Welcome to ACRF Kara Lang!

Hi! My name is Kara Lang and I am the new project assistant for the Mat-Su ACRF office. I was born in Palmer and spent most of my childhood in Big Lake, where I currently reside with my husband and 3 kids. I received my Associate of Arts from Mat-Su College in 2007 and am looking forward to working with resource families in my Valley community.

ACRF is now on Facebook!

You can find us on Facebook under “Alaska Center for Resource Families.” Please “like” us if you are already on Facebook and keep in touch with all the good things happening with foster and adoptive families.

In recognition of May being Foster Parent Appreciation Month; ACRF wants to thank each and every one of you for opening your hearts and homes to the children of Alaska. With your help, we really are weaving a circle of care around the state.

Current foster/adoptive parents are the best recruiters of new resource parents. ACRF offers numerous orientations several times a month throughout the state as well as a teleconference orientation and thru a self-study option. Please check out our website at www.acrf.org for the next orientation in your community.
**Fairbanks Training:**

Unless otherwise noted, the trainings in Fairbanks are held at ACRF: 815 Second Ave, STE 101 Pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 479-7307 to register.

- **APRIL:**
  - Core Training for Resource Families
    Thursday, April 7th from 6:00pm – 9:00pm and Saturday, April 9th from 9:00am – 4:00pm (lunch provided)

- Adapting Through OCS
  Tuesday, April 12th from 11:30am-1:00pm

- Building Families Through Adoption
  Thursday, April 21st from 6:00pm – 9:00pm and Saturday, April 23rd from 9:00am – 4:00pm (Lunch provided)

- **MAY:**
  - Core Training for Seasoned Foster Parents
    Tuesday, May 10th from 5:30pm – 9:30pm

- ACRF Open House
  Saturday, May 21st from Noon – 4:00pm. Stop in to get a collection of summer activities brochures for the kids, pick up some training material, or watch a movie (beginning at 1pm: *Something the Lord Made*).

- **JUNE:**
  - Core Training for Relative Placements
    Saturday, June 11th from 10am - 4pm (lunch provided)

- Adapting Through OCS
  Tuesday, June 14th from 6:00pm – 7:30pm

**Fairbanks Events and Support Groups:**

- **Resource Family Annual Appreciation Picnic.** Saturday, June 4th from Noon to 3:00pm at Growden Park. Theme: Baseball!

- **Grands Raising Great Children Support Group.** Participation is FREE. Limited supervised children’s activities are available during the group – please pre-register if you are bringing your children. Group meets the second Monday of every month from 6:30pm–8pm, at RCPC, 726 26th AVE, Suite 2 in Fairbanks. Call 456-2866 for more information.

**Juneau Training:**

Unless otherwise noted the trainings in Juneau will be held at ACRF: 9109 Mendenhall Mall RD, Suite 6A. Pre-registration is REQUIRED, call John at 790-4246 to register

- **APRIL:**
  - Core Training for Resource Families
    Wednesday, April 20th from 6:00pm–9:00pm and Saturday, April 23rd from 9:00am–5:00pm. Must attend both days.

- **MAY:**
  - Building Families Through Adoption
    Thursday, May 12th from 6:00pm–9:00pm and Saturday, May 14th from 9:00am–5:00pm. Must attend both days.

- Difficult Behaviors in Foster and Adopted Teens
  Thursday, May 19th from 6:30pm–8:30pm
Mat-Su Training:

Unless otherwise noted, the trainings in Wasilla will be held at ACRF: 5050 Dunbar ST, STE A2 (off the Palmer/Wasilla HWY, Brentwood Plaza). Pre-Registration is Required for the following events by contacting Betsy at 376-4678 or bwoodin@nwresource.org.

✦ APRIL:
Adopting Through OCS
Tuesday, April 12th from 6:00pm–9:00pm.
Friday, April 29th from 9:00am-Noon.

Core Training for Resource Families
Mon, April 18, Tue, April 19, Thurs, April 21, and Mon, April 25th from 9:00am–1:00pm. Must attend all 4 days.

Video Day: Autism Spectrum Disorder
Thursday, April 7th from 9:00am-2:00pm.

✦ MAY:
Video Day: Generational Trauma
Thursday, May 5th from 9:00am-2:00pm.

Core Training for Resource Families
Tuesday, May 3rd from 6:00pm–9:00pm and Saturday, May 7th from 9:00am–5:00pm. Must attend both days.

Adopting Through OCS
Tuesday, May 10th from 6:00pm-9:00pm

Core Training for Relative Placement
Tuesday, May 17th and Wednesday, May 18th from 9:00am–1:00pm. Must attend both days.

✦ JUNE:
Video Day: Active Parenting
Thursday, June 2nd from 9:00am-2:00pm.

Upcoming Events in Mat-Su:

Mint Green Ribbon Tying Ceremony, April 10th at 2:00pm, Wasilla High School
This is a community event which will have speakers and then the community will tie a mint green ribbon on the fence at Wasilla High as a visual representation of each child with substantiated abuse or neglect findings in the Mat-Su Valley in 2010.

Mat-Su Family Celebration Festival, April 30th from 11am-5pm, Menard Sports Complex
This is a free community event with children’s activities, agency resource tables, food, workshops, and a cultural presentation by Father Oleksa. For additional information please contact Jamey Duhamel at 707-1743, Geraldine Nicoli at 373-7938 or Penny Westing at 745-1794.

Resource Family Appreciation Picnic, May 21st from 11:30am-2pm, invitations will be sent out with a location.
Annual appreciation event with games, food, fun activities, door prizes, Wild Bird Rehab Center, and balloon animals. Come participate in the event!

Annual Tribal Gathering, June 18th at Raven Hall at the AK State Fairgrounds.
This is a free community event with food, agency resource tables and entertainment. For more information please contact Penny Westing at 745-1794 or Geraldine Nicoli at 373-7938.
Foster and Adoptive Parents Grieve, too
By: John Bennett, Training Coordinator, Alaska Center for Resource Families

What do we mean by grief?
Look up the word, “grief” online, and you’ll find so many definitions, you might be tempted to quote Charlie Brown. For the purposes of this article, we will define grief as “the normal process of dealing with any significant loss.” This definition has three essential components, the fact that grief is “normal,” the fact that it is a “process,” and the fact that it is the response to “any significant loss.”

The idea of grief is often associated with people’s reactions to a death, but we will be using its broader meaning here. Taking a child into your home may bring you great joy, but it also brings losses, and an important part of the process of dealing with these losses is acknowledging them.

Why might you be grieving?
Some, but certainly not all, foster and adoptive parents have dealt with infertility. If infertility is an issue in your life, you must find a way to come to terms with it. However, whether you are dealing with infertility or not, taking in a child with special needs involves sacrifice and sacrifice is loss. What losses might you have incurred in order to provide support to this child?

- Personal time – solitude?
- Personal space?
- The attention of your spouse – your previous relationship with your spouse?
- The harmony and well-being of other children in your household?
- Time and relatives and friends?
- Financial freedom?

You may also be grieving over what has happened to the child, the fact that you are unable to soothe his or her pain, or the fact that you give more than you get back from this child.

If you are a foster parent and a child leaves your home, has that left an empty place in your life? Do you worry about the child and how he or she is doing? Do you wish some aspect of the transition had played out differently?

In addition to the above losses, grandparents raising their grandchildren have their own unique losses. Typically they have lost their role as the spoiling grandparent. Their hopes for their birth children have taken a hit. Their relationship with their birth children often becomes strained. They have lost the life they had planned for themselves.

Acknowledging your losses
Many foster and adoptive parents accept, early on, that they have chosen a difficult path and never take the time to think about what they have sacrificed. Yet, part of dealing with loss is acknowledging it. If you feel worn down by the life you have chosen – and most foster and adoptive parents do from time to time – it can be reassuring to realize how much you have done and to recognize that there is good reason to feel the way you do.

What is grief?
While there may be many definitions of grief, most experts agree on the following:

- Grief is painful.
- The more significant the loss is, the more intense the grief will be.
- Grief’s intensity will diminish over time, but the grieving doesn’t necessarily ever go away completely.
- Sharing your feelings with a sympathetic listener will help move the process along.
- We don’t all grieve in the same way.

It is also important to understand at least one thing grief is not. Grief and depression are not the same thing. Depression is a specific medical or mental health diagnosis and should be treated by a professional. Antidepressants and other drugs might temporarily reduce the intensity of feelings associated with grief, but they will not help you process the loss that is the source of the grief.

What you can do
One of the best things you can do to move forward is to take care of yourself. That means getting plenty of rest, eating healthy meals, exercising, and seeking practical and moral support from your community.

When people are tired, they are easily overwhelmed by the challenges of day to day living. Get plenty of sleep! This is more easily written that done, but it is essential if you are struggling with the painful process of dealing with losses. How you manage to get the sleep you need is up to you, but put it high on your priority list.
Foster and Adoptive Parents Grieve, too continued...

Respite care is also important for many foster and adoptive parents. Taking a child with special needs into your home is a more difficult and important job than most people ever attempt. You are not expected to do it without a break. Having a regular time to be away from your children will revitalize you. Some parents are able to get this time during the day when their children are away at school, but if you need additional time, figure out a way to make it happen. As with getting enough sleep, finding a way to get respite care on a regular basis might not be easy, but you cannot move down the highway if you run out of gas.

Exercise and proper diet are also important ways to recharge your batteries. When you are tired, it is not easy to work exercise into your hectic schedule, but the better the condition of your body, the easier it will be to accomplish the many tasks that parenting demands. Walking a mile each day will make a significant difference for most people. Try it! Eating healthy meals will also help provide you and your children with the strength to grow and heal.

Cultivate a support network. Whether you are raising children with a partner or as a single parent, you need support from outside your home. You need someone you can share your story with who will listen with sympathy. Such supportive listeners are often found in family and friends. Church is another place where many people find the rejuvenating support that helps keep them on track.

Look for adoptive and foster parent groups in your area. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of talking with people who “get it,” people who have experiences similar to your own. Support groups help you feel less alone, provide you with a wealth of experience to draw from, and are often the source of respite providers.

And finally, if rest, exercise, diet and your social network are not enough, and you begin to feel overwhelmed, seek professional counseling. Talk to your caseworker or licensing worker or find a counselor who can provide professional advice. You do not have to make this journey alone.

Foster and Adoptive Parents Grieve, too
1.0 Hour Self-Study Questionnaire

If you read the above entitled article and want foster parent training credit applied to your training requirement, fill out the following questionnaire and FAX it to 1-907-479-9666, mail to ACRF, 815 Second AVE STE 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701 or email to acrf@nwresource.org.

Name: ________________________________ Email: ________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________________________ Provider#: ____________________

1. The article defines grief as “the normal process of dealing with any significant loss.” What does it say are the three (3) essential components of that definition?

2. List three (3) of the things the article says most experts agree on about grief.

3. What mental health diagnosis does the article point out as not the same as grief, and as something that should be treated by a professional?

4. The article mentions rest as important to foster and adoptive parents. What two (2) approaches to getting rest does it recommend?

5. In order to share your feelings with a sympathetic listener, list three (3) people or places you might go to.
New Courses Available from ACRF

Self-Study Course: Understanding Family Contact (2.0 Hours)
DVD: Effects of Neglect in Early Childhood (1.0 Hour)
DVD: Fostering Familiarity and Cultivating Cultural Connections (1.0 Hour)
DVD: Talking to Your Child About Adoption (1.0 Hour)

Available at the Fairbanks ACRF Library!
Call 479-7307 or 1-800-478-7307 to check it out

Check-out period for DVD’s is two weeks