

The MAFF Newsletter

2018 Massachusetts Foster Parent Survey

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC) in partnership with MAFF is preparing to release the 2018 Massachusetts Foster Parent Survey. We want to hear from you! This is a real opportunity to confidentially bring your perspective and experience as a foster parent to bear on efforts to shape foster care policy and practice, including securing adequate resources to meet the needs of children in care.



The survey, which will start on January 3rd and runs until January 28th, will give policymakers concrete information about foster families' concerns and triumphs and inform individuals in your communities about what they can do to support you and your family. The survey covers a wide range of topics including your satisfaction with the information and support you receive from DCF and Kid's Net and the adequacy of financial supports including access to child care.

Taking the survey is easy, it will be made available both online and in hardcopy for participants to complete in both English and Spanish. Please mark your calendars to make sure that your voice is heard this January by taking our survey.

Please direct any questions or comments regarding the 2018 Massachusetts Foster Parent Survey to Nancy Allen Scannell at nscannell@mspcc.org.

A MESSAGE FROM DCF COMMISSIONER SPEARS

Eighteen months ago, the Department of Children and Families began taking a hard look at the foster care system with an eye on making meaningful, sustainable changes. As our team dove into the work, they never lost sight that, without foster parents, we cannot accomplish our mission to keep children safe.

I am excited to share some of the stride we've made, starting with the hiring of 15 staff dedicated to foster and adoptive parent recruitment. Since this tremendous team came on board a year ago, they've tabled at over 500 community events and helped boost foster parent inquiries by 30%. We've also seen a net gain of over 170 unrestricted foster homes statewide since January 2017.

In July, we launched Foster Massachusetts, or Foster MA, for short, the first statewide foster parent recruitment campaign in many years. It includes a new logo, brochures, a recruitment Facebook page, a redesigned web page, and advertising-- maybe you've spotted one of our billboards along the Commonwealth's highways? Combined, the new materials, marketing and videos have reached over 2,000,000 people!

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THE LATEST WORD FROM MAFF



Dear MAFF Members,

There are never really any quiet times in a home full of children! Holidays are an especially hectic time while we try to fit in shopping, wrapping, and cooking for our families. It is my sincere wish that, for each of your families, the feeling of joy and celebration of this season far outweighs any challenges.

I also know this is a troublesome time for many of the children you are parenting. It is my hope that the information in this newsletter is useful in easing some of the difficulties you may encounter during this turbulent time.

This is also a time when in many traditions, including my own, we offer our gratitude for the gifts we have been given in the year that has passed and set goals for the year ahead.

First and foremost, I want to thank each one of you, longtime and new foster parents alike, who have opened your hearts and your homes to a child (or a dozen) for the gift you are in their lives and to our communities.

I also want to extend a personal thank you to some special individuals who work each day to support foster families, First Lady Lauren Baker, EOHHS Secretary Marylou Sudderss, DCF Commissioner Linda Spears, DCF Assistant Commissioner Kathy Lopes, and DCF Director Susan Tucke. Your efforts on our behalf are felt in homes throughout the Commonwealth.

Last but not least, I want to thank the Kid's Net Staff who helps calm sometimes turbulent seas for our families, and our MAFF representatives for lending your experience and wisdom to our advocacy work.

I look forward to working with each one of you in the coming year to make sure that foster families have the support and resources they need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Haddad". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Cheryl Haddad



·Kid's Net·

A MESSAGE FROM THE KID'S NET DIRECTOR

Dear Foster Parents,

I hope you all have had an enjoyable summer and survived the getting back to school process and are taking a deep breath before the Holidays. Just as the seasons change, so do programs. The Kid's Net Program is about to experience change as Donna Stevens, the Regional Kid's Net Director for the Southern Region will be retiring as of December 31st. Although we are excited for Donna as she begins a new chapter in her life, her departure will be felt not only in the Southeast but also by her colleagues in the Kid's Net Program. Donna has been part of the foster care community for more than 30 years (10 of those with the Kid's Net Program) working in both the public and private sectors. Her commitment to the foster families and children that she served is unmatched and we wish her well.

I know that some of you have participated in Regional forums with Commissioner Spears to talk about what is working for foster parents in caring for the children of the Commonwealth and what isn't working and how can we change this? It has been a great opportunity to have foster parents voices heard. It was also an opportunity to work with area office staff to problem solve together and develop recommendations for change.

Finally, as you know the trainings that the Kid's Net Program offers to you are varied and numerous, so I hope that you are checking the training calendar and selecting a training to attend. Some of them are quite heavy but necessary topics such the sexual exploitation of children and others that are geared toward helping you take care of yourself, because sometimes we forget to do that! Please let us know if there are other trainings that you would like that are not on the schedule. Simply contact your Regional Kid's Net Director to arrange this.

I wish you all a happy and healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Michele Benkis
Statewide Director
Kid's Net Program

**MSPCC's Kid's Net
After Hours
Connection / Helpline
5 p.m. - 9 a.m., M-F
24 Hours on S, Su & Holidays.
800.486.3730**

For information about MSPCC's Kid's Net services, visit www.mspcc.org/kidsnet or call the Kid's Net Director in your region:

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BEACON HILL UPDATE

State legislators have taken steps to ensure that transition age youths are not ‘falling through the cracks’ in the child welfare system. The language of the recently passed House and Senate Supplemental budgets pushes for changes around how the designation of APPLA, or Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement is used. The APPLA is a service plan used by the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families for youth “whom, despite Department’s best efforts, would not be served by permanency through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or care with kin.”

Massachusetts is trying to catch up to federal policy guidelines around permanency planning. The APPLA designation was prescribed in *The Adoption and Safe Family Act* (1997) as the least preferred permanency plan. Federal policy states that APPLA status cannot be given without plans for independent permanency that meets the youth’s developmental, educational, and other needs. Massachusetts legislators have begun to address many questions raised about APPLA usage in the Commonwealth, and are taking action to help curb the reliance on the APPLA designation.

An important aspect of the new language, as expressed by the Children’s League of Massachusetts, is the elimination of “APPLA as a permanency goal for children under the age of 16 and the addition of case review requirements for older youth. The Children’s League offers that the “APPLA [...] was initially created to serve as a rare exception,” however the designation was reported in 2015 to make up approximately 19% of total youth in DCF foster care.

This new language could be the first step towards making sure all permanency opportunities have been explored, and the APPLA status is only used when every option has been exhausted, for every child.

DCF COMMISSIONER SPEARS (continued)

We’ve also refreshed our professional development for managers and now require an intensive, five-day training for all social workers who are new to family resource. These learning opportunities reinforce and introduce policy, regulations, and best practices.

While we are moving forward, I assure you, our work is far from done. We need to hear the voices of our current foster parents to truly improve the system.

Assistant Commissioner Kathy Lopes and her team are developing strategies to strengthen our communication with you and enhance foster parent resources. I hope you will continue to tap into those already in place, including support groups, the Kid’s Net Connection Helpline (1-800-486-3730) and ongoing free trainings.

I encourage you to complete the MSPCC’s survey for foster parents this January. We will use your feedback to help us prioritize next steps.

It is extremely important to me that you feel valued, respected, and a strong sense of partnership with DCF. Please know that you inspire our staff with your compassion and incredible dedication. As foster parents, you welcome children into your home at all hours of the day and night and provide life-changing care and support. In their eyes, and ours, you are superheroes.

Sincerely,



Linda Spears

FAMILY RESOURCE LIAISON SPOTLIGHT...

CAROLYN PARK STREET OFFICE

HOW DID YOU BEING FOSTERING?

Over 25 years ago, 28 to be exact, I began fostering. I come from a large family, being 1 of 14, and always knew fostering was in my future. Growing up always surrounded by family and family traditions definitely encouraged me to become a foster parent and impacted what kind of foster parent I am. When I was younger, Sundays were really central to my own family experience. Sundays were for being together, laughing together, and showing support for each other. It is a tradition that I have carried over into fostering- Sundays are for games, cooking out, and just being there for one another.



When I first started fostering, I didn't even consider adopting. That changed when a young girl, now 26, was placed with me. I adopted her. I'm also fortunate to have a lifelong connection when a young lady whom was placed in my home 20 years ago- I consider her family.

HOW MANY CHILDREN HAVE YOU FOSTERED IN TOTAL?

Over the 28 years of fostering, I have certainly lost count. It has to be well over 200 children.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A FOSTER PARENT LIAISON? HAVE YOU HAD OTHER ROLES IN THE PAST?

I have been a FRL for 2 years. It was a pretty great fit- I have shared experiences as a foster parent, and I have been professionally engaged in the social services field.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF BEING AN FRL?

There are many important parts, however I really think it's super important to be able to establish a connection with foster parents. You have to offer support, advice, and experience around difficult placements. I should also highlight that being consistent in communications is a must! You have to make sure that you are maintaining communications from both the foster parent end and the Departmental end.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF BEING AN FRL?

Gaining the trust of foster parents is tough sometimes. Not all foster parents are willing to open up due to the thought that an issue might get back to them, so it is very challenging to establish that trust. You have to make sure that you are supporting the diverse range of foster parents. You get questions from both new parents and 'seasoned' longtime foster parents, and you have to make sure you are appropriately responding. We, at Kid's Net, are always trying to develop our trainings and increase attendance. Sometimes it's a real challenge to get foster parents to come to the trainings, but they are so important to raise awareness with and educate foster families.

Kid's Net Winter Trainings

Area Office	Topic	Date
Taunton	'Holiday Traditions'	12/14
Malden	'Holiday Celebrations'	12/14
Western Region	'Support'	12/14
Greenfield	'Taxes'	12/14
Arlington	'Holiday Gathering'	12/15
Brockton	'Holiday Family Fun'	12/15
Park Street	'Group Support for Families'	12/16
North Adams	'Kid's Net Services'	12/18
South Central	'Kid's Net Services'	12/19
New Bedford	'Holiday Gathering'	12/20
Taunton	'Holiday Traditions'	12/20
Harbor	'Saying Goodby to Foster Kids'	12/20
Haverhill	'Holiday Celebrations'	12/20
Pittsfield	'Tax Questions and Answers'	12/20
Hyde Park	'Stress Management'	12/21
Springfield	'Holiday Break'	12/25
North Central	'How was your Holiday?'	12/26
Greenfield	'Getting through the Holidays'	12/28
South Central	'Holiday Break'	12/28
Worcester Regional	'African American Hair Care Training'	1/1
Coastal	'Hair and Skin Care'	1/2
Greenfield	'Open Session'	1/2
Lawrence	'Effects of Domestic Violence on Children'	1/2
Western Region	'Impact of the Opioid Crisis & Foster Children'	1/2
Plymouth	'Motivational Interview'	1/3
Boston Reg'l Adoption	Group Wisdom for Pre-Adoptive Parents	1/4
Hyde Park	'Group Support for Families'	1/4
Cambridge	'First Aid'	1/4
Framingham	'TILT Team Discussions'	1/8
Lowell	'Medical Social Worker'	1/8
Cape & Islands	'PTSD'	1/9
Fall River	'CPR'	1/9
New Bedford	'Medical Social Worker'	1/9
Robert Van Wart	'Dealing with ADHD'	1/9
Holyoke	'Bedtime Struggles'	1/9
Worcester West/East	'Kid's Net Support Services'	1/9

Want more dates?
Visit us at mspcc.org!



HOLIDAY TIPS FOR FOSTER FAMILIES

“Holidays can be a real challenge for families,” says Sheila Gomez, “and foster parents should be aware during the holiday season”. Children and youth in foster care all experience the holiday season differently. During the time when holiday television marathons are never-ending, it is necessary to be sensitive to children’s emotions and behaviors. “It is important for foster parents to watch for changing behaviors during this time,” explains Shelia, a Clinical Supervisor at MSPCC. For some children and youths, the holidays are accompanied with reminders of past traumatic experiences, and it is especially important for parents to let children have space to experience their own feelings.



There are many strategies and activities to help your family have an enjoyable holiday season. “If you are a household that hosts holiday gatherings or events- you should be preparing your children, extended family, and friends,” offers Sheila. Telling your kids and teens about who is coming to celebrate the holidays in advance can help alleviate the anxiety of meeting strangers or people not well known.

Additionally, having a dialogue with your child’s worker about your child’s experiences around the holidays can be helpful to find out if there are areas related to holiday celebrations that are sensitive for the child, traditions that are important to your child, and other useful information. The best advice for families around the holidays is to trust your instincts about the child to make sure they are comfortable.

Tips from around the fostering community

- Start your conversations about the holidays early.
- Make sure you discuss your own holiday traditions and to have an open dialogue.
- Establishing some simple gifting guidelines and expectations with family members and friends.
- Add a child's tradition into your own.
- Be realistic- don't create your own expectations.
- Have a gift-making station for children to make their own gifts. This allows them to exchange gifts without worrying about cost.
- The holidays can cause stress about birth families. If you can, comfort them about the safety of the birth family.
- Designate a room in the house as a quiet space.

MAFF Officers and Representatives for 2017

President: Cheryl Haddad, North Central Area Office

Vice President: Cathie Twiraga, Taunton Area Office

Secretary: Sue Cox, Arlington Area Office

Arlington Area Office Susan Fitzsimmons	Greenfield Area Office Shirley Mitchell	New Bedford Area Office Vacant	Weymouth Area Office Kerry Roberts
Brockton Area Office Vacant	Harbor Area Office Joan Pearson	North Central Area Office Dawn Grimes	Worcester-East Area Office Stacie Richardson
Cambridge Area Office Patricia Hazelton	Haverhill Area Office Vacant	Park Street Area Office Juanita Grant	Worcester-West Area Office Stephanie Andrews
Cape Ann Area Office Mary Flaherty	Holyoke Area Office Debbie VanEtten	Pittsfield Area Office Missy Tarjick	Members At-Large Julie Springwater (Judge Baker Children's Center)
Cape/Islands Area Office Deidre Littlefield	Hyde Park Area Office Vanessa Morales	Plymouth Area Office Patricia Moroney-Ghanem	Mitzi Bramhall Mary Hynes Paula Stahl (Children's Charter Trauma Clinic)
Central Regional Adoption Michelle Cuff	Lawrence Area Office Joean Serrano	South Central Area Office Mary Beth Fraser	Gloria Kelliher Eleanor Dowd
Dimock Area Office Vacant	Lowell Area Office Nicole Spoto	Springfield Area Office Marianna Litovich	Honorary Member Bill LaPierre
Fall River Area Office Dorrie Nunes	Lynn Area Office Vacant	Taunton Area Office Vacant	
Framingham Area Office Sara Hamerla	Malden Area Office Maria Gattuso	Van Wart Area Office Felicita Nieves	

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