

# F.A.S. TIMES

FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME / FAMILY RESOURCE INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER

## Snapshots from the Collective Family Experience

Jocie DeVries

One of the most surprising gifts I have ever received is the joy I experience gathering the Collective Family Experience. As a young child I was always very content with my lot, happy about the small events in life such as waiting for the pear trees to bloom each spring. Or being overly optimistic that all would turn out fine, whenever any small plight would arrive on my doorstep. But at the same time I was a serious little kid and my secret fantasy was to be invisible so as not to be disturbed while honing my observation skills. I was very amused at life, but I did not giggle at anything.

Raising children with heavy fetal alcohol exposure into their adult years took all my observation skills and much more. In fact, the truth be told, it was such a challenge that I could no longer rely on my observation skills alone. I finally discovered that I really needed to communicate with other people.

My son's diagnosis at the University of Washington didn't help much either. The diagnosis alone didn't give me any way to gauge the appropriateness of my parenting theories because I was not given any written material, i.e., any type of standard of care, from which to correct course when we were obviously off track in one area or another. To unravel the chaos, I knew that I desperately needed my observations to be validated or discarded. I went to see 24 medical and mental health professionals asking for help, but none of them knew as much as I did about the nature of the FASD behaviors in a child who had a normal IQ level. So I had to find a way to meet other families raising diagnosed children before I could ever feel confident about helping my own children out of the chaotic quagmire that we seemed to be bogged down in. That's what I craved: the wisdom of experience. Eventually I did regain confidence and trust in my observation skills, but it took almost twenty years of listening to stories and gaining validation and wisdom from other parents. And amazingly, along the way, I also discovered what giggling was all about.

To understand the power of this phenomenon, I would like to share a story with you. It is another (very small) chapter in the life of Pam Medgard. But first a little background: about twenty-five years ago, Pam and her husband gave birth to a son. Not wanting him to grow up as an only child, they adopted a sibling group (three children) who had experienced heavy fetal alcohol exposure. (They didn't originally intend to adopt that many, but that's another story...)

I will let Pam tell her story in her own words (with her permission, of course). I received the following message from her via e-mail a few days ago. Just remember that the names have been changed to protect the innocent.

I told you, didn't I, that Ginny left her husband and her two kids? She is in Omaha with a famous black rapper, (Leo). She mentioned that Leo was in Wisconsin. I ask her if he was doing a concert or working and she replied, "No, his residence needs to be in Wisconsin."

I ask her why and she said, "He's on parole."

I squeaked out, "Parole?"

She said, "Don't worry mom. He wasn't in prison for any sexual crime. All he did was rob a store."

I asked her why she wasn't living in Wisconsin. She said it was because the apartments were cheaper in Omaha. (I guess Leo must not be *that* famous.) She then told me how wonderful he was and that they could talk for hours. She said she is so happy. All that is missing is her kids. Well...that was last week.

Monday she called and said that her husband Shawn wanted her to come back to try and make their relationship work. I ask her what she was going to do. She said it was a tough decision because she is pregnant!

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2007

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Jocie DeVries

#### • Editor & Publisher

Ann Waller, M.Ed.

#### • Editorial Board

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Dale Clark  
Joline Clark  
Linda La Fever  
Sue Green  
Don Gore

She said that Leo is excited about the baby and doesn't know Shawn wants her back. When Shawn heard that she was pregnant he said he wouldn't raise another man's child, (not exactly the words he used) and he wants her to have an abortion.

Tuesday she called and was very upset, Leo the wonderful, famous, rapper has another girlfriend and she is also pregnant. And Leo would rather be with the other pregnant girl friend. (You know, this is even more dramatic than daytime television...)

I mentioned adoption as an option. She got mad and said she wasn't worried about what to do with the baby right now. She wants to make the best decision for her that will make her happy for a change. I haven't heard from her tonight.

Oh, dear. Before we adopted the kids our life must have been really boring.

My point in sharing this story with you is that Pam has learned how to use humor to express the absurdity of the situation she finds herself in and at the same time she has learned the secret to maintaining a very complex relationship with a person who has the FASD disability. Knowing that tragedy could strike at any moment, Pam does not waste time chiding her daughter or trying to reason with her. She accepts her daughter as she is—disabled—and follows her lead in the conversation. That is how she shows compassion for her daughter. Pam is continually surprised at the twists and turns in the conversation (and in her daughter's life), but she remains realistic in her expectations. Her daughter is free to think through the possible consequences of her choices to the best of her cognitive ability. And Pam (and those of us with

whom she shares her story) is able to giggle, not at her daughter's plight, but to enjoy her life's role as straight-man in the comedy of Life in the FAS Lane. As you can see, Pam is extremely gifted in the fine art of communicating with a person who has the behavioral phenotype of fetal alcohol exposure.

Our hope in producing FAS Times is that you not only learn about the Collective Family Experience with FASD, but that you will also catch a glimpse of the incredible wisdom and joy that we have found in each other's company. In this issue we are going to share just a few stories of the infinite patience that it takes to live Life in the FAS Lane. As you will note, not all of the stories have a happy ending. But we believe that each family's story will be a treasured gift to your soul that will enrich your life immeasurably. If you would like to share your story with us, we would be honored to include it in the Collective Family Experience and maybe in a future issue of FAS Times.

## Announcing: The First Consult on Separating FASD from Co-Occurring Disorders

September 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>

Dumas Bay Retreat Center

Federal Way, Washington

Registration \$125 (Parent Scholarships Available)

### Confirmed Presenters Include:

- Dr. Ann Streissguth
- Dr. Fred Bookstein
- Dr. Paul Conner
- Dr. Glena Andrews
- Dr. Alan Unis
- Dr. Gayle Fay
- Dr. Charles Huffine
- Linda La Fever
- Ann Waller
- Vicky McKinney
- Jocie DeVries

The purpose of this event is to develop FASD public policy recommendations for the Governor's Mental Health Transformation project which will promote recovery and resiliency in individuals who have FASD and Co-Occurring Disorders. Because of the nature of this educational event, reservations are limited to adult individuals medically diagnosed with an FASD, parents of diagnosed children (of any age) and professionals and social service providers who have long term experience working to differentiate the FASD Behavioral Phenotype from other mental health conditions. For more information or to apply to be a consultant, contact Vicky McKinney at 800-999-3429 or e-mail her at [Vicky@fetalalcoholsyndrome.com](mailto:Vicky@fetalalcoholsyndrome.com).

## Vicky McKinney

Vicky McKinney is one gutsy woman. Of course, what else would we expect with that red hair? When we first met her she had just created an educational program to teach teenagers in their health classes about the dangers of drinking during pregnancy. To date, she has personally educated over 12,000 students. She is a compassionate and patient keeper of the FAS\*FRI phone line.

*Our daughter Abby was diagnosed as having FAS at two years old. Unfortunately, the only information the social workers were willing to share with us was that she had a few minor developmental delays and some behavior problems, which were all attributable to her not being secure and they would quickly go away as soon as we gave her all our love!*

*Even though full disclosure of a child's medical and mental health records to perspective adoptive parents has been mandated for social workers in the U.S. since the 1970's, many still do not fulfill this requirement. It may be that they think children will be too hard to place if they are open and truthful about the disability or maybe they are like many other medical and mental health professionals who think children with FAS are throw-away kids that you can't help.*

*But whatever the rationale, a diagnosis is a critical and very positive intervention for children with an FASD. Even though we didn't know Abby had been diagnosed with FAS at two, while searching for answers to her "different behaviors" we learned of the condition through a television documentary years later. We immediately took her in for an evaluation at the University of Washington, where she was diagnosed with FAE because I had no proof of alcohol exposure. This was to be the worst and best day of my life and the hope for Abby's future.*

*There are a lot of things I can do to help Abby be successful. This knowledge has given my life a focus and a determination to bring help and hope to other parents. So I have taken on the job of being there for parents via the phone line (800-999-3429) and internet (Vicky@fetalalcoholsyndrome.org) for the FAS Family Resource Institute.*

Update:

## Linda Belle La Fever

Linda La Fever is a woman of mystery. When you get acquainted with her you notice two things. First, she is just hilarious and lives her life like a stand-up comedian. But the other characteristic is serenity, especially when she starts talking about preventing FASD. Linda has worked through her guilt and shame about being a birth mother of a child with FAS. Consequently, she is not defensive or insecure and she can handle insensitive, ignorant attacks on her character. She is a powerful speaker who deeply connects with other birth mothers and interprets their needs to others.

*I discovered Fetal Alcohol Syndrome when my son, Danny, was five years old. I had been searching several years for the answers to why Danny was so different from my six older children. During that time, Danny and I were living in Southern California. I had been worried about how to arrange for some comprehensive medical testing for Danny when a friend of mine recommended the Inland Regional Center.*

*During the testing, I was shocked and curious when one of the staff asked if I'd consumed alcohol during my pregnancy. I was surprised at the question and I answered, "Well, yes, I did," and for the first time, prenatal alcohol exposure was documented in Dan's medical records. At the end of all the testing, a few hours later, I was to hear the life-altering words that my use of alcohol while I was pregnant was the direct cause of my son's birth defect. The shock of learning that my precious baby*

*was forever disabled because of my drinking changed the entire perspective of my life from that moment forward.*

*One day, a few weeks after the humiliation and agony of meeting with the doctors that day at the clinic, Dan and I sat on the beach in Southern California. I watched over him as he played in the sand while I sipped from my thermos of iced gin. It was then and there that I finally accepted the painful reality of our situation. I whispered to myself, "I'm done now," as I poured the remainder of the gin into the warm sand.*

*Life in recovery has not been seamless or easy and as a single mother there have been many obstacles for both Dan and me. The one thing that I have done well was to pour my entire heart, soul, mind and strength into learning how to care and advocate for this precious child. Professionally, my goal in life is to encourage other women in their recovery as we walk this path together, bringing health, hope, healing and practical help to other birth mothers of children with FASD.*

Update:

## Jocie DeVries

Jocie is the Founder and Executive Director of the FAS Family Resource Institute and Founder and Project Director of *FAS Times*. She has totally devoted her life to FASD education and advocacy since her son's diagnosis in 1990. She is gifted at administration, but if you ask her about it, she says, "I just thought I was bossy." She is also a natural-born leader who knows how to engage others in her concerns and goals. As one federal administrator said, "When Jocie asks you to do something, you really want to try your best to do it!"

*Our children, Cheryl and Russell, came to us with severe bonding and attachment dis-*

orders after being abused, neglected, and set on fire in foster care. They didn't come with medical or mental health records, so we didn't know that a psychiatrist had recommended to state social workers that Cheryl's dysmorphic features be checked for FAS. The only hope the doctor had for the children was that they be placed in a home in a city where they could be in an intensive day treatment program.

So when they came to live with us we were handicapped considerably by not having this information. In a nutshell, our strategy was for me to be a stay-at-home mom. I had good, strong parenting skills, having raised two children previously. My husband was as totally committed to nurturing the children as I was. He was also smart enough to know that I needed respite from cabin fever now and then and he made sure I got it. In addition, our two older children were totally committed to Cheryl's and Russell's well being.

One of the first things we noticed as a family was that the children were moral chameleons. They were excessively vulnerable to imitating any negative behavior that they observed. So we threw out the TV and did without one for 7 or 8 years. We allowed the children freedom from criticism, so they could whine and complain when they needed to (within reason). We felt they needed someone to validate the awful things they had experienced.

On the other hand, we made sure their life was filled with lots of good nutrition, fresh air, laughter and fun. We sought outside counseling when problems needed special attention and we carefully conferred with their teachers throughout their school years. We traveled and gave them a broad view of the world and we taught and showed them the love of a faithful God. Both children have grown up to be remarkably sensitive, kind and loving people, who are pretty good at screening their friends and peers. Their favorite phrase in rejecting a bad environment is, "I wasn't raised that way." And they both have a good work ethic. All in all, we couldn't be more proud of them. Although, if you want to have a more peaceful home life while parenting children with FASD, take out the garbage yourself.

## Delinda McCann

Delinda is a very sophisticated, intelligent, highly educated woman who used her talents, skills, expertise and time to care for foster children. One little vulnerable foster child, a girl, who had been severely neglected and abused, captured her heart. Delinda and her husband, Loren, made her a permanent part of their family and spent the next twenty years caring and advocating for this little girl so she could survive and reach her full potential.

Our biggest time-consumer was, and continues to be, protecting our daughter from other people—from the off-the-wall things she does, as well as other people complaining about her idiosyncrasies.

In the educational system they could not, and still cannot, adapt their teaching to the learning style of children with learning disabilities and they do little to protect the kids from bullies. It would be easy to get frustrated and blame my daughter for the criticism we encounter on her behalf, but we know we have to keep focused on finding the reality behind the turmoil that surrounds her.

Update:

## Ann Waller

Ann Waller has devoted her entire professional career to educating others about the traumatic results of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. She and her husband are dynamic examples of the power of never-ending love for their two adopted children who have FASD. As the editor and publisher of *FAS Times* and other publications of the FAS Family Resource Institute, her tireless attention to detail and product quality are of priceless value to our work.

*They say that parenting isn't for the faint of heart. For parents of children with this disability, that's a gross understatement. These children can take their parents to their limits and beyond. Parents of children with recognizable disabilities are given sympathy, encouragement, support and praise. Parents raising children with an FASD are often misunderstood, blamed, and ostracized for their children's behavior.*

In 1995, FAS\*FRI documented that the large majority of (one or both) parents had been so extremely stressed and/or depressed that they had thoughts of suicide. (Subsequent surveys had similar results.) In fact, I was one of those parents. Only the grace of God and the support of other parents kept me going. Unconditional love can and has worked wonders in our family. So have a couple years of a cutting-edge natural approach to post traumatic stress treatment. Our adult children are still disabled; but they didn't die on the streets or in jail where they were headed during their teen years and they are trying their best to be independent. It's a rocky road to be sure. However, my husband and I are better, more sympathetic people for having traveled it and we are closer to each other now more than ever before (especially after the kids moved out).

Update: Did I say "moved out"? :-) Well, they're baaack...our daughter and her husband and two kids. But the good news is, they both have good jobs and it's only until their new house is finished. It's been a challenge but there have been benefits, too.

Since both of our affected children are now fairly stable adults with families of their own, I have also been in the process of "moving on." I am cutting down my hours spent on FASD, so I can follow where I believe the Lord is leading me and my husband in this phase of our lives. My husband, Gary, and I are starting a non-profit organization,

*Healing Directions, which will encompass faith-based hypnotherapy and Spiritual Direction For more information, look for our website (www.healingdirections.org) which should be done in the next couple of months. There is life after 24/7 FASD!*

## **Dale Clark**

Dale Clark is a perfectionist. Retired from the United States Navy, he now is the manager-in-residence of a crazy house with two affected children and a bubbling, charismatic wife who is also affected. This quiet, dedicated man provides counsel and stability to the family he treasures with all his heart.

*You have to use patience to understand and love people affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. Realize that your child (and in my case, my wife too) is not at fault and neither are you. When working with professionals, understand that they may not have any knowledge or even a clue about FASD. But most of all, don't give up. Keep going until you find the professional that can give you the help you need. This is especially true in the educational system. Don't let anyone try to plug people with FASD into any mold where they don't fit. Find things to do to nurture your child that are comfortable for both you and the child.*

*My hope for the future of my son is to find a safe environment in a supported group home that is appropriate for his age and development. I want my child to be safe and productive. I wish we could go back to the time when the community cared. The success of all our families depends on the connections we make to our communities in order to develop relationships for respite and other services.*

Update:

## **Teresa Kellerman**

Teresa Kellerman is a striking woman with a smile that lights up a room and radiates confidence and competence. A well-educated mother of several children with disabilities, she inspires others.. Teresa is the Director of the FAS Community Resource Center (FAS CRC) located in Tucson, Arizona. The website for this online educational center is found at [www.come-over.to/FAS CRC](http://www.come-over.to/FAS_CRC). Teresa has written a number of the articles posted on her website. In addition, she posts articles written by other parents and professionals, along with many links to other websites. She also travels to different communities to conduct seminars on FASD. In fact, she and her son, John, offer tailored workshops to meet individual needs. Training is available for FASD Prevention, Intervention, Education, Parent Support, Court Systems, or a comprehensive overview of all Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

Teresa and her son, John, a young adult with FAS, have produced an educational video for teens, "FAS: Everybody's Baby," and posters to promote FAS awareness. Teresa is also co-founder of FASWORLD, an international organization that raises awareness about FAS issues, including the sponsorship of the first annual FAS Awareness Day on 9/9/99. For more information on FAS Awareness Day, the FAS Community Resource Center or to arrange for a workshop or presentation, contact Teresa Kellerman at 520-296-9172 or Fasstar Enterprises at [www.fasstar.com](http://www.fasstar.com).

*Understand everything you can about FASD and teach everyone else about it, including your child, so they can accept the reality of the disability and help you to have realistic expectations. Provide support and supervision for your child according to individual needs, based on past track records, to reduce the risk of secondary disabilities. Educate as many people as possible to build the circle of support for successful inclusion into the community.*

*In the future I hope for funding for services that are adequate and appropriate, quality training for everyone that may provide these services and financial support for family-run resource centers.*

Update:

## **Georgia Gore**

Georgia Gore is often seen as a wild woman when advocating for her two adopted children with FASD. But this loving mother has learned to disregard the criticism of others to fight for the services and supports her children need to help them cope with the disability of FASD and the many co-occurring mental health conditions that severely affect their ability to succeed. Georgia is completely devoted to educating others about the traumas children go through when they have FASD and co-occurring mental health conditions.

*The most valuable piece of information I can relay to all of you who are reading this is that parents really do know their children best. Professionals, please take time to understand these fragile children individually, within the dynamics of their own families. If you are willing to build a bridge of "HOPE" and "TRUST" with the parents, all will surely result in the best interest of the child. This is where you will see SUCCESS for the child and the family, as well as you, the professional.*

*Now let me borrow from an old African proverb that I believe was truly meant for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: "It takes an entire village to raise a child." With FASD, truer words were never spoken. Let us all lift these wonderful families up, embrace them with LOVE and KINDNESS and build our bridges to them. These children are our future.*

Update:

## Dorothy Beckwith

Dorothy Beckwith is the most energetic person I have ever met. Several of us at FAS\*FRI felt really good about all the time and energy we devoted to help our kids develop their potential and preserve their self esteem, but when we met Dorothy, we felt like slow-moving slugs. She's also a great cook! She and her husband Eric had "half way" raised their two birth daughters when they adopted two foster children. Dorothy and Eric poured their lifeblood into their children, especially the two they adopted.

*Learn all you can and keep informed about FASD. Understand and accept the uniqueness of your child so you can learn to "dance" with them, knowing when to step in, when to step back and when to step sideways. Learn about Sensory Dysfunction to understand what your child is trying to communicate with the behavior you see.*

*I wish I had been informed from the very beginning. Precious time was wasted searching for ways to keep our family intact. Use more proactive compassionate approaches rather than ineffective parenting techniques (like behavior modification) that often only make things worse. My dream for the future would include supports and services in place for all individuals with an FASD so they can reach their full potential and health for the caregivers to pursue the things they have put on hold for so many years.*

Update:

## Pam Medgard

Both Pam and her husband, Harley, have a terrific sense of humor and they do a great job of supporting each another, knowing intuitively when the other one needs a break. Sometimes Harley tends to hide in the shop and work on his car, but Pam has no problem charging out there after him and demanding that he come help her if things are out of control. They "buck up" for one another when they know the other one is at the breaking point. They now have Service Alternatives helping them and that has literally saved their lives.

*We had one birth son and wanted to adopt, so he would not grow up as the only child. We became foster parents to have a better chance of adopting. The state called us with 3 siblings to be placed on a Friday afternoon. When I told them I didn't think I could handle 3 kids at ages 5, 3, and 10 weeks, their response was that we were the only place left. If not for us they would be on the streets. We were assured that it would just be for the weekend. I called DSHS a week later and said, "Say, we still have the three children." At that point we were told to treat them as our own until they could find another family. Of course they were never able to find another placement.*

*After a year and a half, DSHS started pushing for us to adopt the children. We were told they would need to be adopted by us or another family soon. We asked the state if it was possible to have the children split up due to the fact they were so needy. Some friends of ours were even willing to take the most challenging child. However, the state's inflexible policy was to keep them together, so we kept all three.*

*A friend told us about adoption support. It was a challenge to get it, but the state finally agreed because of the number of children. We searched desperately for information to help us deal with the needs of these children. But caseworkers, doctors and hospitals had no answers.*

*I attended a Fetal Alcohol class after*

*we had the children a few years and was shocked by the information. I cried in the class when the realization hit that they were talking about my children. The more classes and seminars on FAS I attended the better. I learned more effective ways to help our kids.*

*But I still have a difficult time talking to professionals, so I always have an advocate with me who understands FAS. The needs of our affected children have been so severe that it has taken many meetings and hearings to access the right kind of services to keep them, our family, and our community safe. The multiple state and private agencies we have had to work with are too overwhelming for any family to face alone. Because of this help with advocacy we have been able to get most of the services our children need. It has been a long, rocky road and the only reasons my husband and I are still together are that we have a strong relationship with the Lord and a very stable marriage.*

Update:

## Susan Bradley & Dot Workman

Susan Bradley and Dot Workman are two very determined women that you mess with at your own peril. The sparkle in their eyes reminds one of Walt Disney's two busy little chipmunks; but even so, the inner strength of a mother's love comes across loud and clear. They have spent the past five years, since adopting children with FASD, learning about the rights of children with disabilities and the responsibilities of the education system to help them become all they can be.

Cousins and friends since they were children, these two women are both dedicated moms and advocates for children with disabilities. Of the 10 children between

them, Susan has 2 daughters who are affected by prenatal alcohol exposure and Dot has a son and daughter who are affected.

They support each other in advocating for their children in the educational system and have gone on to mentor others in advocacy techniques.

Dot advises parents: *Gather any and all information about FASD so you can be more compassionate toward the behaviors during your struggles with them. Find support for yourself so you have the strength to care for your child. Be realistic so that when the “love fixes everything” theory is proven ineffective, you won’t have to go through such traumatic grieving of the life long nature of the disability.*

Susan reminds other parents: *Laugh and find the humor in life’s “little” obstacles. Absorb all the information you can and don’t be afraid to get out there and advocate.*

In the future, both Susan and Dot wish for more acceptance by people outside the disability circle, better support services, acknowledgement of the amazing compassion of older non-disabled siblings and, for starters, how about a full night’s sleep!

Update:

*need to understand the implications surrounding special needs children so they can make an informed decision to prevent unnecessary trauma to their marriage and existing family members.*

*Do not be deceived by the false promises so freely given by the agencies that tell you, “All the children need is consistency in a loving and nurturing home. Take our Special Needs Children and we will give you all the help you need”...until you need it!*

Jodi found joy and success for her son as they traveled with the all-volunteer Wenatchee Youth Circus for 4 summers where her son’s strengths on the trampoline and in tumbling were fostered and showcased.

Update:

nine years ago, The Resource Center has grown steadily and now offers three support groups which meet each month in the greater Denver area, as well as an on-line listserve, training about FASD for parent groups and professional organizations, and information and referral for parents trying to identify and access community resources.

*Having accurate information about FASD is crucial to parenting alcohol-affected children. An accurate understanding of how FASD impacts their children allows parents to have more realistic expectations, and helps them see that many of the difficult behaviors of their alcohol affected children are connected to brain differences and are not intentional misbehaviors. This knowledge, in turn, opens the door for developing more effective parenting strategies, and learning to build on each child’s unique strengths.*

Update:

## Jodi Hardy

Jodi Hardy is one of the funniest women on the planet. If laughter is good medicine, she is a highly prized resource that can make us all feel better. Her focused and determined personality has provided an excellent circle of support for her children.

She encourages parents everywhere: *Research and learn everything you can about alcohol and other prenatal exposures before adopting. Families*

## Maura Klene

Maura Klene loves children with FASD. She readily acknowledges that they are challenging, and often heart breaking to parents; however she continues to be drawn to the courage, perseverance, innocence, kindness, and ability to live in the moment that she sees in these children. Maura and her husband are the adoptive parents of two children, Michael and Rhianna, both of whom struggle with the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure.

After struggling for several years with the isolation that often comes with raising children with FASD, she began looking for other parents raising children with prenatal alcohol exposure. That search ultimately led to forming a non-profit organization, The Rocky Mountain Fetal Alcohol Resource Center, which is devoted to providing support to all families raising children with prenatal drug and alcohol exposure.

Beginning with one support group

## Craig Peterson

Craig Peterson is an adoptive father of four children, all of which have fetal alcohol disabilities, co-occurring mental health disorders, allergies and severe bonding and attachment problems. Not only does he devote every waking hour to helping these children recover emotionally, he had enough energy and hope that he brought two more children into the household.

*Repetition, Repetition, Repetition. Know your children’s strengths and build upon them.*

*Continued patience, individual realistic expectations, careful planning and a highly restrictive diet leads to most days in our home being joyful with minimal disruption.*

*Work to get your children to understand the concept of choice and that their bad choices bring unpleasant consequences. Don’t give in to inappropriate behaviors.*

*Be firm but loving. My children know I will always be there for them. Make your daily routine predictable; this gives them great comfort.*

*In the educational setting, learn diplomacy and carefully chose your battles, and while the educators are feeling good, ask for the moon and the stars! Find the teachers that understand the difference between “will not” and “can not.”*

*If you feel your parenting techniques are not working, find a new approach. There is always a better way to parent. I continually search for personal best practices.*

Update:

## **Ralph and Ruth Brown**

Ralph and Ruth Brown are the most amazing couple. They have the drive and determination to do what they set their minds to. For example, they had a huge 100-foot fir tree in their front yard and thought it would look better behind the house. So they moved their four-bedroom house around the tree and now the tree is in the back yard instead of the front. So when a little foster baby with lots of health problems came to live with them, they took on that challenge and made her a permanent part of the family.

*Recognize early that your child needs an “external” brain, but realize that you cannot always fill that role. Look to community supports. Learn how the systems work, whether it’s medical or educational or any of the other support systems. Then gradually develop an internal plan to get that system to work for you.*

*Develop a support team of family, friends, church groups, etc. This will require*

*some diplomacy. You may also need to train them so they know they may be supporting you in a manner that may not seem natural to them. Get respite care on a frequent basis. Give up your dreams for your child, but work toward them anyway.*

*Although it is hard, parents have to somewhat release their total responsibility for their children, as they get older and want more independence. Our remaining prayer and hope for our daughter’s future is for her to stay out of jail and be recognized for her disability, so she can establish herself in the community.*

Update:

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*Funding for this newsletter is provided by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse (DASA).*

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