

You are invited to join a **Circle of Support** group for Foster, Kinship, and Adoptive Parents.

These groups meet monthly in all five boroughs. Please join us to learn new information, and have the opportunity to discuss topics that are important to our families. Free dinner and childcare is provided.

Brooklyn:

Bed-Stuy: Audrey 718-783-3797/Yolanda 718-735-8466

Bushwick: Janet 718-573-6654/Queenie 718-452-5038

Canarsie: Betty 718-241-6168/Jill 347-715-6926

Crown Heights: 212-676-6935

Downtown Bklyn: Lourdes 718-596-2035/Gwen 718-484-3709

Flatbush: Nivia 718-675-4504

Bronx:

Concourse Village: Henrietta 718-992-9362/Grace 718-295-2391

Mott Haven: Leatrice 718-379-4739/Carol 718-993-4225

Kingsbridge: Dorothy 718-884-4452/Nancy 718-275-8769

Manhattan:

Central Harlem: Angela 212-426-0983/Stephanie 212-788-2906

Morningside Heights: Gladys 212-280-2286/Veronica 212-665-5741

LGBT: Shawnese 718-529-2532/Greg 718-210-3191

Queens:

Jamaica: Diane 718-712-3874

Long Island City: Minerva 718-726-7063/Nilsa 718-908-8844

Queens Village: Daisy 718-712-6990/Barbara 718-776-1250

Staten Island:

Karen S. 718-273-2805/Audrey 212-676-6941

www.circleofsupport.org

Circle of Support is organized and run by Foster and Adoptive Parents living in our community, in partnership with the NYC Administration for Children Services. Participation is open to Foster and Adoptive Parents from all agencies.

nyc
ACS

NYC Administration for
Children's Services

150 William Street 5th Floor
New York, New York 10038

POSTAGE

COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS: If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this issue, please contact Natalie Hunt 212-676-7586, Natalie.Hunt@dfa.state.ny.us, or Diane Dunk 718-712-3874.

Special thanks to Diane & Natalie.



CIRCLE TIMES

CIRCLE OF SUPPORT MISSION:

To promote a positive environment for foster, kinship, and adoptive parents by increasing the level of community support through networking, building partnerships, and information sharing.

FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES **SPRING** ISSUE 2005

A Quarterly Newsletter Published in the Significance of Foster/Adoptive Parents



Commissioner's Message

Perhaps the most important lesson I've learned in more than 20 years as an advocate for children and families across

this country is that every child needs and deserves a strong family. Those families can come in many different forms, but above all, they're defined by the bonds that exist between adults and the children they care for — and vice versa. Children thrive when they get the attention and nurturing they need today to put them on the road to success and stability tomorrow. Their lives are enriched immeasurably by the adults who welcome them into their hearts and homes, just as the lives of foster and adoptive parents are often made more meaningful by the children with whom they share their lives.

These are things you likely already know as a foster or adoptive parent. As a father of two, I know both what a challenging and rewarding job it is to be the person a child relies on for their most basic needs and emotional support. I thank you for taking on this role, and for making a place in your life for a child who needs you.

Just as every child needs and deserves a strong family, every family deserves to have the support it needs to be strong. Programs like Circle of Support are one way that ACS is working to ensure that families like yours have the resources they need to deal with the challenges they face. Moving forward, my goal is to be certain that Children's Services builds new networks of support and broadens those it already has in place for people like you who are reaching out to touch the lives of children. I firmly believe that we need to develop new ways to be there for our families, so that you can continue to be there for our children.

Again, thank you for choosing to make a child a top priority in your life. I hope that now that we've been introduced, you will feel free to offer me your feedback and counsel.

Best Wishes,

John Mattingly

Commissioner

MINERVA RIVERA *Foster and Adoptive Parent*

Minerva Rivera's journey to becoming a foster parent began when she was just a little girl.

"I always knew that I would do this someday," said Minerva.

As a child, Minerva was placed in foster care because of an abusive family situation. After seven years in the system, she found refuge in the home of her aunt and uncle. "They saved me," said Minerva. "They listened to me and gave me a future. I don't know what I would have done without them."

Minerva's childhood experiences inspired the passionate calling of her adult life. She wanted other foster children to know the love that comes from being part of a caring family. In addition to raising her own three daughters, she is a foster and adoptive parent to eight children, ranging in age from 2 to 18. Her house in Long Island City, NY, is a warm place of joy that these children happily call home.

Minerva recalls how her foster care agency was desperately looking for homes for teenage girls. "I never really thought about caring for teenagers," she said. "At first I was terrified, but I remembered how it was for me in the system. Adolescence is a special time. Teens especially need love and attention. I talked it over with my girls and we agreed to try it. Now, I can't imagine my life without them."

Marquita, age 16, was one of the young girls placed in Minerva's care. "We do lots of family things together. She always makes it fun," said Marquita. "She's the first foster parent I was ever honest with — I guess because I know that as a kid she went through many of the same things I am dealing with now."

Honest, candid communication is at the heart of Minerva's success as a foster mom. Every Friday night is "Therapy Night," where the family talks about what happened during



Minerva Rivera, continued on page 2

REFLECTIONS OF A TEEN

Lynette Roberts came into care when she was three years old, due to her birth mother's substance abuse and inability to care for her. Lynette was first placed with her maternal grandmother, with whom she lived until she was seven. But Lynette's maternal grandmother became very ill and had to be hospitalized for a long time, and was unable to care for her; subsequently, she was placed in the home of her godparents. Lynette reports that through foster care she was able to meet and socialize with other children. Reflecting on her 16 years in the foster-care system, she feels there needs to be better communication between the agencies, foster parents and caseworkers. [Lynette is now 19 and is preparing herself for adulthood. She presently attends Medgar Evers College and works part-time.]

—Lisa West-Durham



Minerva Rivera, continued from page 1

the week, share their feelings and help solve each other's problems. "Getting teens to sit down and talk to you takes patience and persistence," said Minerva. "Once they believe you are really there for them, they start to open up and share their emotions."

Minerva also volunteers as the leader of her neighborhood's "Circle of Support" — a monthly support group where foster, adoptive and kinship parents gather to exchange ideas, share resources and build supportive friendships.

Like many of her other foster children, Minerva recently adopted Marquita. "I am so happy to be fulfilling my life's dream. I get so much love in return," said Minerva. A few years ago, the children gave their mother a surprise 40th birthday party complete with a Betty Boop theme — her all-time favorite cartoon character. "We are a real family — there are no distinctions between adopted, foster or biological child in this house. Everyone helps each other."

RAISING KIDS WITH CHARACTER

Adolescence is a time when teens become aware of changes in their bodies, their lives and their personalities. They need to separate from their parents and find their own identities. Children as well as adolescents need to secure their independence in order to develop positive values and positive lines of communication between them and their parents.

Have compassion. Discipline gently. Teach by example. Be available. Most of all, listen with not only your ears but with an open HEART!

—Diane Dunk

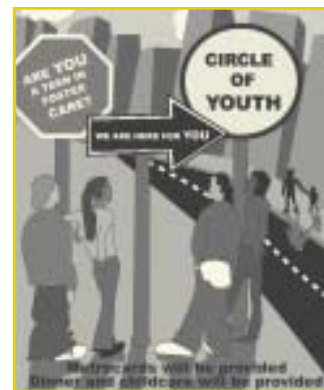
BIRTH PARENT PERSPECTIVE

Carol Frances' son was conceived through rape four years ago. At the time of his birth she was abusing drugs to deal with her rape. When her son was 13 days old he was placed with a foster family. Today, Carol refers to his placement in foster care as the best thing that could have happened to her and her child.

Carol's son was placed with a loving foster family. They cared for him until he was 1½ years old. The foster family opened their home not only to her son but also to Carol, allowing her the opportunity to visit her son almost daily. While her son was in their care, Carol followed all the necessary steps to get him back. She could have reunited with her son when he turned one; however, because she knew he was in a loving home, she postponed their unification until she had stable housing.

The bonds between Carol, her son, and the foster family remain tight; the foster parents are now her son's Godparents. They babysat while Carol attended school and obtained her CASAC (Certified Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor) diploma. Carol is grateful to her son's foster family; as she noted, "They did the job that at the time I was unable to do. God blessed me truly."

—Kara Egan



CIRCLE OF YOUTH
718-726-7063
Natasha & Marquita

Circle of Youth is a support group for foster and adopted youth. Participation is open to youth 13-21 including those who have aged out of care.

Mission: To provide a comfortable environment where young adults and adolescents in foster, adopted, kinship, and congregate care settings can come together to learn about their rights, express their feelings, set a positive example, and help each other achieve goals.

Purpose: Meet other foster and adopted youth. Learn about information and programs. Discuss topics that are important to youth in care.

Admission is free
Meal and childcare provided
Metrocards provided

TODAY'S FOSTER CARE —Your Love Will Make All the Difference in Their World

The Administration for Children's Services launched the **Today's Foster Care** campaign in May 2003 to help recruit and retain foster parents. The campaign was designed to communicate the ongoing need to find qualified foster families. The messages were focused on reaching potential foster parents living in the highest need communities. Hopefully, you saw some of these advertisements on television, radio, newspapers, outdoor billboards, or posters which were distributed throughout the community by Circle of Support members and other volunteers.

Overall, the results have been quite good. When the advertising was running, the ACS Hotline received 63% more calls than usual from people interested in becoming foster and/or adoptive parents. Among people who saw the campaign, it significantly improved their attitudes toward foster parenting, the need for more foster parents and their perception that overall the New York City foster-care system is doing a good job. Best of all, it looks like the campaign successfully increased the number of certified homes by as much as 18% during the winter of 2004. Based on these positive results, ACS expects to continue advertising for new foster parents in the future.

Even with all the improvements, there is still an urgent need to find new foster parents, especially those interested in working with teenagers and large sibling groups. Today, about half of the 18,826 New York City children in foster care are teenagers. Many live in group homes, but what they really need are loving families. These young adults are looking for guidance and stability...a role model, just like you. So, if you or someone you know can provide a loving, supportive environment, a home with commitment, tolerance, patience and love, then you can enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences. Open your heart and home...become a foster parent for a teen. Call the hotline for information on how to get started: 212-676-WISH.

TIPS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

- 1) Share positive information about the child, such as report card grades or a child's achievements in sports, school activities, or church. This kind of information sharing keeps the communication positive between you and the caseworker. Of course, this type of information should be shared with the child's parents as well.
- 2) Consider the caseworker a resource. Don't hold back from asking questions about services, community resources, foster parent groups, training activities and other ways in which the caseworker can be helpful to you. Don't be afraid that the caseworker will think you can't cope on your own; rather, think of yourself as taking responsibility for the situation by taking advantage of opportunities.
- 3) If the caseworker calls you to discuss a problem, try to stay calm and listen. The more defensive you are the less likely you will be able to hear what is being said or respond effectively. Be aware that it may not be easy for the caseworker to make this kind of call. Trust that the workers have good intentions.
- 4) If you call the caseworker first, frame your concern in terms of, "This is a problem that we need to address together." Realize that by alerting the worker to a certain problem, you are taking responsibility for the situation.
- 5) When bad news needs to be communicated to a child, talk to the caseworker about who should deliver it. Sometimes it is better if both of you talk to the child at the same time.

WATCH

The Adopting Teens & Tweens Show every Thursday at Noon and 8pm

- If you live in Brooklyn and have Cable TV: Channel 68 – Cablevision & Channel 35 – Time Warner
- If you do not live in Brooklyn and/or do not have Cable TV: watch or listen online at www.bcat.tv/bcat and click on Television #2 under the words BCAT Live Stream

LISTEN TO

The Adopting Teens & Tweens Radio Forum, a live call-in show, every Sunday from 8-9pm

- 1240 AM on your dial, if you live in Nassau, Queens, parts of Brooklyn, and Western Suffolk
- Listen online at www.am1240wgbb.com

Youth Out From Under
 Y.O.F.U.

Self-Awareness Evening Program

Youth/Young Adults 12+

Tuesday & Friday 6:30-8:30PM

Grace United Methodist Church
 125 W. 104th Street, NY, NY