



Volunteer Emergency Families for Children

Northern Valley Region

Family Newsletter

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VEFC Parent Wins Governor's Award

Karen Cockrell is one of nine winner of the Second Annual Governor's Caregiver Recognition Award. Congratulations, Karen! Read more about the award and Karen on Page 4.

Mark Your Calendar NOW!

The annual Family Appreciation Dinner will be held on June 19 at 5:30 pm
Outback Steak House will be catering the affair, and The Dill Pickers will provide entertainment.

The dinner will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Stephens City.

You won't want to miss this event!

New Booster Seat Law

On July 1, 2007, a new law goes into effect in Virginia regarding booster seats. Children up to age **EIGHT YEARS** must be properly secured in an appropriate child restraint when riding in a vehicle.

Seat belts may be substituted for children between ages four and eight **ONLY** with a written statement from a physician who determines that use of a child restraint system would be impractical by reason of the child's weight, physical fitness, or other medical reason. Previously, children in Virginia could legally ride in a standard adult seat belt at age five. Booster seats for ages five through eight were recommended but not required—until now

Can You Give Us an Hour?

The Warren County Community Wellness Festival will be held on April 28 from 8:00 am until noon at Warren Memorial Hospital. VEFC will have an information table to call attention to our program. Can you help man the table for an hour?

Please call or e-mail Pat Spory (504 636-9858; pspory@vefc.org) if you can assist with this event.

Placements

January: 13 requests, 12 placements. One child did not need to be placed. Ages of children placed ranged from 22 months to 15 years

February: 8 requests, 3 placements, 5 not served. One found an alternate placement; the rest were cancelled. Ages of children placed ranged from 15 months to 17 years.

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Summary of "Trauma in Utero" by Fedele Regan, L.C.S.W.

Presented January 26, 2007, to foster care and VEFC families

*Following is a brief summary of material presented at the January In-Service program that would be most helpful to VEFC families. More information was provided about working with local assessment resources and public schools to provide for children with special needs. That information is available by contacting Pat Spory or Melanie Trabosh at Warren Co. DSS. Please note the reading list at the end of the summary. Ms. Regan especially recommended **The Explosive Child** by R. W. Greene.*

Ms. Regan began her presentation by discussing the effects of various substances on the developing fetus. Her research shows that, when we are born, we have a reserve of brain cells. When the drugs listed below are taken, they may cause a decrease in the reserve brain cells of the fetus. Consequently, these children may be more susceptible to the effects of Alzheimer's, HIV, premature aging, and drug use.

Alcohol is by far the worst drug with regard to fetal effects. It affects every cell in the fetus' body. Researchers do not know how much or how little causes damage or *when* it is caused. Damage occurs along a continuum from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) to Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE), one level down. Damage is irreversible. FAS effects include: distorted facial features; mental retardation; deformities of the limbs; heart, liver and kidney problems; hearing and vision problems; and behavior and learning problems. Behavior and learning problems may include:

- Problems with focused thinking
- Inability to attach
- Impulsivity
- Poor judgment
- No understanding of cause and effect

Research indicates that, in the 1990's, drinking during pregnancy was the number one cause of mental retardation in the USA.

Tobacco and nicotine use during pregnancy may result in lower birth weight, poor reading skills, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and a high risk for developing asthma by age seven.

Caffeine's effects seem to be minimal, with a possible connection to growth retardation.

Marijuana use compromises verbal and memory components of learning.

Heroin use may result in small head size, premature birth, and low birth rates. Heroin use in the father results in higher rates of neurological impairments. This is the only drug thus far in which a connection has been made between father's usage and effects on the fetus.

Methamphetamine use may result in increased rates of premature birth and detachment of the placenta, fetal growth retardation, and heart and brain abnormalities.

Inhalants—no reliable human studies have been completed; animal studies suggest abnormalities.

Malnutrition of the mother during fetal development may result in long-term cognitive, social and behavioral deficits in the fetus.

Ms. Regan stressed that good assessment is critical to working with children affected by substance abuse and named local options for assessment.

Strategies to help the child:

1. Make eye contact, if possible. Be sensitive to the child's ability to do this. You may have to work up to it.
2. Use touch; for example, gently take the child's face in your hands, hold his hands. Be careful to ask permission first, since many troubled children have been physically abused and may view touch as threatening.
3. Speak directly in a clear, firm, and kind voice. Provide clear, concise, and complete explanations. Focus on what to do, not what is wrong. Ask the child to repeat instructions back to you; hearing is not enough. The child may even be able to repeat it back but still not really understand it.
4. Observe the child to determine if he or she hears and understands what has been said.
5. When a child has hit or kicked, touch the hand or leg as you tell the child that violence toward anyone or anything is not permitted.

“Trauma in Utero” (continued)

6. Modeling and role play: Ms. Regan stressed that we tend to talk too much and need to do more showing. Practicing a conversation or role playing a situation can be very helpful. If a child says, “I don’t know how to make friends,” try practicing a conversation, playing the part of a new child whom your child has just met.

7. Visual aids

8. Coaching

9. De-escalation skills

10. Self soothing

11. AVOID-“WHY” QUESTIONS—the child really doesn’t know and such questions are not effective because they put people on the defensive and cause hostility. “What” questions are better.

Children who have been negatively affected by substance abuse during their development are at higher risk of being abused. This is because of the difficult behavior that they present. Some discussion ensued regarding abuse that happens early on, when children are preverbal and the brain is not fully developed. Ms. Regan explained that abuse experienced at this time is processed wholly at an emotional level, since there is no language yet developed. This preverbal abuse causes children to experience things in the extreme. They may have a very emotional reaction to something that, for a non-abused child, would be a non-event or, at least, upsetting to them only to a minor degree.

Tantrums thrown by an abused child are not necessarily for manipulation, as is often the case with children who have not been abused or suffered trauma. The abused child may have an extreme emotional reaction, as described above, and be in tremendous distress. Tantrums may indicate the inability to handle a situation and calm themselves down. “Self-soothing” is something we learn to help ourselves become calm, whether it is done by handling a favorite blanket, eating, or some other behavior or thinking pattern. The inability to self-soothe could also lead to difficulty in falling or staying asleep. This does not mean that you should give in to an abused child’s tantrum demands, but rather that you try to help them become calm, perhaps by simply holding them and speaking in a quiet voice or just offering them a glass of water. You try to help them learn to calm themselves down.

Parenting Pitfalls:

- Sarcasm: it gets you nowhere.
- Unresolved hurt and anger of your own.
- Trying to be perfect: allow yourself to make mistakes and acknowledge that we *all* have issues.
- Inadequate rest and support: need help
- Burn out: I can’t take this anymore.

Finally, Ms. Regan said that children with special needs require consistency. All those who are around the child should reinforce the same messages. The child’s past can never be an excuse for him to hurt another person or animal or be destructive. Avoid over-stimulation. Transitions are difficult for them; give them plenty of warning ahead of time and frequently remind them of changes to come. Children who are really difficult always have some kind of neurological problem; they truly don’t want to be the way that they are but do not know how to be different.

Parent-Friendly Books:

Greene, R.-W. (2001). *The Explosive Child*, New York, NY: Harper Collins Publisher

Jaffe, A.V. & Gardner, L. (2006) *My Book Full of Feelings*, Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company

Mancuso, H. (2006). *The Way to A*, Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company

Taffel, R. & Blau, M. (1999). *Nurturing good Children Now*, New York, NY: Golden Books Publisher

Taffel, R. & Blau, M. (1991). *Parenting By the Heart*, Reading, MA: Perseus Book Group Publishers

Karen Cockrell Receives Governor's Award



The Governor's Caregiver Recognition Award symbolically honors the thousands of caregivers who lovingly take care of family and friends day after day. Although the award is only given to a few caregivers, it serves to heighten public awareness of the contributions of all caregivers.

This year, nine people were selected to receive the award. Karen Cockrell was one of them. It is interesting to note that Karen was the only award winner whose care was devoted to strangers; all other recipients were caring for family members.

Karen Cockrell, of Front Royal, has been a VEFC parent since August, 2000. Since then, she has welcomed children into her home 36 times. In an article in the *Northern Virginia Daily* (March 6, 2007), Karen recalled her first placement:

Her first placement was a 17-year-old girl. Even though Cockrell said she initially didn't want to house teenagers, 'I wouldn't have traded her for the world. As soon as she came here, she was like my daughter, and I had her the whole three weeks and I cried the day that she left.'

Karen has four children of her own who have easily adapted to sharing their home with the foster children. In fact, her teenage daughter plans a career in service to children.

A neighbor said of Karen, "Karen has an amazing gift with children. She has a very natural way of working with them and just loves being with them. Caring for them seems never to be a burden or a problem for her but, rather, a joy."

Karen, accompanied by Pat Spory, was interviewed by Channel 3, the new Winchester station the end of March. This is another great way to spread information about VEFC and, perhaps, attract new families.

Congratulations to Karen and to all VEFC parents for their love and caring for children in need.

VEFC Gala Will Conclude VEFC Week

Governor Timothy Kaine proclaimed April 29 through May 5 "Volunteer Emergency Families for Children Week." The week will conclude with the 11th annual "Give Your Heart to a Child" gala fund raiser will be held on the fifth of May at the Hilton McLean Tysons Corner.

The Gala will have a Mexican "Cinco de Mayo" theme. Barbara Harrison, who does the "Wednesday's Child"-spots on Channel 4, has agreed to act as honorary chair and may be able to come to the gala. The event will be attended by a host of corporate, individual and volunteer supporters who champion VEFC and its work.

Tickets for this event are available at half price for VEFC families. If you are interested in attending, contact the Richmond office at 1-800-756-6167 Lodging is available at the Tyson's Hilton, hosting the gala, for \$99 per night if callers ask for a room in the block reserved for the "Give Your Heart to a Child Gala."

Some Examples of VEFC Care

All these stories are from the Northern Valley Region. The names in these stories are changed, and some editing has been done for space reasons.

A Thanksgiving to Remember

Not wanting to break up the family during Thanksgiving, the Smiths took all three Jackson children for the holiday weekend. Arthur is 14 years old, Janet is 11, and Katie is 9. They arrived while Mr. Smith was dropping the Smith girls at his mom's house, a holiday tradition so that they can help her get the house ready for their family celebration. The Smith son, Jason, and Mrs. Smith were there to welcome Jacksons. They noticed right away that the Jacksons were not shy.

As the weekend wore on, Mrs. Smith realized that, without knowing it, a desire of hers had been fulfilled. "I had wanted to have people over for Thanksgiving that had nowhere else to go," she said. "I am often reminded of Jesus' command to invite the homeless, infirm, and poor: those who cannot repay you for your kindness."

The children were basically good, but doubling the number of children to care for was a bit stressful. Also, the Jackson children had their own set of issues and traits to deal with. Arthur was in tears the night before he left and at times during the day of his departure. He wrote a poignant letter that he left for the Smiths to read, ending it with:

Staying with you guys has really opened my eyes and heart, especially to new adventures, so thank you."

Mrs. Smith said, "It's placements like this that open your eyes again to the impact just a few days can have on the life of a child. It also reminds us that there is a culture out there so foreign to us, full of strife and despair. We are candles of hope in their darkness. God bless the ministry of VEFC!"

Needing a Mother

Susan, 12 years old, was placed in the Williams' home primarily because of truancy. She had been truant for 59 days the previous year and was on the same track this year. Susan's mother, a single mom, works at night in an adult club. She was not home when Susan went to school, and she did not insist that she go.

While at the Williams', Susan went to school every day and was encouraged to get back into the pattern of attending. Teachers were thrilled with her progress. Mrs. Williams says that Susan is a "bright, smart kid."

While with the Williams, Susan tried to take the blame on herself, saying, "It's my fault. I throw a fit and don't go to school." Mrs. Williams explained that, as the parent to her children, she is responsible for ensuring that they get an education and that they learn to face doing things they don't always want to do. She said that Susan's mother needs to "step up and do her part as a parent."

Mrs. Williams met Susan's mother, who had Susan at age 17. Mrs. Williams observed that the mother treated Susan like a friend rather than like a daughter. She saw Susan looking at her and longing for a mother.

After two stays with the Williams family, punctuated by a brief stay with her mother, Susan went home to her mom.

Respite and Acceptance

Joanne, age 17, has been in foster care for a number of years. She has been in other VEFC families in the past, both when she was initially removed from her home and in subsequent respites from foster homes. Joanne had been sexually abused by an older brother from the age of 6 until she was 13; he is now in jail for the abuse.

Joanne needed a place to go from her group home during Thanksgiving vacation. Louise, a single woman with grown children who are on their own, was happy to welcome Joanne as her first placement. After she came, they went grocery shopping to get some of the things she liked to eat. They went on Thanksgiving Day to Louise's friend's home, where Joanne fit right in, helping to set and clear the table and playing card games after the meal.

Joanne spent a lot of time sleeping the next few days. She said she didn't get to sleep much at the home because it was noisy, and she enjoyed catching up. She was allowed to call her mother and grandmother while there as well.

Joanne liked the fact that it was quiet at Louise's house and that she could be there without any other kids. They spent time hiking together on nearby trails with Louise's dogs. She confided to Louise, "I'm bisexual — are you okay with that?" Louise assured her that she accepted Joanne just as she was. On Sunday, Louise's son and family came to dinner and they hiked together outside. In the evening, they went out of town to another family dinner.

Louise's quiet home and unconditional acceptance, with the dogs and with others for occasional company, was just what Joanne needed to experience a peaceful respite from the group home, where she returned following her stay.

A Little Humor

First Grade Proverbs

A first grade teacher presented her class with the first half of a well-known proverb and asked them to come up with the remainder of the proverb. Here are some of the results:

Don't change horses — **until they stop running.**

Strike while the — **bug is close.**

It's always darkest before — **Daylight Saving Time.**

Never underestimate the power of — **termites.**

You can lead a horse to water but — **how?**

Don't bite the hand that — **looks dirty.**

A miss is as good as a — **Mr.**

You can't teach an old dog new — **math.**

If you lie down with dogs, you'll — **stink in the morning.**

Love all, trust — **me.**

The pen is mightier than the — **pigs.**

An idle mind is — **the best way to relax.**

Where there's smoke, there's — **pollution.**

Happy the bride who — **gets all the presents.**

A penny saved is — **not much.**

Two's company, three's — **the Musketeers.**

Don't put off until tomorrow what — **you put on to go to bed.**

Laugh and the world laughs with you

My young grandson called the other day to wish me Happy Birthday. He asked me how old I was, and I told him, "62."

He was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "Did you start at 1?"

After putting her grandchildren to bed, a grandmother changed into old slacks and a droopy blouse and proceeded to wash her hair. As she heard the children getting more and more rambunctious, her patience grew thin. At last she threw a towel around her head and stormed into their room, putting them back to bed with stern warnings.

As she left the room, she heard the three-year-old say with a trembling voice, "Who was THAT?"

A grandmother was telling her little granddaughter what her own childhood was like. "We used to skate outside on a pond. I had a swing made from a tire; it hung from a tree in our front yard. We rode our pony. We picked wild raspberries in the woods."

The little girl was wide-eyed, taking this in. At last she said, "I sure wish I'd gotten to know you sooner!"

A little girl was diligently pounding away on her grandfather's word processor. She told him she was writing a story. "What's it about?"

"I don't know," she replied. "I can't read."

I didn't know if my granddaughter had learned her colors yet, so I decided to test her. I would point out something and ask what color it was. She would tell me, and always she was correct. But it was fun for me, so I continued.

At last she headed for the door, saying sagely, "grandma, I think you should try to figure out some of these yourself!"