



Staff Information

Karen Nolte
Executive Director
ext. 232

Rachel Neukirch
Director of Education and
Counseling Services
ext. 223

Sarah Boeker
Therapist
ext. 235

Trainers:

Geri Brotherton
Mark Goodwin
Joy Hughes
Gail Knipshild
Diana Meyer
Laverna Milberg
Lynne Phoomsathan

Dr. Maureen Taylor
Clinical Consultant

A Message from the Crew:

Whew! Another year has come and gone. It has certainly been a year of ups and downs.

Children's Home Society of Missouri has been providing service to the Saint Louis Community since 1891. Our mission to improve the quality of life for children in need continues to be the driving force behind all that we do.

During challenging times, agencies are often forced to limit their programs or even close their doors. It is with great pride that we tell you the doors of CHS remain open and we continue to be a strong and vital organization meeting

the needs of children and families every day. While the challenges exist, we are well positioned to address them now and in the future.

So as we entered this new year, please know that we are not going anywhere.

CHS staff are available to consult with you regarding sharing information with your child's school, to talk directly with school personnel, or to speak to your child's class about foster care and adoption. If you would like to receive this service, contact any of the Education and Counseling staff.

Sometimes we all need a little inspiration.

This issue is dedicated to reminding you why you choose, every day, to continue to love and nurture the children who need you. If you have a story to tell, please send it and we will include it in a future issue.

Don't Forget

Children's Home Society has an extensive collection of books and other resources available on various topics involved in fostering or parenting children through adoption. You are welcome to borrow any you would find helpful but please remember to return them when you finish so other families can access them.

Somewhere it is written that parents who are critical of other people's children and publicly admit they can do better are asking for it.

-Erma Bombeck

the steeper the mountain
the harder the climb
the better the view from the
finishing line...

Trading Places

When you came you were so small
You had hardly begun your life at all
We brought you into our home and hearts
With expectations of giving you a brand new start

All of our lives were a puzzle then
You were a puzzle piece needing a place to fit in
Your piece was welcomed
We remade our puzzle for you
And in loving you we all grew

With tears and thanksgiving we watched you grow
Until now your life is something we knew
So completely from first minute to last
We cannot believe so much time has passed

And now they say it is time for you to go
Unknowing how it hurts us so
But puzzles always must be put up
And breaking the pieces apart must be done

Now look what has happened
See what God has done
You once were a piece in our puzzle
Filled with smiling faces
Now we are a piece in yours
We have traded places...

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before i was a mom

Author: Unknown

Before I was a Mom
I never tripped over toys or forgot words to a lullaby.
I didn't worry whether or not my plants
were poisonous.
I never thought about immunizations.
Before I was a Mom - I had never been puked on.
Pooped on. Chewed on. Peed on.

I had complete control of my mind and my thoughts.
I slept all night.
Before I was a Mom I never held down a screaming
child so doctors could do tests.
Or give shots.

I never looked into teary eyes and cried.
I never got gloriously happy over a simple grin.

I never sat up late hours at night watching a baby
sleep.
Before I was a Mom I never held a sleeping baby just
because I didn't want to put them down.

I never felt my heart break into a million pieces when I
couldn't stop the hurt.
I never knew that something so small could affect my
life so much.

I never knew that I could love someone so much.
I never knew I would love being a Mom.
Before I was a Mom - I didn't know the feeling of
having my heart outside my body.

Children need love,
especially when they do
not deserve it.

-Harold Hulbert

Human beings are the only creatures on earth that
allow their children to come back home.

-Bill Cosby

WELCOME TO HOLLAND

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I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability - to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this.....

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip - to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. The Michelangelo David. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say. "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a

horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower-paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around.... and you begin to notice that Holland has wind-mills....and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy... and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away... because the loss of that dream is a very very significant loss.

But, if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things ... about Holland.

My child is not a label

By Denise Ulman

My child is not a label.

My child is a person in their own right.

My child is a breathing, thinking, loving human being.

I have accepted that you need to assign labels, but only because the labels may help to explain my child's differences. That does not make my child that label, and that label makes my child no less a person than any other person on this earth.

Do not look at that label first, look at my child first.

Do not try to understand my child by only that label.

Look further to understand my child by gazing into my child's eyes and listening to what my child has to say, no matter what form my child's communication may take.

My child may not communicate in a way that you understand, but that does not mean that my child can not communicate.

It may not always be easy to understand what my child has to say, but if you persevere you will find the effort well worth the reward of getting to know my child.

Forget the label and let my child teach you who he/she is.

denise@springmeade.com June 1999

**Listen to your child's behavior.
It will lead to a solution.**

-Heather Forbes

Grown-ups never understand anything for themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

-Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The Woman in the Mirror.....

By Cheryl Veenstra February 2001

I saw an unfamiliar face in the mirror today. She caught my eye as I rushed to start the day. I hardly recognized this woman. What had changed in her eyes? She was no longer young, naive and viewing the world through rose-tinted glasses. What had caused the worry lines and thoughtful brow? How could she look so fragile and weary, yet also determined and strong? Around some corner on the road of life.....she had been shaken to the core of her very being.

There was a time when only tears and fears were reflected in those eyes. A doctor's unexpected words, the future suddenly uncertain.....gray, shadowy images of the vague and scary concept of her child labeled in the world as "disabled".

An incredible journey began that caught her by surprise and would take her places she never thought she would go. The journey had been long at times and she had shed tears of pain and tears of joy. She'd had hopes and dreams dashed in the blink of an eye. She'd asked the question WHY?

She'd had friends fail her and not know what to say or how to help. She'd seen her child suffer. She'd cried silent tears into her pillow at night. Tears of exhaustion and fear. Tears of helplessness and longing. Tears of thankfulness and relief. Tears that are choked back during the day, but are unleashed like floodwaters in the safety of the night to wash away any walls being built up to protect her heart. Nights of worry blurring into days of endless responsibility.

But then slowly, but surely, her broken heart begins to heal and mend.

The same pity she had once felt as she watched a mother hold her 'special child' close was now looking back at her in the eyes of strangers. But a smile tugs at her lips as she suddenly realizes that now she knew the secret! The hard-fought, carefully guarded secret that was slowly revealed in the depths of her heart.....but only after the tears and anguish of the first days and weeks of this new life. The illusive truth that mothers of special children discover as they take their first faltering steps down this new pathIt was okay. She and her child could survive, even thrive!

It was not as grueling and unforgiving a road as she had imagined. The fog, confusion, despair and fear were being slowly replaced by peace, acceptance, contentment, joy and gratitude. A mother's unique, unconditional love changes the equation that may look hopeless and tough from those outside, looking in. She will fight for, live for and die for her child.

These special children transform those around them into different people. Stronger people. Dare I say it.....deeper people. Long gone are the days when all they had to worry about was where to vacation or what color mini-van to buy. They now struggle with life and death medical issues. They must answer their child's questions about life's unfairness and pain. What remaining strength and energy they have is spent trying to make their 'family life' as normal and happy as possible.

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To My Foster Child

If I knew it would be the last time
I would be there to share your day,
I'm sure you'll have so many more
so I can let this one slip away.

There will always be another day
but maybe I am wrong?
For who knows what tomorrow brings,
I have to be so strong.

We had to live everyday,
not knowing if you'd leave
And praying to our God above,
That he too would believe,

That you were right where you belonged,
with a large, loving family.
But that all changed so quickly,
it seems unreal to me.

If I knew it would be the last time,
that I would hold you oh so tight,
I would have let the cleaning go,
and held you with all my might.

So if you're waiting for tomorrow,
why not do it today?
For if tomorrow never comes,
your chance has slipped away.

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One of the greatest gifts you can
give to your children is your own
self-understanding.

-Heather Forbes

After a while you learn the subtle difference
between holding a hand and chaining a soul.

And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and
company doesn't mean security.
And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts
And presents aren't promises.

And you begin to accept your defeats with your
head up and your eyes open.
With the grace of an adult, Not the grief of a child.

And you learn to build all your roads on today,
because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for
plans and futures have a way of falling down in
mid-flight.

After awhile you learn that even sunshine burns if
you get too much.

So you plant your own garden and decorate your
own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring
you flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure...
That you really are strong
And you really do have worth,
and you learn and learn...
With every good bye you learn.

All children must look after their own
upbringing.
Parents can only give good advice or put
them on the right paths,
but the final forming of a person's
character lies in their own hands.

-Anne Frank



CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY

OF MISSOURI

9445 Litzsinger
Saint Louis, MO 63144

(314) 968-2350

www.chsmo.org

*Improving the Quality of
Life for Children in Need
Since 1891*



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A twinkle returns to the eyes of the woman in the mirror as she takes a deep breath and remembers what she's been fighting for. How very worthwhile this journey has been! This child is an incredible gift and it is a privilege to be given the task of raising her. Her child is beautiful and perfect in her eyes. She longs for her child to be seen by the world through this filter of love, acceptance and potential. Could others take the time to see past this little girl's slower steps to see the life and love reflected in her eyes? Would her child be able to see herself through the filter of contentment that the woman has journeyed so long to discover?

Hope was rekindled as the woman's eyes grew brighter. The future remained uncertain, but the

incredible, protective love she felt for her child threw a warm blanket over the cold, dark storm clouds that used to threaten her very soul.

As she threw open the doors of her heart, she felt the warm sun on her face and she beheld a beautiful rainbow of intense beauty and unmistakable peace. Hope still comforts this woman who cries in the middle of the night.

Love gets her through each day. Faith takes her hand and leads her around each corner and through each deep, dark valley. Peace soothes her heart as she relinquishes control of their destiny to One wiser and all knowing. Joy brings laughter and smiles to those tired eyes once again. Each day is recognized for the gift it is.