



# Resource Parent Newsletter

## July 2013

State of Maine DHHS Office of Child and Family Services

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Dear Resource Parents,

Thank you so much for the work you do each and every day as you provide a nurturing, safe environment for children who have been abused and neglected. We recognize that the daily efforts you make require a great deal of sacrifice and skill. Children who suffer from abuse or neglect can present with difficult behaviors and challenging emotions. Recognizing their trauma and trying to establish a new parenting relationship with these children while simultaneously supporting their contact with their birth parents is hard, hard work. Please know that your commitment and service to children and their families is deeply appreciated by the staff of the Office of Child and Family Services. We are sincerely humbled by your grace and good will.



Louise Boisvert, Associate Director OCFS

### Updates from OCFS

Foster care re-design is still in the planning stages and we are looking to design a system that is more responsive to foster parents' needs, children's needs and the needs of birth families. We will keep you updated as the details unfold over the next several months.

Staff turnover in OCFS continues to be a significant challenge. Several of our district offices have had 25% to 33% loss of casework staff over the past two years. We recognize that this has created a hardship for the families we serve. We apologize for any inconvenience that staff turnover has had upon your family and the services you have needed from us. We are intensifying our efforts in the recruitment and retention of staff.

An evidence based parenting program will be established throughout the state in the coming twelve months. **Triple P** is the Positive Parenting Program that has been proven helpful and effective for managing both normal and challenging behaviors of children.

We are in need of foster homes for children in state custody. Homes for teenagers are especially in short supply. If you know anyone who is interested in becoming a foster parent, please have them contact their local DHHS office.

### Normalizing life for youth in care

Youth in care have asked OCFS to emphasize the importance of caregivers teaching youth life skills in the home. Youth want to learn skills such as cooking, doing laundry, balancing a checkbook, and filling out job and post-secondary education applications in a normal, family setting. In past years, the Department often relied on contracted staff or programs to teach life skills to youth in care. Youth inform us that it is preferable to learn these skills in a home setting as part of a normal family routine. They appreciate their caregivers spending this quality time with them, teaching the skills they will need as adults.



## Signs of Safety

Over the past few years, the Office of Child and Family services has embarked on improving case-work practice by embracing the concepts of "Signs of Safety". Signs of Safety was developed in Australia and is a practice model for child welfare professionals that incorporates four basic components:

**It is a questioning approach - less directive and more open to hearing individual views and stories.**

**It is strengths based - looking at the protective capacities that parents demonstrate over time.**

**It honors the individual during each contact**

**It is an *organized* child safety/protection practice - clear statements of harm and danger, clear safety goals and clear safety plans**

If you have noticed caseworkers mapping out the worries and the strengths in family team meetings, this is directly connected to this practice model. It is our goal for all families to have regular family team meetings where safety issues are discussed with respect and progress is assessed towards the safety goals. Resource parents should be invited to these team meetings and should be given the time and attention to address whatever concerns they may have in regards to the safety of the children.

## Respite Days

Several resource families have expressed confusion regarding whether or not the 14 allotted days of respite are calculated based upon the calendar year or upon the fiscal year. Respite days are based upon the **calendar** year, January 1 to December 31st.



## Important Statewide Data

We currently have 1849 children in state custody.

We have 125 youth over the age of 18 in the voluntary care of the state.

We have 442 children freed for adoption. Most of these children will be adopted by their current caregiver. The rest are in need of an adoptive home.

632 children have entered state custody since October 2012