Montana State Legislature

Exhibit Number: 6

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DATE Mon Feb 1 2005
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MSF/APA Testimony
Human Services Committee
2/1/05

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee for the record my name is Twila Costigan. I am speaking to you today as the Past-President and current Executive Board member of the Montana State Foster Parent Association.

Brief idea of who I am.

Other testimony...

Who are the kids CFSD serves? They are all ages with varied and diverse backgrounds and personalities. What they all have in common is that they have been abused and/or neglected by the adults in their lives who were supposed to keep them safe and meet their physical, emotional, intellectual and developmental needs. What they also have in common is a drive to be "normal" and their vision of "normal" is as diverse as each child/youth is unique.

Foster and Adoptive parents. Who are these people? Where do they come from? Why do they parent other people's kids?

Who are foster and adoptive parents? They are special kinds of folks who love other people's kids so much that they find ways to open their hearts, homes and checkbooks to help meet these kids' needs. They are rich and poor and in between. They are young and middle aged (can't say "old" any more), tall and short, skinny and ...well you know the opposite of skinny. They are 8th grade grads, 12th grad grads and PhD's. They are Lutherans, Fundamentalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Atheists and Catholics. They are people who have opened their homes to the peering eyes of social workers, therapists and CASA volunteers. They have agreed to forsake their privacy and live in a fish bowl so they can help kids. They have placed their birth children at possible risk. They are your neighbors and your peers...They are the hope for thousands of children who are or have been in the temporary or permanent custody of the State of Montana due to abuse and neglect.

Foster parents receive an average of $15/day from the State of MT to care for our most vulnerable members of society. Day cares receive about $20/day and it costs about $11/day to kennel a dog. I guess that puts foster parents in the middle of those two businesses. No wonder it's not possible for foster parents to parent other peoples' kids just "for the money".

Foster parents are expected to provide for the child's basic physical needs with $15/day even though as the graph shows the USDA says it costs about $19/day to parent a birth child.

But foster parents are also expected to meet much more than basic physical needs...they are expected to meet the intense emotional and complex developmental needs of these children. They are expected to transport kids to therapy and sometimes attend with them. When the Division cuts or reduces the respite, clothing, respite and transportation allowances for foster families, it only puts more of the burden of caring for these wards of the state on the broad but increasingly scarce shoulders of foster parents.

The numbers of foster parents have been steadily declining over the past decade due in part to the emphasis placed on placement of children within their family systems and in part to the large numbers of foster parents who have adopted their foster children. Both of these reasons are very honorable ones. I would like to point out however that there used to be many foster parents in our state who had been temporarily parenting other people's kids for 10, 15, 20 even 30 and more years. These folks are few and far between in the system today.

Recruitment and retention of foster parents has not been a focus of the Division for many years because they have had to recreate their world to be one where only the worst cases get their attention. They have become a child protective agency and ONLY a child protective agency.

Adoptive parents are expected to do the same things as foster parents only they get to have some control over where the child lives and goes to school and whether their children have contact with the adults that hurt them in the past. Adoptive families are always based on LOSS and there is no way to ignore this issue. One of the down sides to being an adoptive family occurs when the abuse and neglect suffered by the children comes out in behaviors and mental health needs that outstrip the adoptive family. At these times the adoptive family must go back to the Division and ask to renegotiate their Adoptive Subsidy. Renegotiation of Adoptive Subsidies is increasing in our state as societies' issues become more and more complex. There are no post-adoptive services proposed in the Division's budget and that is very concerning to me.

The 2 most common complaints MSF/APA Board members receive from foster and adoptive parents is that they do not get phone calls returned from social workers and that the social workers don't really know the kids. This is directly tied to the fact that the Division does not have enough social workers. Last session Chuck Hunter referenced a study that was done and stated that the Division is sorely lacking in social worker resources...to the tune of about 44

FTE's across the state...if my memory serves. Our experience validates this lack of social workers.

We are supporting the CFSD budget and ask that you provide adequate funding for:

- As many new Social Workers as possible (beyond the request for 5 Independent Living FTEs) to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Children's Bureau Audit.
- All Foster Parent Support Services are line items and cannot be used for other purposes by the Division. Support Services for every foster parent must include allowances for diapers, respite, clothing and transportation. Families need one respite weekend per month to recharge their batteries. We need clothing allowance of a minimum of $400/year and transportation allowances of $87.50 per month for each child in care
- $28,000 for the annual training conference for foster and adoptive parents
- $25,000 for an MSF/APA Executive Director to
    - Collaborate with the Division
    - Coordinate and distribute the quarterly newsletter
    - Coordinate the annual training conference
    - Coordinating and fund raising to allow siblings to have contact
    - Grant writing
    - Representation of MSF/APA and Montana at national conferences and trainings
    - Build and mentor parent support groups across the state

Foster and Adoptive parents are the backbone of the Child and Family Services Division. We need your support. We thank you for the hard work you are doing on the children's behalf and we hope that you will provide us with the tools we need to care for these children that we love. I'd like to introduce 2 other Executive Board members...our President, Pat Llewellyn from Missoula and our Treasurer, Pam Guschausky from Great Falls. Please listen to the other parents who have been able to come today.

Twila Costigan –
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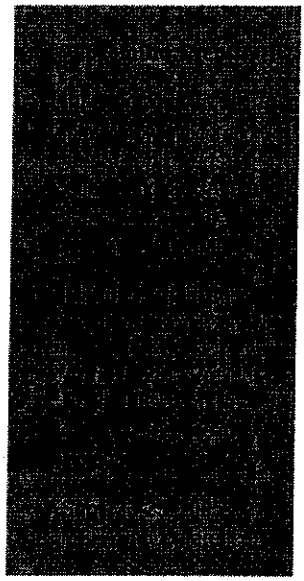
Montana State Foster/Adoptive Parent Association

MSFAPA News



From the President

Okay, so no one lives and breathes advocacy like we do. We advocate for children, birth families, children, our families, children, education, children, mental health services, children, children, children. Would we change a thing?

Could we change a thing? How about if we all decide that in 2005 we are going to advocate for the advocates, US! Does that sound selfish with all the needs the kids have? Well stop and look at it in the right perspective:

"Why are we foster/ adoptive parents?" Because we love parenting. *"Okay, but this is painful parenting at times."* Yes, but someone has to do it and we do love these kids, right? *"Well, it can also be a financial hardship."* Now don't get us started on that one! *"And we don't get treated as a partner in the child's life."* True, very true, but things are changing. Baby steps, but changes.

So who advocates for us? Well sorry, it has to be the same people that advocate for the kids. But, the bright side, we are really GOOD at it. Good at advocating for the kids that is, so that is our start. If we are healthy, educated and empowered because our needs as foster/ adoptive parents in Montana are met we will be able to make a really significant difference in the lives of our kids.

So how are our needs met? Boy, are we an easy group! Our needs are based on being valued as a parent and having the resources to make a difference as a parent.

So where do we think that comes from? CFSD is a start yes, but just to see what they need *us* to do. **WHAT???**, you ask! Well, CFSD is first a Child Protection Agency, a puzzle for sure as they try and fit the needs of the families, birth and foster, to the complexities of protecting the kids. And yes I do believe that they are seeing us as an integral piece of their puzzle at long last (what better protection is there for a child than a safe, loving home?). But, now we have to show them that we are willing to be a significant link in that puzzle.

Where am I going with this lengthy piece? Well folks I am going to do what I can to "educate" the legislators and, MSFAPA is going to go to the hill in support of the CFSD budget. But MSFAPA is you and I, all of us collectively, and we need to make that statement. The CFSD budget is about protecting children but we are that center piece, that piece, when missing doesn't make a complete

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Region 4 News

Supper and Support Group for Foster and Adoptive Families in Helena

PATH/ICH, Catholic Social Services, Family Find and local Social Workers donations, in December, allowed us to bring Santa in to pass out treats and get photos with each of the children. We had a special dinner that everyone enjoyed. This foster and adoptive support group is growing in size and support for each other – we have found that offering child care at no cost to participants as well as a simple dinner to families is a big draw.

However, the recent budget cuts at DPHHS mean that paying both the child care provider and food costs depend on community support. Fortunately, the local chapter of Family Find and board members have been extremely generous in recognizing the basic need to support foster and adoptive families in order to help maintain, retain and strengthen families/placements. They have volunteered to solicit pizza donations, contributed money for child care and other costs.

For more information on the next support group meeting call Gretchen at 444-9391.

Livingston Resource Parents Meet with Local Legislatures

Chris Benden and Val Newton met with Legislatures Pat Wagman and Bruce Malcolm in mid December. The goal of the meeting was to bring to their attention that in their districts there are a raucous group that was concerned about what the state of Montana was doing to improve the lives of foster/adoptive children. The resource parents wanted to impress upon their political minds, that each of their decisions, no matter the committee, would effect our kids. Money spent elsewhere was directly cutting into services impacting the children, say, a clothing allowance or respite.

The support group met with the Deputy County Attorney in November for a question/answer session on the law and the foster care system.

In December the foster/adopt support group brought Regional Administrator, Fred Fischer to speak to the area resource parents. He has been most gracious when it comes to his time and they could not be more thankful to him.

For more information on the next support group contact Chris Benden or your Family Resource Specialist.

Townsend Support Group

Grandparents raising grandchildren, foster and adoptive parents in Townsend are meeting monthly. There have been about 16 families attending their meetings. The meeting consists of a program, discussion and questions/answers time.

The meeting is held the 2nd Saturday of each month at the community room of the library in Townsend. Snacks and babysitting are available. If you want more information, call Nancy at 266-3710.

Region 1 News

Keeping Children Safe will be starting February 22, 2005 at the Phillips County Library. Future meeting dates will be scheduled at that time.

KCS will be held at Poplar in April. Contact Patsy at 228-2108 for more information.

Regions 2 & 3 No Information Submitted

Region 5 News

Christmas Giving Benefits Children in Flathead

Thanks to Merlin Information Services, CenturyTel, CASA, and folks from the Flathead Community College, all our kids in care (and birth kids) received new Christmas gifts! The families and CFSD workers truly appreciated the nice, new gifts for the kiddos. The selection was amazing, baby dolls, hat/glove sets, DVD's, a couple of gift certificates, Spiderman stuff, Dora, you name it! We were overwhelmed by the generosity shown by people to children they will never get to meet.

We also continue to receive handmade quilts and blankets from Project Linus, youth groups, individuals, various Church quilting groups, and RSVP, every child entering care gets to pick out their own blanket. We are thankful to these thoughtful individuals who use their time and talent to offer a warm, snuggly to a hurting child. Dianna Lamers, FRS

Save the Date MSF/APA Annual Conference September

Missoula Adoption Celebration

An Adoption Celebration was held at the St. Paul's Lutheran Church on November 17, 2004. Four families participated by finalizing their adoptions in front of friends and family as part of recognizing National Adoption Month.

Mayor Mike Kadas issued a Proclamation recognizing November as National Adoption Month. Cake and chili were provided after the ceremony with entertainment from the St. Joseph School Choir.

Montana Foster Care Independence

Foster Youth Advisory Council.

A retreat will be held at Fairmont Hot Springs on March 19-20 to establish a Foster Youth Advisory Council. The purpose of the council is to engage young people and to promote leadership among our foster youth. The council will advise the MFCIP on programming and assist with conferences etc. Other activities the council may decide to undertake are: to develop an information/orientation booklet for foster youth entering care; informing the field about the strengths, needs and concerns of youth transitioning from foster care; service learning projects; and collaborating with other youth councils across the state to promote youth leadership.

Terry Harrak from the Child Welfare League of America and a member of the National Foster Youth Advisory Council will be facilitating the retreat. Terry facilitated two break-out sessions at our October conference and was very well received by our youth. We are still accepting applications for MFCIP eligible youth who would like to participate. .

Education and Training Voucher Funds are still available, retroactively, from October, 2002 to September 30, 2004 for former foster youth who has been in a higher education setting and has outstanding loans from that period. Contact Jane Wilson at 444-4191

Legislative Contact Information

The 2005 Legislative Session is in full swing. This means it's time for resource parents to fire up their advocacy power. In order to keep informed of the many changes contact Twila at twilac@intermountain.org to be added to the Legislative Alert Group. She'll keep us updated on proposals that impact children.

The responsibility then becomes "ours" to contact our local representatives and senators to be the voice for the children and families of Montana. Below is the website that provides all the contact information you need.

http://leg.state.mt.us/css/sessions/59th/default.asp

MSFAPA Annual Conference

The MSF/APA Annual Training Conference to be held in Helena at the Colonial Inn on September 23-25, 2005! Dr Bruce Perry will be our keynote speaker.

Dr. Perry is a nationally known speaker who will talk to us about the effects of abuse and neglect on the brain. We are excited to be able to partner with Child and Family Services and Intermountain Children's Home and Services to bring us such a high quality speaker.

In Helena we are busy forming committees and working on a theme and breakout sessions. If there are trainings that you would like to see at the conference please contact Twila Costigan toll free at 1/866-457-4859 or email twilac@intermountain.org.

Child Abuse and Neglect Conference

The dates for the 2005 Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect Conference are April 26, 27 and 28. The Conference features 5 main headliners to include Joyce Pavao, author of "The Family of Adoption" who will be speaking on "Developmental Crises in Adoptive Families" and "The Journey from Foster Care to Adoption"; Freta Parkes, an educator who will be speaking on "The Culture of Poverty" and "Generational versus Situational Poverty"; and Vincent Felitti, who is a physician and researcher from California and will be speaking about a new study that shows a significant relationship between childhood maltreatment and adult physical and mental illness.

There will be many other breakout sessions addressing issues of mental health, chemical dependency, methamphetamines, educational advocacy, family centered practice, medications, etc. Three panels are planned including a teen foster care panel, in-home services panel and a residential treatment panel. AND.... new this year - the conference will have informational booths in the common areas for networking with available services throughout Montana. More information will be coming out. Hope to see you there!

National Parent Leadership Month

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage every one of your parent groups and local agencies to go on line and read up on the things we can all do to honor a parent(s) in your communities in celebration of National Parent Leadership Month.

I will ask the Governor to issue a proclamation and suggest you ask your local mayor or community leader to do the same.

There is an actual toolkit that has some great ways to get involved in NPLM. Parents Anonymous® Inc. It doesn't have to happen Feb 1, it can happen anytime in February, so take a couple of days to group together and let's see how many areas can show that above all we honor and respect each other. What an awesome way to send the message that what we do is fulfilling and incredibly respectable. To let others know that one gets to meet some great people and get involved in some incredible experiences through foster care and adoption. And that there are some that shine and deserve to be honored.

Go to your banks and institutions and ask them to feature their community Parent Leader honoree on their reader boards. Get a TV spot to "broadcast" it. There are many ways we can all start to group together to bring positive attention to foster care and adoption and this is one that we should be proud to be involved in.

If there is anything MSFAPA can do to assist you contact one of us. Pat Llewellyn

Celebrate Adoption 2004

The 8th Annual Celebrate Adoption Party held November 23, 2004 in the Montana State Capitol Rotunda was determined to be a big success. One never ceases to be amazed at the love and devotion exhibited at this event honoring all phases of adoption. It is truly a spiritual experience to be present when a child is legally made a member of his/her family. The glow on the faces of the adoptive family defines "love."

Promptly at 2:00 p.m., Helena Police Honor Guard posted the colors and Mistress of Ceremonies, DPHHS Director, Gail Gray led the audience in the pledge of allegiance. That was the beginning of an extraordinary hour. Monsignor Kevin O'Neill, of the Helena Diocese presented the opening prayer which was followed by the wonderful St. Andrew School Choir, singing their trademark song, "On the Day that you were Born." This song has become a tradition as this Choir has been present at all eight Celebrations.

After Mayor Pro Tem Sandy Oitzinger, proclaimed November as "National Adoption Awareness Month" outgoing Governor Judy Martz emphasized her appreciation of everyone involved with adoption and praised all the good works that have been done.

Special Guest Speakers (members of the Adoption Triad) presented their stories and experiences. Tiffany Maierle of Bozeman represented birth families; John Joyce, a single dad, spoke on adopting a son from foster care and also being a foster parent. Kristan Beausoleil-Barbour of Helena was adopted as an infant,. She told of her relationship with her birth mother as an adult and she also related what a wonderful life she has.

Treasure Book Stork Awards were presented to Governor Martz, DPHHS Director Gail Gray, and DPHHS - Child and Family Services Adoption Specialist, Lynda Korth. Also, honored for their outstanding services to the families in the Helena area were three Family Resource Specialists from Helena. Peggy Colvin, Liz Hayden and Elizabeth Skinner. A Stork Award was also presented to a surprised Rosemary Miller, Director of Catholic Social Services of Montana.

The highlight of the ceremony of course is the Adoption Finalizations. District Judge Jeffrey Sherlock along with attorneys Bill Driscoll and Beth Baker presided over the finalizations of three families. Judge Sherlock had his "Sylvester" stamp ready (his signature emblem for adoption finalizations), The recipients of that special mark were McKenna Taylor Moore, daughter of Todd and Jenny Moore of Helena along with big brother Shawn. Traveling from Great Falls, Bill and Kristen Raaen finalized the adoption of their son Jayden Thomas Raaen. Kevin and Tina Stump of Helena finalized the adoption of their daughter Angela. Tina graciously allowed the Treasure Book to feature her in their latest poster and TV ad campaign ***"Does it really matter how a child is delivered?"***

After the closing prayer by Monsignor O'Neill and the Retiring of the Colors by the Helena Police Department Honor Guard, refreshments were served. Photographer Audrey of Audrey's Fine Portrait Studio - Helena captured the event by snapping pictures of families and Governor Martz.

By 4:30 p.m., November 23, 2004, the Rotunda was quiet but you could still feel the love and joy. That's what it is all about. Until next year, celebrate adoption.

Check This Out

So much information, so little space. MSFAPA wants to encourage you all to visit our web site and add your comments. We are always looking for pictures, adoption celebration stuff from your family, personal stories about foster care and/ or adoption, and anything you would like to share with all of us. The site can be reached at msf-apa.org. If there are things you would like to see, you can reach Debby Wheeler, the web site manager, at xxstchr@nemontel.net.

There are some very good articles that several contributors to the newsletter have found on the web. Carolynn Bright of the Helena Independent wrote a series on methamphetamine. She discussed how the drug is affecting children. These can be accessed at www.helenair.com.

The Minnesota resource parent newsletter, Family Voices, can be located on www.mnasap.org. This month there is an article about adolescents telling their adoption story. There is also a developmental chart on children and their understanding of adoption.

If you have found a site you think might be of interest to other resource parents, just e-mail us and we'll try to focus it in the next newsletter.

Kevin Frank, Region 2

I consider myself a Montana native although I was born in Champaign, Illinois while my dad was a graduate student there. I was raised in Billings from the age of two. My mother is from the Red Lodge / Joliet area and my dad was born and raised in Laurel. I'm the oldest of three brothers and have one brother in Bozeman and the other in Seattle.

I can hardly go anywhere without somebody knowing my parents. Dad was in the Billings school system for 30 years, very active in a number of church groups (and part time pastor), and was a former Governor of Kiwanis (Montana). Mom was a teacher, school principal, and then director of STEP in Billings before she retired. My grandmother was a teacher (one of the first graduates of Rocky Mountain College in Billings), both of my parents were former teachers, and my great uncle was superintendent of school district #2 in Billings – so I was probably supposed to be a teacher. There's still time.

Music was almost my entire identity in high school and college. I was on a music scholarship in college, played in the orchestra for the Billings Studio Theater, and was a member of the Billings Symphony for a couple of years. Oboe was my primary instrument but I also played English Horn, Tenor Saxophone, and had seven years of piano lessons. I haven't played anything but the radio, though, since about 1986.

I was married to my first wife (Barbara) in 1987 - and still am. After college, I didn't really know what I wanted to do so I joined the Army as a commissioned officer and went active duty, but my running around the country (and two months in Germany) proved nearly fatal to our marriage. Our son Zac was born in June of 1990, and we moved back to Montana in September, 1990. Barb has always been incredibly patient with me and very tolerant of my unplanned adventures

There were openings (aren't there always?) for social work jobs with DFS in Anaconda and Deer Lodge at the time and I had applied while still out of state. I had an interview in Butte in late September, 1990, and they offered me my choice of either Anaconda or Deer Lodge. We chose Anaconda because it was larger and I started there the first week of October, 1990.

Anaconda turned out to be a great place for me to learn the CPS business. We liked Anaconda but it wasn't home, so after two years we started looking east and I transferred with DFS to Red Lodge in April, 1993. Stayed for a year as a caseworker in Red Lodge and took the Fiscal Officer position in the Billings regional office in June, 1994.

After a year or so as the Fiscal Officer, I moved into the newly created position of computer tech support and spent the next four years for all divisions of DPHHS in the South Central and Eastern regions. When the Regional Administrator position opened in Billings, I had mixed feelings about applying but in the end I decided that at 35 years old I was now a grownup and could handle it. I've been the RA in the Billings region since March, 2000.

My experience with the Department throughout its' various name changes, structures, and directors – and through my different jobs, has been broad and rich. I can't really describe the strangeness of being drawn to this line of work but I think it's fair to say that the highs are higher and the lows are lower than anything else I've been a part of. It's like being paid to be immersed in the human condition. Every day is truly unique and there is no exact repeat of any one situation. It requires finding a level of comfort with the unknown, the unpredictable, the uncertain, and the subjective. Art Dreiling, Regional Administrator for the western region, once said of the RA position, "...this is the damndest job I've ever had." I think he said it best.

I really have no idea where I'll be a few years from now but to date, my years with the Department are without regret. I like to believe it's made me a better person and I have met some of the highest quality people I could ever hope to meet. Like most of us in this business, I'll look back someday hoping that I did more than just put in my time – but actually made a difference in some way. Time will tell.

To all the foster and adoptive parents out there I would like to say that there is no one I respect more than you - even though we ignore you, often disregard your input, routinely take advantage of you, and expect you to work cheap. You provide the most honorable of community services.

Kevin Frank