



Volunteer Emergency Families for Children

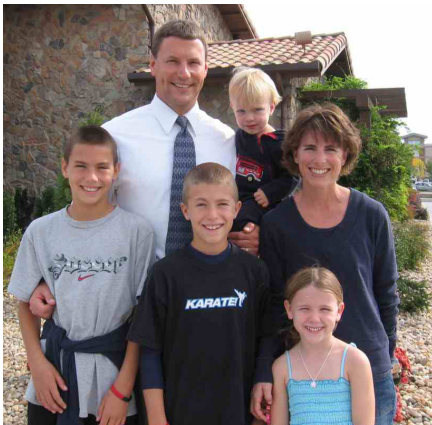
NORTHERN VALLEY REGION

Family Newsletter

Vol. XII No. 2

January 2008

Local VEFC Family Honored



Sheri and Duane Wernecke are this year's recipients of the VEFC "You Make a Difference" award.

The Wereneckes became VEFC parents 13 years ago. Starting by housing small children, they now care for teens as well. They have four children of their own, ranging in age from 2 to 12.

Sheri credits the children with making their home so accepting of troubled youth. We started doing this before we had kids. They've grown up with it....The kids know how to talk with them."

We offer our congratulations to the Wernecke family on this well-deserved award

Inside This Issue

Confidentiality is Critical:

Page 2

Gang Awareness Summary:

Page 2

Grief and Foster Children:

Page 4

VEFC Stories:

Page 5

Humor:

Page 6

VEFC Book Sale

The VEFC Council is having a used book sale to benefit VEFC. It will be held Friday and Saturday, March 7 and 8. It will take place at Calvary Church of the Brethren, Winchester (South of Costco on Rt. 522). If you have any books you wish to donate, please bring them to the Church on Thursday, March 6.

Be sure to tell your friends and spread the word:

- **Friday, March 7, from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.**
Saturday March 8, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- **Calvary Church of the Brethren, Winchester**
- **All proceeds go to VEFC**

Please help to publicize this event any way that you can: Through church bulletins, word-of-mouth, and clubs or organizations you belong to. If you can help with the sale on Friday or Saturday or with set-up on Thursday, please contact Pat Spory.

Confidentiality Is Critical

A Note by Pat Spory

We have all felt the tug to share the stories of the children that we serve. We want others to know just what they are going through and what it is like to care for them as we have them in our homes. Certainly it is a good thing to let people know that child abuse and neglect take place in our own communities, and telling stories is an effective way to communicate it. Weaving stories into presentations which I give about VEFC is critical to helping people to understand what we do and how they can help. I am careful to change details, use events which happened a good while ago, or mix stories together so that my audience will not recognize a child in what I say

I wish to caution you regarding how much detail you divulge and the settings in which you do it. Since I also serve as a VEFC host family, I am very familiar with the temptation to give the details about a child I am hosting and to have others become as indignant as I am about what has happened to the child. It is not okay to give details of a child's situation to others who have no need to know and who have not signed a confidentiality agreement as we have.

You may, however, want to discuss a child's situation with another VEFC family so that you may gain ideas about how to care for them. At times, you may be sharing the care of a child in placement. We do want you to feel supported and to know that you can turn to others in the VEFC network. You may also have occasion to talk with a long-term foster care parent, especially if you are doing respite for them. *Please be very careful that you do not have any of these sorts of discussions in public places where others may overhear.* It could well be that the person standing nearby in the grocery aisle hearing you talk with another caregiver about a VEFC placement is someone from that child's family. If that happens, it can cause lots of problems for DSS, as they work with the family, and can ultimately hurt the child. As always, I am amazed at how all of you continue to give of yourselves for the children who need your care. I am grateful for every one of you—and so are the DSS workers. They frequently tell me how glad they are to have VEFC as a resource.

Gang Awareness Presentation Summary

The following is a summary of a presentation given by Officer Simmons of the Northwest Virginia Regional

Gang definition: A group of three or more persons banded together in a common cause and involved in criminal activity. They often adopt common dress, tattoos, representative colors, and graffiti.

Gang participation or recruitment to a gang by an adult is a felony. If recruitment occurs on school property, punishment is enhanced.

Characteristics of gang members:

- Likely to be male
- Often the product of a broken home
- Aggressive, hostile behavior
- Ages range from 9 to 40

In 2004, racial membership in gangs was:

- 50% Hispanic
- 30% African American
- 10% Caucasian
- 10% Asian/others

Smaller cities and rural counties report the highest percentage of female members. In 2005, there were an estimated 25,000 gangs in the USA ; gang membership totaled 750,000. More than half of the homicides in LA and Chicago in 2005 were gang-related. Gangs move from the cities to the suburbs when families, moving out of areas where gangs are prevalent, inadvertently spread gangs to their new neighborhoods. If their children are already involved, the gang presence comes with them. In the Northern Shenandoah Valley, some of the most

active gangs are MS13, the Bloods, Crips, Surenos, and Gangster Disciples.

Gang Signs: Graffiti is an early sign, identifying a gang's territory. Tattoos usually include initials or symbols. Common symbols are a triangle of three dots, often on the face or between the thumb and forefinger five-pointed or six-pointed stars; stylized initials; tiny pitchforks; happy and sad faces together; 187 stands for murder; Bloods burn a dog paw pattern on their arms using a cigarette.

Clothes: Certain football jerseys in certain colors are often chosen as gang wear (MS 13 members may all wear jerseys of #13). Certain belt buckles, jewelry and colored bandannas (hanging from pockets or worn around the head) may all be used to proclaim gang membership. The presenter stressed that it is not just wearing a particular color that indicates gang membership, and that school officials are looking for patterns of behavior. They suggested that parents should be concerned if kids want to wear the same shirt or the same color five days in a row and get angry if any other color is suggested.

Hand Signs: Gangs use specific hand signs to communicate, spelling out their names, names of other gangs, or actions that gang members plan to take. Body language is used. Rubbing a hand on the stomach may mean "surround the person" and taking off a shirt means "prepare to fight." There are hand signals that a leader may give to signal that he wants someone killed.

Music: Gangsta rappers include 50 Cent, Tupac and many others.

Gangs fall under two major groups, either the People Nation or the Folk Nation. These are not gangs but rather alliances under which gangs are aligned. (A parallel would be baseball, with the American League and the National League.) Membership in one gang automatically pits members against some other gangs, or makes immediate alliances with those in the same nation. The roots of today's gangs go back to the 1920's.

Gangs in the Folk Nation, some of whom are the Disciples, the Crips, the Cobras, and the Gangster Disciples, use a number 6 or a 6-pointed star. Their symbols are worn on the RIGHT side of the body; that is, their bandannas would hang from the right pocket, or their tattoos would be on the right side of the face, etc. When they use the pitchfork symbol, it is drawn with the tines pointed up. The Crips, for instance, wear blue, 6-pointed stars, and won't use the letter "B" (because it stands for Bloods) or when they do write it, they cross it out. A "B" with a downward-pointing pitchfork drawn through it, and a "K" after it, stands for "Blood Killer."

Gangs in the People Nation, which would include the Bloods, wear symbols on the left side of the body, use a 5-pointed star or the number 5, and draw the pitchfork with tines down. The Bloods originated in Southern California to defend against the Crips of the Folk Nation. Opposite to their counterparts, Bloods will not use or will cross out the letter "C" and will wear the color red.

Gang mentality is "all for one, one for all." Six people might attack one person just because he is of another gang. Gangs demand strict loyalty and following the rules and will quickly punish insurrection, instigated by the established leader. MS 13, the largest Hispanic gang, may use a cross as a symbol, and meets near water. Their meetings may in some ways resemble a church service, with the leader exhorting the group while the others listen. Gangs provide:

- A sense of power and protection
- A code of morals (loyalty, retaliation)
- Identity

The presenter cautioned that parents should monitor their children's My Space entries to see what they have posted about themselves. Kids may identify themselves as Crips or Bloods or whatever, even posting pictures of themselves with gang symbols. At this point they may be gang "wannabes." Then adult gang members from outside of their area see these postings, come to where the kids live, teach them about gang membership and truly recruit them.

Grief and Foster Children

By Stephanie Tracy, LCSW

The recent holidays are shown on TV and movies as happy times for all. However, the reality of losses that all have experienced are in great contrast. Feeling grief does not disappear at this time of year. A child in foster care has endured many losses, most noticeably their parents and their homes. As you know, they have probably lived in many other homes besides yours.

The most common type of loss for children is moving. Children have fewer skills than adults to adjust to transitions. The pain of loss can come from an abrupt move or an unanticipated separation. These unexpected changes shatter existing emotional connections, often causing fear and intense emotional pain for the child. When loss is sudden and unexpected, there is much less time for the child to begin adjusting.

The pain from loss is also related to the nature of the relationship, the history of other losses, the vulnerability of the particular child, the support system available, and other factors. If separation takes the child away from the family and familiarity, he or she may experience a similar intensity of pain as if this were a death.

For most children, loss and fear go hand in hand. They do not know what will happen to them. And fear intensifies and complicates the other emotions associated with loss.

The fearful child cannot concentrate in school, will misinterpret comments, and will sometimes regress to immature behavior (a young child may start to bed-wet) or self-destructive coping behavior (a preadolescent may drink or experiment with drugs).

What can you do as a foster parent, even if the child is with you for only a day or two?

1. Tune into the child. Pay close attention to the content and mood of what he or she says, listen to his or her stories, and look at his or her drawings. The better you understand his or her feelings, the easier it will be for you to comfort the foster child in your home.
2. Allow the child to communicate his or her pain and bewilderment when ready. If you force the child, this may cause feelings to go underground.
3. Consider your own feelings of sadness to avoid discouraging a child's readiness to express his or her feelings.
4. Be sensitive to any inappropriate remarks or teasing from others.

While the foster child may not be in your home for a long period of time, you can become an important emotional bridge for the foster child who has experienced many losses.

Stephanie Tracy is a clinical social worker. She has experience with children in foster care, residential treatment and shelter care. She currently works with teens and families, couples and individuals in her practice in Winchester, VA. She is also a valuable member of our Community Council.

Stories: *I wanted to give you a very big thank you...*

All names in these stories have been changed.

Amy, a teenage girl, had gotten into an argument with her mother. Amy's dad intervened and ended up physically abusing the teenager. Amy felt that she needed some time away from home and did not feel comfortable with returning there immediately after being treated at the hospital.

CPS workers responded to the situation by offering a VEFC respite placement. The worker explained that VEFC families are volunteers who open their homes to children and teens in crisis and that Amy could remain in her parents' custody while in the home, which is what they decided on.

Amy came to the Monroe's the evening after having been in the hospital. Her face was red and swollen where she had been struck and her pants were spattered with blood, believed to have come from a nosebleed that occurred when she was struck. The hospital had given her a clean T-shirt. (The next day, Mrs. Monroe helped her to wash the blood out of her jeans, showing her how hydrogen peroxide works wonders on removing bloodstains.) The Monroe's gave her plenty of time to rest the next day, knowing she was exhausted from her ordeal. During the course of the placement, Amy explained that she and her mom were Christians and that they attended church together. Mrs. Monroe asked her if she would like to pray together for her family and she gratefully accepted the suggestion. Amy and Mrs. Monroe spent time cooking meals together and potting some plants to grace the deck. She remarked that she often helped her mom do the same thing and, as they talked, she found a number of similar interests between Mrs. Monroe and her mom, which helped her feel more at home. Mrs. Monroe explained to Amy that she did not have to talk about anything that happened in her home but, if she wanted to talk, Mrs. Monroe was available to listen. Amy was only with the Monroe's for a few days. The CPS worker came to visit with Amy and together they discussed a safety plan that the worker had already talked over with her parents. Amy returned home to her parents, and, sometime after, the Monroe's received a card from them sent by way of the DSS office. Amy's mom wrote in the card: *You don't know us but I wanted to give you a very big thank you for taking in our daughter Amy. It was the worst day of our lives. That was such a kind thing for you*

to do. We had hit bottom and we are now trying to pick up the pieces. We are doing better now. Amy and I are going to get counseling. Amy told me that you were very nice and loving to her. You have a very big heart and may God give you back ten folds of kindness that you are showing to others. You have made a difference in our lives and we will never forget the thoughtfulness and act of kindness you gave to us in such a dark time in our lives. Please keep us in your prayers. -She signed the names of all the family members.

VEFC families usually don't know the effects of the care they have given to children. To get feedback directly from the biological family is most unusual (and very welcome). This story exemplifies how much good can come from a few days care and should be encouraging to all VEFC families. You DO make a difference!

Jeremy, age four, was placed into a VEFC home because of chronic neglect. He came to the Anderson home one evening and was crying hard because he missed his mother. Eventually, they managed to help him calm down enough to get him to sleep.

Jeremy came to the Andersons so dirty that his skin was crusty from the filth; and, at only four year old, he had a strong body odor. He had only the clothes that he was wearing; his mother had no other clothing for him.

The Andersons, a gentle young couple with no children of their own yet, found Jeremy to be a very pleasant little boy. They were pleased to note that he was easy to get along with and complied when asked to do or not do certain things. He was used to eating only SpongeBob cereal and did not want other foods, not even a meal from McDonald's. By the end of his stay, he was enjoying a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, and he was much cleaner.

One day he accompanied Mrs. Anderson to Pennsylvania to a church gathering where he played with other small children in the room while the adults packed foods which were being sent overseas for a relief effort. He "helped" by pushing around some of the boxes.

At the end of his stay with the Andersons, Jeremy went to a long-term foster family.

Humor

Forrest Gump Goes to Heaven

The day finally arrived. Forrest Gump died and went to heaven. At the pearly gates, he was met by St. Peter himself. However, the gates were closed and Forrest approached the gatekeeper.

St. Peter said, "Well, Forrest, it is certainly good to see you. We have heard a lot about you. I must tell you, though, that the place is filling up fast, and we have been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short, but you have to pass it before you can get into heaven."

Forrest responded, "It sure is good to be here, St. Peter, Sir. But nobody ever told me about any entrance exam. I sure hope that the test ain't too hard. Life was a big enough test as it was."

St. Peter continued, "Yes, I know, Forrest, but the test is only three questions. First, What two days of the week begin with the letter "T"? Second, how many seconds are there in a year? And, third, What is God's first name?"

Forrest left to think the questions over. He returned the next day and saw St. Peter, who waved him up, and said, "Now that you have had a chance to think the questions over, tell me your answers."

Forrest replied, "Well, the first one: Which two days in the week begin with the letter "T"? Shucks, that one is easy. That would be Today and Tomorrow."

The Saint's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "Forrest, that is not what I was thinking, but you do have a point, and I guess I did not specify, so I will give you credit for that answer. How about the next one?" asked St. Peter.

"How many seconds in a year? Now that one is harder," replied Forrest, "but I think and think about that, and I guess the only answer can be twelve."

Astounded, St. Peter said, "Twelve? Twelve? Forrest, how in Heaven's name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?"

Forrest replied, "Shucks, there's got to be twelve: January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd..."

"Hold it," interrupted St. Peter. "I see where you are going with this, and I see your point though that was not quite what I had in mind. But I will have to give you credit for that one, too. Let us go on with the third and final question. Can you tell me God's first name?"

"Sure," Forrest replied, "it's Andy."

"Andy?" exclaimed an exasperated and frustrated St. Peter. "Okay, I can understand how you came up with your answers to my first two questions, but just how in the world did you come up with the name Andy as the first name of God?"

"Shucks, that was the easiest one of all," Forrest replied. "I learnt it from the song, "Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me I am His own." St. Peter opened the Pearly Gates and said, "Run Forrest, run!"

As a man strolled down a beach at sunset, he saw another man approaching. He noticed that the man kept leaning down, picking things up, and throwing them into the water. He did this time and time again. Getting even closer, he noticed that the man was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach. One at a time, he was throwing them back into the sea.

Puzzled, he said, "Good evening, friend. I'm wondering what you're doing."

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean. It's low tide right now and these starfish have washed up onto the shore. If I don't throw them back, they'll die here."

"I understand," he replied, "but there must be thousands of starfish on this beach, and all up and down the coast. There's just too many to get to them all. Can't you see, you can't possibly make a difference?"

The man smiled, bent down, picked up another starfish and, as he threw it back into the sea, said, "Made a difference to that one!"