

# **Keeping It Simple**

**A Common Sense Approach to Service Delivery:**

**Revising The Foster Care System To Ensure Foster Children**

**Receive The Necessary Services That Will Enable Them To**

**Grow And Develop To The Maximum Degree Possible.**

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February 5, 2008 – A court ordered analysis of child abuse and neglect cases in Michigan’s Department of Human Services, issued by the Children’s Research Center, affirmed allegations made by the Children’s Rights group accusing the Department of Human Services of systemic failure to provide children, referred or committed to their care and supervision, with stable foster care placements, necessary services, and proper protection from further mistreatment.

The report pointed out major deficiencies in Michigan’s service delivery to children under its care. These deficiencies included: (1) Children being placed in relative homes that were unlicensed without the required checks for criminal and child abuse violations on the relatives, thereby neglecting the safety of the children placed. (2) DHS caseworkers failing to make mandated visits to children in foster care placements. (3) Children being abused and/or neglected in their foster care placements. (4) Children are being moved from placement to placement thereby continuing to traumatize and destabilize them. (5) Children who are eligible for adoption endure longer than necessary time in foster care after they become eligible. (6) DHS provides poor planning and fails to adhere to standards of good practice in providing for the needs of children in care and reporting. (7) DHS has failed the children entrusted to its care and supervision by failing to provide necessary and mandated medical, dental and mental health care. (33)

Is the “system” really broke or is it a waste product of philosophical rhetoric and political power struggling? Each of us has an idea of how to improve the system. Some feel parents that don’t provide the basic needs for their children should not have them. They fail to look at the whole picture or take into account events that have influenced the way these parents act. Some feel we should provide assistance, but fail to understand past events that have influenced these parents and provide for adequate services and monitoring. Others feel we should impose rules on these parents, hold them accountable, but fail to provide avenues and supports that would offer them a path to a better life.

Developing a common sense program that utilizes all the public and private services Federal, State, local governments and the private sector have in place to assist people in developing and reaching their potential, should be the ultimate goal of society. If we look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, we begin with the basic needs. Maslow’s model consists of six levels of needs beginning with the lower levels; ●physical needs – food, clothing; ●safety – shelter, physical protection. These must be met and maintained throughout our life if we are to achieve the upper levels. The next two are ●belonging – (social connections) and ●love. The final two levels are ●self-esteem and ●self – actualization. (8,36)

Maslow assumes that physical and safety needs have to be met throughout our lives. Everyone begins at the lower level of needs first and must have these needs met before they can progress to the next level. Maslow also assumes that no one has all their needs completely met.

When looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs it is easy to see how young people who have come from a disruptive environment and are moved into an unfamiliar environment, can revert to survival or infantile behavior.

The Directors of the human services agencies of the State of Michigan stated in their December 1993 report on "Improving The Well-Being Of Michigan's Children", "Children are our most precious resource, and their preparation for the future must concern all of us. ...Our investment in the well-being of Michigan's children will determine the State's future, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of the quality of life for all citizens." (Improving Michigan's Children, 1993) (21)

The Directors also quoted then Governor John Engler as saying, "Our children's fundamental requirements must be met today to prepare them to lead Michigan in the future." (Improving Michigan's Children, 1993)

So where are we today? A Michigan's Children analysis report states, "Michigan's Commitment to Children - Rhetoric or Reality? *Funding* for most of the major child abuse and neglect prevention programs has been *cut* since fiscal year 2000, even as the number of child abuse victims grew 5 percent and foster care placements increased nearly 28 percent. After five years of major cuts in programs designed to help make all children ready for school, lawmakers raised *funding for early childhood services* by about \$7.7 million in 2007. Still, overall funding is *down 34 percent since 2001*, restricting access to preschool for more than 16,000 income-eligible four-year-olds. Spending for Medicaid services continues to grow in Michigan, as caseloads increase. Meanwhile, *funding has been cut in preventative services*. Today, one in five Michigan children is born to a mother who had inadequate prenatal care. Nearly one of every ten is born low-weight, placing them at risk of a range of poor developmental outcomes and chronic illnesses. Approximately 1,000 Michigan infants die each year before their first birthday." (Michigan's Children, December 2006). (22)

### CONTINUUM-OF-CARE

What do people who have what society calls a *successful life* have in common? We all had someone who validated us as individuals; who believed in our abilities and encouraged us to move ahead; who provided us with external support when our self worth was lacking, and in some way implied that *God don't make junk!*. Alice Miller, in her book "The Untouched Key", called this person a *helping witness*. (2) I call them *character builders*.

Studies I have done indicate an even greater need for this type of person, or persons, in young people's lives today. Over the years we have seen politicians, actors/actresses, professional sports players and public service agencies advocate for *mentor* programs. Webster's II New College Dictionary (1999) defines mentor as; "A wise and trusted teacher or counselor". (20)

How can we as care providers accomplish this? How can we be *builders of character* when young people come to us already damaged, physically and/or emotionally? We can use the tools, skills and resources we have; like a contractor remodeling a home.

We must take young people as they are, but our attitude and actions about them as human beings can go a long way in effecting change in them. Dwight Eisenhower once used an illustration with string to explain leadership; “Pull it and it will follow wherever you wish, Push it and it will go nowhere at all.” (34)

Attitude is important, as well as belief in your abilities. Our attitude is our choice; we determine how we will approach the day and our activities. Even though events happen that seem negative, we have the power to determine our attitude towards these events. I once saw on a billboard with these words, “*Choice not chance determines our destiny.*” Attitude provides us with the ability to do the things we need to do, with the talents we have.

So where do we go from here? How do we harness the potential of our youth-in-care? How do we take an existing system and improve it? The State of Michigan, Department of Human Services has as their mission, “We Strengthen Individuals and Families Through Mutual Respect and Mutual Responsibility”. One of Webster’s II New College Dictionary (1999) definitions of “respect” is, “Willingness to show consideration or appreciation. To feel or show deferential regard for: Esteem. (Deference – courteous respect for or submission to another’s opinion, wishes, or judgment).” Mutual is defined as, “1. Having the same relationship each to the other. 2. Directed and received in equal amount. 3. Possessed in common.” (Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 1999) (20)

If we regard another’s feelings, thoughts and self-worth as important and equal to what we would expect from others in regard to us, we can easily begin to empower our youth-in-care and their families. In order to do this in a way that has the greatest impact, we need to look at our services as a continuum-of-care. For most of us, we had the support of a family and/or extended family and community throughout our life. How can we then not offer this same opportunity to the children and families under our care?

What should a continuum-of-care of services look like? The ideal continuum-of-care would be one that is accessible at any time in a person’s life development. Children/youth, single parents, young families, middle aged and older adults, all would have the opportunity to access services in child rearing techniques, daycare services, education, employment, mental health, health care etc, *without* the fear of reprisal or negative stigma. As I stated at the Binsfeld commission hearings, “When our Department of Human Services opens its doors each day, people should be waiting in line to access our services and the programs that we have to offer. Instead, they hide behind locked doors and covered windows afraid that if they come to us requesting assistance with their children, we would take their children away from them or make them feel inferior.” It has happened!

This continuum-of-care needs to be a collaborative effort – involving government and the private sector. We don’t operate in a vacuum, so this continuum-of-care effort needs to

encompass all governmental entities; human services, education (early childhood, preschool, high school, college and trades), health (physical/mental), and employment programs.

Communities and the private sector need to take some responsibility also. Communities, and their citizens, create the atmosphere for its members and have the ability to envelop or alienate individuals or groups. The private sector needs bodies; healthy, educated and trained, for their operations to run. It is time that all parties take a close look at what their goal and role is. All three, government, business and citizens want a strong economy where people are employed, families have the ability to provide for their needs and care for their children, and crime is low.

How can these factions work together to create this venue? Government needs to take the lead, reassess, and focus on ways where all parties can contribute to, and benefit from this plan. This will involve government and the private sector coming together to work on and accomplish this plan. All parties must come to the table with a clean slate and open mind, prepared to honestly negotiate and compromise, so that a realistic plan can be accomplished that benefits all citizens. We will need to reassess our purpose, priorities, and our overall objectives as a society.

If we believe our country was founded on “Christian” values, we need look no further than the Bible to find solutions. Christ taught us to care for the widows and orphans, to do well by others, to give to charity and to not shore up our wealth.

Business must also participate. If business expects employees that are ready and able to step into the job market, they must be willing to work with those entrusted with educating these workers and offer their knowledge and resources.

Alice Miller, a brilliant Swiss analyst, states in her book, “For Your Own Good”: “All children are born to grow, to develop, to live, to love, and articulate their needs and feelings for their self-protection. For their development, children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them, and honestly help them to become oriented in the world.” She goes on to say, “If mistreated children are not to become criminals or mentally ill, it is essential that at least once in their life they come in contact with a person who knows without any doubt that the environment, not the helpless battered child, is at fault. In this regard, knowledge or ignorance on the part of society can be instrumental in either saving or destroying a life. Here lies the great opportunity for relatives, social workers, therapists, teachers, doctors, psychiatrists, officials, nurses [and others], to support the child and to believe her or him.” (Miller, 1990) (1)

## **PREVENTION**

A continuum-of-care should begin with prevention. There is an old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”. If we plan ahead, if we take the time to educate and assist children and families at the early stages, we can prevent many of the social issues we have today. Collaboration is a key component. A good family history should

include information that would provide a detailed an outline of the family. This *assessment* needs to identify all the players and how they and their actions/inactions, impact family functioning. What are the emotional, cognitive, environmental, situational and behavioral issues? Family functioning can be improved by providing the supports necessary to assist family functioning.

What is prevention? Webster defines it as. “1. To keep from happening: Avert. 2. To keep (someone) from doing something; impede.” (Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 1999) (20) Prevention involves families/extended families, communities and their organizations, and local, state and federal governments. Families are the first level of defense. How they teach and coach their members is the first step in a positive or negative outcome. How open and involved the community is and how they interact with their members is a second level of defense. Government is the final level. How the government views all of its citizens and chooses to construct its laws/policies, models the behavior its citizens will follow. If a parent is abusive, there is a high probability the children will be abusive.

Prevention needs to be a partnership involving professionals from all service agencies that focus on a common goal; improving family functioning. Shared planning and delivery of services leads to practices that are better able to meet the needs of children and families.

If the legislature would take the time to seriously debate this issue and seek input from those most knowledgeable about social welfare, they could come up with a proposal that would involve other governmental agencies and put together a bill that would not only take steps to reduce the welfare numbers, but also provide families with the skills and abilities to enter the job market. This would in fact assure “Kids will be better off if they see their parents working and learn from that.”

Is it easy? NO! Can it be done? YES! Adults have been programmed by their past to respond to the world in a certain way. Reality belongs to the individual. What each of us perceives as reality is colored by our experiences, or lack of experiences. The great thing is, as adults, we can choose to change our behavior! We can decide now that we are going to take the steps necessary to give more time and focus to our children. ***They are our future.***

### **FOSTER CARE/RESIDENTIAL CARE**

PROBATE CODE OF 1939 (EXCERPT) Act 288 of 1939, 712A.1 Definitions; proceedings not considered criminal proceedings; construction of chapter. Sec. 1. (3) This chapter shall be liberally construed so that each juvenile coming within the court's jurisdiction receives the care, guidance, and control, preferably in his or her own home, conducive to the juvenile's welfare and the best interest of the state. If a juvenile is removed from the control of his or her parents, the juvenile shall be placed in care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents.” (PROBATE CODE OF 1939 (EXCERPT) Act 288 of 1939) (17)

So what does this mean? We are all aware of the abuse that children have suffered at the hands of individual State's and their contracted providers. We have laws that provide for the protection of children, yet too many times children under the jurisdiction of State and local governments end up short changed by our system. When this happens, there is a whole lot of finger pointing and accusations made as to why this happened and who's to blame. Someone is always looking for a "fall guy", a person that can be held accountable for the wrong doing and someone that can be "*punished*".

As a society, we spend an inordinate amount of time and money seeking revenge for wrongs and not enough time seeking ways to better people and society. Why? My guess is that it is easier to punish, for this is what society has been conditioned to demand. It is supposedly cheaper to lock someone up then it is to structure society to eradicate these social problems. It "*does our heart and soul good*" to punish the wrong doer! But we still have victims, and I would suggest we have more victims then before because the powers that be have failed to address the real issue. Politicians have forgotten that they are elected by the people to serve *the people*, not themselves. They have forgotten that the role of government is to serve all citizens, not just those that can put money into their re-election coffers or provide other favors for them. They have also forgotten that they are to protect those less fortunate, not only those who have money and "power". Providing programs that work to prevent problems and support society as a whole, are better than what we have now.

Youth-in-care need to be educated, need employment and job skills, need to learn to budget money, interact appropriately with others in society, and need a place where they are valued for who they are and what they can achieve.

Foster and residential care can be an ideal environment to provide this. Youth should be able to get individualized educational needs met, they should be able to have employment opportunities available and they should have their physical and emotional needs met (Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Remember the Michigan Probate Code, "*care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents.*" (PROBATE CODE OF 1939 (EXCERPT) Act 288 of 1939). (17)

Now one could argue that these youth would not have had any chance if left in their home environment, and the fact that they were removed from a negative situation and services provided, should give them the desire to want to better their life. This could be true, but by not fully and accurately providing the services necessary to affect change in these young people's lives, aren't the Court's and the State creating the same type of environment they removed the youth from? Maybe not an environment that is void of the basic needs, but an environment that is void of the emotional nurturing and caring that these youth so desperately need and have been lacking in their lives.

In an article published in The New York Times, January 27, 2007 by Erik Eckholm, on a study of former youth-in-care in Detroit, Michigan, indicated that they believed part of their problems started when they were removed from their parents. Some felt they were removed to too hastily, and being moved away from family, relatives, friends and their

school. They suggested that they have a say whenever changes in their status was being considered and to provide them with help in maintaining family ties. (32)

The State has the ability to mandate services for youth-in-care. They contract with private agencies and individual foster parents, and provide public institutions for youth needing placement outside of their homes. They can mandate that these contracted providers provide opportunities to youth under their supervision, to promote social growth in the areas of employment and education, while also providing for their individual emotional needs. Some would argue this is already being done, but a look at our prisons, licensing investigations, and now the Children's Rights report, will prove otherwise.

If we are seeking educated, employable, law abiding tax paying citizens, wouldn't it be prudent for law makers to mandate specific requirements for any agency providing services to youth-in-care and provide for adequate oversight, resource acquisition and penalties for non-compliance?

By law and policy, youth-in-care are entitled to services that will give them the opportunity to grow, develop and prosper – socially, emotionally and cognitively. Remember what the Michigan Juvenile Code says, “each juvenile coming within the court's jurisdiction receives the care, guidance, and control, preferably in his or her own home, conducive to the juvenile's welfare and the best interest of the state. If a juvenile is removed from the control of his or her parents, the juvenile shall be placed in care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents.” (PROBATE CODE OF 1939 (EXCERPT) Act 288 of 1939) (17)

If we as a society are making judgments on another parent's ability to parent appropriately, then “we” as a society need to set the example and provide services for the children we have removed, that will provide them with the opportunity to better themselves.

So why doesn't this happen? My guess is that it is a cost issue for one and a philosophical issue second. To actually provide the services youth-in-care need requires a financial outlay and a commitment beyond a year. But if the Legislature and the Courts are telling parents that they are not providing adequately for, or properly monitoring their children, then they are mandated to provide the programs and services that will. If they believe parents are not capable of providing what Maslow refers to as the basic needs, and additionally the services and guidance that will enable their children to grow and mature into responsible adults, then the State must demonstrate this behavior.

### **AFTERCARE**

We spend a large amount of time, energy and money on youth in placement, yet the vast majority of youth placed in out-of-home care are no further ahead then the day they entered care. They are ill prepared to take care of themselves physically, socially, economically and psychologically; or provide for themselves in a socially acceptable

way. We have failed to provide them with the basic skills they will need to navigate society in the future. Leaving care or leaving home as a young adult is a very vulnerable time in any young person's life and the majority of youth leaving our system have no positive role model to turn to for assistance. Our system appears to place more emphasis on the out-of-home placement than quality of services the child receives.

Gary Stangler, director of Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, a foundation in St. Louis states, "In our society, most 18-year-old kids aren't ready to be thrust into the world." (31)

Add to this what Jean McFadden stated in her paper presentation at the Sixth International Foster Care Organization Educational Conference, August 1991, in Jönköping, Sweden, "When we work with young people in care, assisting in their preparation for emancipation at ages 17 or 18, we often find that they have difficulty in making decisions, setting goals or making good choices in personal relationships or use of leisure time. We should not be surprised, as this is the natural consequence of our system. If they have been denied choices at age 10, and have never participated in planning their lives as adolescents, how in God's name can we expect them to set goals at age 18 and function independently at age 19? By denying them genuine decision making earlier, have we not set them up to fail when they leave care?" (5)

McFadden goes on to state, "... to truly empower, we must stop making the decisions and plans for youth. Instead we can help strengthen them to demand and acquire what is their right – equal resources; opportunity equal to that of other children not in care; just laws and choice to determine their lives." (5)

Brian Raychaba, in his book *To Be On Our Own*, stated, "most youth have parents they can live with or at least rely on, but children leaving the care of child welfare are on their own. The child welfare system has no further responsibility for them." (29)

Patrick O'Brien, Director, New York Region Downey Side Families for Youth, in his testimony before a Joint Hearing of the New York State Senate Committee on Child Care and the New York State Assembly Committee on Children and Families, May 3, 1990 discussed the importance of life skills training for youth-in-care. He indicated that far too many youth do poorly after leaving care in spite of this training and relates this to, "... no one tried to develop a lasting human relationship in the child's life." (28) Alice Miller calls this person, "a helping witness". (2)

Raychaba discusses the feelings of isolation, rejection and abandonment former youth-in-care have. They have no one to turn to (in a positive sense), when problems arise, "for many youth, independence all too often becomes synonymous with isolation and loneliness". He goes on to state, "... it is clear that termination of care and maintenance at the age of majority witnesses the abrupt end of varied facets of support necessary for the continued well-being and successful development of young people. Concrete monetary support, educational and skills development support, informational/referral support, social integration support, and emotional support generally cease with the termination of care. And to compound matters, there is very often very little in the way

of healthy support to supplant the abruptly ended institutional care: young people from care characteristically exhibit, in the words of Anderson and Simonitch, “little if any family support to hold onto and buoy them up through this difficult life adjustment period.” (29)

I submit that it is possible, with continued State support; youth can gain the skills necessary to allow them to function in society and reduce the feelings of loneliness and anxiety. The Directors of the Human Services Agencies of the State of Michigan, in their December 1993 report on *Improving The Well-Being of Michigan's Children* stated, “Children are our most precious resource, and their preparation for the future must concern us. ... our investment in the well-being of Michigan's children will determine the State's future, not only in economic terms, but also in terms of the quality of life for all citizens.” (21)

The U.S. Congress recognized the extraordinary needs of youth who are or had been in foster care when they exit the child welfare system and make the transition to independence. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-66) permanently reauthorized the Independent Living Program effective October 1, 1992. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106-169) was enacted into law On December 14, 1999. This act amended Section 477 of the Social Security Act and provided states with more funding and greater flexibility in carrying out programs designed to help youth make the transition from foster care to independence, and increase their ability to take care of themselves physically, socially, economically, and psychologically.

Michigan's Department of Human Services policy regarding Independent Living states in CFF 950. *“The Foster Care Independence Act mandates state and local governments to offer an extensive program of education, training, employment and financial support for youth leaving foster care. Participation in such programs is to begin several years before high school completion and continue, as needed, until the youth is discharged from foster care, establishes independence or reaches 21 years of age. Despite its authorization under Title IV-E, the Independent Living Program is not a foster care maintenance program; it provides funds directed towards one goal, assisting youth that are or were in foster care to become self-sufficient adults.”* (25)

The goal of independent living preparation is to assist youth in transitioning to self-sufficiency. CFF 722-6 mandates that the Treatment Plan and Services Agreement for each youth, age 14 or over must contain a written description of the programs and services that will help youth prepare for transition to a state of functional independence, and the ability to take care of them self physically, socially, economically and psychologically. Services are to be provided based upon identified needs. Independent living preparation skills are to be assessed for each youth. Additionally, youth are to be involved in the development of their Independent Living plan and be responsible for its implementation with the assistance of identified individuals. Independent living preparation activities for youth 12-13 are encouraged based upon availability of services and assessment of need. I submit that all youth-in-care have this need.

CFF 722-6 further states that foster parents/relative/unrelated caregivers are an invaluable resource for independent living preparation. This would involve training in daily living skills, budgeting, (referred to as customary parental duties), that could be done in the home. The Parent-Agency Treatment Plan and Services Agreement are to detail the services the foster parent/relative/unrelated caregiver will incorporate in their daily routine to assist youth. For the average citizen, this is a clear mandate for any youth-in-care. However, what is written and what actually is accomplished are vastly different.

What happens when we remove children from their home and place them with a contracted provider; a provider that is supposed to provide “*care as nearly as possible equivalent to the care that should have been given to the juvenile by his or her parents.*” (PROBATE CODE OF 1939 (EXCERPT) Act 288 of 1939). (17)

I coordinated and supervised a Longitudinal Study of randomly selected former youth-in-care. Dr. Jane Swanson (Grand Valley State University – School of Social Work), a dedicated child advocate and professional, conducted this study from 1992 through 1996. This particular longitudinal study covered former youth-in-care under the Michigan Department of Social Services (now the Department of Human Services) in the following northern Michigan counties; Emmet, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Antrim, Otsego, Montmorency, Alpena, Leelanau, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona and Iosco.

Michigan, along with the other States had received federal funding to assist young adults in the foster care system gain the skills necessary to enable them to function socially and economically after leaving the foster care system.

In the first year of the study a baseline for individual outcomes and variables was provided, as well as providing assistance in outlining types and amounts of independent living skill development needs.

At the conclusion of the first Longitudinal Study the following areas of concern were listed: ●A low rate of health insurance coverage; ●A high rate of pregnancy; ●A low rate of full-time employment; ●A low rate of community agency support despite numerous social problems; ●A generally low utilization of public assistance (which may be a positive outcome or negative one depending on the circumstances); ●A high rate of arrest and/or incarceration; ●High rates of housing changes. (4)

In 2006 a study was conducted in Wayne County, Michigan regarding youth that had left the foster care system and were living on-their-own. “Youths from Detroit and two surrounding counties who aged out in 2002 and 2003, mainly African-American, were surveyed three and a half years after they left care. Seventeen percent had stayed in the streets or in shelters for an average of two months each. Some 33 percent had spent long periods “couch surfing” with friends or relatives. Four in ten were high school graduates. The average youth had been unemployed half the time since leaving care; most jobs were in fast food, averaging just \$600 per month. More than one in four males had spent time in jail. In other common patterns, many youths are eager to sever ties with the child

welfare bureaucracy, some squander their limited aid and others are in no shape to take advantage of these benefits” (24)

An article regarding youth aging out of the foster care system published February 21, 2007 in the Toledo Blade, noted the same issues the Zones 2 & 3 Longitudinal Study and Wayne County study found. The article indicated that for many foster-care children becoming a legal adult was more intimidating than exciting. It was noted that many youth exiting the system had nowhere to go, no job with which to earn money to support themselves and no one to turn to for support. While noting that foster-care systems do their best to provide for these children when they are removed from their parents, they also have serious weaknesses, including providing aftercare services for youth who age out of the system. These youth cannot remain in foster care and are no longer monitored by the system that removed them from their homes in the first place. They have reached that magical age of “adulthood” and are expected to “make their way” in the world and not come into contact with the legal system. (31)

The article stated that “if society forces these new young adults to fend for themselves, the social ills surrounding the issue will become more burdensome to society.” They also highlight the fact that most of these youth do not finish high school, do not have jobs or a place to call home. These youth do not have health coverage and the system did not feel it necessary to assist them in signing up for this coverage when they aged out. What this leads to for many is dependency on the system for further support and/or contact with the legal system. Exactly what Senator Handiman wished to avoid.

The article does concede that some of the teenagers manage to better themselves, however this is not the norm and most move into a life of uncertainty, destitution and isolation.

The article further stated that Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan co-chaired a task force in 2006 to find better ways to help teenagers who were aging out of the foster care system, but concluded that Michigan and other states needed to do more. The writer felt that solving the aftercare issue for youth aging out of foster care was an awesome and possibly expensive task and felt society owed these young adults some hope and assistance, stating that, “If we don't help them now, their lives will be ruined, and in every way, the burden on society will increase.”

I propose the following regarding Aftercare. Some of this has been previously mandated by policy, however better oversight is necessary and additional safeguards need to be added.

\*Mandate transitional services on a daily basis for all youth, especially those ages 14 and older, and mandate accurate documentation of these services. Mandate coordination with aftercare service providers at least six months prior to release.

\*Allow for supervised independent living for at least six months for youth in residential care facilities, prior to total release from care.

\*Mandate assessment and coordination with existing community services/resources at least 6 months prior to a youth's release from care (i.e., vocational education, college, employment agencies, DHS, DCH, courts, etc). Mandate confirmation of this coordination of services – I can't emphasize this enough.

\*Mandate aftercare supervision/follow up for at least one year by DHS, Private agencies, or courts if the youth returns to a family like setting or goes on their own.

## CONCLUSION

What can be done to enhance the services to youth-in-care and families involved in the Child Welfare System? Motivation for change must not include selfish motives, self preservation of jobs, or status. It must focus on the best interests of society as a whole. It must include sacrifice from government, business and citizens in order to promote the general welfare for all.

USA Today published an article on a child welfare study conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund. The study looked at six indicators to gauge the quality of life for children in 21 industrialized countries. This study concluded that Britain and the United States fared worst. The United States ranked last in health and safety which was calculated from data about infant mortality, low birth weight, immunizations and deaths from accidents and injuries. Sweden, Denmark and Finland, countries with strong welfare systems, were at the top of the list. (16)

Now we have policy and laws that provide for these services. These policies and laws set out what services are to be provided to our children. The problem is that "we" as a society don't want to **pay** for these services and programs. We want to feel good about *helping those less fortunate*, but we become selfish when it comes to having to shell out the money to provide these services.

The Honorable Judge Charles Gill of the Connecticut Superior Court, in his "Essay on the Status of the American Child, 2000 A.D.: chattel or Constitutionally Protected Child-Citizen?" in regards to *Family Preservation or Family Reunification* states, "On the surface, these are rational goals. And, in some situations, they are even workable for adults and children alike. Unfortunately, this national policy plays out quite differently in actual practice for hundreds of thousands of children. The national policy pendulum has swung so far to the adult side that we are leaving children in emotional limbo, or zones of danger, for often fatal periods of time. There are two practical reasons why the pendulum favors the adults. The first is money. It is cheaper for government to continue to keep children at "home" with their biological parent or parents. Second, it sounds good to the under-informed public, religious theorists and ultra conservatives that we are making "reasonable efforts" to preserve families. The truth is we are disregarding the security, love and bonding needs of our most helpless children. ....needs are ignored in an attempt to salvage harmful biologic caretakers, resulting in what one medical journal reported as an extended stay in temporary placements for children, more emotional and academic

problems and less likelihood of adoption. Many of these children are later seen in the delinquency courts.” (Gill, 1991). (27)

I propose that within the first 30 – 60 days after a family enters the system a thorough assessment is done on the family; including extended family. This assessment should include a psycho-social and educational evaluation of all family members, and psychological if necessary, to help determine the best possible alternative for the child(ren) and family. CFF 722-3 of the Department of Human Services Children’s Foster Care Manual mandates that, “Unless harmful to the safety needs or best interests of the child, the biological parent or psychological parent of the child shall be involved in the selection of any out-of-home placement.” (25) I would submit that this rarely happens. Reports may document that the parent was involved in the “case conference”, but I would submit that if interviewed, most parents would indicate they were not consulted regarding the placement decision.

The Federal government monitors the number of placements each child in care experiences. The goal is to have the fewest number of placements possible when a child is placed out-of-home. By completing a thorough assessment of the whole family and extended family, a worker will have as much information as possible to make a qualified decision. We would not make a personal decision requiring a large expenditure without first getting all the information possible about the players and risks involved, so why would we make a judgment regarding a family’s future without all the pertinent information on this family? My guess again is cost. But I would submit that it will and has cost the State more in the long run by not getting qualified information due to longer out-of-home placements and moves, then it would cost for a thorough assessment.

Now the State will argue that it already has the “Strengths and Needs Assessment” that is to be completed on all families. The key phrase is “is to be completed on all families”. I submit that this is more fiction than reality with State/local governmental and private agencies.

I propose the following for legislators and policy makers:

- \*Redefine foster and residential care; it is not a babysitting job. Foster parents and residential workers need to be elevated to at least the level of paraprofessional with training and guidance.
- \*Foster parents should be paid the equivalent of a salary. This should be based on a per youth average. In exchange, you can mandate time out and training. Foster parents would be considered paraprofessionals.
- \*Mandate training specific to the type of youth placed and on a monthly basis, and provide Continuing Education credits for this training.
- \*Mandate a provision of services and accurate documentation of these services; provide oversight to ensure conformity.

- \*Mandate working with parents/guardians and accurate documentation of this service. If the goal is to return home, the more involved all parties are, the sooner this can be accomplished.
- \*Mandate worker/foster parent/parent or guardian contact on a bi-weekly basis for youth-in-care. Ensure transportation assistance and flexible times for the parent/guardian. Include in this, assisting the parent/guardian involvement in doctors, school and other appointments involving their child/youth.
- \*Mandate foster parent contact with schools and other community resources for their youth.
- \*Mandate accurate documentation of clothing and allowance for children and youth on a quarterly basis.
- \*Mandate involvement with volunteer organizations, business' and employment agencies for all youth age 14 and older. Mandate accurate documentation of this.
- \*Mandate appropriate independent living training for all youth-in-care age 14 and older by foster parents and residential agencies and accurate documentation.
- \*For residential agencies, mandate monthly training updates for all workers specific to treatment programs offered; in addition to generic training.
- \*Mandate working with the legal parent on a monthly basis to promote reunification.
- \*Mandate private agencies provide Licensing/Purchased Services Division coordinator with staff and foster parent training –online- monthly, by type of youth under their care.
- \*Mandate County Department of Human Services oversight and sign off of case Initial and Updated services plans and supplemental service plan reporting. Or mandate quarterly meeting between all parties (DHS, private agency worker, foster parent, parent/guardian, youth and youth's attorney) and eliminate the supplemental report from DHS, since the majority of workers do not complete it.
- \*Mandate unification of reporting, i.e., one form with specific areas for Abuse/ Neglect or Juvenile Justice youth to streamline the reporting process.
- \*Mandate coordination of policy dealing with youth-in-care to eliminate confusion.

The question is, what individuals are willing to step up and put aside selfish, self serving behaviors and focus on promoting the betterment of society as a whole. This is my challenge to public officials, business and private citizen's; let's see who will be the first to step up to the plate.

My suggestion is for the legislature to take the lead. The legislature has the responsibility and duty to mandate that services are coordinated and all agencies that provide services to children and families work together. The legislature makes the laws and controls the

purse strings for programs and the agencies that provide the services. This means ALL agencies, public and private. Former President Bill Clinton says, “*The purpose of politics is to give people tools to make the most of their lives.*” (35)

Court’s need to take a more active role, be more in tune with the needs of children and families and mandate that Guardian ad litem’s and attorney’s, actually meet with and consult with children and families. The object of a hearing is to provide the information necessary for the judge to make an informed decision about a matter s/he would otherwise be unqualified to make. They need to respect the social workers and agency workers entrusted with the responsibility of working with and planning for the future of these children and families. They also have the responsibility to question the goals/objectives set out for children and families, as well as progress/barriers to these goals/objectives. In “The Best Interest of the Child it is stated, “Even child care agencies which are delegated responsibility for safeguarding the welfare of children often have conflicts of interest between their need to safeguard some agency policy and the needs of the specific child to be placed.” (3)

The State should consider the possibility of mandating that any attorney or Guardian ad litem for a child, must be able to demonstrate they are familiar with child development, juvenile law and are capable of providing the oversight necessary to ensure each child under their care receives the services necessary to grow and develop in a positive way. As stated in the book, *In The Best Interests Of The Child*, “The task of counsel for children is to discover and to represent the interests of the specific child who is their client. The problem is not that the Guardian ad litem gave the child *only* legal representation. He failed to recognize that he did not know enough about child development and parent-child relationships... the child’s lawyer should present and implement a client’s instructions to the best of his or her ability.” (3)

The book goes on to state, “Lawyers and judges abdicate their professional roles when they allow a court hearing to be limited to rubber stamping (or, for that matter, to rejecting automatically) proposals made by child welfare agencies or local authorities. One of the arguments for providing a child with independent counsel in such cases is that the state cannot be presumed to represent the interests of the particular child.” (3)

“It is in the best interests of the child for all of the professional participants to recognize that neither separately nor together do they make or make up for a parent... their function is the placement process is to enhance each child’s opportunity to have a parent whose knowledge is general but to whom the child is special. The professionals’ challenge is how to be caring without taking unnecessary control of the life of the child for whom they do not and cannot take full responsibility. The effectiveness of participation by persons of different disciplines in the child placement process depends on their learning from one another.” (3)

The following editorial, *Protecting our state's kids should be at top of our public agenda*, from the Lansing State Journal, reprinted in the Livingston Daily, February 26, 2007 sums up the choices legislators and taxpayers have. (30)

“Somehow, someday these stories have to stop. A child is dead. An adult who should have protected the child is, instead, imprisoned for causing the child's death. Another parent is deemed to have not properly cared for her child. And the state's children's ombudsman's Office is again left to investigate the actions of state workers charged with child protection.

This particular case involves the death of little Anishia Moy. A few months ago, it was little Ricky Holland's death that was at the center of court cases and headlines. As horrible, as frightening as these cases are, what really terrifies is what we do not know. How many children are in danger or suffering at the hands of those who should love and protect them?

In December, we called on Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature to make child-protection issues a top priority at the Capitol in 2007. In recent weeks, of course, the political energy has gone into Michigan's huge budget and tax questions. Lawmakers must not let the fiscal emergency crowd out the social crisis.

Last summer, Granholm and the Legislature agreed to spend the money to hire more child-protection workers. Where is the momentum now, though? The end of the year was consumed by a turf battle over the ombudsman's office. As part of her effort to close an \$800 million budget deficit, Granholm just issued executive orders to cut, among many other things, foster care payments this year.

For the next budget year, Granholm calls for \$40 million to hire additional child welfare workers and find permanent homes for foster children. We have no doubt that the governor and lawmakers want to do more to protect vulnerable children. Yet we are allowing circumstances to drive us from that goal, allowing circumstances to force us into settling for limited measures. Something far more bold is required if we don't want more Ricky Hollands and Anishia Moys, or more children who are deprived or hurt in ways that do not make the headlines.

We said it in December and we'll say it again: We're not making progress in child-rearing. To make budgets fit revenues, Michigan citizens must be ready to live with a variety of reduced services or a variety of increased taxes, or both. But somehow, someday, child protection must remain at the top of the public agenda.”

### Legislature

You are the key to fair and just services to the citizens of your state. Do not pass laws you are not going to accurately monitor and enforce.

The legislature is similar to a jury. Your mandate is to listen to “all” the “evidence”, and then make a decision based on this information. To migrate towards or pursue a course prior to getting “all” the information is prejudicial (and an injustice) to the citizens of

your state. Failure to take the time to educate yourself prior to making a decision is equal to prejudice and a violation of your oath of office.

State policy makers should be mandated to provide policy that is easy to understand and execute. Forms should be standardized for ease of use to reduce duplication of generic information. Policy makers should provide outlines to workers and private agencies that offer a synopsis of services available and how to access these services. Online policy should provide for easy access by key words.

It appears that today politics is more about party preservation, behavior equivalent to gang behavior, than on open, honest communication and debate. When preservation is the primary focus, individuality is discouraged. Politicians are elected by the people, to serve the people, to ensure compliance with the Constitution for the betterment of society, not personal benefit or personal promotion. Do unto to others as you would have done unto you. Get out of your protected world and experience others. Ask yourself honestly, “what is your agenda”? Who are you representing? For whose benefit are you promoting your agenda? Are you truly an individual seeking to better society as a whole, or are you a follower, promoting selfish agenda’s and being a puppet for those with power and money?

Can you honestly look at yourself in the mirror each day and honestly tell yourself you represent all citizens? What is your motivation?

### Courts

You are not the “know it all” authority. Your function is to make a decision based on the information presented, just like a jury. If the child welfare system is built on the belief that each child/youth deserves a safe, stable and loving home, your job is to understand and help create the conditions that will bring about this end. You must consider the “best interests of the child” without concern for your political career or monetary issues. Yes, making sure you don’t spend money without regard to the quality of the services purchased is important and your responsibility, however, not providing for the services necessary to prevent a child’s/youth’s further degeneration into the system is not in the child’s best interests or the best interests of society.

You are educated in the law and legal expertise; you are not a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, educator, doctor, etc. You would not allow someone without legal knowledge to make claims about legal issues; you should not presume to have more knowledge outside your area of expertise than the professionals representing these areas. You do have the right to question their recommendation, this is your job. Acknowledge and learn about each profession’s attributes.

### Business

You need to step up to the plate also. You want educated, knowledgeable people for employment, what can you do to assist schools, vocational centers and colleges to accomplish this? Can you provide training opportunities, money, resources, etc to assist?

Look at your advertising budget; can some of this money be used to assist? You receive tax rebates from the citizens of this state/country, what are you going to give back?

### Citizens

What is your role? You can impact law and policy through your involvement. You vote; you have the right and should question your legislator about proper use of your tax money. You would not allow someone to spend your money on a service that was not provided by a knowledgeable, trained professional – why would you allow your legislator to spend your tax dollars on services that are not provided by educated, knowledgeable and trained professionals? You take preventative measures to ensure your vehicle is in good condition, why would you not insist that your tax dollars be used to prevent further social decay?

Demand results and performance from your investment. Not taking the steps necessary to prevent further social decline has contributed to the explosive increase in our prison population today. Many of these adult prisoners were in the juvenile justice system, either for abuse/neglect or delinquent acts. What was not done that could have been done to assist these young adults and families better their situation? Were services not provided due to cost? We spend on around \$14,000 per year for the average foster care placement in Michigan. We pay an average of \$33,000 per year for a prison inmate, according to a report in Gongwer news. (23) This is a difference of \$19,000, which is 58% more expended to keep someone locked up, then to assist a child/youth and their family in care.

You also have a duty to educate yourself about the subject you are questioning. You cannot expect your legislator to take your input as truth unless you have looked at all sides of the issue before coming to your conclusion.

Or society continues on a path that incorporates a generational pattern of social neglect by those entrusted with the responsibility of insuring each person's right to the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness. Instead of taking the time to address the cause, we have morphed into a society that treats the symptoms, albeit poorly, or ignores them.

Punishment appears to be easier and cheaper than prevention and treatment. It is always someone else's responsibility to change, always someone else's responsibility to step up to the plate, to be the "adult" and make the decisions. Pointing the finger and passing the buck is a national trend.

My challenge to all that read this is to be the adult, to step up to the plate, to forget about your personal agenda and begin taking care of the children. Let's begin to change the social agenda to one of opportunity for *all* our citizens, with prevention programs that are available at any point in their life cycle. Remember the ripple effect you get when you drop a stone into the water? What each of us does to another has an impact on others. Let's, as a society, become that *helping witness* Alice Miller spoke of. For those who have had the blessings of a good life, let's "pass it forward".

As policy makers lets strive to ensure families and children are educated and aware of not only what is available to them, but how to access these services and who to contact. Let's begin to focus on those things we can and should do and not on the cost in dollars. We cannot accurately or honestly put a cost on helping to better a person's life, we have some idea of the cost in dollars and social decline by not addressing these issues.

Ignorance breeds ignorance. Our current system is like a hamster in a wheel, it just keeps going around and around, but not getting anywhere. We change the names of agencies and programs and introduce revamped ideas and continue to address the symptoms instead of the cause. We have become a reactive rather than proactive society.

You want to nurture and guide, not control. What we as caregivers may want for young people, is not necessarily what we get. We need to understand and acknowledge that there is a difference between guidance and control and what we do speaks louder than what we say at times.

Controlling creates dependency, stifles creativity and self-expression, and can lead to some major conflicts. Jean McFadden (Professor at Grand Valley State University and renowned advocate for children and families) states, "When we work with young people in care, assisting in their preparation for emancipation at ages 17 – 18, we often find that they have difficulty in making decisions, setting goals or making good choices in personal relationships, or use of leisure time. We should not be surprised, as this is the natural consequence of our system. If they have been denied choices at age 10, and have never participated in planning their lives as adolescents, how in God's name can we expect them to set goals at age 18 and function independently at age 19? By denying them genuine decision-making earlier, have we not set them up to fail when they leave care? ... to truly empower, we must stop making decisions and plans for youth." (McFadden, 1989 p.2) (5)

Empowerment of our youth-in-care will require that we as workers and caregivers be supportive of this effort. This will involve relinquishing some of our control to enable them to learn by doing, with us as support networks. We must understand that these young people are survivors; they have developed the skills necessary to survive in the environment they are in. Good or bad, they have the skills they need to maintain and carry on. Our responsibility, the responsibility of the "system", is to assist these young people in refining their survival skills in a way that will benefit them now and into the future. Listen to them!

Please Believe In Me  
(For All Youth-in-Care)

I did not chose  
the birth I had.  
I did not chose  
my mom or dad.

I am what I am,  
what you can see.  
Won't you please  
believe in me!

I only wish  
for you to see  
The talents I have  
inside of me.

Don't look at me  
as damaged goods.  
I can do well  
and know I could.

Beyond yourself  
you have to look  
Forget the stuff  
you got from a book.

See me for the person  
I am, and can be.  
Oh please, please,  
just believe in me! (13)

This change will not and cannot happen over night, it will take time and effort on everyone's part. Like learning to walk, these youth will need to go through a learning process step by step. You need to learn to crawl before you walk, walk before you run and swim before you dive in. This process goes on in "normal" homes daily; shouldn't it be afforded our youth-in-care? The question now is, are we as professionals willing to take the risks by loosening the controls and allowing these young people the chance to better themselves and eventually society? (White, 1991) (6)

Encourage youth, let them make decisions, little by little, and take the consequences for these decisions. This will help to empower them and encourage them to be more assertive in acquiring necessary skills and knowledge. I personally feel all youth-in-care should be afforded the opportunity to participate in assertiveness training classes and encouraged to practice these skills on a daily basis.

We need to create a safe, secure and nurturing environment for youth. We need to use *patience* and *praise* more than impatience and ridicule. We need to set limits and be consistent. We need to *communicate* openly and honestly and make sure our actions follow what we say. *Respect* their feelings, they are human beings too. Be *forgiving* and

*understanding*, keep cool, allow room for questioning your decisions; and don't be afraid to admit an error. (10)

Talk with them, not at them. Listen to what they have to say, I continue to be impressed at how creative our youth-in-care are. Get involved; be informed about their world, not to be meddlesome or controlling, but to show you care. Above all else, be honest with them and yourself. (White, 1995) (6)

I would like to leave you with the following suggestion for all youth-in-care. Some have come from Chris Durocher (Michigan Child Welfare Training Institute), a friend and colleague of mine.

### Rights & Reasonable Expectations of Children & Youth in Foster Care

In all cases, you have a right to and/or reasonable expectation of:

- Care and supervision, food, clothing, shelter, goods and services, safety and security, as outlined or required by the law, Foster Care policy, and licensing rules and regulations, and as appropriate for your age, stage of development, and individual life situation, you have a right to:
- Be treated as a human being;
- Practice your religion and/or refuse to attend or practice the religion of others;
- Receive and send mail and/or be present (when mail is opened), if there is clear and convincing evidence that your mail must be opened by someone else;
- Have and/or have secured your personal possessions;
- Have the allowance portion of the foster care payment provided to your caregiver;
- Be placed with your relatives, kin, or siblings and/or have a plan of contact as required by law/policy;
- Have a discipline and/or behavior management plan, and plan for your future development, specific to your needs and stage of development;
- Be enrolled in school or a school program that supports your educational and developmental needs; and have access to extra curricular programs like band and sports. In addition, you have the right to be allowed to test out or have your credits carried over if you are moved during a school semester;
- Medical, dental, vision and mental health care that meets your individual needs;
- Be in a placement that is safe, secure, and that best meets your specific needs and individual permanency plan and you have the right to pre-placement visitation;
- Privacy and confidentiality of your case;
- Have a treatment plan & service agreement that was developed with your family/kin, caregivers, *and you*. If you are 14 years old or older, you have a right to an independent living or adulthood preparation plan, developed and approved with your assistance. You also have a right to sign and receive a copy of this plan. In addition to this plan, you have a right to employment & transportation assistance to that employment;
- Be cared for by people who have been screened, trained, are knowledgeable in child rearing and development practices, and are able to best meet your needs;
- If a North American Indian child/youth be treated according to the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster care policy;

- Be represented by and have access to a Lawyer Guardian Ad Litem (LGAL);
- Have age appropriate clothing, school supplies, personal care products, and all other goods/items necessary for your developmental needs;
- All goods and services available through funding and programs intended to meet the needs children and youth in foster care.

By not providing this information to our youth-in-care, we are relegating them to second class citizens and denying them access to services and legitimate participation in their treatment plan.

It is time that we treat youth-in-care as human beings - empowering them to take control of their lives. We need to do much better in promoting better communication between youth in care and their workers and care providers.

***Children Learn What They Live***  
***By Dorothy Law Nolte***

*If children live with criticism,  
They learn to condemn.*  
*If children live with hostility,  
They learn to fight.*  
*If children live with ridicule,  
They learn to be shy.*  
*If children live with shame,  
They learn to feel guilty.*  
*If children live with encouragement,  
They learn confidence.*  
*If children live with tolerance,  
They learn to be patient.*  
*If children live with praise,  
They learn to appreciate.*  
*If children live with acceptance,  
They learn to love.*  
*If children live with approval,*

*They learn to like themselves.  
If children live with honesty,  
They learn truthfulness.  
If children live with security,  
They learn to have faith in themselves and others.*

*If children live with friendliness,  
They learn the world is a nice place in which to live.*

*Copyright © 1972/1975 by Dorothy Law Nolte*

*Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.*

*This is the author-approved short version. (37)*

## About the Author

William (Bill) White is a licensed, clinical and macro, Master's Social Worker. He has been involved in the child welfare system for the past 30 years. He began his career as a Juvenile Probation Officer/Court Referee/Supervisor in Leelanau County Probate Court under the Honorable Elizabeth Weaver, in September 1978. In March 1987 Bill began his employment with the State of Michigan in Charlevoix County for the Department of Social Services (now the Department of Human Services). During this time he was involved in delinquency, foster care, prevention, and foster home licensing. In 1988 Bill was a committee member for the Independent Living Task Force for the State of Michigan. This committee was designed to promote independent living skills and aftercare services for youth-in-care and former youth-in-care. In September of 1989 Bill moved to the DHS Traverse City, Zone 2 office to coordinate the Youth-In-Transition program for 27 counties in northern Lower Michigan and eventually coordinated this program for the whole state for two years. Currently Bill is a Child Welfare Consultant for the Purchased Services Division, State of Michigan.

Bill received his Associates in Law Enforcement from Northwestern Michigan College and his Bachelor's in Criminal Justice and Master's of Social Work degrees from Michigan State University. He also completed a Post Graduate Fellowship at the University of Michigan in child abuse and neglect. Bill is currently certified in Basic, Self and Advanced Hypnosis and is pursuing certification in Hypnotherapy.

During his time as coordinator for the Youth-In-Transition program, Bill was involved in developing regional conferences for youth-in-care, ages 16 -19, and developing and providing trainings for youth-in-care, foster parents and volunteers regarding independent living skills and mentoring. Bill was instrumental in getting independent living monies distributed to the local county offices to enhance service provision. Bill also developed and implemented Transitional Living and Mentor contracts for youth leaving care and assisted state and private agency workers in promoting and enhancing services for youth-in-care and former youth-in-care.

A major accomplishment for Bill and youth-in-care was the development of a group of foster youth who would provide workshops at foster parent and worker trainings, on their experience while living in the foster care system. The name of the workshop was "Speaking From Experience". This group provided youth with an opportunity to express their personal experience while in the foster care system, and also empowered youth to become more active in their treatment planning and the Youth-In-Transition program.

In July 1991, Bill traveled to Jönköping, Sweden with Emily Jean McFadden (Grand Valley State University Professor of Social Work) and conducted a workshop "Adolescents Work and Play in Groups: Learning Skills" at the International Foster Care Conference (IFCO). Bill co-authored "*A Philosophy of Goals Groups*", August, 1991, with Jean McFadden.

Bill has provided talks and workshops for foster parent and volunteer trainings, and high schools. He has taught on Group Behavior for Grand Valley State Universities Masters of Social Work program. He has written papers/proposals on numerous topics pertaining to youth-in-care. Bill has been involved in and received awards in the following areas:

- Exemplary Social Work Practice in Public Child Welfare Award - **1993** (Michigan Chapter N.A.S.W.)
- Private Counseling Service
- Certified by the Bay Area Adventure School for the high ropes and initiative course
- Instructor/author (with Emily Jean McFadden – GVSU Professor of Social Work) at International Foster Care Conference – Sweden. Coauthored “*Adolescents Work and Play in Groups: Learning Skills, August, 1991.*”
- Coordinated a Single Mother’s group for single mother’s looking to explore career options
- Trainer for STEP – Systematic Training for Effective Parenting
- Coordinated and ran Parent Self-Help Group
- Leland Board of Education and other school committees
- Michigan Association of School Boards (State Legislative Committee)
- Numerous committees related to youth and families
- Outstanding Young Men of America
- Certificate of Merit – Leelanau County Department of Social Services
- Certificate of Appreciation – Michigan Association of School Boards
- Acting Supervisor for the Northern Michigan Adoption Program

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