

Spring 2015

# Advisor

NEWSLETTER

## Featuring

7 Ways to Foster  
Creativity

What a child  
or youth can  
expect from a  
lawyer

## Plus

A Foster Mom's Story

April is Autism  
Awareness Month

Prevent a fire in your  
home



SASKATCHEWAN  
FOSTER FAMILIES

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Have you ever considered being a foster parent and don't know how to get started?



SEARCH FOR...  
"Saskatchewan Foster Families Association"  
on YouTube.



**SASKATCHEWAN  
FOSTER FAMILIES**

233 4th Ave South  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
S7K 1N1

Phone: (306) 975-1580  
Fax: (306) 975-1581  
Toll Free: 1-888-276-2880  
E-mail: [sffa@sffa.sk.ca](mailto:sffa@sffa.sk.ca)



## PAGM

**Provincial Annual General Meeting  
Radisson Hotel Saskatoon, Michelangelo A  
Saturday, June 13, 2015 @ 8:30 am**

*For an updated schedule of events visit us online at <http://www.sffa.sk.ca/provincial-annual-general-meeting/>*

## Training

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association will be travelling the province this year offering training to foster parents in groups. If you have some ideas of the types of training you would like please contact Wayne at (306) 975-1528 or [wayne@sffa.sk.ca](mailto:wayne@sffa.sk.ca). While the topics vary widely here are ideas:

- Grief and Loss
- Helping A Child Control Anger
- Lifebooks



## Holidays

To avoid disappointment contact your resource worker to let them know in advance before you plan a holiday if you intend on taking your foster children with you. Certain financial allowances are available to foster parents.

## When should I call for support?

Being a foster parent isn't easy, but it is rewarding. It is important to know that you have support when you are struggling. If you have questions about policy, case planning or need support with investigations or quality of care, know that you are not alone. There are many different people who can support you and answer any questions that you may have. **We are in need** of PRIDE co-trainers,



# A Message from the Chairman of the Board

The Provincial Board of Directors and participants from across the province finally had the opportunity to meet to discuss and provide input into our strategic plan in early March. Our initial session in November was postponed due to weather.

Our approach with planning took a bit of a different view. The key focus of the strategy was directed more towards recruitment and retention. In an effort to have fresh ideas, the Provincial Board of Directors included foster parents from various points across the province. In addition, we invited a guest speaker to talk to us about the future foster parent, often referred to as "millennials." The intent of this discussion was to help the planning attendees to understand the "misunderstood generation" which is where our future foster parents will most likely come from.

We then spent time in digging deeper into strategies around the recruitment and retention categories of our strategic plan. The digging deeper portion of the planning began to look at ideas focused on SIX STEPPS. You will recall a brief discussion



“ We invited a guest speaker to talk to us about the future foster parent, often referred to as "millennials."

about these STEPPS from previous communications. *Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, Stories*. A commitment has been made by all participants to meet again in June to continue working with the Board of Directors in mapping out the strategic direction of the organization.

The two-day meeting also included a presentation and discussion with Mark Dolan of WMCZ Lawyers, experts in Board Practices and Governance Procedures. Mark educated the board and guests on what a Non-Profit Corporation was the role of bylaws, role of the board and what good governance is. He pointed out the statutory and common law fiduciary duty of the board of directors to act in the best interests of the corporation, the SFFA.

There will be more communication in this regard moving forward. The good news is that much of the foundation of governance has been established, but our policies, constitution, bylaws do need some attention. Implementing the changes will take time and will be phased in over time.

In closing, a reminder that this year's Provincial Annual General Meeting will be held on June 13, 2015 in Saskatoon at the Radisson Hotel. If you would like more information, please call the Provincial Office at (306) 975-1580.

Regards,

*Kevin Harris*



The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association wishes to credit the Saskatchewan FASD network for use of their material in our article entitled "Recognizing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder" which appeared on pages 10 through 12 of our Winter 2014 Advisor newsletter.

## SFFA's Board of Directors:

CHAIRPERSON  
Kevin Harris

DIRECTORS  
Tara Switenky  
Christine Fullawka  
Herman Goertzen  
Konota Crane  
Tim Adams



## We need your e-mail

We are now sending e-mails to our foster parents on a monthly basis. To be added to our list and receive the latest news, please send your e-mail address to [wayne@sffa.sk.ca](mailto:wayne@sffa.sk.ca) — THANK-YOU!



# 7 Ways to Foster creativity in kids

“Cover your walls with art and other evidence of creative expression.”

Many people assume that creativity is an inborn talent that their kids either do or do not have: just as all children are not equally intelligent, all children are not equally creative. But actually, creativity is more skill than inborn talent, and it is a skill parents can help their kids develop.

Because it is a key to success in nearly everything we do, creativity is a key component of health and happiness and a core skill to practice with kids. Creativity is not limited to artistic and musical expression—it is also essential for science, math, and even social and emotional intelligence. Creative people are more flexible and better problem solvers, which makes them more able to adapt to technological advances and deal with change—as well as take advantage of new opportunities.

Many researchers believe we have fundamentally changed the experience of childhood in such a way that impairs creative development. Toy and entertainment companies feed kids an endless stream of prefab characters, images, props and plot-lines that allow children to put their imaginations to rest.

Children no longer need to imagine a stick is a sword in a game or story they've imagined: they can play Star Wars with a specific light-saber in costumes designed for the specific role they are playing.

Here are some ideas for fostering creativity in your kids:

**1. Provide the resources they need for creative expression.** The key resource here is time. Kids need a lot of time for unstructured, child-directed, imaginative play—unencumbered by adult direction, and that doesn't depend on a lot of commercial stuff (see this post about unstructured play).

Space is also a resource your kids need. Unless you don't mind creative messes everywhere, give them a specific place where they can make a mess, like room in your attic for dress-up, a place in the garage for painting, or a corner in your family room for Legos.

Next time someone asks for a gift suggestion for your kids, ask for things like art supplies, cheap cameras, costume components, building materials. Put these in easy-to-deal-with bins that your kids can manage.

**2. Make your home a Petri dish for creativity.** In addition to creative spaces, you need to foster a creative atmosphere.

Solicit a high volume of different ideas, but resist the urge to evaluate the ideas your kids come up with. At dinnertime, for example, you could brainstorm activities for the upcoming weekend, encouraging the kids to come up with things they've never done before. Don't point out which ideas aren't possible, and don't decide which ideas are best. The focus of creative activities should be on process: generating (vs. evaluating) new ideas.

Encourage kids to make mistakes and fail. Yes, fail – kids who are afraid of failure and judgment will curb their own creative thought. Share the mistakes you've made recently, so they get the idea that it is okay to flub up. Laughing at yourself when you blow it is a happiness habit.

Celebrate innovation and creativity. Cover your walls with art and other evidence of creative expression. Tell your kids all about your favorite artists, musicians, and scientists. Share your passion for architecture or photography or that new band you want to listen to all the time. Embrace new technologies like Twitter so your kids grow to find change exciting, not overwhelming or intimidating.

**3. Allow kids the freedom and autonomy to explore their ideas and do what they want.** Don't be so bossy. (If that isn't the pot calling the kettle black, who knows what is.) Stop living in fear that they are going to be kidnapped or not get into a great college. Statistically, the odds are very low that they'll be kidnapped, and I'm here to tell you that I'm not a happier person because I went to an Ivy League school.

External constraints—making them color within the lines, so to speak—can reduce flexibility in

thinking. In one study, just demonstrating how to put together a model reduced the creative ways that kids accomplished this task.

**4. Encourage children to read for pleasure and participate in the arts.** Limit TV and other screen time in order to make room for creative activities like rehearsing a play, learning to draw, reading every book written by a favorite author.


**5. Give children the opportunity to express “divergent thought.”** Let them disagree with you. Encourage them to find more than one route to a solution, and more than one solution to a problem. When they successfully solve a problem, ask them to solve it again but to find a new way to do it (same solution, different route). Then ask them to come up with more solutions to the same problem.

**6. Don't reward children for exhibiting creativity.** Incentives interfere with the creative process, reducing the quality of their responses and the flexibility of their thought.

Allow children to develop mastery of creative activities that they are intrinsically motivated to do, rather than trying to motivate them with rewards and incentives. Instead of rewarding a child for practicing the piano, for example, allow her to do something she enjoys more—maybe sit at her desk and draw or take a science class.

**7. Try to stop caring what your kids achieve.** Emphasize process rather than product. One way you can do this is by asking questions about the process—Did you have fun? Are you finished? What did you like about that activity?

Source: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising\\_happiness/post/7\\_ways\\_to\\_foster\\_creativity\\_in\\_your\\_kids](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/7_ways_to_foster_creativity_in_your_kids)



“ Creativity is not limited to artistic and musical expression—it is also essential for science, math, and even social and emotional intelligence.



# Counsel for Children

## • FACT SHEET •

### What is the purpose of the Counsel for Children Program?

The program can provide a lawyer for children and youth involved in child protection proceedings in appropriate situations. The program will help ensure the views of children and youth are heard by the court or other decision makers, especially in difficult cases. The program will provide lawyers free of charge to the young person or child.

### Why would a young person need a lawyer?

Having a lawyer will ensure the child or young person's best interests are considered fully in negotiations, mediations or court proceedings. It will also ensure the child or youth is receiving sufficient information about their case and the possible outcomes. In certain situations, there may be an even greater need for a child or youth to have a lawyer, such as:

- where proceedings are complex, perhaps because

there are several siblings who may have different interests, or where there is a proposal to separate siblings, or where different parties (Social Services, parents, etc.) have different proposals for the care of the child or youth;

- where the proposed arrangements for the child or youth will have potentially long-lasting consequences, such as permanent wardship, which may sever contact with biological family members; and
- where the youth or child has expressed a wish to have their views considered.

### How is a lawyer appointed?

A lawyer can be appointed for a child or youth by court order at the start of or during child protection proceedings. That order is then sent to the Counsel for Children program, which arranges for a specific lawyer for the child or youth.

As well, anyone, including a child or youth, may contact the Counsel

for Children program toll-free at **1-877-787-5424** or on the internet at <http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/cfc>.

The caller may be asked to provide some information about the child or youth, their circumstances, and why the caller thinks a lawyer could help.

### Does a child or young person have a choice about whether a lawyer will be appointed for them?

A lawyer assigned to a case will contact the child or youth and ask them whether they want a lawyer before doing anything further.

### Will the program be available everywhere in Saskatchewan, or just certain areas?

The Counsel for Children program will be available across the province.



# What a child or youth can expect from a lawyer appointed by the counsel for children

If a lawyer has been appointed to represent you, you can expect the lawyer will:

- Listen to you
- Answer your questions
- Return your phone calls and messages
- Explain things in plain language
- Meet with you before going to court or other proceedings
- Meet with you in a place that is comfortable for you
- Go to all court or other proceedings in your case
- Tell the judge or mediator what you think and what you want
- Explain what they can't do for you

“ The Your lawyer should listen to what you have to say and ask questions about your views so that they can properly prepare your case.

## Meeting with your lawyer

The lawyer we appoint for you should meet with you in person at a place that is comfortable for you. He or she may give you a business card and should tell you:

- Their name, phone number and email address;
- That you can ask for a different lawyer or refuse to have a lawyer;
- What their role is as your lawyer and how they can help your voice be heard in proceedings;
- What your legal rights and options are, including discussing whether you want to attend proceedings;
- About the legal process and what may happen in court, mediation or meetings;
- About confidentiality and what that means; and
- About how important it is for you to tell them the truth about your situation. Services provided to youth and children by lawyers through the Counsel for Children are free of charge.



Q. What will your lawyer do after your hearing or proceeding?

A. Your lawyer should talk with you again and explain what happened and what it means for you.

If you have any questions or require further information, call us toll-free at 1-877-787-5424 or look us up on the web at <http://www.justice.gov.sk.ca/cfc>.





Photo by mrhayata (CC BY-SA 2.0)

# FASD TRAINING PROGRAM

## FREE TRAINING – EARN A CERTIFICATE ONLINE

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This new training program, which is the result of a collaborative effort between Douglas College and the Victoria Foundation, is created by experts in the FASD field. The program will launch on April 1 and run until May 29th, 2015.

It is suitable for justice workers, social workers, key workers, outreach workers, CLBC staff, teaching assistants, employment specialists, foster parents and family members of individuals living with FASD.

The FASD Training Program consists of four fully online self-paced modules, and one online module, which is supplemented with a one-day face-to-face workshop offered in the following communities: Nanaimo, Kamloops, Prince George and Nelson.

The modules, covering a wide range of topics relating to FASD, are:

- Fundamentals of FASD
- Primary and Secondary Disabilities
- Strategies and Solutions
- Family Matters\*
- Building Supports for Individuals with FASD

\* Followed up with a face-to-face workshop session.

*For information visit:  
<http://bit.ly/1vGBA1l>*

*To learn about the locations & dates  
for the face-to-face workshops or to  
register for the program email:*

*[FASDProject@douglascollege.ca](mailto:FASDProject@douglascollege.ca)*



# Advocating for Children and Youth in Care: Your Role as a Caregiver

Advocating for children and youth in care means helping them to use their own voice or speaking out on their behalf to make sure that their rights, interests and views are respected and protected.

As a caregiver, it is part of your role to advocate for the children and youth in your care, and to work collaboratively with other members of the team to make good decisions that are in the best interests of the child or youth.

The following must be considered when making a “best interests” decision:

- safety;
- physical/emotional needs and level of development;
- continuity of care;
- maintaining relationships with parents and others;
- cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage;
- for an aboriginal child, preserving cultural identity must be considered;
- the child’s views; and
- the effect on the child if there is a delay in making a decision.

Advocating on behalf of a child or youth is not always easy or straightforward. Every situation is different and the circumstances surrounding the issue or concern may be very complex.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

### 1. Understand your role as an advocate

An effective child and youth advocate:

- promotes a child-centred approach;
- promotes a collaborative problem-solving approach;
- is knowledgeable about the rights of children and youth (eg. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Child, Family and Community Service Act);
- sets aside personal views and focuses on the child or youth’s views and best interests; and
- upholds the child or youth’s right to participate by ensuring their views are heard and considered.

### 2. Be prepared

It’s always good to be prepared in your advocacy role, by:

- gathering all the information needed to fully understand the situation;
- having a conversation with other members of the team about how you see your role as an advocate;
- supporting and encouraging the relationship between the child or youth and their worker;

- recognizing the child or youth’s level of development and how they can best participate in meetings;
- encouraging the child or youth to use their own voice;
- managing the child or youth’s expectations about situations; and
- knowing your limits. If you feel your role as a caregiver is impacted, get support for yourself and seek out another advocate for the child or youth.

### 3. Support self-advocacy

Support children and youth to advocate on their own behalf by helping them to:

- use their voices to express concerns, needs and desires;
- learn how to keep records of events and meetings and obtain information;
- learn to negotiate and brainstorm ideas with others;
- listen to and consider others views; and identify advocates who can help them.

### 4. Build positive relationships

Developing and modeling good working relationships can be accomplished through a “team approach” which puts top priority on the best interests, needs and rights of the child or youth in care through:

- mutual goals and understanding;
- creative problem-solving that leads to better decisions and outcomes;
- a focus on the child or youth’s strengths and abilities; and
- an environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

### 5. Model good communication

Effective advocacy requires good communication skills. Here are three principles for success:

- communicate clearly;
- listen to and understand the perspective of everyone involved; and
- be aware of your feelings and be objective. Emotions can run high when advocating and it is important to know if they are getting in the way.

### 6. Get support if you need it

Help can come from a number of sources such as another caregiver, your resource worker or one another organization.

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/advocating\\_role\\_caregiver.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/advocating_role_caregiver.pdf)

# When you have room at your table A Foster Mom's Story

Article & photos by Rachel Goble



*Single and a school teacher, this young woman bravely opens her home to foster care children because she has room at her table.*

He was four days old when Julie got her first phone call that there was a child in need of a home. She had just recently completed her certification courses, taking the process step by step, still slightly in shock as to what she was potentially committing to. A single woman on a teacher's salary — surely there must be better homes to place these children in? Julie had offered to take any child that needed a home. While most families may be on the foster to adopt track, or only want to foster older kids that could be more independent, Julie had the flexibility to open her home to those that may be hard to place.

Zeke had spent the first four days of his life wide awake in a hospital

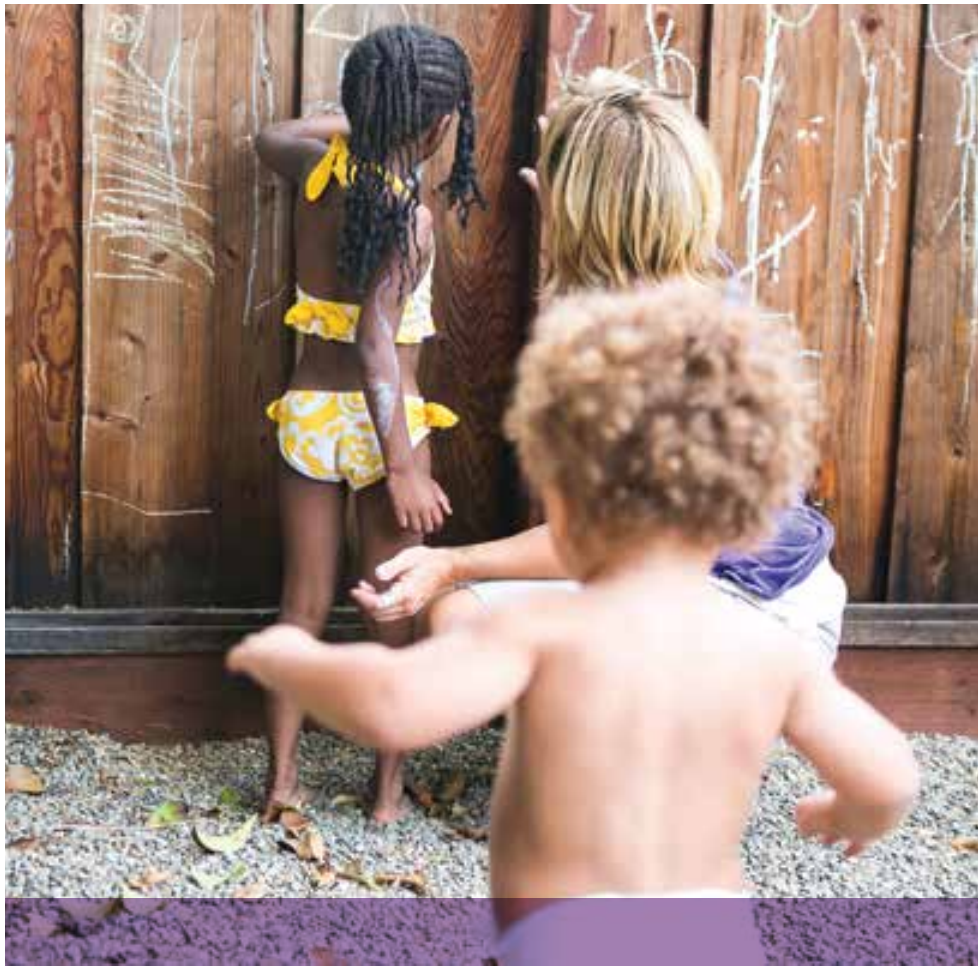
bed. He was born addicted to meth and opiates, so the doctors had kept him in the hospital to monitor his withdrawal from the powerful drugs. Zeke's mom was a sex worker and his Dad was her pimp. They were living in a hotel downtown, sharing the room with another sex worker who also happened to be pregnant and gave birth to her baby in that same hotel room.

"Zeke's mom was on too many drugs" Julie shared. "She wanted to love her son, but the drugs were too powerful. The saddest part was getting her info — they interview the parents to get info. She was a foster baby herself. She loved music, wanted to be a singer. Zeke was her only child that they knew of."

The day that Julie got the phone call about Zeke, she was having her weekly Saturday brunch with her Mom. She had nothing: no crib, no diapers, no clothes, no bottles, not even a car seat to get him home. She said yes, and that day a seat was filled at her table (a seat that was hurriedly purchased at Target along with many other necessary items for a first time Mom without time for a baby shower). Not knowing if she would have Zeke for a day, a week, or for life, she simply said yes, and opened her home.

"His dad was a gang member." Julie reflects on the last time she saw his Dad. "He had cigarette burns on his face from growing up. He was waiting for me on the steps to the court one day. I thought he was going to kill me. But he asked





if I had family to support Zeke if I died. I said yes, I do. He expressed his desire to see the cycle of violence in his own life end. Told me his story. And that was it. I never saw him again. That was his closure.”

The first thing you notice about Julie’s home is its warmth, as though you’re instantly transported to the beach. Her sweet and no-longer-the-center-of-attention labrador retriever, Hudson, greets you at the door when you arrive. Walls are covered in family photos and reminders of the love that abounds in this home. Julie has Zyler on her hip, unloading groceries from the car while Zeke and Zoe are inside playing. Zoey is dancing while Zeke plays the drums on any object he can find that makes noise when it’s hit.

“The Foster system is very pro family reunification. They provide the birth parents with a lot more

resources than they provide the foster parents — which is the way it should be,” Julie reflects on her experience. “But somehow it’s not breaking the cycles. I wish that more efforts were given to prevention — more community help. More awareness of drugs, or prostitution. Part of what they’re doing better is trying to prevent kids from going from one home to another. They’re looking for more permanent homes for kids, which is helping.”

Zoey started living with Julie when she was a year and a half. Born at 4 lbs, the doctors had told her birth mom to bring her back in a couple of weeks for a checkup. She was never brought back, and no one ever followed up with her. It wasn’t until a year and a half later that someone took Zoey to a neighborhood clinic because she wouldn’t stop crying.

At 18 months she weighed 16 lbs

and wasn’t even on the growth charts. They thought that Zoey was on drugs because she was so unresponsive, and her little body was covered in scabies. Julie received a phone call, asking if she could take Zoey. Recognizing that she was a single Mom with a newborn already in her home, she asked them to call her back in 24 hours if they couldn’t find a placement. A day later, Julie got the second phone call that no one would take Zoey because her scabies were so contagious. Another seat was filled at Julie’s table that day. Zoey was diagnosed with ‘failure to thrive’ by the doctors, having never been fed solid food and unable to open her eyes in the sunlight because of a lack of outside exposure.

“As a teacher I’d seen foster care kids come through school with no resources. I don’t think I’m the solution, but I did want to do something.

“As a teacher I’d seen foster care kids come through school with no resources. I don’t think I’m the solution, but I did want to do something. I think the foster community needs more awareness of the great need for foster families, resources... I would talk anyone I know into doing it. If they’re calling me — a single Mom on a teacher’s salary — to take a fourth and fifth kid? That shows you the lack of people and resources.”

Zyler was born addicted to meth so the doctors took him right away. His Mom was in and out of jail for a

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“ They are just as wanted and loved, even though they came from a different place — their birth mom — they came to me — their heart mom.

long time — still is. She sells drugs and prostitutes herself to be able to afford them. Julie doesn't know as much about his background, but acknowledges the deep connection between the drug trade and sex trafficking. She's still fostering Zylar (after having adopted Zeke and Zoey) but believes that she'll adopt him as the court learns more of his background.

“I've learned that I'm stronger and braver than I thought. I had to face the fear of being single. Not being able to do it on my own, being left with these kids with no resources or help or anything. How will I deal with their issues? My fear was that I wouldn't be able to handle them effectively like they deserve to be handled and treated. But I learned that there's not a limit to how many kids I can love. It's doable. You just make it work.”

Fear seems to be the main hurdle for families thinking about fostering. There isn't a lot of education about the needs of foster care families, or the resources available to them. It's a

hard system to navigate. There are respite resources available to foster care families, for example, but this service is rarely public knowledge while families are considering opening their homes to foster children. While there are social workers assigned to the children, there are no social workers assigned to the foster families themselves. There's no overarching system that ties all of the resources together — it's a system run by amazing people — but no one to tie it all together or provide a resource guide.

A 'typical' foster child, as Julie outlined, never truly knows where home is until they're either adopted or placed in a foster family willing to foster them until they're able to be reunited with their family. They push people away, knowing they are probably going to get rejected anyways. It's a never ending cycle when there aren't enough families to foster. Cultural barriers commonly provide another source of fear for families looking to foster.

Typically, families are much less afraid to take younger children than older ones. It's difficult to predict the needs that a child will have or what life for a foster child is like — it's so based on their situation — but Julie expresses the desire for it to become more normalized. Many foster care youth end up trafficked when they bounce between homes and don't have a guardian invested in them and mentoring them. The need for a permanent person willing to provide a home for these youth is a great need.

“I desire to keep their culture intact. Both black culture and foster culture. Both are part of who they are. Integrating the culture of fostering has already deeply rooted. We go to foster events, we'll foster dogs, we'll volunteer in the foster system as they grow up... fostering will be a part of our lives.”

Julie expressed her desire to be completely open with her children. Zoey is just starting to notice the skin colour difference, and will start school soon. Without a Dad in the home and being exposed to children who are in traditional families, she knows these questions will begin to pop up as other kids ask questions and begin talking. But when they do ask, she plans to be completely open.

“My hope for these three is that they grow up to realize that it wasn't a bad thing they were adopted. I hope they'll want to help the system. And realize that they weren't given up. They were born for a purpose and a meaning and their parents just couldn't do it. They are just as wanted and loved, even though they came from a different place — their birth mom -- they came to me -- their heart mom. A single mom without a lot of money. I hope I can give them the resources to do what God put them on this planet to do.”



April is



Autism

Awareness Month



## What is Autism?

**A**utism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a complex lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that typically appears within the first three years of life. It is considered to be a spectrum disorder meaning the primary symptoms can be expressed in varying degrees of severity. Individuals with autism will have difficulties with verbal and non-verbal social communication, social interactions, and can display a range of rigid or stereotyped, repetitive behaviors, often with insistence on a specific routine that they will show resistance to changing. Hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to sensory stimuli is also often observed.

“ It is considered to be a spectrum disorder meaning the primary symptoms can be expressed in varying degrees of severity.

The diagnostic criteria for ASD was recently revised in May 2013 in the Fifth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V) produced by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The edition immediately preceding it, the DSM-IV, had ASD or Autistic Disorder as one of five disorders under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD): Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD), Rett's Disorder, and Pervasive Development Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Each of these disorders had specific diagnostic criteria but shared the primary symptoms of deficits in social communication, social interaction and rigid, stereotypical behaviors.

ASD is not considered to be curable but it is highly treatable. Early intervention programming has shown dramatic results in improving the eventual outcome for the child. Symptoms can be lessened and skills can be acquired with treatment and support. Children do not “grow out” of autism but with specific programming and supports can learn like other children and can also be given the tools to manage and live more effectively with their symptoms.

## Who is affected?

The latest statistics indicate that as many as 1 in 68 children are affected by ASD. What was once viewed as a rare disorder is now recognized as one of the most common neurological disorder affecting children.

(CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>, April 10, 2014)

## What causes Autism?

Exactly what causes ASD is still unknown. Current research suggests that a predisposition to autism might be inherited. Researchers have not found a specific “autism gene” but instead a nonspecific factor, which may increase the likelihood of having cognitive impairments. Over the last five years, scientists have identified a number of rare gene changes, or mutations, associated with autism. Researchers have also found neurobiological differences in the brains of individuals with autism. The current theory is that ASD is caused by a combination of “risk genes” and environmental factors in the early brain development period.

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## Characteristics

### Social Communication/Social Interaction

- Deficits in verbal and non-verbal communication
- Loss of or delay in developing spoken language
- Difficulty using speech in a meaningful way
- Difficulty or absence of ability to imitate sounds and words
- Difficulty or inability to point in order to express need or interest
- Indicating needs with gestures (sometimes unusual ones) instead of words
- Rarely initiates communication
- Repeating words or phrases heard (echolalia) instead of answering
- Confusing gender (he, she) and pronouns (I, me, you) in speech
- Unusual pitch and rhythm in speech
- Difficulties with social interaction
- Unusual or lack of eye contact
- Unusual or lack of facial affect or expression
- Difficulty interacting with other people (responding back and forth, turn-taking), making friends, and understanding others

“Individuals with autism tend to be diverse. Therefore, it is difficult to use words such as all or none when describing this group.

- Apparent lack of empathy or consideration for others thoughts or feelings
- Difficulty controlling emotion and excitement
- Laughing, giggling or screaming at unusual times
- Difficulty joining other people
- Difficulty sharing attention with others

### Behaviours: Stereotypical, rigid routine, sensory stimuli

#### *Repetitive, stereotypical behaviors*

- Repetitive actions or body movements (e.g. Hand flapping, finger flipping, spinning, rocking etc.)
- Unusual postures, walking or movement patterns

#### *Rigid routines, behavior patterns*

- Problems coping with change; dependency on parts of routines
- Unusual or inappropriate habits or interests
- Anxiety or tantrums (“meltdowns”) when things unexpectedly change
- Difficulty with delayed gratification, waiting

#### *Sensory Stimuli*

- Difficulty imitating gross or fine motor movements
- Intense focus on moving or spinning objects
- No fear or understanding of real dangers (running, jumping off of objects etc.)
- Over or under reaction to sight, sound, smell, taste, pain or touch (including being held)
- Actively sensory seeking behaviors (running, spinning, jumping, seeking deep pressure contact and hugs, excessive smelling)
- Actively avoiding sensory stimuli (covering ears, eyes, avoiding crowded busy rooms and places)
- Intense or unusual activity levels



## Cognition and Learning

- Difficulty paying attention or shifting attention (stuck on an idea or action, perseverates)
- Difficulty understanding abstract ideas
- Difficulty grasping time and order of events
- Thoughts and actions may appear illogical, may seem to arrive at irrational conclusions
- Can have very a strong memory for certain specific details and facts, especially in an area of obsessive interest
- Difficulty using items or toys to represent real objects
- “Black and white” thinking, difficulty in understanding “exceptions to the rule”
- May not benefit from typical teaching methods,



rather need alternative teaching methods that concentrate on visual strategies, reinforcing, step-by-step and concrete learning

## Associated Features and Concerns

- Unusual sleep patterns
- Sudden, unexplained, extreme distress or fear, phobias
- Eating problems (often sensory and texture related aversions)
- Toileting problems
- Grooming, self-care difficulties or lack of concern for
- Self-injurious or aggressive behavior or destructive behavior



“ People do not grow out of autism. Autism is a lifelong disorder; however, the manifestation of symptoms may change over time. While there is yet no known cure, autism is definitely treatable.

## How is autism diagnosed?

There are no medical tests for diagnosing autism. An accurate diagnosis must be based on observation of the individual’s communication, behaviour, and developmental levels. However, because many of the behaviours associated with autism are shared by other disorders, various medical tests may be ordered to rule out or identify other possible causes of the symptoms being exhibited.

The characteristic behaviours of autism spectrum disorders may or may not be apparent in infancy (18 to 24 months), but usually become obvious during early childhood (24 months to 6 years). While there is no one behavioural or communications test that can detect autism, several screening instruments have been developed that are now used in diagnosing autism.

When autism is suspected, your child will need to be referred to someone who specializes in diagnosing autism spectrum disorders. This may be a developmental pediatrician, a psychiatrist or psychologist. Other professionals may be included who are better able to observe and test your child in specific areas.

This multidisciplinary assessment team may include some or all of the following professionals. They may also be involved in treatment programs.

**Developmental pediatrician** – Treats health problems of children with developmental delays or handicaps.

**Child psychiatrist** – A medical doctor who may be involved in the initial diagnosis can prescribe medication and provide help with behaviour/emotional adjustments and social relationships.

**Clinical psychologist** – Specializes in understanding the nature and impact of developmental disabilities, including autism spectrum disorders. May perform psychological and assessment tests, and may help with behaviour modification and social-skills training.

**Social Worker** – May provide counselling services or act as case manager, helping to arrange services.

**Occupational therapist** – Focuses on practical, self-help skills that will aid in daily living, such as dressing and eating; may work on sensory processing, coordination of movement, and fine motor skills.

**Physical therapist** – Helps improve the use of bones, muscles, joints, and nerves to develop muscle strength, coordination, and motor skills.

**Speech/language therapist** – Involved in the improvement of communication skills, including speech and language.



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# Myth Busters

**Myth:** All individuals with autism possess special skills and genius abilities (e.g., are able to memorize license plates, complete complicated mental math, display exceptional musical/artistic skills)

**Fact:** Although the individual with autism depicted in the movie Rainman possessed special abilities, the vast majority of people with autism do not. Individuals with autism who possess genius abilities are often referred to as “savants” or “autistic savants.” Approximately 50% of all savants have autism, while only about five to ten percent of individuals with autism possess extraordinary savant skills.

**Myth:** There is a cure for, or people grow out of, autism.

**Fact:** People do not grow out of autism. Autism is a lifelong disorder; however, the manifestation of symptoms may change over time. While there is yet no known cure, autism is definitely treatable.

**Myth:** Poor parenting causes autism.

**Fact:** While there is no one known cause for autism, it is known the disorder is not caused by poor parenting.

**Myth:** Children with autism just need more love and a good spanking.

**Fact:** Autism is not caused by a lack of love, and it is not cured by punishment. Parents need support to manage difficult behaviours with structure and consistency.

**Myth:** People with autism have to be in special programs for the autistic.

**Fact:** Individually designed programs best meet the needs of a person with autism. Those with autism should be learning, living and working in settings where there is ample opportunity to communicate and interact with others who have the skills they lack.

**Myth:** All individuals with autism are withdrawn, avoid eye contact, engage in self-injurious behaviour, rock, spin objects and avoid affection.

**Fact:** Individuals with autism tend to be diverse. Therefore, it is difficult to use words such as all or none when describing this group. Some individuals engage in eye contact, while others enjoy tickles and hugs. Not all engage in rocking, spinning or self-abusive behaviour. Individuals with autism do share common behavioural characteristics, however, and it is on this basis that a diagnosis can be made.

Source: <http://www.autismservices.ca/about-autism>



## Resources:

### Autism Services of Saskatoon

A Saskatoon-based charitable organization dedicated to supporting individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.

209 Fairmont Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7M 5B8  
Phone: (306) 665-7013  
Fax: (306) 665-7011



<http://www.autismservices.ca>

### Regional ASD Services

ASD consultants can screen for the possibility of ASD, refer for diagnosis and assessment, and facilitate the development and implementation of a support and/or treatment plan for individuals up to the age of 19 years.

ASD support workers can implement specific ASD therapy plans under the supervision of an ASD consultant for children who have not yet successfully transitioned to school.

<http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/autism-resources>

### SaskFEAT

SaskFEAT is a volunteer organization that helps families and caregivers deal with autism. For over 10 years, SaskFEAT (Saskatchewan Families for Effective Autism Treatment) have been actively advocating for services and support for individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their families and their communities.

Box 483  
Shaunavon, SK  
S0N 2M0  
[saskfeat@sasktel.net](mailto:saskfeat@sasktel.net)



<http://www.saskfeat.com>



# Prevent a fire in your home

As you dive into your spring cleaning, keep fire safety in mind. Take care of your smoke alarms and clean your clothes dryer, to prevent fires. And, are you aware of what you need to know to protect your family from a 9-volt battery fire?

## Clothes Dryer Safety

Doing laundry is most likely part of your every day routine. But did you know how important taking care of your clothes dryer is to the safety of your home? With a few simple safety tips you can help prevent a clothes dryer fire.

- Have your dryer installed and serviced by a professional.
- Do not use the dryer without a lint filter.
- Make sure you clean the lint filter before or after each load of laundry. Remove lint that has collected around the drum.
- Rigid or flexible metal venting material should be used to sustain proper air flow and drying time.
- Make sure the air exhaust vent pipe is not restricted and the outdoor vent flap will open when the dryer is operating. Once a year, or more often if you notice that it is taking longer than normal for your clothes to dry, clean lint out of the vent pipe or have a dryer lint removal service do it for you.
- Keep dryers in good working order. Gas dryers should be inspected by a qualified professional to make sure that the gas line and connection are intact and free of leaks.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.
- Follow the manufacturer's operating instructions and don't overload your dryer.
- Turn the dryer off if you leave home or when you go to bed.

### AND DON'T FORGET...

Dryers should be properly **grounded**.

Check the **outdoor vent** flap to make sure it is not covered by snow.

Keep the area around your dryer **clear** of things that can burn, like boxes, cleaning supplies and clothing, etc.

Clothes that have come in contact with **flammable substances**, like gasoline, paint thinner, or similar solvents should be laid outside to dry, then can be washed and dried as usual.

### FACT

The leading cause of home clothes dryer fires

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# Smoke Alarms Save Lives!

Smoke alarms that are properly installed and maintained play a vital role in reducing fire deaths and injuries. If there is a fire in your home, smoke spreads fast and you need smoke alarms to give you time to get out. Having a working smoke alarm cuts the chances of dying in a reported fire in half. Almost two-thirds of home fire deaths resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

Here's what you need to know:

- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home.
- Test your smoke alarms every month.
- When a smoke alarm sounds, get outside and stay outside.
- Replace all smoke alarms in your home every 10 years

## Smoke alarms by the numbers

In 2007-2011, three of every five home fire deaths resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

## 9-Volt Battery Safety

9-volt batteries power our smoke alarms, household items and toys. They can be found in most homes. But these batteries can be a fire hazard if not stored safely or disposed of with care.

### The problem

- 9-volt batteries can be dangerous. The positive and negative posts are close together. If a metal object touches the two posts of a 9-volt battery, it can cause a short circuit. This can make enough heat to start a fire.
- It is unsafe to store 9-volt batteries in a drawer near paper clips, coins, pens, or other batteries. Do not store common household items such as steel wool, aluminum foil, and keys near 9-volt batteries. If these items touch the two posts, there is a greater risk of a fire starting.
- Weak batteries may have enough charge to cause a fire. Some fires have started in trash when 9-volt batteries were thrown away with other metal items.

### Storing 9-volt batteries

- Keep batteries in original packaging until you are ready to use them. If loose, keep the posts covered with masking, duct, or electrical tape. Prevent the posts from coming in contact with metal objects.
- Keep them someplace safe where they won't be tossed around.
- Store batteries standing up.
- 9-volt batteries should not be stored loose in a drawer. Do not store them in containers with other batteries.

### Disposal

- 9-volt batteries should not be thrown away with trash. They can come in contact with other batteries or pieces of metal.
- 9-volt batteries can be taken to a collection site for household hazardous waste.
- To be safe, cover the positive and negative posts with masking, duct, or electrical tape before getting rid of batteries.
- Some states do not allow any type of battery to be disposed of with trash. Check with your city or town for the best way to get rid of batteries.

## 9-Volt Battery STORAGE

Keep batteries in original packaging until you are ready to use them. If loose, keep the posts covered with masking, duct, or electrical tape. Prevent the posts from coming in contact with metal objects.



# Giant Rainbow Collage

Create a giant, beautiful and vibrant rainbow collage to consolidate knowledge of colours, practice sorting and matching and have a go at working on a large scale collaboratively!



First, cut a large semi-circle from a piece of a cardboard box. Then paint on a basic rainbow using poster paints. Any smaller kids participating can paint freely on another piece of cardboard next to you. While leaving it to dry, round up some colour buckets or any other suitable containers, to collect papers and collage materials in.

Once the paint is dry, squeeze lots of runny glue onto one colour band at a time and brush through the area with a paintbrush.

Between everyone participating, start sticking all of the scrap materials from each bucket onto the corresponding colour.

It may take a bit of time, but it would take a LOT longer if it wasn't a collaborative project! Everyone can share in the accomplishment of the finished product.

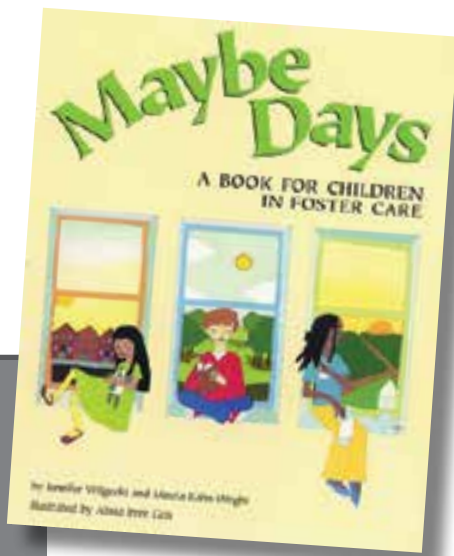
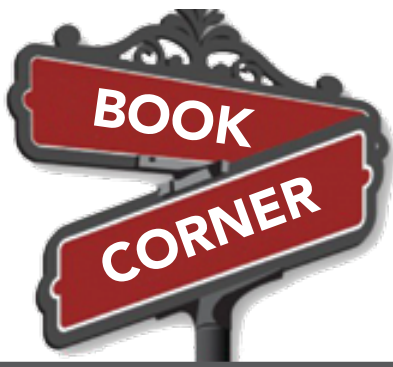
Happy rainbow colours are just perfect for birthday celebrations.

This activity is good for:

- recognizing, naming and matching colours
- sorting and matching according to one criteria
- creativity
- fine motor skills development through tearing, sorting and sticking
- working together on a collaborative project (PHSE)







**Maybe Days: A Book For Children in Foster Care**  
by Jennifer Wilgocki

Will I live with my parents again? Will I stay with my foster parents forever? For children in foster care, the answer to many questions is often "maybe." *Maybe Days* addresses the questions, feelings, and concerns these children most often face. Honest and reassuring, it also provides basic information that children want and need to know, including the roles of various people in the foster care system and whom to ask for help. An extensive afterward for adults caring for foster children describes the child's experience, underscores the importance of open communication, and outlines a variety of ways to help children adjust to the "maybe days"—and to thrive.

Paperback: 29 pages  
Publisher: Magination Press;  
2nd edition (Feb. 8 2002)  
ISBN-10: 1557988021

*"Absolutely on the mark! This book covers every issue that you will encounter in the typical foster care setting. I can not recommend this book strongly enough. It should be given out as a textbook at training sessions. Nothing we were told or personal experiences that were related to us in training cover what is going to happen with your first placement to your 10th. Do not hesitate to purchase this book and copies for anyone you know that is or wants to be a foster parent. Of course it won't solve the problems that you encounter unless you have lots of patience, understanding and maturity."*

Make a difference  
for foster parents and  
**become a  
volunteer!**

The SFFA volunteer programs provide important support to our members. We are in need of PRIDE co-trainers, rate board and peer support volunteers province wide.

We are actively recruiting volunteers for your region!

If you are interested in providing support to fellow foster parents, please call Wayne Roman toll free at **1-888-276-2880**.



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