

SUMMER 2018



PARTNERS

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FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Welcome to Summer 2018!

Here's to warm weather, longer days, and time away from the hustle and bustle of school schedules. (Although, I know there are some of you who really would rather have the routine of school!) Either way, I hope you have time to enjoy family, friends, and sunshine.

For this issue, we decided to do "Coalition 101." Why? We often find that, depending on who you are and how you have come to know us, you may or may not know everything we have to offer. Also, we know so many of you are our "champions," the folks who let others know that we are a resource. Hopefully, this issue gives a nice overview of and puts a spotlight on the help and support we are committed to providing.

I also want to share some of the ways that we are working to innovate and enhance the information and support we deliver. In this issue, you will read about the latest initiative we have launched called "Journey Partners," a peer support program we are hoping will enhance how we provide support for individuals and families who reach out to us. Moving forward, we are looking into new ways to expand our training offerings to answer some requests we have received for more advanced options. We believe new forms of technology will get us there, so stay tuned! Finally, we have been working for two years on a new website: No Matter What: *Stories of Resilience for Foster & Adoptive Families*. This site will be filled with videos of inspirational stories of strength and resilience told by the parents who have lived them. We believe that hearing about the journeys that others have taken can inspire more families to seek help when they need it—and know that doing so is a sign of tremendous strength, and not a weakness. We hope to have something launched for everyone to view by the end of year.

Behind everything we do is the belief that **every child needs a champion**. The person or persons who think they are amazing and wonderful in their own special way. And, because we know that journey can be a roller-coaster of celebrations and setbacks for so many families, we also believe and are committed to the idea that **every champion needs support**.

Wishing you a great summer!



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Making the Call

By Casey Ward

I was a foster parent with Milwaukee County for five years. Before receiving my license, and as I was going through the training classes, I was blessed to find a group of amazing moms. Some were as green as I was; others had many years of fostering under their belts. I have also been fortunate enough to work with some of the very best licensing workers, case workers, and Guardians ad Litem. As a foster parent, you learn quickly that the workers assigned to you and the children in your care have lots going on. It seemed to me as though they had hundreds of questions tossed at them on a daily basis.

I'm the type of person who, when I have a question, I want to find the answer as quickly as possible. So, I would often turn to my circle, my "core" as I call them, to ask questions, look for support, and bounce ideas around. Well, just like those workers, I quickly realized that my fellow foster parents also have overflowing plates. I began to think I was becoming a burden and that was the last thing I wanted.

At some point, a friend of mine told me about the Coalition and the resources that were available there. I listened, interested, but I honestly believed that places like the Coalition were for people who were far more in need than I was. I started telling myself that I could just figure everything out on my own. Again, my friend told me to call the Coalition. To be honest, it probably took another three or four more times being told to call the Coalition for support before I took her seriously. I was stubborn . . . until I simply couldn't be any longer.

I had a little one in my home who was dealing with big feelings. Those feelings would turn into rage and start

affecting the other children in my home, not to mention my wife and, because it was mainly directed at me, it was affecting ME! I simply didn't know where to turn to get her the help I could see she needed.

I took a breath and made the call to the Coalition.

The person I spoke with was so kind and patient. I explained a bit about the challenges I was having with my kiddo. Truthfully, the response was something I simply wasn't expecting: *they got it*. They let me talk, they heard me, and they *understood*. There was no judgement, only kindness and helpfulness. They answered my questions and went one step further and suggested a video series that they happened to have in their free library. I remember thinking there had to be a catch . . . were they going to ask me for a donation? The whole experience was too good to be true. But there was no catch and the support was there! They sent me the video and it was perfect. Since that first call, I kept going back, and have since taken advantage of many other things the Coalition offers.

Foster and adoptive families are full of unique challenges and the Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families operates by the philosophy that every child needs a champion and every champion needs support. They have been a support for so many of us—a support I am now proud to be a part of as a Coalition team member. I am now that person my friend was to me, telling other foster and adoptive parents to, "call the Coalition!" I know that, if they are anything like I was, I will have to tell them three more times, at least. But, that's okay. When they're ready, the Coalition will be there.

MAKING CONNECTIONS:

Helping Families Create their Circles of Support

By Diane Behm



When my husband and I adopted our first child, we enjoyed the life of new parents, braving get-togethers with a car seat and pack and play. We took our son to restaurants and the store. We believed in our hearts that our love could conquer all, and we weren't that different from our friends who had just had biological children. As time went on, and we adopted our second and third, (and fourth and fifth) we began to realize what many adoptive parents realize: love isn't always enough.

Adoption is possible only because of a deep loss for our children. And, while love and stability are key, there is a part of our children that holds this trauma of separation from their birth family. As a result, we, as adoptive parents, will ultimately need to approach parenting differently.

Throughout our journey of parenting, our group of friends has changed. This is probably true for most parents. Your friends have become the parents of your children's best friends. They are the ones whose kids are on the same soccer team, or that new mom or dad you connect with at drop-off in the mornings. As our friends changed, my husband and I began to realize that our friends were the parents who really understood: other adoptive parents. Parents who learned about our family, didn't judge, and were the ones who pitched in when we needed help. I mean really helped, by coming over and cleaning while I ran my child to school, or took the kids overnight so we could just finally get a full night of sleep.

At the Coalition, we try hard to be those kind of friends. Whether you are just beginning your journey of adoption, your children were adopted many years ago, or are adults looking to begin a search for their birth family, we know you need support. The Coalition isn't just an advocate and leader in the foster care and adoption ecosystem, we are here to coach families, as well, so you can be resilient. So you can get up and do this again tomorrow. So you can feel strong and confident.

We have worked hard in the last year to build our programs of support for our post-adoptive families. We are here to connect you to others and support your family. Here's a peek at some of the things we've been doing for quite some time, and some new offerings we've recently begun to share.

TRAININGS AND WEBINARS

The Coalition offers many opportunities for education throughout the year, and we do this through in-person trainings and conferences, as well as webinars. Our training topics are determined by our families. We ask what you need, and

Continued on next page

how we can help get you the information you need to be the best parents for your children. Trainings and webinars have included topics like, “why kids lie,” “working with schools,” “understanding children’s sexual behaviors,” and more. Even though our webinars aren’t face-to-face contact, you will come away knowing that you are not alone, that there are others who are experiencing exactly what you are. Our experienced local trainers mean you will have another resource in the community.

Additionally, our live trainings and conferences throughout the year offer you the chance to connect with other families, and spend some time really learning and discussing relevant topics.

PARENT TALK

Parent Talks are evenings specifically for adoptive parents. We welcome adoptive parents from all backgrounds and with children of all age groups and needs to come together and enjoy a meal (that you didn’t have to cook or clean up after!) and talk with other adoptive parents. This offers an environment of acceptance and understanding that lets parents know that they are not alone.

Parent Talks are very loosely structured events. We have some question prompts to get you talking if you need them, but many groups take the conversation where they need to take it. We hope that parents leave these evenings knowing that everyone needs help sometimes and that it’s okay to reach out and ask for that help. We also hope parents leave feeling more confident and with some fresh ideas for building resilience in yourself and your children.

OPEN HOUSES – MEET AND GREET

Many times, when we haven’t asked for help before, or are just reaching a new age, or developmental stage that is proving to be harder than we thought, we don’t even know what’s available. We hold open houses and meet and greet events in the community every quarter, so you can stop by and find out more about the Post Adoption Resource Center. Learn about the resources we have and, as always, meet other families and talk with our Resources Specialists for help that matches your unique family and challenges.

JOURNEY PARTNERS

What we have learned while working with our families, is that there is no substitute for someone who has been exactly where you have been. Peer support has been around for a long time, and we are excited to start supporting our families this way in addition to everything else we do. Coalition Journey Partners have lived experience being adoptive parents. They have had the same questions, worries, and struggles, and they are here to help you. Many of you may have already found other adoptive families organically along the way, but if you haven’t, please call us and we can connect you to a family who has walked ahead of you, and can point the way through.

We hope you’ll join us for some upcoming events soon! If you aren’t on our mailing list, you can **sign up here** to be notified of our upcoming trainings, family events, and conferences.

A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Photo listing. Data mining. Child-specific webinars. The terms themselves certainly sound technical and a bit cold. However, these services are really some of the more heart-warming things we do here at the Coalition. In fact, we offer a variety of inspiring child advocacy services for children and youth in the foster care system. Some of these may sound familiar, others perhaps less so. Read on to learn more about how we help advocate for children most in need of connections.

♥ **Photo listing** is a tool used by social workers and their teams to help raise awareness for the need for an adoptive home for a specific child. Very often, these children have been waiting the longest for a permanent connection (through no fault of their own). When a child is photo listed, you’ll see his or her photo—sometimes a series of photos—as well as a description of the child that includes some of the things he or she enjoys. Children who are photo listed are typically older (six and over).

♥ The **Heart Gallery of Wisconsin** is another aspect of photo listing. The Heart Gallery is a physical “kit” that includes 8-10 framed photographs of children who have been photo listed. We have several Heart Gallery kits available to be sent to and displayed at various locations across Wisconsin. The gallery visits family friendly locations in Wisconsin communities with the mission of raising awareness of the need for foster and adoptive homes for children. Many of the children who are on our photo listing website are also included in the Heart Gallery.

♥ We have found that **videos** have the power to bring children to life much more vividly than a simple photograph and description. Children who participate in these videos are typically age 12 and older. These videos are a chance for viewers (potential adoptive parents) to “meet” the child, and also help prepare children for adoption and increase connections. Happily, sometimes children are matched with their “no matter what” family as a result of their video! Once complete, videos are uploaded with the child’s photo listing on wiadopt.org.

♥ The newest tool in our family of recruitment strategies are **child-focused webinars**. The webinar is a chance for potential adoptive families to learn even more information about a child directly from members of that child’s care team. In many cases, the information shared during a webinar goes beyond what you might read in the child’s photo listing profile or see in their video.

All of these tools are ways that we help to advocate for Wisconsin children and youth who need a permanent family connection. You can see photo listing profiles and photographs, as well as videos, on our website: wiadopt.org/kids. If you are interested in hosting the Heart Gallery, please let us know!

Here to Help



Whether you are a foster parent, adoptive parent, relative, or birth parent, the Coalition for Children, Youth, and Families is here to support you at every step in your journey. We know it can be a little unnerving sometimes, reaching out to people you don't know; especially when you are feeling vulnerable, upset, or at the end of your rope. So, here's what to expect when you call the Coalition.

We will answer any questions to the best of our knowledge or refer you to a partner organization that can provide further support. We always try to provide information in a timely matter; passing along resources while on the phone with you or in an email by the end of the day. Our support staff will listen to your needs and connect you with a member of our Resource Team. We have several Resource Specialists on staff, all of whom have knowledge about the many different aspects of the child welfare system and adoption. Based on your specific situation, we can provide you with:

- **Tip sheets**—in-depth informational articles written by our staff about a variety of topics related to foster care, adoption, and caring for children and youth, as well as taking care of yourself, too.
- **Library materials**—we have a large collection of books and DVDs that we send out free to Wisconsin families. We'll even include return postage.
- **Connections**—If you need a phone number, we are happy to provide that to you. Same goes for information about support groups in your area, adoption attorneys, and other helpful contacts.

We get phone calls every day about a wide variety of topics related to foster care and adoption. Here are just a few of the things we regularly talk to people about:

- **Private adoption, such as adopting an infant or adopting internationally**
- **How to make adoption affordable**
- **Getting started as a foster parent**
- **Adopting from the foster care system (also known as a public adoption)**
- **What to do if you are expecting and wish to make an adoption plan for your child**
- **Resources to help support you as a parent, such as therapists, medical providers, and school support**
- **Ongoing education and training opportunities for you and the children in your care**
- **And much more!**

SUPPORT BEYOND FAMILIES

If you're familiar with the Coalition, you probably know about our Home to Stay backpack program, our phone support, our webinars, our family fun events, and our annual "A Place in My Heart" and "This is My Story" conferences. What you may not know is we do additional "behind the scenes" partnering throughout the state to support families as well.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES:

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH SUPPORT SPECIALISTS (ROSS) PROGRAM

It has long been said that the best people to talk to foster and adoptive parents about fostering or adopting or getting support are other foster and adoptive parents. That is why the Coalition has two ROSS team members, both of whom are experienced foster and adoptive parents. These team members travel throughout the state raising awareness about foster care, adoption, and the services of the Coalition. They are our own Foster Parent Champions!

FOSTER CARE COORDINATORS' CONFERENCE

Annually, the Coalition and Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) team up to host a conference for Foster Care Coordinators, Tribes, and Private Foster Care Agencies. This two-day conference features national speakers with an objective of providing information to help Coordinators better support children and families. In addition to the presentations, this is an opportunity for agencies to share information and best practices between one another.

COALITION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

FOSTER CARE FOOTNOTES PUBLICATION

Foster Care Footnotes is a monthly newsletter for Foster Care Coordinators to share information and ideas for better serving children and families. Topics can range from recruitment and retention, to communication, self-care, and utilizing resources to support foster families. It's also a great tool for spreading the word about some of the various activities going on around our state.

TRIBAL RECRUITMENT

The Coalition also works closely with the 11 tribes in the state. Much like the work we do with DCF to encourage more people to consider becoming foster parents in every Wisconsin county, this work is aimed at helping more Native families consider foster care and providing support to the staff in those tribal communities.

Recently we have developed new recruitment tools and updated recruitment campaign materials such as lawn signs, brochures, and billboards. This is all to address the unique needs of the tribes. We're also working on a video for tribes to use another recruitment tool.

Being a partner and a support resource to families is at the heart of all our work at the Coalition. By supporting those agencies, staff, and organizations who also interact with children and families touched by foster care and adoption, we aim to make sure everyone has the resources they need. If you would like more information on these or any Coalition resources, please contact us at 414-475-1246.



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wiadopt.org
wifostercareandadoption.org
postadoptccyf.org

An umbrella of services over
foster care and adoption;
information and referral;
recruitment; training,
education and support for
families and professionals.



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