need to understand the importance of play. The demands of the 21st century will require creative minds. According to Sharna Olfman, a psychology professor at Pittsburgh's Point Park University who has studied children's imaginative play, "Many of our greatest thinkers locate their capacity for original and profound thought in their imaginative abilities, first developed through creative play in early childhood." Olfman believes that if children do not develop an ability to think creatively, they will mature into adults who lack the capacity to innovate – in business, government and their personal lives.

Edited from Play: Priceless by Susan Shepardson. Ms Shepardson began her career in Early Childhood Education in 1981. Currently, Susan works for Anaheim City School District and owns her own design firm. She specializes in play environments for commercial and residential use. Susan holds a Masters Degree in Child Development. She can be reached at 949-554-3912 or susan@susanshepardsondesign.com.

Summer fun at the movies

Regal Cinemas and AMC Theaters both have opportunities during the summer for children to attend free or low cost G and PG rated movies on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings at 10:00am. The Regal Free Family Film Festival is two days a week, offering everything from Veggie Tales to Madagascar. AMC's program offers Summer Movie Camp once a week for \$1.00, with profits supporting children's charities. Call your local theaters for more information!



Five year reviews

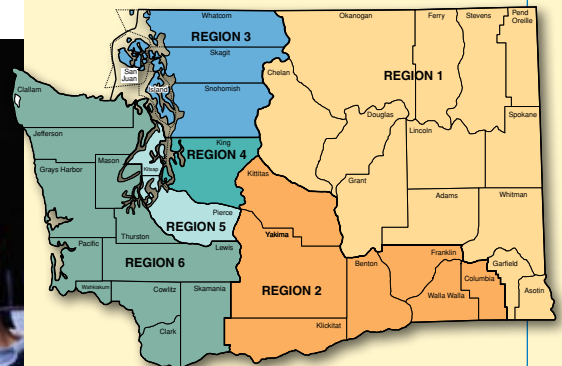
The Adoption Support Program conducted a review of changes in your family circumstances or child's condition every five years. The review included a request for your IRS 1040 and a well child check. A new law no longer requires the department to do these five year reviews. However any time there is a change in family circumstances, the adoptive family may request in writing to revise the agreement. Your request should be sent to your regional adoption support program manager listed in this section.

Regional Contacts

- Region 1 – Spokane**
Jan Lammers* 509-363-3383
Pam Copeland* 509-363-3379
- Region 2 – Yakima**
Steve Bergland* 509-225-6500
Carol Cyr 509-225-6531
(Financial Specialist)
- Region 3 – Monroe**
Steve Foster* 360-805-3032
Linda Richardson* 360-805-3030
- Region 4 – Bellevue**
Aaron Washington* 425-590-3072
Jenne Norris 425-590-3069
(Social Worker)
- Region 5 – Tacoma**
Cindy Anderson* 253-983-6359
Laura Davis* 253-983-6281
- Region 6 – Tumwater**
Cheryl Barrett* 360-725-6758
Kim Mower* 360-725-6778

Toll free number: 1-800-562-5682
(listen carefully to the recorded message)

* Adoption Support Consultants



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, call 206-605-0664 and in any county from Snohomish County north, call 360-510-7601 or 360-863-6530.
- 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, 1-800-391-CARE (2273) or www.fpaws.org. FPAWS is seeking new members and supporting foster parents in many ways, including referrals to local associations.

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.

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 400 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.

This comes to us from the Everett Herald. What a great resource for foster families in that area! What a great idea!

Field trips help foster families and children

By Julie Muhsstein, Herald Columnist

Child development experts talk about asset building. Maybe you've seen these developmental asset lists – family support and caring adults, safety, positive peer influence, self-esteem – all those things that keep children on the right path. Think of a recipe. Those so-called assets are ingredients for making a good kid.

Kids couldn't care less about childhood seen through the eyes of social workers. With schools about to shut their doors for summer, fun is at the top of children's lists. It's time to bust out of the classroom. That's how kids see summer.

That's how Nancy Reisner sees summer, too – for all kids.

Reisner, a mother of three school-age children, lives in Issaquah. This summer, she'll spend lots of time with Snohomish County children as she launches Nancy's House Fieldtrips. It's a new non-profit organization with a packed schedule of fun outings for kids in foster care.

With weekend and midweek trips to the Imagine Children's Museum in Everett, Jetty Island and the beach in Mukilteo, Woodland Park and Point Defiance zoos and other destinations, the aim is to mix old-fashioned summer fun with positive experiences and role models the experts say all kids need.

Reisner has run her own licensed day care and worked at a preschool for children with special needs. Last summer, she worked with Y Community, a YMCA of Snohomish County program for children who have experienced homelessness.

With Nancy's House Fieldtrips, she wants to help foster children and the families who care for them. All children in a household -- the foster children and biological kids -- will get out on field trip days, giving foster parents a much-needed break.

"For these families, respite is difficult. We'll be taking all the kids so parents can recharge," Reisner said.

With her own kids ages 7, 11 and 14 at home in Issaquah, Reisner plans to go on every field trip. "I have a large support system, my own extended family," she said. That's what she hopes Nancy's Fieldtrips will create for foster children: "a simulated version of an extended family."

"Positive relationships are key. We want these kids to grow up and not just be OK, but be great."

This link will take you to more information, through Snohomish County United Way: <http://volunteer.united-e-way.org/uwsc/org/10314721405.html>