Mental Health Needs of Youth in Foster Care

By Lisette Austin

When life becomes chaotic and feels like it is falling apart, it is easy to feel alone and depressed. And when you are an abused or neglected child who has been separated from family and shuttled from home to home, the feelings can become incredibly overwhelming and isolating—perhaps even spinning out of control. For many in foster care, the result of this kind of emotional trauma is the development of a mental health disorder. They find themselves in a system that is ill-equipped to provide the mental health services they need and that can further impede their progress towards emotional well-being.

According to the World Health Organization, nearly 20% of children and adolescents worldwide suffer from some type of emotional or behavioral problem. The U.S. Surgeon General reports that roughly 1 in 10 American children experience a mental illness severe enough to cause significant impairment. The prevalence of mental health problems of youth in foster care is even more staggering. “Anywhere from 40 to 85% of kids in foster care have mental health disorders, depending on which report you read,” says Stephen Hornberger, director of behavioral health for the Child Welfare League of America.

The reasons for these high numbers are understandable. Children in foster care are struggling to cope with the traumatic events that brought them into care, including parental abuse or neglect, homelessness and exposure to domestic violence and substance abuse. While they struggle to deal with the tremendous loss of their family, they also frequently blame themselves for being removed. Many children long to return to their families, regardless of the history of mistreatment. At a time when they desperately need a sense of consistency and stability, they are living in the uncertain world that is foster care: multiple placements, unpredictable contact with family and the inability to control their own lives. These conditions can be a hotbed for serious emotional disturbances.

Although it is clear that a large number of children and youth in foster care are in need of mental health care, studies show that less than one-third receive mental health services. One of the reasons is the lack of experienced mental health professionals available to this population. “There is a shortage of well trained providers who can deal specifically with loss issues,” says Dr. Toni Heineman, clinical psychologist and executive director of A Home Within, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping meet the mental health needs of children in foster care. Heineman adds that a recent, informal survey revealed that only 3% of mental health providers work with children in foster care. Those that do are often inexperienced trainees unfamiliar with navigating the child welfare system and only available for one year. “Being abused, neglected and removed from their family are extraordinarily painful experiences for these kids,” she says. “Put them with people who aren’t well trained and it can be an overwhelming experience for both parties.”

I went to my first therapist at age 12. At the time, my life was filled with chaos, and I didn’t know who to talk to or how to handle it. My dad was in jail, my mother and I weren’t talking, and in a little more than a year, several family members had died. All the feelings I had began to build up inside, and I felt like I was drowning in my emotions. Sometimes I would cry like a baby. Other times I’d feel angry and confused.

I didn’t trust anyone, especially my family, and I thought people were saying negative things about me. I started to disrespect my elders, steal, stay out late, and fail in school. Things got so bad that I was sent to two different group homes. At the homes I pretended to feel better about myself, but being there made me feel like more of a failure and like I didn’t deserve to live.

“They are often self-medicating.”

Hornberger of CWLA agrees, adding that some disorders are overlooked because of the belief that parental neglect is less detrimental than abuse. “Research shows that neglect can actually have more long-term effects compared to the abuse cases,” he says. “Just because kids are quiet doesn’t mean that they are well.”

Additional system challenges include lack of collaboration between providers and parents (both foster and biological), lack of continuity of care due to multiple placements, budget cuts that further limit access to trained providers, lack of routine mental health assessments and unmet mental health needs in family members. “I would say that the system has certainly had difficulty addressing the complexity and severity of mental health needs of these kids,” says Hornberger. “We are failing them in all jurisdictions.”

Pockets of Hope

With these circumstances, it is understandable that many who are involved in child welfare can end up feeling frustrated and helpless. But there are pockets of hope—people and organizations that are brainstorming and implementing solutions that could ultimately serve as guideposts for communities across the country.
Non-Violent Crisis Intervention will be offered in Salmon Arm in June

**Non Violent Crisis Intervention – Core Training**

Tuesday morning, June 3 from 9 AM - 12 PM,

AND Thursday morning June 5 from 9AM - 1PM

in the Library at the Downtown Activity Centre

This training provides an understanding of effective communication during moments of escalating aggressive behavior, along with the core philosophy of maintaining care, welfare, safety and security. This is training that’s highly recommended for Foster Parents whether you have children who are physically aggressive or not, and we’re able to offer it at no charge, thanks to funding from Okanagan Foster Parents Association.

(There will however be a $20.00 charge for the training manuals.)

On completion you will receive certification from the Crisis Prevention Institute. **Contact Kathi to pre-register @ 250-832-0462**

**Note:** Foster Parents are never allowed to restrain children in care unless they have taken this training and restraint is part of the child’s Plan of Care.

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**BBQ**

for Foster Parents & MCDF Staff!

Friday June 6, 2008 at Marine Park, (By the Wharf)

Mark your calendars and bring the Kids.

For more info contact

Dianne Gamblin @ 250-804-2648

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**Okanagan Foster Parents Association**

Annual General Meeting will be held in Kelowna, May 3rd - Saturday, at the Best Western in the Art Gallery, 11:30am to 12:30pm, lunch included. If you would like to attend please let me know so they can plan accordingly for the meals.

**Foster Parent /MCDF Partnership Meeting:** Foster Parents representatives meet with MCDF staff to discuss issues of concern. If you have something you’d like discussed at the next meeting contact Grant Smith @ 250-835-0133

Or Kathi Fischer @ 250-832-0462

The next meeting dates are: Tuesday, May 27, 2008 at 12:30 pm. Wednesday, June 18, 2008 at 12:30 pm
BCFFPA Conference and Annual General Meeting

May 30 and 31, at Sun Peaks Resort outside of Kamloops.

There are some great workshops planned for this event - and it’s a wonderful opportunity to network with Foster Parents from throughout the province. Even the meetings are interesting, so plan to attend. If you haven’t received a package in the mail, contact Heather Bayes for details.

The BCFFPA Interior Macro Region board is pleased to announce that the 3rd Interior Region AGM will be Friday, May 30, at 7:00 pm. It is scheduled to coincide with the Provincial BCFFPA AGM at Sun Peaks Resort. And there’s a special “deal” for Foster Parents from the Interior:

Your Interior Region Board was successful in securing funding to assist Foster Parents in the Interior Region with relief costs to attend these meetings. There is also some money available for expenses. Please contact Heather Bayes at hhbayes@telus.net or phone 250 838-9361 for details.

Camp for Kids Grants:

BCFFPA offers grants to members in good standing to send their foster/birth/adopted children to camp. Apply by May 31. Details available at www.bc fosterparents.ca.

NEW to the Library

Many educational DVDs now available. Call me if you want an updated library list.

Recommended Reading...

Depression, Anger, Sadness: a resource developed by Youth Communications, that address the topic of mental health issues faced by teens.

The teens in Depression, Anger, and Sadness candidly describe facing difficult emotional problems and what they did to try and help themselves. Because these writers not only describe their problems and fears but also the various ways they have tried to help themselves, their stories will help teens to face and better understand their own emotions.

Website Facelift

Okanagan Foster Parents Association wants to dress up our web site www.okfosterparents.ca with some photos. If you have photos to “donate” to the web site please send them to NOIsupport@okfosterparents.ca (this is to Noelle who is the coordinator in the North Okanagan, she handles the OFPA Website). We’d like photos of children, youth or families, BUT NO PHOTOS OF CHILDREN/YOUTH IN CARE, and they must be photos that you can give permission to post. No names will be included.

Passport Reminder

Plan ahead! It usually takes up to 8 months to get a passport for a child in care; in some cases it has taken a year.

Call the Health Nurse

If a child joins your family who is under 6 years old, please call Public Health Nursing at (250) 833-4100. They will check that immunizations and screenings are up to date.

The OPFA Website

has an assortment of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) info sheets regarding relief, alternate care, life books, emergencies, money, documenting and reporting, support workers, and levels of care. You can access them and many other helpful documents at www.okfosterparents.ca.

Children’s Books

If you have not checked out the new CFK website you’ll really be surprised at what you find there! www.communityforkids.ca

Things to Remember

Webinars

www.bcfosterparents.ca

Dates to Remember

Salmon Arm Foster Parent Association meets the third Tuesday of the month in the lower level of St Joseph Catholic Church at 90-1st St, S.E. in Salmon Arm

• Tuesday May 20, 2008 at 10:30am
• Tuesday June 17, 2008 at 10:30am

Coming in June

Building Bridges “Round Table Discussions” to forge strong and positive relationships between Foster Parents & Social Workers, in order to successfully co-parent the children in our care.

For More Information Contact Grant Smith 250-835-0133 Dianne Gamblin 250-804-2648

Pre-school Story Time held at the Okanagan Regional Library on Wednesdays

• Wednesdays @ 10:30am & 1:30pm in Salmon Arm
• Wednesdays @ 10:30am in Sorrento

Baby Talk is a drop-in group for all parents with children from birth to 12 months, to learn about parenting babies and networking with other parents of infants. It’s offered at Salmon Arm Health Unit @ 851-16th St, NE in Salmon Arm, and held every Monday from 1:30 - 3:30 pm. Contact Public Health Nursing at (250) 833-4100 for more information on this group and find out about upcoming groups as well.

The Shuswap Foster Parent Information Center offers a variety of programs to support families and children. Contact them to ask about their Parenting Workshops and Social Skill Groups for Kids.

Contact the Family Resource Centre at their new location at 181 - Trans Canada Hwy (the old Re/Max building) in Salmon Arm, or call 250-832-2170 for more information on these and other programs that they offer. Okanagan College Courses for Kids began hosting a support group for Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren. The group’s popularity with area grandparents demonstrates the increasing need for these types of services.

Consistently, two of the biggest issues grandparents identify are the huge changes in lifestyle they face, and the difficulty of letting go of their dreams and plans for retirement. Through mutual support, encouragement and information-sharing, these grandparents are working hard to provide the best possible environments for their grandchildren.

Contact The Shuswap Family Resource Centre at 250-832-2170 for more information on Grandparents raising Grandchildren.

Recommended Reading...

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Coordinators Notes:
It seems that everyone is finally breathing a sigh of relief, Spring is finally here!
One of things I delight in most about the arrival of spring is hearing the giggles and chatter of children on the streets as they burst forth with an exuberance of energy. It’s as if the world has awakened from hibernation, and is a time of new growth and renewal; not just for the natural world, but for all of us. It’s a time to step out of the routines that have become familiar to us through the winter months, and connect with the things that bring greater enjoyment into our lives. It helps to refocus on what’s important in life and a time to reconnect and appreciate the people who contribute to our lives.

So I challenge you to shift your perspective, just a bit, away from the hecticness of our families’ schedules and incorporate some gentler more playful time into your week. It’s amazing how rejuvenated and refreshed we feel; and when we return to the “have to” tasks & timelines of our daily lives we can tackle them with renewed energy. Everyone benefits. It’s usually those spontaneous and simple fun times that children remember the most.

The warmer weather has arrived at last, everyone ENJOY!

Kathi Fischer

Happy Mother’s Day to all the Foster Mom’s out there!

“Before you were born, your parents weren’t as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you thought you were. So before you save the rain forest from the parasites of your parent’s generation, try delousing the closet in your own room.”

Bill Gates (addressing high school students)

Children’s Science Exam Answers
If you need a good laugh, try reading through these children’s science exam answers (they deserve some credit for originality and innovation)

Q: Name the four seasons.
A: Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.

Q: Explain one of the processes by which water can be made safe to drink.
A: Flirtation makes water safe to drink because it removes large pollutants like grit, sand, dead sheep and canoeists.

Q: How is dew formed?
A: The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

Q: How can you delay milk turning sour? (brilliant, love this!)
A: Keep it in the cow.

Q: What are steroids?
A: Things for keeping carpets still on the stairs.

Q: What happens to your body as you age?
A: When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.

Q: How are the main parts of the body categorized? (e.g., abdomen)
A: The body is consisted into three parts – the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain; the borax contains the heart and lungs, and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels A, E, I, O, and U.

Q: What is the fibula?
A: A small lie.

Q: What does ‘varicose’ mean? (I do love this one...)
A: Nearby.

Q: Give the meaning of the term ‘Caesarian Section.’
A: The Caesarian Section is a district in Rome

Q: What does the word ‘benign’ mean?
A: Benign is what you will be after you be eight.

Any Foster Parent interested in taking the Safe Babies course, it’s being offered in Vernon from May 13-June 3, 2008; contact Noelle Typusiak, Foster Parent Coordinator for the North Okanagan, at 250-558-0939 for more information.

Ya’ gotta’ love the face on the dog!

Photo Submitted by Val McLean
Info from MCFD

Here’s a general overview of the role and function of the Teams at MCFD

**Intake:**
The Intake Team investigates child protection concerns, assesses situations that put children at-risk, and ensures their safety by implementing and developing safety plans. The Intake Team is usually the first to hear of child protection concerns in the community, and offers the Family Development Response and Family Group Conferencing models as case management options that use less intrusive means to eligible families. The Intake Team Leader is Barbara Hay.

**Youth:**
The Youth Team provides integrated services to youth 14+ and their families, and offers youth justice programs that are managed by probation officers. The Youth Team also provides supports to youth in-care, conducts investigations, and works with community partners such as Youth Outreach Workers and Community Safe-bed Homes to keep youth in our community safe. The Youth Team Leader is Tami Lund.

**Resources, Family & Child Services:**
The Resources, Family & Child Services Team provides services to children and families involved with MCFD, works in collaboration with foster parents to place children in foster care, and also provides guardianship and adoption services. The Resources, Family & Child Services Team Leader is Holly Connor.

**Child & Youth Mental Health:**
CYMH is a multi-disciplinary team that works in coordination with other professional agencies in the community to provide a range of mental health services. These include direct clinical services in liaison / consultation with community agencies, community education, and program development and evaluation to address the mental health concerns of children and youth. The CYMH Team Leader is Alison Nadeau.

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A note from: Bonnie Thompson, Okanagan Foster Parents Association 250-498-4109.

**FREE MONEY!**
I have had a few inquiries regarding the money to attend the BCFFPA Annual General Meeting on May 30th and 31st, and I now have some more information regarding that. The BCFFPA has a certain amount of money available to people who want to attend the AGM. They will take that money and divide it by the amount of people applying and you could get a maximum of $250.00 per family. To receive this you must be a member of the BCFFPA for 30 days previous to the meeting, so if you are not a member you don’t have much time to do that. To check out the agenda for the AGM or to get an application form for membership go to www.bcfosterparents.ca. On that note, the Macro Region of the BCFFPA has $200.00 per family available for child care while you are at the AGM. To get this you must phone me and I will pass your name on. This is on a first come first serve basis.

More Free Money!
Foster Parents should have a current First Aid/CPR Certificate and OFPA wants to help you get yours, they will contribute $25.00 towards the training. Contact Kathi for details @ 250-832-0462

Check for classes in your area by calling the Okanagan College in Salmon Arm (804-8888) and) or St. John’s Ambulance in Vernon (250-545-4200).
INFANT DEATHS LINKED TO UNSAFE SLEEP PRACTICES

VICTORIA – In 88 per cent of sudden infant deaths recently reviewed, one or more unsafe sleep risk factors was identified, and the Child Death Review Unit of the BC Coroners Service is urging parents and caregivers to ensure infants are placed to sleep in a safe environment.

Last week, the unit completed the review of 33 sudden infant deaths, most of which occurred in 2005-2006.

"In 29 cases, we found evidence of at least one, sometimes multiple, unsafe sleep practices," said Kellie Kilpatrick, director of the Child Death Review Unit. "Bed-sharing was the number one risk factor, and while we know that in a small number of cases, infants die suddenly during sleep with no explanation, these 29 cases demonstrate the critical need to educate parents and caregivers on how they can reduce the risks of preventable deaths."

This is consistent with a preliminary review of infant deaths that occurred in 2007, which confirms that unsafe sleep practices continue to be risk factors seen in sudden infant deaths. These practices include unsafe sleep surfaces (adult beds or couches), unsafe sleep environments (bed-sharing, extraneous items including blankets and/or toys) and unsafe sleep positions (on stomach or side). The Child Death Review Unit’s (CDRU) full report on sudden infant deaths 2003-2007 will examine the trends seen in over 110 cases of unsafe sleep and is expected to be released later this year.

The CDRU supports and encourages parents and caregivers to follow the Canadian Pediatric Society’s recommendations on infant safe sleep environments, which were also included in the CDRU special report Infant Deaths 2003-2004, including:

1. • For the first year, an infant should sleep alone on its back in a crib that meets the Canadian government safety standards;
2. • Bed-sharing carries an increased risk of death for infants under one year of age, particularly if the mother is tired, sedated, under the influence of intoxicants and/or overweight;
3. • Room-sharing with an infant who has his own sleep surface is protective and preferable to bed-sharing;
4. • Waterbeds, couches, futons, air mattresses and "makeshift" beds should not be used;
5. • The sleep environment should be free of loose bedding, pillows, soft materials and bumper pads;
6. • Car seats and infant carriers should not replace the crib as a sleep surface. Safety harnesses may lead to increased risk of airway obstruction; and
7. • Exposure to cigarette smoke should be eliminated both before and after birth.

For more information on infant safe sleep practices, see the Canadian Pediatric Association website, www.cps.ca/english/statements/CP/cp04-02.pdf.

The B.C. Coroners Service is responsible for the investigation and review of all child deaths. It makes recommendations to improve public safety and prevent death in similar circumstances.
British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations Membership

Please complete the below form and return to: Cindy Davies, Membership Coordinator, Salmon Arm FPA
At: 1550 – 13 St, S.E., Salmon Arm, BC  V1E  2G5

NAMES: ___________________________________________ EMAIL: ___________________________________________

PHONE: ___________________________ ADDRESS: ___________________________ CITY: ___________________________ P/C: ________

MACRO REGION – INTERIOR REGION – OKANAGAN LOCAL ASSOCIATION – SALMON ARM

* THIS IS A NEW MEMBERSHIP   ☐ * THIS IS A RENEWAL MEMBERSHIP ☐

MEMBERSHIP (JANUARY-DECEMBER):
1 YEAR SINGLE @ $30.00  1 YEAR COUPLE @ $35.00
2 YEAR SINGLE @ $50.00  2 YEAR COUPLE @ $60.00

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO SALMON ARM FOSTER PARENTS ASSOCIATION
(Note: The Provincial BCFFPA for administration of the program & development of services to foster parents will use $10.00 of this membership fee. The balance of the fee remains in your local association to support foster parents in your region).

I/We contract with ________________ (ie MCFD, delegated agency, regional agency, etc.) OR my affiliation with the BCFFPA is ________________, (ie staff, MCFD, non-foster parent, etc.). As members of the BCFFPA, I/We agree to abide by the Bylaws, Policy and Procedures, and Code of Ethics of the Federation.

_________________  ____________________  ________________
(Signature)  (Signature)  (Date)

Please Join Us For

ROOTS Celebration

“Five Year Anniversary”
June 13, 14, 15 2008
Armstrong Fair Grounds

Camping sites will be Available for the weekend

“The Whole family is welcome!!

There will be, Entertainment, Craft tables for all different Nations, Aboriginal dancers and Drummers, Elders, learn some Traditional games

For more Information: Contact Sheila (250 215-8210
Tanya Helton – Forest Cottage Centre
Workshop: Responding to Attachment Disorder

Tanya Helton, M.Sc. is a parent coach and owner of Forest Cottage Centre Inc. which is an attachment-based support centre for parents and professionals dealing with severe behaviour in children. Headquartered in Fort St. John, BC, Forest Cottage provides services to parents, social service agencies, professionals, and educators across Canada. Tanya’s passionate presentations and empathetic support are well-recognized by all who have worked with her, making a long-term difference in her clients’ lives. She has three adopted special needs siblings and one adopted child.

This workshop is sponsored by The Okanagan Foster Parents Assoc. and the Penticton Foster Parents Assoc. It will be of interest to foster parents, adoptive parents, social workers, teachers, child care workers etc. Check out Tanya’s website at: www.forestcottagecentre.com

The workshop will include: An Introduction to Attachment and Bonding
- Symptoms of Attachment Disorder
- Understanding the Needs of Families
- Understanding the Child’s Perspective
- Behavior Strategies
- Long Term Planning – Getting the Help You Need

Wednesday, June 11, 2008
Okanagan University College-Theatre
583 Duncan Ave. West, Penticton
9 AM- 3PM “Ask the Expert”- question period to follow- 3-4 pm

Cost: Foster parents (MCFD & CLBC) $15
Others: $60 till May 31st, $75 after May 31st

Space is limited so book early to avoid disappointment. Lunch is provided.
Parking is free in the student parking areas.

To register please send payment to: Betty Bogyo 1787 Fairford Drive, Penticton, BC V2A 6C7. (checks made out to Penticton Foster Parents Assoc.)
For more information contact Betty Bogyo 250-488-0561 or email: betty_bogyo@telus.net.

Registration for workshop, Tanya Helton, June 11, 2008, 9am-3pm, doors open at 8:30am.

NAME______________________________________
ADDRESS___________________________________ Ph #_____________________________
ASSOCIATION_______________________________Email address: ____________________