



Therapeutic Information Education Support

Summer 2006

Kids & Families Together Launches “Partners in Permanency”

Through the truth and beauty of the old African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child,” Kids & Families Together has come to understand that it takes the commitment of child welfare, community-based organizations, and many caring families and individuals dedicated to the well-being of a child to bring him or her safely into responsible adulthood.

That is why we are pleased to announce that we have launched **Partners in Permanency** to provide services and support to families that have come together through foster care, kinship care, and/or adoption. Through contracts with the VC Human Services Agency and the Ventura Community College, K&FT now provides the following programs:

FOSTER PARENT MENTORING — Some of Ventura County’s most experienced foster parents offer new foster parents the opportunity to learn from their experiences and challenges as they parent and navigate the often complex child welfare system.

SUPPORT, EDUCATION & TRAINING —

In-home education and training by supervised educators, interns and trainees who have specialized knowledge and training in subjects

of interest and relevancy for caregivers of children who have suffered trauma, loss, grief, multiple placement changes and being prenatally exposed to drugs and/or alcohol.

CLINICAL CASE MANAGEMENT — Family driven, in-home support program for pre and post adoptive families, as well as guardianship and kinship families. K&FT’s professional team works with the family to design supports that will integrate and celebrate



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Kinship Identification & Outreach

Kinship is a legal or informal relationship created when children are cared for primarily by relatives other than their biological parents. Most often this is created between children and their grandparents, but may also include aunts, uncles, brothers or sisters. Sometimes the kinship caregiver is a close family friend or neighbor. Census 2000 revealed that there are over 20,000 such children in Ventura County. With funding from The California Endowment, Kids & Families Together is looking to identify Kinship families to provide them with information on services and support systems that are available. If you believe that we could be helpful to a Kinship family please provide us with their contact information or let them know about us. Visit the Kids & Families Together website for updated information on our programs & services or to register for our T.I.E.S. Newsletter.

A Message From Our Board President

Tom Archbald, MFT

A few months ago, an acquaintance of mine mentioned that a boy in her kindergarten class never smiled, never looked directly at anyone, and never spoke. He was living with his grandfather, she added, because his mother had “disappeared” after leaving a note saying she was going away and not coming back.

I immediately went into outreach mode: I sent her a stack of brochures (enough for every teacher in the school), wrote on a post-it note the names and numbers of people to call so she didn't actually have to read the

brochure, and told her I'd call her in a week to see how things were going.

Doing this felt good for several reasons: 1) I was offering real and immediate help; 2) the help I was offering had the structure, expertise, leadership, and emotional support necessary to help this boy and his grandfather; and 3) I felt part of an organization in which children and their families can begin to heal from terrible, repeated trauma & abuse and can learn to have healthy, consistent, and safe familial attachments for the rest of their lives.

Last week, the teacher reported to me that the boy had stood up with

the rest of his class at “graduation” exercises with a smile on his face from ear to ear, a smile that was returned by the grandfather sitting in the audience. According to her, both of them had been seeing Faith and Mick for the last few months at Kids & Families Together. She said the changes were “miraculous.” I reminded her that the so-called miracles were brought about by a combination of hard work, expertise and love.

May this work continue. May this organization grow and strengthen itself as we help our clients and families do the same for themselves.

Book Review

The Jonathon Letters: One Family's Use of Support as They Took in, and Fell in Love With, a Troubled Child

by Michael Trout & Lori Thomas

Reviewed by: Shaina Sadler, Family Support Specialist

The Jonathon Letters is a compilation of e-mail correspondence between Lori Thomas, a foster-adopt mother and Michael Trout, a specialized therapist experienced in attachment issues. The exchange of letters tracks the struggle of this particularly persistent and persevering family as they take in a deeply wounded four-year-old foster boy with a history of trauma and loss. These letters record the story of the joys and pains of parenting a child that brings with him challenging, mysterious, and at times heartbreaking behaviors that

manifest in children with Attachment Disorder - incessant lying, aggression, withdrawal, manipulation, defiance, and rage, among others.

The Jonathon Letters illustrates how one family maintains in the face of multiple regressions as Jonathon's progress unfolds in a tortuous pattern of one step forward, three steps back. Through the Thomas' determination and ability to draw upon external supports, Jonathon's growth and healing become evident as he allows himself to be loved for the first time. Lori speaks candidly on her own inter-

nal struggle, her vulnerabilities, and her pain as she takes a risk in welcoming this wounded child into her family. Her devotion, diligence, and unique ability to keep perspective, while simultaneously living through the gut wrenching ups and downs of Jonathon's transformation, offer hope for all foster, adoptive and kinship families who find themselves at a loss with the challenging behaviors of their child.

Available for checkout from our K&FT Library!

Get Connected: VC's 2-1-1 Helpline

2-1-1 is an easy-to-use, three-digit telephone number that connects people with community services and volunteer opportunities throughout Ventura County. 2-1-1 offers access to resources such as:

- Basic human needs: food, clothing and shelter
- Physical and Mental Health
- Drug and Alcohol Intervention, and Rehabilitation
- Employment Support
- Support for older Americans & persons with disabilities
- Legal Aid
- Programs for kids

This free, confidential service is a Division of Interface Children Family Services and is available 7 days a week in multiple languages.

You Can Help!

Much of our support for things such as our “free” lending library and outreach to the community comes through the generosity of our donors. Kids and Families Together is a California not-for-profit organization tax exempt under IRC Sec. 501c(3). We appreciate any financial assistance that you may give us.

Next Issue:

Kids & Families Together's new Mobile Outreach & Support Center!



Having Faith

By Faith Friedlander, MFT—K&FT Programs Director

Dear Faith,

Five years ago, my husband & I adopted our granddaughter Brenda after our daughter Rita committed suicide. Brenda doesn't know how her mother died and I'm not sure how to discuss it. Their relationship was often strained and tumultuous due to Rita's mental illness. How should I approach the subject?

It's not unusual to worry about what to tell your adopted child about her past. However, it is absolutely necessary to be honest. Children are not “protected” by lies, omissions, or distortions. If the truth is revealed in the future due to a search or an accidental discovery, a serious rift in the parent/child relationship may occur- a rift which may not be easy to repair with an apology or explanation.

I recommend not waiting until she is eighteen because that is often a time of transition out of the home, leaving her vulnerable to sorting out painful thoughts and feelings on her own. Starting sooner gives your child the advantage of an emotionally and physically available parent.

Look over family pictures together and make it a safe time to revisit memories of her mother. Talk honestly with her about the suicide. Give her lots of empathy and don't try to talk her out of her feelings. Make sure she understands that the suicide is not her fault. Depending on her age, she might express anger, denial, or may be scared that other loved ones might die too.

If talking about these issues feels overwhelming for you, I encourage you to find a therapist to help you talk with your child about issues related to adoption, grief and loss. I also encourage you to seek support for yourself as this process may bring up your own feelings of grief around the loss of your daughter.

About Us

Kids & Families Together is a not-for-profit organization that offers a safe, supportive resource, education, and counseling center where families and the community can meet and share information regarding foster, kinship, and adoptive care.

OUR MISSION is to strengthen relationships and provide safe, supportive help and education that keeps families emotionally connected to one another.

NEWSLETTER STAFF

—EDITOR—

Leticia Sandoval

—GRAPHIC DESIGNER—

Carrie Dittmar

CONTACT US

Kids & Families Together
856 E. Thompson Blvd.
Ventura, CA 93001
(805) 643-1446
FAX (805) 643-0271
www.kidsandfamilies.org
connect@kidsandfamilies.org



"Our Center"

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family members, as well as provide information related to parenting skills, topics such as birth family, normative developmental states and attachment. Clinical Case Managers will provide appropriate referrals and linkage to other family-serving community partners on an on-going basis, as well as provide crisis stabilization and follow-up as needed.

PRE & POST ADOPTION THERAPY

— Traditional therapeutic interventions are often ineffective with children who have been in the child welfare system and have issues such as loss, grief, attachment and/or have been prenatally exposed to harmful drugs and substances. K&FT therapists have specialized training in Theraplay® and Dyadic Development Psychotherapy, two models of family-cen-

tered therapy, which have been recognized for their efficacy with attachment disordered children.

CREATING PERMANENT

CONNECTIONS — provides professional staff support to interview and help facilitate a "permanent" connection for Ventura County foster children and their identified adults as mentors and potential life-long connections.

It is our intention to provide integrated programs that will provide a seamless circle of support that will compliment our county's child welfare professionals and stabilize our families as they navigate through the often tumultuous developmental stages of raising a child who has experienced early trauma or multiple losses.

Opportunities for Education, Understanding, and Support at Kids & Families Together

COUNSELING ORIENTATION

If you are interested in therapeutic services for your foster, adoptive, or kinship child, join us for an informal orientation which includes: an overview of K&FT's Clinical Programs & therapeutic treatment models: Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Theraplay®, an introduction to Attachment, recommended reading materials, as well as, tools and ideas to help facilitate a loving connection between you and your child.

KINSHIP SUPPORT GROUP

The challenges for kinship families are on-going and often frustrating. Meet other kinship caregivers and receive the support you need to help your family thrive!

FOOD SHARE PANTRY

A variety of food items are available, at no cost, to emancipated youth and kinship families.

Please call Kids & Families Together for more information!