

Fostering Hope

For YCS Specialized Treatment and Foster Home Families

Winter 2009



Fashion Show



H'Olympics

**THANK YOU FOR ALL THE LOVE, CARING,
AND DAY TO DAY EFFORTS YOU HAVE MADE
TO GIVE ALL OUR CHILDREN HAPPY HOMES
ALL THROUGH THE YEAR.**



Children share their thoughts and feelings about the holidays (pages 4-5)



Adoptions



Fostering Hope

Let's get acquainted
Welcome to Our New and Growing Families

Congratulations to families with their first placements!

- Michelle & Gerald Johnson** welcome two boys into their home.
- Jose & Leci Oliveira** welcome a 13 year old girl into their home.
- Narlin Nicholas** welcomes a 16 year old boy into her home.
- Troy & Treena Bess** welcome an 8 year old boy into home.
- Lisa Smith** welcomes a 15 year old boy into her home.

A special thanks goes out to all existing parents who have so generously opened up their homes to other children.

- Kimberly Williams** has welcomed a 12 year old girl into her family.
- Miriam Sloan-El** has welcomed a 19 year old boy into her family.
- Nelson Velasquez** has welcomed a boy into his family.
- Galen & Mary Norwood** have welcomed a boy into their family.
- Belinda Neris and David Atias** have welcomed a 15 year old girl into their family.
- Betty Blackwell** has welcomed a 16 year old boy into her family.
- Rosezena Perry** has welcomed an 8 year old girl into her family.
- Alice Hubbard** has welcomed two teenage girls into her family

A Warm Welcome!

New parents whose homes have been officially licensed

- ◆ Clyde and DeAnnette Cross from Atco
- ◆ Beatrice Hamilton from Paulsboro
- ◆ Gerald and Michelle Johnson from Berlin
- ◆ Jerry and Lyinelle Moore from Mays Landing
- ◆ Jessie and Denise Williams from Willingboro
- ◆ Mary Ann Jones from Newark
- ◆ Lisa Smith from Newark
- ◆ Lisa Ford from Newark
- ◆ Tahira Justice from Newark
- ◆ Elaine Murray from Paterson
- ◆ Carmen Willis from Paterson
- ◆ Mae Bradley from Paterson
- ◆ Sharon Brown from Paterson

Congratulations to all our families who have finalized the adoptions of their foster and treatment home children. We know it has been a long journey for each of you, and we wish you all the best as you bask in the glow of permanency this holiday season.

- ♥ Innessa & Alexander Roboostoff and their son Andre
- ♥ David & Randee Soffer and their son Joey
- ♥ Alma Jones and her son Steven
- ♥ Carla and Patrick Adams and their son Michael
- ♥ Charlita and Michael George and their twin sons Daquon and Dashawn
- ♥ Antonio and Rosa Guercio and their son Mathew
- ♥ Marky Kay Carney and Diane mechanic and their son Ricky



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How do you manage the holidays when your religious beliefs and traditions are different from your foster child?

Lisa Smith is a practicing Muslim; her teenage foster son is Christian. Ms. Smith shares her thoughts on how her family amicably co exists during the holidays.

In my home we do not celebrate Thanksgiving, but I know this is an important holiday for my son so we went over a family member's home who celebrates Thanksgiving. My son had a great time. The next day we celebrated the Islamic holiday of Eid-al Adha (honoring the completion of Mohammad's place of prayer in Mecca) at our home. We had another feast and exchanged gifts. This was the first time my son had taken part in a Muslim celebration and he had another great day.

However, in the Islamic faith, we do not believe that religion is something you can force upon another person. In my home, each person's spiritual belief and customs are respected. What you believe is in your heart and it must be honored. I've encouraged my son, to follow his beliefs. There is a church close to the mosque where we go to pray. I have offered to take him to church, but so far he has declined.

We've talked about the upcoming Christmas holiday. I told him that I am not comfortable having a tree in our communal living area. However, if he wants he can have a small tree in his room and decorate his window with lights and any other holiday decoration he wants.

No matter what you choose to celebrate, I think holiday time is the best time.

Message for Parent Advisory Council Presidents

Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year filled with love and compassion. Thank you for your many efforts all year long and for being patient with our children

Remember, the children that we care for today are our future of tomorrow.

May each and everyone of our children find a place in our homes and hearts, and may we continue the journey to work as one family.

***Charlita George
Southern Region
PAC President***

***Diana Munford
Northern Region
PAC President***

Tips for Helping Your Child Cope During the Holidays

For a child who has been adopted or is in foster care, the holidays bring about feelings of loss, separation, and grief. This is especially true when the child is old enough to have memories from past seasons. "Children who were removed from their birth families due to abuse, neglect, or substance abuse may associate the holidays with traumatic times," explains Lois Melina in the article, [Holidays Can Bring Up Lots of Emotions](#). "Rather than approaching them with a sense of joyful anticipation, these children may unconsciously associate holidays with disappointment or [trauma]."

Steps you can take to help a child cope with the stresses of the holidays:

- Recognize that what the child is feeling is perfectly normal given the situation. Let him know that you understand and that it is alright to feel the way he does.
- Allow the child to talk about it on her terms – resist the temptation to push her into talking about her feelings or the past, but do not try to avoid it either. If the child has a caseworker, discuss the possibility of getting him into counseling to help him work through his emotions.
- Identify with them. Tell them about a time that you felt as they do. Most of us have experienced a year when our holiday was met with the loss of a loved one or other significant event. Identifying helps the child not feel so isolated in his grief, and may help him to open up to you.
- Get them involved in outside activities. Play dates, sports, holiday activities, volunteering – all help to ward off the sense of sadness that is a common thread for foster and older adopted children this time of year. Keep them active but do keep things balanced. The holiday season tends to lend itself to busyness so use common sense to keep things in check.
- Find ways to incorporate traditions that the birth family participated in that the child can remember. Learn along side the child about her native customs if she is culturally different from the rest of your family. By doing this you give the child a sense of pride and self-worth, and, who knows, you may gain a new family tradition!

***IN THEIR OWN WORDS....
OUR CHILDREN OPENLY SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS
ABOUT THE UPCOMING HOLIDAYS***

The holidays can be a confusing, emotionally charged and difficult time for children and teens in foster/treatment homes. One young woman, now 25, who had been in foster care almost all her life, described the holidays as painful. “The holidays scream ‘family’, ‘togetherness,’ and ‘traditions,’ - every year I have to define what these words mean to me” *

Fostering Hope gathered six children, in YCS treatment homes, and their mentors for a discussion on what the holidays meant to them, what they would like their treatment parents to know about how they feel during the holidays. While nibbling on pizza and donuts, the youths, ages 9 to 19, openly shared their views for 90 minutes. Their identities have been protected so they could speak openly. As you will discover, the conversation took many turns, and at each juncture they have given us insight into the thoughts and feelings.

Frankie: I don't remember any holidays with my real family cause I've mostly been in foster homes. I was with one family for a long time. Every year I would go up into the attic and bring down the tree and all the lights and I would do all the decorating.

This year, I am with my new family. My mom (she says I can call her mom and she says I am her son) didn't want to decorate. When I explained to her that it was something I did in the past and really wanted to do, she said it was OK for me to put up the family's decorations.

Lanie: I've been in a lot of different foster homes since I was three. One tradition that I liked was going to church and seeing a Christmas play I'd like to go this year, but I don't want to ask my foster mom. I hope we go, but if we don't that will be OK

Lanie: I lived with a lot of Spanish families and they'd make this delicious Spanish food and then the neighbors would visit each other and everyone would bring each other food. It was a lot of fun.

Frankie: I miss eating ham, that was always something I looked forward to. My family doesn't eat pork but my mom made a turkey ham for Thanksgiving. That was OK. Being with my family is the most important thing.

Vanessa: This is the first year that I won't be with my family. It is really disappointing. Every year at midnight all the kids got to open one gift. Because my sister and I are the youngest we got to open two gifts. I call my family every day and I keep telling myself that one day I'll be with them.

Vanessa: I hate Christmas. I cope by laughing. I will be laughing a lot. I don't want to cry because crying makes me feel like I'm weak but I am not because I've been through a lot of things.

* excerpted from fosterclub.com

Lanie: [Lanie has been in a new home for about 6 months] I usually call my foster mom, “Mom.” She is real nice to me. She worries about me like a real mom would and takes care of me like a real mom, but I don’t think I can call her “mom” when the holidays come. It just doesn’t feel right. It is like I am betraying my real family.”

Lanie: I just want my family to be themselves. I was in one home where the foster mom treated me like I was an accessory on her handbag. She didn’t care about me at all, and then when the holidays came she was telling everybody that I was her daughter and she was acting like she really cared about me. It made me so angry. Lanie’s advice to parents: “Don’t go overboard.” Mimicking someone hugging and kissing Lanie says, “This makes me so uncomfortable. Just treat me regular.”

[Recently Lanie reconnected with her biological family through the internet] My aunt told me that when I was little I tried to climb the Christmas tree because I thought Santa Claus was on top. That was really nice to find out.



Vanessa: This [conversation] is making me feel really crummy. You want to know the saddest thing? I see my sister every day at school and we hug and kiss and she lives close to me, but I can’t see her for the holidays.

Sara: I can’t see my brother. Every year I get gifts for him and then I just throw them away because I don’t see him because he doesn’t get along with my grandma. I think, ‘Is that my brother or not?’

Sara: This is my first year with this family. I don’t know what they are going to do for the holiday, but I am going home and celebrate the holiday at my aunt’s or step mother’s house. My grandma takes me with her to visit our relatives and we always help them decorate the tree.

By a 15 year-old girl

Jessie: [who lives in the same treatment home as Sara explains to her the family traditions] All of the family comes over our house and we cook dinner, sing carols and the kids play outside. I like to help Mrs. P. put out the Santa Claus and gifts.

1. Stay connected to family and friends

Send cards or e mail messages to family and friends during the holidays. It's a great time to create or update your address book. Make phone calls to friends from an old neighborhood or to previous foster families. (Get your family's OK first).

2. Speak up for visits

Let your foster parents and caseworker know how important visits are to you during the holidays. Do what you can to help arrange the visits. Understand that the holidays can be a busy time for everyone, so you may need to "remind" foster parents frequently to do what it takes to get a visit arranged. If they need a little help in understanding where you're coming from, talk to your caseworker.

3. Let 'em wag'

If you're feeling a little lonesome and if you're a dog lover, you're in a category with lots of other people who adore pets. Throughout the holidays, your Humane Society may need help walking and bathing dogs, teaching them new tricks, and helping them find good homes. Check with your local shelter or pet store to see if there are any volunteer opportunities.

4. Connect to a place of worship

If you belong to a place of worship, check into all the holiday activities that might be going on and join in! Activities around the holidays might include social gatherings, caroling and volunteering. If you do not belong to a church or temple but have been thinking about joining one, the holidays can be a fun time to get acquainted with places of worship in your community.

5. Write on

If you like to write, keep a daily journal for the holiday season. Use your writing as a way to vent feelings, work through anxiety and worries, and to reflect on the true meaning of the holidays. Some find it helpful to write "letters", even if they will never be sent, to loved ones you are missing or who have passed away.

6. Be Yourself

Chances are you'll naturally be meeting and running into lots of people during the holiday season. The simplest things can connect you to someone, and one of the easiest places to get started is by being yourself and showing kindness. Compliments always make people feel special and recognized. Start by noticing something unusual or unique about the person. Admire a piece of their jewelry, or shoes they're wearing, or their impressive vocabulary. By pointing out something remarkable and singular, you can easily start up a conversation or make a new friend.

7. Lend a hand

Volunteering can unite people with similar values. If you're uncertain where to start, ask your foster parent, caseworker or a neighbor to help you research the possibilities (who knows — they may even join you!).

8. You'll make it

Everyone appreciates a homemade gift. Consider making holiday ornaments, knitting scarves, or crafting bookmarks. Search the internet for ideas and instructions about making inexpensive holiday crafts. Most everyone loves homemade cookies or candies wrapped in pretty boxes.

9. Visit others who may feel alone

Check with a nursing home or a local hospital to find out if there are people who would enjoy having company during the holidays. Consider bringing a favorite holiday story to read aloud or load your iPod with Christmas songs .

10. Connect at FosterClub.com

Be sure to visit the FosterClub and connect with your peers who may be feeling the winter blues or struggling with the holidays. Let us know how you spend the holidays and give your own ideas about how to find your own peace during the season.

Excerpted from fosterclub.com

DID YOU KNOW...

If your child seems unexplainably upset during the holiday season, it may be that certain holiday situations have brought up uncomfortable Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. It is important to have a safety plan for coping with these symptoms when they occur. Part of safety planning is knowing what soothes a child and allowing them access to what soothes them when they become upset. This may mean that the parent needs to check that the I-pod is charged and brought along on holiday visits, if listening to music is a soothing activity. Parents need to support the children through the holidays and any time a PTSD trigger may increase pain and anxiety.

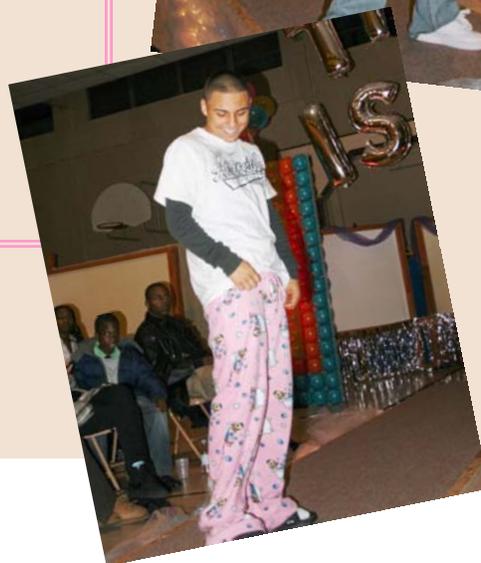


This is Me!

Southern Treatment Home Program hosts a fashion show by the children

What better way to boost the self esteem and confidence of the children than organizing a fashion show where the children are the stars. The children strutted down a runway studded with lights against a background of balloons announcing **"This is Me."**

This year's show featured the stylishness of dressing in pink. Sixteen year old Zhade, ended the show with a collection of five outfits that she personally put together.



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL FAMILIES WHO HAVE EARNED THEIR COMPLIANCE BONUSES

Carla & Patrick Adams
Betty Blackwell
Mary Conyers
Bessie Eggleston
Yavanca Gonzalez
Norma & Arundell Morris
Dianna Munford
Belinda Neris & David Atias
Evelyn & Murray Shaw
Kimberly Williams

ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE?

Last year we offered all our treatment home parents an opportunity to earn extra money if they were in 100 percent compliance. To date, we have paid out very little in compliance bonuses. Many of our treatment home parents are missing out on the chance to earn an additional \$1,000.00 annually.

We are here to help you with any compliancy questions. Contact your regional administration or recruitment department. They're ready to assist you meet the challenge.



**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR YOUNG RISING STARS
AND ALL OUR FAMILIES FOR GIVING YOUR CHILDREN
THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED**



Bryant - congratulations on graduating high school and finding employment as a counselor-in-training at the Holley Center.

“Site administrator, Alex Seidler, cannot say enough good things about Bryant. “He is punctual, energetic, has a great relationship with the children and an overall very positive attitude.”



Nasir - Congratulations on your promotion to assistant manager at Chick-Fil-A.



Ty-Heema - Congratulations on your promotion to supervisor at Chucky Cheese



Fostering Hope

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**From the Desk of William Waller
Vice President, YCS Treatment Home Svcs.**

Dear Parents,

I am very grateful to all of our young people who had the courage to share their very real feelings regarding the holidays in this edition of Fostering Hope. What is expressed is very moving and is evidence of how much our children need you as parents during this difficult time. Please be aware and supportive as the season can be a painful reminder to our children of the many separations and losses that they have experienced in their young lives.

I am confident that I can count on each of you to rise to this challenge.

Best Wishes for a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year!

Sincerely,

*William Waller
Vice-President*