

You have joined room: Lobby

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Barbara_Rall: This chat is for people who want to discuss issues of search and reunion in adoption

Barbara_Rall: This chat will be followed by the foster care chat hosted by Janis Nietzer and Janet Farrand

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Janis has joined.

Barbara_Rall: Hi Janis, thanks for joining the chat

Janis> Hello!

Barbara_Rall: Janet F. has said she will try to join us as well

Janis> I spoke with her earlier and she was planning to join in

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Barbara_Rall: I do have some news to report, although you may know about it already

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Janis> Hi Janet, just talking about you!

Barbara_Rall: Oh, okay

Barbara_Rall: Hi Janet, welcome to the chat

Janet_Farrand> Hi everybody sorry I'm a little late.

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Janis> As someone who has fostered for many years, I can truly appreciate the need to have time to recharge batteries!

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Janet_Farrand> Foster and Adoptive Family Services continues to advocate for just that. If we can keep kids out of foster care, that is wonderful. Getting treatment should not automatically mean giving up your child to relatives or foster care.

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Barbara_Rall: It would be wonderful if mothers could have foster care along with their kids. My experience has been that many of them have not been adequately parented themselves

Janis> Keeping the lines of communication open, in whatever ways the foster parent is comfortable - through letters, etc.

Janet_Farrand> I think it is really important for prospective foster parents to realize they need to support the birth parent bond. If you are trying to do that you can think of many creative ways to do so.

Janis> The foster parent can actually be a mentor for the birth parent, particularly as the time for reunification approaches

Janet_Farrand> I don't mean that all foster parents must meet the birth families, although in almost all instances I have meet those of my children (although I don't identify myself by last name).

Barbara_Rall: Janis, if foster parents can do that, it's extremely helpful

Barbara_Rall: Birth parents often feel demonized

Barbara_Rall: Even when parental rights are terminated and the child moves on to adoption, it's important to stress the good qualities of the birth parents

Janis> There are many to do this, along a continuum of contact from letters to phone calls to face to face meeting - every situation is unique and what is comfortable with one person in a particular situation may be different for another person

Janet_Farrand> As much as you love the child in your home, your best gift to them is to make their return home successful (and the majority return home). So you need to look at it that for the child's sake (even if you personally disagree with the reunification plan) you need to strengthen that bond.

Janis> Very true

Barbara_Rall: I can imagine though that it must be hard if you disagree with the reunification plan

Janet_Farrand> You don't have to agree, and can tell the caseworker, law guardian, CASA, etc. why you disagree in an appropriate manner. However, even if you disagree, you need to expedite visitation and communication between parent and child

Barbara_Rall: Of course you must help with visitation and communication. I was thinking about the emotional aspects for the foster parent

Janet_Farrand> If the child returns home, you've done everything possible to make it work between the parent and child....that is the goal here. If they are truly unfit, maybe that will come out during one of the visits. Visitation is just so essential.

Barbara_Rall: I agree about visitation. Sometimes foster parents get frustrated if the child comes back distressed after a visit, but I think the work is to help the child process the feelings, not stop the visits

Janet_Farrand> It is very difficult to be working towards a plan you think is bad for your child. But you have to think how much worse it will be to send home your foster child to parents they don't know anymore, or who don't know him.

Janet_Farrand> You can make sure they know he is afraid of monkey's, or allergic to strawberries, and give them all the lifebook information as it occurs, so they still truly know their child.

Janis> Many folks ask why visits continue when birth parents may not have done those things asked of them. However the purpose of visits is to maintain the relationship between parent and child, not as a reward for the birth parents

Janis> Lifebooks are one of my favorite parts of fostering. Creating a book that helps a child and their birth family know who that child was - their likes and dislikes, personality, developmental milestones, etc.

Barbara_Rall: have you seen the lifebook info on adoption learning partners web site?

Barbara_Rall: It's really well done and a course you can take for free

Janis> No I haven't, I will need to check it out

Janet_Farrand> It can be difficult to deal with sending a child on a visit and having them come home bouncing off the walls. I had a toddler whose parents kept giving him red koolaide in a bottle. He'd be bouncing off the walls, he was ADHD and I think red dye set him off more than the sugar.

Barbara_Rall: there is a link on the njarch web wite

Barbara_Rall: I think some kids have loyalty issues that get stirred up when they have visits. it can cause acting out when they get back to the foster home

Barbara_Rall: I want to thank you both for joining us tonight.

Janis> It was a pleasure

Barbara_Rall: I'm just sorry there weren't more people here to benefit from your experience

Janis> Setting aside time is hard for folks

Barbara_Rall: We will make a copy of the transcript and post it on the web site so others can read it when it's convenient

Barbara_Rall: I'll close the chat room now.

Janet_Farrand> Not sure I have the hang of this yet, seem to be behind you two all the time, but enjoyed the experience.

Janis> Bye bye!

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Barbara_Rall: I want to thank you both for joining us tonight.

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Barbara_Rall: I'm just sorry there weren't more people here to benefit from your experience

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Barbara_Rall: We will make a copy of the transcript and post it on the web site so others can read it when it's convenient

Barbara_Rall: I'll close the chat room now.

Janet_Farrand> Not sure I have the hang of this yet, seem to be behind you two all the time, but enjoyed the experience.

Janis> Bye bye!

Janet_Farrand> byeYou have joined room: Lobby
Welcome!

Barbara_Rall: Welcome to the search and reunion chat. I'm sorry we were disconnected

Barbara_Rall: This chat is for people who want to discuss issues of search and reunion in adoption

Barbara_Rall: This chat will be followed by the foster care chat hosted by Janis Nietzer and Janet Farrand

Barbara_Rall: xxx

Barbara_Rall: xxx

Janis has joined.

Barbara_Rall: Hi Janis, thanks for joining the chat

Janis> Hello!

Barbara_Rall: Janet F. has said she will try to join us as well

Janis> I spoke with her earlier and she was planning to join in

Barbara_Rall: I hope we have others as well. We have done a lot of e-mail publicity

Barbara_Rall: I do have some news to report, although you may know about it already

Janis> I know. It is hard for folks to make room in their schedules, and for busy parents, to be sure to remember to sign on at the right time!

Janis> What is the news?

Barbara_Rall: NJARCH has submitted a number of workshops to the DYFS training academy for approval

Barbara_Rall: I hope to hear from them soon. It will mean that individual groups can host the workshops and their members will get training credits

Barbara_Rall: Don't you sit on the committee with Fran Gervasi?

Janis> Yes, I was aware of that. I believe the committee is setting up the criteria they will use to grant approval for in-service trainings, and then the Training Academy will be reviewing the materials you submitted.

Janis> I am sure NJARCH trainings will receive approval

Barbara_Rall: Things seem to grind slowly at the training academy

Janis> Everything takes time, and I think with the reform being back on the table, some things are moving slower than we would like because energy is being invested in other areas

Barbara_Rall: I gave the transracial workshop for 55 people in Sayreville under the auspices of Catholic Charities. They got approval for it. Once the workshop has been submitted two or three times, you'd think it could be permanently approved

Barbara_Rall: I think this budget impasse between the governor and the legislature will have some impact on the reform progress as well

Barbara_Rall: It's hard to do any planning when you don't know how much money will be available

Janis> True - we are all waiting to see what is going to happen

Barbara_Rall: Someone who is in a position to understand these things thinks the state government will be shut down

Janis> Wow

Barbara_Rall: At least for a day or two.

Barbara_Rall: Of course, Monday is a work day and Tuesday is a holiday. Perhaps they can come to a compromise this weekend

Janis> We once traveled to the Steamtown USA in PA only to find that the federal government had shut down all the state parks and historic parks for the day due to the budget crises of several years ago

Barbara_Rall: Anyway, let's talk about foster care

Janis> Ok

Janis> If Janet doesn't come on soon, I'll reach out to her

Barbara_Rall: I've been meeting some very dedicated people as I travel around the state doing workshops. I'm really impressed by their desire to help the children in their care

Janis> I meet many many wonderful folks as well in chairing our local Volunteer Committee of FAFS

Barbara_Rall: Janet had some minor surgery this morning and may not feel up to coming on. I told her we'd understand if she couldn't make it.

Janet_Farrand has joined.

Janis> Surgery was postponed to another day

Janis> Hi Janet, just talking about you!

Barbara_Rall: Oh, okay

Barbara_Rall: Hi Janet, welcome to the chat

Janet_Farrand> Hi everybody sorry I'm a little late.

Barbara_Rall: I'm hoping some other folks will join us. We sent out about 100 e-mail reminders about tonight

Barbara_Rall: I was telling Janis I've been doing lots of training for resource parents and I've met some really dedicated people

Janet_Farrand> I can see I'm a real novice at this. I wrote a response to your first line, when your second line came up.

Barbara_Rall: What do you two see as the biggest challenges for resource parents?

Janis> I think one of the biggest challenges is developing a support network for your family

Barbara_Rall: Don't worry about responding too slowly, sometimes conversations can leap frog across responses

Barbara_Rall: Do you think some folks don't know about the FAFS groups?

Barbara_Rall: they seem like a great resource

Janis> Fostering puts many demands on a family - meeting the needs of the children in your care, balancing those needs with the needs of your immediate family, work, schooling, etc. etc

Janis> I think many folks do not know the support they can get from their local FAFS volunteer committees, others find it difficult to make the time to attend.

Barbara_Rall: I imagine baby sitting is a problem for some people

Janis> True, also evenings can be filled with after school activities, homework, housework for those who work full-time, etc. etc. etc.

Barbara_Rall: What kind of services would you like to see available for resource families? What really would help retention?

Janet_Farrand> Being a foster parent should be as easy (or hard) as being a parent to your biological children. And, in lots of ways it is. But, most children in foster care return to their biological parents or other relatives. So while you need to love and care for the children in your home, you need to keep

Janis> Child care is always a need - whether during working hours or for respite time. But also there is a need for support services for families - training in a variety of modalities (on-line, classroom, video, etc.) to help folks learn to meet the needs of children in their care, counseling services at

Janis> Also there is a need to have the opportunity to speak with others who are dealing with many of the same issues - who understand your frustrations and joys

Janet_Farrand> I agree. Respite is thought of vacationing without the children, which it can be. But respite is a time for parents to recharge their batteries, on occasion, and can be much needed.

Janis> And, of course, it is important to feel like an integral part of a team working toward the best interest of the children you love and care for.

Barbara_Rall: the same as needing a weekend away from your bioi kids from time to time.

Janis> As someone who has fostered for many years, I can truly appreciate the need to have time to recharge batteries!

Barbara_Rall: Janis, what do you think has kept you going all these years?

Barbara_Rall: Janet, I would ask you the same question

Janis> The children

Janis> Plus I have been fortunate enough to have a wonderful support network in my husband, my mother, and a few friends I have met over the years.

Janis> And a general optimistic nature - I am always sure things will get better

Janet_Farrand> That is exactly correct. I believe children in care should be treated the same as all other family members, and that would naturally include taking everybody on the family vacation. However, a really difficult child may necessitate a short break from the nuclear family, to keep the placement intact

Janet_Farrand> I keep typing too long messages, how many lines are you allowed? I am not a very good chat room person!!!

Barbara_Rall: It's better to type short lines and just do two or three separate entries

Barbara_Rall: You can continue your thought in the next entry

Janet_Farrand> We have fostered for 17 years and adopted twice. We had a very rough first experience.

Barbara_Rall: Was it a challenging child, or being beginners or both?

Janet_Farrand> He was drug exposed and premature. I had started going to my county foster parent support group right after finishing my pre-service training.

Janet_Farrand> So, I had support of other foster parents right from the beginning. It was essential, I took notes at training but didn't know anything. I thought the caseworkers would call me during the first week to see how the baby was doing!!

Janis> My first experience was also rough - we took in two brothers, ages 2 and 4. My birth children were 3 and 5 - and I found myself quickly overwhelmed! I did not have the support yet of other foster parents, and the placement lasted only 2 weeks with us.

Janet_Farrand> We had very large and healthy sons, and were a bit scared of a 4 pound 10 oz premature baby. Other foster parents were a huge resource and support to us. We got involved with our local right away. As we saw how the system didn't work efficiently, we had to get involved in trying to improve it.

Janet_Farrand> The tough part was parting with our little guy after three years. He was/is our third son, who doesn't live with us. Today, with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, I believe he would not have returned home.

Barbara_Rall: He probably would have stayed with you. Do you know how he is doing?

Janet_Farrand> After 17 years I have seen improvements, although there is so much that needs to be made better.

Janis> For me, the Foster Care Unit at DYFS was very understanding of our inability to continue to care for those first two boys. They discussed our needs as a family, and the type of children we could care for, and the next little girl placed with us fit right in.

Janis> I think having that first child leave to return home can be very difficult for folks, and is probably a time when the greatest support is needed.

Barbara_Rall: It can work the other way as well. I have been having contact with a birth mother who lost her parental rights not due to abuse. She is desperate to learn if her child is okay.

Janet_Farrand> He is going to be 17 this year. We worked with his family prior to his return home and stayed in touch after it. He visited with us a lot, until they moved to the deep south. We still see him, but rarely.

Barbara_Rall: Basically it was a case of her not being able to get her life together in a timely way. I think permanency is very important for kids they can't stay in the system an inordinate amount of time. It's not good psychologically

Janet_Farrand> Unfortunately, things have not gone that well for him and his family, but we remain in contact and try to support him. It is the most difficult thing we have tried to do in foster care.

Barbara_Rall: Janet, that must be very painful

Janet_Farrand> ASFA is a good law, but it can result in some parents losing children they would have reunited with under past laws. I believe the error must be on finding permanency for children, not in hoping a birth family will get their act together. Prior to ASFA children were in care for 4 years, before gua

Barbara_Rall: I've been getting a number of calls from people who have completed DYFS home studies, but only want a child who is legally free. What can I do to help them try foster care

Janis> I don't know - fostering takes the ability to commit 100 percent to a child, knowing they may and probably will reunify with family

Barbara_Rall: I agree with you about ASFA, kids can;t wait for parents to get it together, but it was hard to explain that in an empathic way to the woman who calls from time to time

Janis> the vast majority of children do return home. I think it is a decision a family must truly consider, because otherwise we will be breaking their hearts again and again

Janet_Farrand> I tell folks in that situation that they want children in their lives. Try foster care, it might work out, if not, they have helped a child in need and God has somebody else in mind for their forever family.

Janis> That's true Janet

Barbara_Rall: I think it's particularly hard for childless couples

Janis> I do tell folks that many many people choose not to foster, because they fear losing the children

Barbara_Rall: Especially if they've been through a lot of infertility treatment

Janis> However, throughout our lives, we enter into relationships with no guarantees about the future

Janet_Farrand> Regarding your birth mom, my heart goes out to her. After 17 years of caring, I have more empathy for birth parents than ever before.

Janis> Many folks can not imagine going on after a child leaves, however I can not imagine my life these past 17 years without having met all these wonderful children. Each has brought something unique and wonderful to our family

Janet_Farrand> I believe people must be responsible for themselves, and adults can't expect their children to wait for them to get their acts together. But some people have had such a tough time of it. You could see how your own life could have been different if you'd had to walk in their shoes.

Barbara_Rall: I don't think my birth mom has ever been able to grieve the loss.

Janis> It must be unbelievable difficult to lose a child

Barbara_Rall: Ann Paice at DYFS in Trenton told me the other day that she gets letters from women in prison whose parental rights were terminated because of the length of their sentences, not because of abuse or neglect.

Janet_Farrand> Yes, the mandatory drug sentencing laws has increased the female prison population and resulted in some of New Jersey's increase in children in care over the past years.

Barbara_Rall: I've been thinking about whether there was a way to offer some kind of support to DYFS birth mothers.

Janet_Farrand> I have heard of some groups who help birth mothers in prison, work on better visitation, ways of keeping the bonds going between child and parent.

Barbara_Rall: So much of this issue is drug related and while I don't condone drug abuse, my heart goes out to them, We need more mother child treatment centers

Janis> That is absolutely true. Often the waiting time for treatment keeps children in care longer

Janet_Farrand> Foster and Adoptive Family Services continues to advocate for just that. If we can keep kids out of foster care, that is wonderful. Getting treatment should not automatically mean giving up your child to relatives or foster care.

Janis> As foster parents, we can help to promote a positive relationship between the child and the birth mom or dad in several ways

Barbara_Rall: It would be wonderful if mothers could have foster care along with their kids. My experience has been that many of them have not been adequately parented themselves

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