

# Together Facing The Challenge



## Newsletter



**Save the Date**  
October 27 & 28, 2021  
9:00 am-1:00 pm

**VIRTUAL  
CONFERENCE**

**2021**

A Very Special  
**CONGRATULATIONS**  
to the following agencies:

Certification

Growing Home Southeast, Inc.  
Brandi Nichole Family Enrichment  
Center  
Family Preservation Community  
Services– North Carolina  
Caring for Children

Recertification

Support, Inc.  
Thompson Child & Family Focus  
ACI– Dungarvin



## *Inner strength, courage and collaboration are essential tools needed to successfully navigate our changing landscape*

Much has transpired over the last 18 months since the pandemic changed our lives in ways we never imagined. In addition to the pain, loss, and grief experienced by many, we were forced to look deep within ourselves, discover our strengths and work in community to support one another. As much as the pandemic impacted our lives and what was familiar to us, it also demonstrated what we can accomplish when working together to meet the needs of the children and families we serve.

Much has changed during these times, while much remains the same. Our primary focus and responsibility is to help strengthen and support our children, youth, and families by providing them with the tools and resources they need to move from a place of fear and hopelessness to a place of hope and resilience.

This issue of our newsletter highlights ways in which folks are addressing the physical, emotional, and mental health needs of the children they work with, with an emphasis on the **Invisible Suitcase** children come into care with and how we can effectively support their healing. It has been invigorating to see and hear from so many of our partner sites across the Carolinas as they share some of their experiences working with children from a **trauma-informed** lens. In addition, one foster family highlights their story, reinforcing the power and impact one can have in making the difference for a youth in care by doing the hard work and staying the course.

Maureen Murray, Director TFTC

# Thank You!

### To Our Special Guest Trainers

Cindy Bradshaw

Cherokee County DSS



Jennifer Burkett

South Carolina YAP

One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves when caring for children who have been through trauma is not “what’s wrong with him/her?” but rather “what happened to her/him?” When we change the way we think about a child’s trauma-response behaviors, we will change the way we address them and therefore more effectively help care for them. We teach this concept through a discussion of triggers and responses. In training, we do an exercise to help our foster parents identify their own triggers and subsequent responses. When foster parents understand how their own triggers influence their behavior, they begin to better understand how to work with the children they care for. It can be a challenge for our foster parents to see through a trauma lens – and some are resistant to it – but it is essential to developing a relationship with the child in their care and ultimately helps behavior management techniques to be more successful.

-Jennifer Burkett

# Do The Hard. You Will Change a Life!

My husband Greg and I have been foster-parents since 2009. We have had a wide range of children in our care from newborns to a young mother and child and all ages in-between. We currently have a sixteen-year-old young man who has been in our care for a year. The long-range goal is to assist him in becoming an independent, successful adult.



This young man, whom we'll call Tommy, first came to us when he was four years old. He was with us for one year before being reunified with his biological father. While in our care, Tommy's mother passed away from a drug overdose and we had the difficult task of explaining the loss of his mother to him as well as having to take him to his mother's funeral.

Tommy spent the next seven years going between his father and his maternal grandmother. At the age of twelve Tommy was placed in a group home. After about two years in the group home, Greg and I were asked by the Department of Social Services if we would be willing to reestablish a relationship with him with the goal of long-term placement. His father fought this, and a court order was sought to grant us visitation rights. Once visitation was granted, we were able to establish a relationship with him quite easily. This was partially due to the fact that we had various pictures of him and us together when he was four along with pictures of him and his mother and of him and his twin brothers. The family pictures we took when he was four gave him a foundation that he didn't have, and it gave him hope for a possible forever family. He still keeps these pictures in his bedside nightstand. Having pictures, and especially a life book, is an effective way of helping youth cope with the many losses they have dealt with in their lives.

Parenting children in foster care, especially those who have been exposed to trauma, has many challenges. Some of the challenges we have faced are academic difficulties due to children being moved from school to school, lack of early parental involvement, and delays in social and emotional development due to a lack of modeling of healthy relationships. There is also the challenge of dealing with the attachments of family members. Children have a hard time understanding why they can't just be with their own biological families.

The main way we have dealt with these challenges is to collaborate with Youth Villages to form strong relationships with all of the adults currently in their lives, social workers, teachers, counselors, parent and youth partners. And to maintain contact with family members whenever possible. Strong, effective communication is essential. We have also received training through Together Facing the Challenge which has equipped us with tools to use in our parenting such as behavior contracts, establishing house rules, setting goals for life skills, effective consequences, the power of praise, and so much more.

Greg and I have learned a lot over the past 12 years. Being a foster parent is hard! Dealing with youth who have experienced trauma is hard! Giving up your freedom is hard! Dealing with the Justice System is hard! Saying goodbye to a child you've loved and cared for is hard! But a child with no family and with little hope for the future is even harder! Greg and I learned early on that we are investing in the lives of the most vulnerable amongst us, and if we have to take on some hurt to lessen theirs then we are willing to embrace the hard. I would encourage anyone who is considering fostering to *Do the Hard. You will change a life!*

# Trauma-Informed

**We can talk about operating with a trauma-informed lens, but hearing actual success stories can be more impactful. Thus, we reached out to several partner agencies to ask for real-world situations where foster parents and/or staff have operated in trauma-informed ways to better meet the needs of their youth. Three agencies' submissions are included here, and each story highlights the power of considering the unique trauma history of each child before responding with consequences.**

We had a child refuse to enter the bathroom alone, turn the shower on or flush the toilet by herself. The parent asked the social worker about any trauma the child may have experienced in the bathroom and found out the child was locked in the bathroom for long periods of time. The foster parent would do those things for her and would constantly reassure she would not be locked in the bathroom while in her home. The foster parent also bought the child a bird and now the child and bird go into the bathroom (minus the foster parent) and turn on the shower and flush the toilet.

-CTS Health

We have a foster dad who is working with a 9 year old male who has disrupted several previous placement. He really struggles with managing his emotions and can quickly become upset and withdrawn, sometimes resorting to property destruction or self-harm. There was a recent incident where the foster dad had to take away the child's electronic (tablet) as previously agreed upon if he did not comply with specific rules. The child went into a major episode of tantrums and attempting to hurt himself. Foster dad had only been working with the child for a few weeks and was still learning his triggers. He called the coordinator to his home who showed up and offered support in de-escalating. They were able to talk through what happened just before the incident, what happened after, and process how to avoid getting to that level of anger the next time around. Foster dad was able to see past the behaviors and see that the child was experiencing some anxiety about being without his tablet. This allowed them to establish some better clear-cut expectations and asked the child for input on future consequences and time frames for what he felt was fair.

-Easterseals UCP

# Success Stories

We have a super star single foster mom in the Durham area working with a challenging 9 year old girl who is working on going back to her father's custody. As visits increased with dad, this girl's problematic behaviors increased. Foster mom was able to see through these negative behaviors as anxiety and fear about going back to dad. She advocated for visits to be slowed down and for the team to determine if there were any concerns for safety with dad. During this time, she also reached out to dad to get to know him better and started sharing helpful parenting strategies with him to help the visits become more successful.

-Easterseals UCP

regarding a child's frequent lying behaviors and how they were having difficulty with it in their home. At the upcoming CFT the team addressed this behavior while reviewing goal progress. This child's social worker was present and able to discuss this child's behavioral history, including this youth receiving harsh punishments in the past for rule breaking. The social worker was able to suggest that this youth may have begun the habit of lying to protect himself from severe punishments; and the foster parents were able to provide reassurances that they do not use harsh consequences in their home. After this CFT, the foster parents were able to better understand this child's invisible suitcase, that lying may have been a protective behavior, and to recognize their youth lies both to please other people and to avoid harm. The foster parents were able to take a more trauma informed approach to address the behavior, provide more informed pre-teaching, and use more decision making techniques rather than consequences of loss of privileges or time out.

-Support, Inc.

Another foster parent couple in our Greensboro area is fostering a very challenging IAFT child. He struggles with making friends his own age and tends to cling to adults. They take him on a regular basis to the community park and have invited a friend the child made from school to meet them for play dates. Recently at the park the child wanted to take his shoes off and put them in the pond during a community outing at a local park. Foster mom told the child it was too dangerous because there could be bacteria in the water or possibly snakes. The child became upset and complained about not being allowed to do "fun things." Foster mom typically can be "on guard" for this child's challenging behaviors. However, this parent said instead of looking at his response as "he's challenging my authority," she was able to recognize that his reaction was normal and very typical for any child. Instead of getting in a power struggle, she asked the child to come up with some safe alternatives for "having fun." This child has made 2 false allegations on these foster parents (he admitted later to lying and

CPS could not find any evidence of any harm they had caused). These foster parents have really hung in there with this child, recognizing that his false allegations are just part of invisible suitcase.

-Easterseals UCP