



# SAVE OUR CHILDREN COALITION



## NEWSLETTER

Catherine Parkins, Editor

### “The ABCs of Education in Foster Care” conference enlightens!

Eighty guests were in attendance on Saturday, June 6, 2009 for “*The ABCs of Education in Foster Care*” conference, co-sponsored by CAUSE (Citizens Alliance to Uphold Special Education) hosted at UM-Dearborn.

The program’s keynote speaker was **Dr. John Seita**, Associate Professor, Michigan State University, School of Social Work. Dr. Seita explored the “private logic” of youth in foster care, emphasizing the way that foster youth think about themselves and their life experience in the foster care system. He also explored the concepts of family privilege and Connectedness, Continuity, Dignity, and Opportunity (CCDO) from his research. Dr. Seita also presented from the perspective of someone who had been a foster care youth himself and shared his personal experiences. For further information about any of Dr. Seita’s research, visit [JohnSeita.com](http://JohnSeita.com).

Following Dr. Seita’s presentation were **Ann**

**Rossi** from the Michigan Department of Human Services and **six youth from the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI)**. The youths shared their challenges and triumphs in obtaining an education while being in foster care.

A shocking example of the challenges found came from a panelist who explained she unable to graduate on time when she was moved from a placement in one county to another, one month before graduation. A second MYOI panelist explained that by age 13, he was already attending his 18th school.

The MYOI panelists all emphasized the need for increasing awareness of educational resources for foster care youth. The panelists also called for better discretion about their status as a foster care youth in the school system. Two examples that came to the fore: social workers arriving in obvious State vehicles gained uncomfortable attention for youth. Second,

announcing that a youth’s social worker was present in public settings like the school lunchroom made them uneasy in front of classmates.

The third panel presentation was introduced by **Joanna Lofton** of CAUSE. Presenters included **Terresa Henderson-Jackson**, University Preparatory Academy, **Cynthia Simms**, Detroit Public Schools, and **George Winn**, The Children’s Center.

Ms. Simms spoke on “Resource Mapping,” an activity used to help students, educators and professionals illustrate resources available to them and discover what is available to them. Ms. Henderson-Jackson spoke on the need to reach out to students early on, to individualize learning and goal-setting. Mr. Winn focused on the need to design programs to solve problems for youth, and to involve them in the process.

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**Save Our Children Coalition** (SOCC) is a coordinating body which encourages collaboration among established and emerging community groups for Michigan’s children in foster care.

Save Our Children Coalition seeks to determine strengths in the foster care system, and supports the development of programs that fill gaps and correct problems.

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Feedback from the conference was very enthusiastic and called for more information about foster care and ways to help youths educational experiences while in foster care.

# Photos from “The ABCs of Education in Foster Care”



Keynote Speaker: Dr. John Seita



Ann Rossi (left) with panelists from Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative (MYOI)



**Joanna Lofton**, CAUSE (at podium)  
(L-R) **George Winn**, The Children’s Center;  
**Terresa Henderson-Jackson**, University  
Preparatory Academy;  
**Cynthia Simms**, Detroit Public Schools

# Perspectives: 12 Tips for Connecting

*This month, we present a Perspectives column that goes to the heart of interacting with foster youth as individuals. How do you connect? These 12 tips are courtesy of John Seita's website, [JohnSeita.com](http://JohnSeita.com).*

## **1. Recast All Problems as Learning Opportunities.**

*Please coach me, don't scold at me. Seize the Teachable Moments!*

## **2. Provide Opportunities for Fail-Safe Bonds.**

*A person like me really needs a fan club. Family Privilege in Action.*

## **3. Increase Dosages of Relationship.**

*I'm not sure that anybody really cares.*

## **4. Don't Crowd.**

*When you get too close, I need to back away for a while.*

## **5. Use the Back Door.**

*If you are interested in what I want, you are important.*

## **6. Decode the Meaning of behavior**

*I try to hide what I really think.*

## **7. Be "Authoritative."**

*Help me learn to control me.*

## **8. Model Respect to Disrespectful Youth.**

*Your respect builds mine.*

## **9. Enlist Troubled Youth as Team Members.**

*I am the world's best expert on me*

## **10. Touch in Small Ways.**

*I watch the little things you do to discover who you are.*

## **11. Give Seeds Time to Grow**

*Be patient with me – I am still learning.*

## **12. Keep Faith and Hope Alive.**

*I look into your eyes to see if you will give up.*

## SOCC Speakers Bureau Launched

On April 20, 2009, volunteers gathered for an orientation and training session for the SOCC Speakers Bureau. The Speakers Bureau has been established to build awareness about children in the foster care system in Michigan, and to engage communities in working to improve the lives of these children. The training session itself was planned and carried out by volunteers, including Bobby Wade (Children's Center), Tanya Griffiths (Catholic Social Services of Wayne County), Trina Richardson (Bethany Children's Services), Nichole Hoshock (DHS), Mary Trepanier-Street (UM-Dearborn) and Gail Bagale and Jennifer Bak, community volunteers.

Speakers are now equipped with a presentation of facts about the foster care system, designed and developed by Mary Trepanier-Street, Jennifer Bak, and Catherine Parkins. Additionally, the training session worked with the speakers to help each one develop a personalized approach to his/her presentation, depending on background and experiences of the individual.

We are pleased to have a group of speakers representing many different fields, including the Courts, Department of Human Services, foster care agencies, foster care review boards, foster care alumni, faith based and community groups. Our hope is to "match" speakers with community groups

requesting presentations, depending on the group and its interests. Additionally, the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative will provide youth who are transitioning out of foster care to accompany our speakers to engagements when they are requested.

The next step is to "market" the Speakers Bureau to the public. We have had some requests, and they have resulted in increased awareness of the needs of children in foster care, and beginning offers to help. We need to keep spreading the word!

# Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care Update

It's not too early to plan for ways that congregations can help with needs of foster children going to school. Donation drives for school supplies and school clothing need to start in August so that children are ready for school after Labor Day. These donation drives are effective ways to help raise awareness of congregations about the concrete needs of foster children and youth.

We are finding that people **want to help** alleviate the hardships of foster children in our communities. But they **need to be asked** for specifics.

**Come on August 11 at 7:00PM to First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham (1669 West Maple Road, Birmingham 48009) for our next Faith Communities Coalition meeting.** We will continue to share what is happening in our congregations, and learn from some of our service providers about needs and projects which we can assist. It's even not too early to think about joint projects for the holiday season.

Meanwhile, the momentum grows among our congregations. Several churches had sermons, special presentations, and newsletter arti-

cles to emphasize May as Foster Care Month. The session of Grosse Pointe Memorial Church voted to partner and support the work of the Coalition.

Collaborative efforts are emerging between local congregations and service providers: Working in conjunction with The Children's Center staff, Rev. Brenda Jarvis and Rhonda Barley enthusiastically report that their transitional housing for youth, A Place of Refuge, is now a reality. Life Church in Canton is collaborating with the Judson Center to provide periodic respite care to foster families. Other church groups are offering mentoring opportunities for foster children. Some comments we've received recently :

***" We are glad to put the word out to our congregation and to our denomination on the pressing issue of foster care in our area. We want to inform many in our denomination of the heartfelt needs of these families and children. We have sent information out to our denomination and local congregation about the programs in Foster Care. We welcome support in helping host a display table at our denominational annual gathering. We will***

***promote this program in the fall of 2009."***

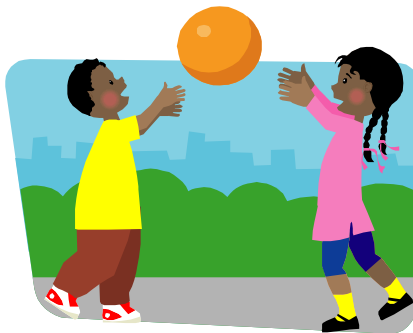
Director of Outreach, Congregational Church of Birmingham

***"A most worthy project and we are happy to have members of our congregation who are foster parents. We have a living witness to the power of extending the boundary of what it means to be a family at our local church. Our Deacon's committee is interested in this program and have assigned a Deacon who is interested in following up with this. Thanks for reaffirming this program. We support it wholeheartedly."*** Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church, Chair of Missions & Outreach Committee

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Help keep this momentum going! Participate in our next Faith Communities Coalition meeting on August 11. Contact the coordinator, Rev. Kate Thoresen at 248-643-8373 for details.

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## SOCC Advisory Committee

The SOCC Advisory Committee, representing the many perspectives and “voices” of those who care about the welfare of Michigan’s children in foster care, utilizes the special expertise of many of our supporters in moving the Coalition forward.

The Advisory Committee is composed of the following members:

**Gail Bagale**, SOCC Interim Director/Volunteer

**Brenda Baker-Mbacké**, Michigan Foster Care Review Board

**David Benjamins**, Detroit Institute for Children

**Lacea Curtis**, The Guidance Center

**Paul Duford**, Shared Youth Vision Project

**Danita Echols**, Wayne County Department of Human Services

**Rosalind Folman**, Developmental Psychologist

**Jonnie Hill**, CIAO Project

**Robert B. Holmes**, University of Michigan

**Nicole Hoshock**, Michigan Department of Human Services

**Cameron D. Hosner**, Vista Maria

**Annette Howard**, Faith Communities for Families

**Gilda Jacobs**, Senator, State of Michigan

**Viola King**, Legal Aid and Defender Association

**Jack Kresnak**, Michigan’s Children

**Shirley Mann-Gray**, Children’s Hospital of Michigan

**Mona Perdue**, Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative

**Kelly Ramsey**, 3rd Judicial Circuit Court of Michigan

**Trisha Stein**, Child’s Hope

**Deborah Strong**, Great Start Collaborative Wayne

**Cynthia Swift**, Plymouth-Canton Community Schools

**Veda D. Thompkins**, Families on the Move

**Kate Thoresen**, Faith Communities Coalition on Foster Care

**Mary Trepanier-Street**, University of Michigan-Dearborn

**Annemarie Valdez**, Child’s Hope

### Save Our Children Coalition

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If you would like to be removed from the Save Our Children Coalition mailing list, please e-mail [SOCCProject@umd.umich.edu](mailto:SOCCProject@umd.umich.edu) or call the office at 313.593.5052.