

# MAFF NEWS

## MAFF IN ACTION

### FY 2021 BUDGET

Development of the state budget for the coming fiscal year is well underway and MAFF is working hard to ensure that your voices help to inform that process. Based on feedback from, MAFF Representatives about local needs and concerns, as well as the results of the MSPCC survey and the DCF Community forums our areas of focus are recruitment and retention of well qualified foster parents and supporting placement stability by:

- Closing the gap between the daily rate of support for children in foster care and actual expenses
- Improving access to behavioral health supports
- Increasing access to child care for children in homes with working foster parents

### FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

As every foster parent knows, the rights and responsibilities related to foster care cannot be found in a centralized website. The Foster Parent Bill of Rights will set guidelines for establishing a clear understanding between foster parents and DCF. The specified rights include:

- to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect;
- to receive information that is important to the ability to properly care for and protect a foster child;

- to receive services and supports to enable them to care for the child, including the right to take a break sometimes; and
- to insist that their rights be honored without fear of retaliation.

The bill also establishes the “reasonable and prudent parent standard,” which gives foster parents the right to make routine decisions about a child’s daily activities.

The idea is not new. Since 2001, 17 states have enacted a Foster Parent Bill of Rights. It’s time for Massachusetts to join them.

### FOSTER CARE POLICY AND PRACTICE

MAFF Representatives are partnering with DCF, MSPCC and other stakeholders to help shape policies and practices which support child safety and the wellbeing of foster parents. Current efforts include 1) discussions on strengthening policy and practice regarding complaints against foster parents (including 51As) to better include the foster parent perspective, and 2) a brand new MSPCC led effort in Worcester, funded by the Health Foundation of Central MA, to pilot innovative approaches to supporting foster families.

Want to get involved? Contact Cathie Twiraga at [c.twiraga@gmail.com](mailto:c.twiraga@gmail.com)

To find out more about our priorities, learn where the budget process stands, and find out ways to help, visit:

[www.mspcc.org/maff/](http://www.mspcc.org/maff/)



# A Letter from the MAFF President



Can you believe we are already into 2020? We have been busy! Luckily, having been Vice President first, my transition into the President role has been an easy one. I am excited to introduce you to MAFF's new Executive Board. Our past Taunton Representative, Kelly Lamb, took over for me as Vice President, and our past Pittsfield representative, Missy Tarjick, is our new Secretary. We have been working well together planning for what we would like to see for MAFF's future.

Along with MSPCC Kid's Net, we organized the Caring for the Caregivers Retreat in Plymouth this past October. Ninety women came together to participate in pieces of training and support groups along with some pampering and relaxing exercises. These women were able to make some positive connections and increase their circle of support. We had such a great response that we will be holding a one night Caring for the Caregiver retreat to follow the bi-annual conference in October 2020.

We have partnered with Theresa Harmon of To The Moon and Back in organizing her 2nd annual Beyond NAS 2020 conference, which focuses on families caring for children with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). She will have Dr. Lisa Prock as a keynote speaker as well as other speakers who are immersed in researching and caring for kids with NAS. You will find more information about both these conferences and the retreat further in this newsletter.

Kelly, Missy and I have been making trips to the State House to meet with legislators to increase support for the Foster Parents Bill of Rights (FPBOR). We have had great success in establishing ongoing relationships and plan to work together on future projects outside of FPBOR. We are working closely with DCF and meet with management regularly so we can help find ways to troubleshoot issues and better support foster families.

With life being so busy for us all, we appreciate how valuable everyone's time is. We know how hard it is to be able to volunteer your time and we are so appreciative of our Area Office MAFF representatives who have made a commitment to spend some of their precious free time working with us! It is also why we are working diligently to make MAFF more accessible to our representatives as well as to all foster, kin and adoptive parents who are interested in taking on a role in MAFF. Kelly is doing great work keeping our Facebook page updated and informative. If you have not already, you can find us on Twitter at @instantfamilies. We are looking for grants to provide the technology to have better teleconferencing options for those that cannot make it to a meeting, and we hope to be able to move our meetings around to every region in the future.

It is my goal to make sure all foster, kinship and adoptive parents know who we are and what we do here at MAFF. If you do not know who your office MAFF representative is, I ask that you email me at [c.twiraga@gmail.com](mailto:c.twiraga@gmail.com) so I can put you in touch with them. We work in support of you so the best way we can do that is to find out directly from you what you need from us. Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns.

**Cathie Twiraga**  
MAFF President

## TO THE MOON AND BACK CONFERENCE

Join To the Moon and Back, the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Massachusetts Alliance for Families, on Friday, May 8th at Hotel 1620 in Plymouth, Massachusetts for the 2nd Annual Beyond NAS 2020 Conference focused on families caring for children with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) and the community of providers who support them including behavioral health clinicians, teachers, nurses, pediatricians, early intervention providers, and early childhood educators.

Dr. Lisa Prock (Boston Children's Hospital) will discuss the Neurobiology of NAS and Dr. Munish Gupta (Beth Israel Hospital) will discuss the work of the Perinatal Quality Improvement Network on NAS. The conference will also include the team from Lives in the Balance to discuss practical ways to support children with neurological differences. Ed Jacobs MSW, LICSW will discuss progress on the Drug Endangered Children's Initiative. More speakers to be announced! The agenda also allows time for much needed discussion and connection with other members of this vibrant and caring community.

Attendees will enjoy a continental breakfast and lunch. CEUs will be offered for Social Workers, LMHCs, and nurses.

If you have any questions or want to be involved in this event, please email Theresa Harmon at [theresaharmonLICSW@gmail.com](mailto:theresaharmonLICSW@gmail.com) or Jennifer MacIver Edwards [jmaciveredwards@me.com](mailto:jmaciveredwards@me.com)







**The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) is looking for volunteer families to become hosts for our new Weekend Family Connections program!**

This program is focused on finding families for youth age 10 and up who are living in a group home or residential setting. Families volunteer to host a youth two weekend nights a month. The host family provides the youth with opportunities to meet other adults in their lives, such as neighbors, co-workers, members of their faith-communities, or sports teams. The goal of the program is to build connections that will ultimately result in the identification of an adoptive family, while allowing the youth a positive experience with family life. Your family could be the bridge to a permanent connection that these youth sorely need.

Find out how you can get involved and support youth in foster care through this program by emailing Lindsey Brynjolfsson at [lindseyb@mareinc.org](mailto:lindseyb@mareinc.org) or visit MARE's website to learn more at: <https://www.mareinc.org/page/weekend-family-connections>.

Weekend Family Connections is a Partnership between MARE, Cambridge Family and Children's Service, and DCF.



## **ON APRIL 1ST, MAKE SURE FOSTER KIDS ARE COUNTED!**

Census Day will be observed nationwide on **April 1, 2020**. By then, your household will have been invited to provide some basic information about your home and who lives in it. **ALL kids** living in the home on April 1st, whether temporarily or permanently, should be counted. This includes: grandchildren, nieces, nephews, children of friends, and foster children.

The results of the census are used to make determinations about important issues, including how many congressional representatives a state has and how an estimated \$880 billion a year in federal funding is distributed for schools, roads and other public services like support for children in foster care.

For more information on how to count foster children in the 2020 Census, visit: [mspcc.org/2020-census](http://mspcc.org/2020-census)

## **IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO SIGN UP FOR FOSTERMA CONNECT!**



FosterMA Connect is DCF's secure intranet for licensed DCF foster and pre-adoptive parents. Foster parents will be able to quickly see the latest news and events, access forms, find contact information, ask questions, engage in discussions, and more. All licensed DCF foster and pre-adoptive parents have access. If you have not yet accessed the site, please look for an email from Virtual Gateway that will include your log-in information. Any questions or if you need help logging in, please contact DCF Foster Care Managers Karin Bettencourt at (617) 748-2265 or [Karin.Bettencourt@state.ma.us](mailto:Karin.Bettencourt@state.ma.us) or Jennifer Pudder at (617) 748-2264 or [Jennifer.Pudder@state.ma.us](mailto:Jennifer.Pudder@state.ma.us)

# MAFF Representative Spotlight

## LAURA AND PAUL TABERNER, PLYMOUTH



We have been foster parents since June 2011 and MAFF representatives for approximately 18 months.

It is very hard for us to list a single thing that is the most rewarding part of being foster parents. One is when you see significant improvement in a child, often in a very short period of time, when they have simply been given the love and caring that each child needs and deserves. Another is when you see your foster child reunited with their biological parent or find a forever home with an adoptive family. Another is when you see your children be kind and generous to the foster children that become part of the family.

We joined MAFF because we felt that we had a lot of insight to share given our experience fostering approximately 70-80 foster children since 2011. We wanted to be a voice for all foster, adoptive and kinship families, who do such important and difficult work every day. Being a foster parent is, of course, rewarding, but it can also be lonely and frustrating. Our hopes were (and continue to be) that by joining MAFF we could make the experience of being a foster parent more positive, assist foster parents in being considered professionals, and to provide foster parents with a voice.

For the coming year, we hope that MAFF can help the Foster Parents Bill of Rights become law and also further certain aspects of the Bill of Rights, including improving communication between DCF staff and foster families as well as improving the 51A process. One other issue we would like to see MAFF address is the inconsistency in approach between the various DCF offices.

## VANESSA MORALES, HYDE PARK

I have been a foster parent for approximately ten years. It has been a blessing to be able to share my home with over 100 children from 3 months of age to 18 years old. I have had children for one night and up to two, four, and six years before moving to permanency. I have had children leave and some return. I have built relationships and made life long connections with some of the children who have passed through my home. My son came into care when he was three years old, and I officially adopted him when he was five. He is now nine and is a blessing.

We, as foster parents, make a difference in the lives of the children that come into our homes no matter what the age. There are times it is challenging, and many times rewarding. I joined the Massachusetts Alliance for Families (MAFF) four years ago so I can continue to make a difference in the lives of the children in care. I represent the Hyde Park Office. We advocate for the needs of foster parents. For example, childcare was a major issue across MA for many children in care. We, as MAFF members, heard the complaints of the foster parents. We brought it to the board and then advocated for more childcare. Since then, we have received more childcare, making it more accessible for foster parents to access.



As MAFF members, we use our voice collectively. We make sure that our voices are heard. We advocate and we meet with the Commissioner. We suggest or create new legislation; things we want to see changed or improved for children in care. As a MAFF representative, I listen. As mental health concerns as a society are on the rise, we at MAFF are already on it, seeking to increase and make available adequate mental health services for our adopted, guardianship, and foster children currently in care.

**We want you!** Maybe you have thought about becoming a MAFF representative before or perhaps this is the first time you are considering it. Either way, we want to talk to you! We have area office MAFF board representative vacancies to fill and we are looking for foster and adoptive parents from across the state to join us in addressing the barriers foster, kinship and adoptive families face. MAFF meets quarterly and there are opportunities to join subcommittees depending on your area of interest. We believe MAFF is most effective with representation from every area of the Commonwealth. Please consider filling a vacancy and reach out to us with questions today! [maff@mspcc.org](mailto:maff@mspcc.org)

# CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS RETREAT

On October 19th-20th, the first Caring for the Caregivers Retreat was held in Plymouth, MA. This retreat for foster, adoptive, and kinship mothers was an opportunity to come together in a nurturing environment for a time of much needed self-care, connection, fun, and high-quality, supportive, and educational discussion groups. The Caring for the Caregivers Retreat provided over 90 mothers respite from the daily and often relentless challenges they face in raising children in DCF care with traumatic histories.

The retreat was jam-packed with fun, friendship, and laughter. On Saturday attendees participated in breakout sessions where they learned parenting tips, including Trust Based Relational Interventions, perspectives on transracial adoption and parenting, trauma-informed occupational therapy tips, and more. Saturday night was the highlight of the event, a slumber party, complete with arts and crafts, manicures, games, yummy food and even bean bags and a canopy "bed." The mothers had a blast participating in the "Best Pajamas" and "Bad Hair, Don't Care" contests. Thanks to our generous sponsors and donors, the mothers were treated to delicious meals, chair massages and reiki, fun activities, and gifts and prizes. Everyone left the retreat feeling rejuvenated, refreshed and with several new friends. Given the success of this event, it is the goal of MSPCC/Kid's Net and MAFF for other self care/retreat opportunities to be coordinated in different parts of the state in the near future. Stay tuned and we hope you will join the next one!

A huge thank you to our sponsors, which included: Tiny and Sons Auto Glass, To the Moon and Back, Easton Lions Club, and Steve and Eliza Binghouse.



## SAVE THE DATE!

The MSPCC Kid's Net foster care conference will take place this fall. In the near future, we will be sharing details about the topics and speakers who will be part of this inspiring biannual event. This year, we have added an overnight option that will focus solely on self-care. More information regarding both events and registration will be forthcoming. You will not want to miss it!

**October 16, 2020**

**College of the Holy Cross**

**Hogan Campus Center Ballroom**

**1 College Street  
Worcester, MA 01610**





## Massachusetts Alliance for Families

### MAFF OFFICERS

President: Cathie Twiraga

Vice President: Kelly Lamb

Secretary: Missy Tarjick

### MAFF AREA REPRESENTATIVES

Brockton: Rebecca Hally

Cape Ann: Laura Pacheco

Cape/Island: Melissa Anderson

Coastal: Carol Fitzgibbon

Greenfield: Dondi and Shirley Mitchell

Holyoke: Tracy Collins

Hyde Park: Vanesa Morales

Lawrence: Joean Serrano

Lowell: Steve Mesite

Lynn: Elise Caputi

Metro North: Laura Gaughan

New Bedford: Michael Kramer

Park Street: Juanita Grant

Plymouth: Laura & Paul Taberner

South Central: Mary Beth Fraser

Springfield: Marianna L. Litovich

Worcester-West: Gina Doyle

## WE ARE YOUR STATE FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION.



### ABOUT US

The Massachusetts Alliance for Families (MAFF) is a state-wide association of DCF foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers. The MAFF Board is charged with ensuring that MAFF's work is informed by a statewide perspective and addresses existing regional disparities. MAFF events are open to all DCF foster, adoptive, and kinship caregivers and other supporters are welcome and encouraged to participate in advancing MAFF's advocacy agenda.

### OUR PRIORITIES:

MAFF's advocacy is focused on ensuring that children in DCF care and their caregivers have access to services and resources to support healthy physical and emotional development and enable them to succeed academically and socially. This includes recruitment and retention of well-trained and supported foster families and resources to enhance placement stability and help youth prepare to lead successful adult lives. For more detail about our current advocacy efforts go to [www.msppcc.org/maff](http://www.msppcc.org/maff).



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