

VERMONT ADOPTION CONSORTIUM

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2017



If you are interested in becoming a member of the Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC) please consider joining us for the June 9th VAC meeting from 12:30-4:00 at the Waterbury State Office Complex - for more information contact Catherine Harris at (802) 241-0901 or catherine.harris@vermont.gov

HAPPY FOSTER CARE MONTH!!



Our thanks and appreciation for all of the nurturance and care that our foster/kin parents provide to the children in their care!

In this issue....

- The 2017 VAC Conference was a success!
- Spring is a time to get out—an activity for your family
- Camp For Me and all that it can do for your child
- Wondering about Book review
- Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship
- Calendar of upcoming events
- Learning & Support Galore!

May is Nat'l Foster Care Month-Our thanks to all our foster parents whose care and nurturance help children thrive!



Welcome to the Spring 2017 Newsletter,

Spring is gathering speed as flowers bloom and the warmth of summer approaches – and the Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC) is gathering momentum as well! April 21st marked our first event of 2017 where parents, youth, and service providers gathered to increase their knowledge, understanding, and energy at the VAC conference “Adoption and Guardianship Evolving in the 21st Century”. It was a great day with remarkable speakers who have set a high standard for our future events – keep your eyes open for other upcoming events (see page 6) and read about the conference starting on page 3!

As we move into the warmth of summer please remember the importance of building a community of love and support to wrap around your family. Nothing helps us through the hard times, exhaustion, and challenges of parenting like family and friends who can come along beside us – and we all need this “village” to help us celebrate our accomplishments – big and small – and to note the milestones of our family’s life!

I hope you all take time to enjoy this season with your family – get outside – plant a garden - take a walk – have a barbecue – play in a park – take lots of deep breaths of our fresh Spring air and celebrate being part of the Vermont’s dynamic adoption/guardianship community.

Catherine Harris



Spring is such a miraculous time of year to observe the beauty of nature unfold before our eyes. Trees are budding; purple and yellow crocuses are blooming, revealing that the ground is indeed thawing.



Spring provides us with longer days to enjoy a plethora of outside activities that we have missed over the long winter. We can enjoy playing ball, going for long walks, and planting a garden. What a wonderful time of year for families to connect!

Why not head outside as a family and observe the subtleties of spring together? **This activity** involves noticing aspects of nature that only occur in the spring. Ferns, for instance, begin with very distinct coils, which later become fronds. These subtle changes can be observed and documented to track the amount of time required for a fiddle head to become a full grown fern or a leaf bud to become a leaf. Younger children might enjoy making a picture of this progression, while older kids may be more interested in creating a time line to track changes. This activity can be enjoyed by children of all ages and families benefit from the opportunity to engage in mutual conversation about a topic that is both interesting and neutral.



Submitted by Pam Montgomery, NKHS Post Permanency Case Manager

May is Nat'l Foster Care Month-Our thanks to all our foster parents whose care and nurturance help children thrive!

Adoption and Guardianship Evolving in the 21st Century



At this year's annual Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC) Conference on April 21st **Diane Dexter**, Adoption Chief for the State of Vermont from 1993 until her retirement in 2016, provided the keynote and set the tone for our day together. She recounted how one of her early supervisors described her as a bulldozer when she had an idea that could benefit the people she was serving – and it was clearly this quality that helped to

move the adoption/guardianship community forward during her time in leadership. Diane highlighted her efforts to create a “seamless system of care” for families adopting or taking guardianship through the foster care system and the work that she did with Vermont’s adoption/guardianship community:

- ◇ the evolution of our foster care system from a dual foster/adoptive care system to a foster-to-adopt system, decreasing transitions for children;
- ◇ the creation of the Vermont Adoption Consortium that brought together private adoption and foster care agencies, community mental health centers, and adoptive parents so that they could cross-pollinate information about raising children with traumatic beginnings;
- ◇ the development of Project Family addressing the permanency needs of children lingering in foster care;
- ◇ and the recognition of families’ need for adoption-competent services resulting in the establishment of one of the oldest post permanency support programs in the country.

A parent noted that Diane’s advice for families to “hold the birth family in their hearts with kindness” to be an important reminder. Diane received a standing ovation in recognition of her creative, innovative, and persistent work to build, strengthen, and support the adoption/guardianship community of Vermont. She truly was a bulldozer, in all the best ways!

Following Diane was the remarkable **Tina Bleau** presenting our plenary. She is a longtime supporter of children who are not being raised by their biological parents and the service providers who support them.

Tina is a Licensed Psychologist Masters who specializes in the assessment and treatment of developmental trauma, adoption, and attachment issues providing therapeutic care to families and clinical support to our post permanency support programs.

Tina inspired the parents and service providers attending the conference as she spoke of the hard work children and their parents do in her office as she asks them to move beyond their comfort zone to -

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Adoption and Guardianship Evolving in the 21st Century (continued from page 3)

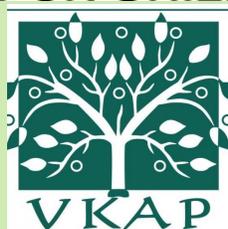
- to look at and heal from the trauma that they experienced. And it was this courage that Tina drew on when agreeing to present the plenary for our conference – she started her talk being transparent around her fear of presenting but that she asks her clients to be courageous and that she could only do the same. She held the room with her wisdom and her stories throughout our time together. One story brought the room to tears as she described the journey of a youth coming to live with a parent that was truly his match – and a difficult weekend of escalation that ended in an opening for healing and attachment. Tina spoke of the mother telling her son that “he didn’t need to do this anymore,” that she was there to stay and then his response to this, in therapy, to play a song for his mother letting her know how much she meant to him. Tina reminded all of us that moments like these are never the end of the story and the struggle but that they do mark progress and that it is this progress that we can hold on to while we negotiate the next challenge of parenting a child who has experienced loss and injury – sometimes physical but always emotional. And that while children need at least one parent who can consistently meet their needs and love them that exhaustion can creep up on us and the importance of our creating a village to surround ourselves and our children to carry us through.

The creative use of film clips to both illustrate her talk and to engage us in the material was creative and resulted in good discussions at the tables – and for those who hadn’t yet seen the film “Lion” many left determined to see it, a movie that digs into the emotional life of a young man adopted at 5. Tina succeeded at meeting the challenge she set for herself and held the room with her energy and passion for children and their families who have been touched by adoption!

After a delicious lunch attendees had a chance to check out the Resource Fair with tables manned by knowledgeable staff who provided lots of great information. In attendance was Camp for Me, Good Beginnings, Wide Horizons, Friends in Adoption, Howard Center, Child Welfare Training Partnership, PSP, Lund, DCF-Family Services, Vermont Adoption Consortium, Vermont Kin as Parents, Carol Bick with her new book “What do I Say Now?”, and Judith Bush with her classic book “The Bean Seed.”

The afternoon workshops provided dynamic opportunities to engage with experts in the field of adoption and guardianship – parents who have raised children who they adopted or provided guardianship to, young adults who were adopted, mental health professionals, social workers, an attorney, etc.

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Adoption and Guardianship Evolving in the 21st Century (continued from page 4)

Advocating For Your Child: From The School To The Pediatrician To Residential Care - Dana Robson This presentation helped to increase the understanding of families' rights when working with schools to when a family needs to access increases services through Vermont's mental health system of care from private therapists to residential placements. Understanding the process, the supports available to assist with the negotiation of these sometimes confusing worlds, and what does and does not need to happen was helpful in providing context to what families and service providers bump up against. The speaker emphasized ensuring your medical providers have the information they need and went through the process that should occur if the need arises to shift providers. The importance of the coordinated service plan process and how it underpins identifying and accessing services through the education and mental health systems was strongly emphasized.

What Would I Have Wanted To Know Then That I Know Now? – Barb Hash, Carol Bick, Ruth D'Angelo The parent panel had a packed room with the three panelists

sharing their experiences and recommendations. One panelist stressed the need for understanding the commitment we must make to our children when we make the decision to adopt transracially/transculturally. She discussed the importance of preparing ourselves and our children for racism, intrusive questions, etc. She stressed understanding the world from the child's perspective and how we must be proactive in our efforts. Another panelist represented kinship adoption and the unique dynamics of adoption within the family. Her "We'll figure this out" mantra was how she phrased her response to each new challenge. Her commitment to her son was evident through her sharing of his story. The last panelist stressed the need for lifelong commitment as she had many children, varied ages and different ethnic/racial backgrounds. She felt that being educated and continuing education is critical for herself and understanding that "love is not enough" to sustain us through the difficult times. All of the parents spoke of the importance of being okay with *not always getting it right*, awkward moments with their children in public, how we all need to learn and use positive adoption language and the need for their children's stories to be viewed as "their stories to share."



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Your Choices in Adoption: Private, Private Agency, International, and Public – Dawn Smith-Pliner, Karisa Thompson, Michelle Tarnelli, Sarah Mraz The Choices in Adoption Panel highlighted the evolving ways adoption has changed and provided a great overview of the types of adoption that are available to families interested in expanding their family. It provided an overview of the current types of adoption from infant adoption to public/state adoption to international adoption. Our panelists shared a great deal of knowledge about the challenges and opportunities that exist within their areas of practice and allowed attendees to expand their knowledge and ask questions regarding the different types of adoption.

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Adoption and Guardianship Evolving in the 21st Century (continued from page 5)

Openness in Adoption – Brenda Hamlin, Dawn Smith-Pliner, Jodi Leonard The Openness in Adoption workshop had a lively discussion regarding the advantages and complications of openness. Three speakers shared their experiences. One was an adoption agency director whose agency has been supporting open adoptions for decades. The second panelist was a grandmother who with her husband, adopted her grandchildren, and the third panelist shared her story of a long-term, successful experience with her son's birth-mother. The intimacy of this workshop supported having a very candid, fruitful discussion.

Everything I Wish My Parents Had Known - Ben Lachman, Deirdre Graham, Libby Branch, Mark Hemley Four young adults ranging from 17 to 33 years of age courageously shared their stories with a roomful of parents and service providers. They were candid about their adoption experiences as well as where they each started, which ranged from an international adoption to a public adoption to a private adoption. Their stories were all unique and yet with shared themes. They made clear the importance of having known that they were adopted – none of the panelists could remember a time when this wasn't part of their understanding of themselves. Some spoke of how positive it was in their lives to have parents who were comfortable talking about adoption and the challenge for one of them where talking about his adoption experiences and asking his questions didn't feel welcome or safe. They underlined that it is up to parents to create the space for those conversations as without feeling it's okay to bring it up they won't initiate the discussions or ask their questions – leaving them to pursue answers with others outside of the family system as the questions and wonderings are always there.



It was the hard work and determination of the Vermont Adoption Consortium Conference Committee that brought this year's conference to life!

Ann Clark, Catherine Harris, Dawn Smith-Pliner, Gillie Hopkins, Janet Benoit Connor, Judith Blank, Sandra Schlosser, and Simone Cote

PUT IT IN YOUR CALENDAR—Upcoming events you shouldn't miss:



TRANSRACIAL/TRANSCULTURAL PARENTING WORKSHOP—June 10 at Lund in Burlington—this workshop will increase your understanding of the role race and culture play in the adoption experience. Contact Catherine Harris at 802-241-0901 or vtadoption@vermont.gov



Save the date—September 13, 2017—for the **Vermont Kin as Parents Annual Conference**—”Understanding Trauma with Hope and Resilience” with Dr. Joelle van Lent.



Lund's Annual Adoption Picnic—September 24th from 11-3 at the Essex Fairgrounds. For information please contact Toni Yandow at (802) 864-7467 or tonit@lundvt.org



You're Invited to the Camp For Me Spring Social: Connect with adoptive families and enjoy a leisurely hike to the summit of Mt Philo! On **Sunday, May 21 at 1 pm** we'll gather in the parking lot at Mt Philo State Park in Charlotte. Snacks provided at the summit! All adoptive families are welcome and encouraged to join us for this free social event, even if you've never been to camp. Please contact Ana Ruesink at info@camp4me.org for more information or to RSVP.

May is Nat'l Foster Care Month—Our thanks to all our foster parents whose care and nurturance help children thrive!

The **Vermont Adoption Consortium** is a dynamic organization where you will find opportunities to contribute to adoptive and guardianship families. If you want to participate please consider joining one of the following committees:

- ◆ Conference Planning and Training
- ◆ Outreach
- ◆ Diversity and Adoption

If you would like more information or are ready to join please contact:

Catherine Harris at 802-241-0901 or
Catherine.harris@vermont.gov

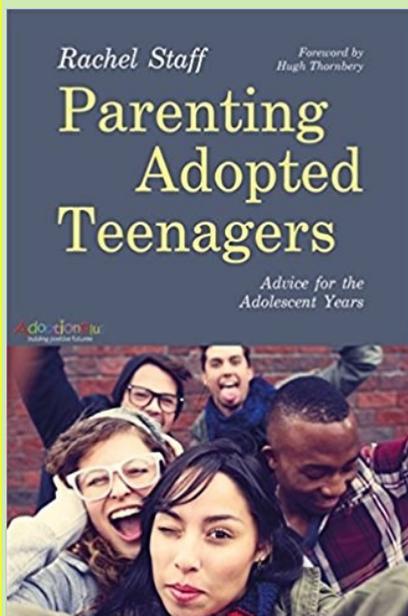


We are looking for pictures of adoptive and guardianship families working, playing, and celebrating together!

Please consider submitting pictures of your family to be used in future VAC Newsletters – they can be forwarded electronically to vtadoption@vermont.gov
Thanks!!

Book Review:

“Parenting Adopted Teenagers...Advice for the Adolescent Years”



by Rachel Staff

How can adoptive parents and their teenagers navigate the challenges of the adolescent years?

Have HOPE... this book is a great resource for parents and professionals as it presents first-hand accounts from families and teens themselves providing concrete suggestions on how to survive this sometimes tumultuous period. Teens that were adopted have an added layer of complexity that may add challenges to what are just “normal” teen behaviors. This book provided me with a better understanding of why teens do what they do, and how their trauma and attachment histories impact their brain development and the behaviors that emerge from this.

This book can help all of us who are committed to these youth be better prepared to deal with this stage in a young person’s life.

With greater knowledge we can learn to guide them and access the resources needed to provide the “scaffolding” needed to support them on their life’s journey. This book is a great place to start!!!

Promising Practice Alert for Adoptive and Guardianship Families!

The **National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG www.qic-ag.org)** is a national project designed to promote permanency, where reunification cannot be safely achieved, and improve adoption and guardianship preservation and support. QIC-AG is built on the premise that child welfare agencies need to provide a continuum of services to increase permanency stability - starting when children first enter the child welfare system, and continuing after adoption or guardianship has been finalized.

QIC-AG is working with eight selected sites (states, counties, tribes) to develop a continuum of services that increase pre- and post-permanency stability for families, improve children's behavioral health, and advance the well-being of children and families. A service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, USDHHS, the QIC-AG was awarded to Spaulding for Children in partnership with The University of Texas at Austin, The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Vermont was one of the sites chosen by QIC-AG! In collaboration with DCF's Family Services Division, Lund, UVM, and University of Texas-Austin, Vermont developed and is testing a promising practice which, if proven effective, can be replicated (or adapted) in other child welfare jurisdictions across the country.

The Vermont QIC-AG project hopes that early outreach to families will enable DCF-Family Services and its partner agencies to identify and understand the strengths and protective factors associated with families formed by adoption and guardianship. The identification of those families who are doing well or those who are struggling or facing elevated challenges post-permanence will support the development of a process for this early outreach. This information will help us to better understand not only how to effectively and quickly respond to the needs of adoptive and guardianship families but also which services and supports are most helpful to families. The Vermont intervention consists of a survey distributed to adoptive and guardianship families, formed through the Vermont Child Welfare System who are currently living in Vermont. The survey questions are based upon standardized measures looking at Family Wellbeing, Child Wellbeing, and Caregiver Wellbeing. Additional questions address birth family/sibling relationships and services in their communities.

Vermont is currently in year three of this project. The implementation phase of the Vermont Permanency Survey began in late 2016. The initial survey was distributed electronically and in paper format to 50 families, statewide. This cycle yielded a response rate of 55%. As of February 14, the survey reached adoptive and guardianship families, known to Family Services, in the Burlington, Middlebury and Barre districts. Over the next 18 months we will reach families in all DCF districts in Vermont!

Once the data starts rolling in, the project staff will distribute district specific findings. We hope to engage with community providers to brainstorm ways we can continue to partner to enhance families' experiences.

In conjunction with the survey, the project staff are developing a guide for all families regarding typical adoption and guardianship developmental stages. This will include some suggestions about ways to best support their child and family through these stages and to think about when additional support may be warranted. Links and contact information will be provided so families can reach out when they are ready.

If you have questions about the project feel free to contact Christina Shuma, Site Implementation Manager at christinas@lundvt.org or (802) 864-7467 x2011.



Camp For Me: Summer Fun for Adopted Children and Teens Since 1995

For more than 20 years, Camp For Me has created a summer day camp experience for children and teens who share one special thing in common: adoption. Whether they were born in the US or abroad, whether they were adopted at birth or out of foster care, whether their families are multicultural or transracial or LGBT – campers at Camp

For Me find a safe and supportive community where they can share their stories and be themselves. They also have a whole lot of fun!

For two weeks in July every summer, Camp For Me transforms the beautiful grounds of Stowe High School into an action-packed fun zone for adopted children and teens ages 7-17. Camp For Me features traditional summer activities: games, sports, arts and crafts, theater, yoga, swimming, field trips, nature play, hiking, and more. The program is grounded in a philosophy of family-centered values that offers campers empathy, understanding, and structure. Surrounded by a caring community of peers and adult leaders, campers find common ground and build friendships that last long past summer.

Founded in 1995 by the Vermont Children's Aid Society, Camp For Me evolved in 2010 when parents, volunteers, and former VCAS staff came together to maintain the vision and principles of the discontinued VCAS program. Camp now operates as an independent non-profit organization, serving approximately 100 campers every summer.

Camp For Me is proud to be a member of the Vermont Adoption Consortium, working alongside partner agencies and organizations who share the goal of providing opportunities for adopted kids as well as support for their families. Together, we are helping adopted youth build strong and healthy lives.

Registration for Camp For Me 2017 is currently underway. Campers may enroll for one or both of our two one-week camp sessions: July 10-14 and July 17-21. Visit www.camp4me.org for more information. We hope you'll join us for fun and friendship this summer!

Submitted by Ana Ruesink
(info@camp4me.org)



CHECK OUT THE VERMONT ADOPTION CONSORTIUM LIBRARY



Have you ever wondered if there's a book about:

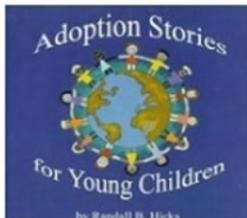
- ⇒ how to talk with your child about adoption?
- ⇒ how to support school staff in understanding your child's needs?
- ⇒ understanding your child's attachment challenges?
- ⇒ the impact of developmental trauma on your child?
- ⇒ parenting your adopted child?

There just might be! With over 700 books and approximately 50 audio-visual materials, there is a good chance the Vermont Adoption Consortium (VAC)

Lending Library might be able to help. We have an extensive collection covering a broad range of topics and authors all available for loan to parents and professionals in Vermont and New Hampshire. We also have a wonderful assortment of children's story books covering all kinds of subjects.



The library is physically located at the Easterseals Vermont office in Berlin and while you are welcome to come by and browse you can also take a look at the library offerings on line and then check books out via email or a phone call. They will be sent directly to your home!



Adoption Stories for Young...

In-Stock

Checkout the collection on line or in person!

Our online library can be found at <https://vac.myturn.com>

To check a book out by telephone:

Call in your request to **(802) 223-4744**, please provide your name, address, and phone number – and please spell out your name and address to ensure proper delivery.

To check a book out by email:

Email us at vtadoptionconsortium@eastersealsvt.org providing your name, address and phone number.

To browse through the collection in person come to the Easterseals Berlin office:

Choose your resource from the shelf – just call ahead to let us know when to expect you (802-223-4744). We are located at 641 Comstock Rd, Suite 1, Berlin, VT 05602.

Books are checked out for 30 days. If you require further time you just contact the office at **(802) 223-4744** or vtadoptionconsortium@eastersealsvt.org.

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SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILIES

The following Support Groups are provided by the Vermont Adoption Consortium in collaboration with Post permanence Services (From Lund, Easterseals, NFI or NKHS). Some groups are also co-sponsored by community partners.

Addison County

Support Group for Adoptive Families held the 4th Tuesday of the month. Held in Middlebury.

Contact Donna Provin (below) for where it will be held this month.

Please call Donna Provin at (802) 343-0565 or email donna@lundvt.org for more information.

Brattleboro

Support Group for Adoptive Parents the second Monday of the month, 6:30-8:30 pm. Brattleboro Savings and Loan Community Room

Please contact Danna Bare for more information: Danna Bare, M.Ed, (802) 258-0308

Chittenden County

Chittenden County Circle of Parents Support Group for Adoptive and Guardianship Families This group is held the LAST Tuesday of every month from 5:00-6:30pm in South Burlington.

Pre-registration is required.

For more information or to RSVP, contact Katherine Boise, BSW, M.Ed at Lund at (802) 864-7467.

Franklin County

1st Tuesday of every month at the Senior Center, 75 Messenger Street, St. Albans from 5:30-7:30 pm. Dinner and childcare provided at no cost. Please contact Nina Kempf-Miller (802) 524-1700 or Monica Darrah (802) 578-2702 to RSVP or for more information.

Morrisville

2nd Thursday of the month, the Morrisville DCF office - 5:30 - 7pm

For information contact: Karen Langdell, Easterseals of Vermont, (802) 730-6667

Shaftsbury

3rd Thursday of the month from 7 - 9 pm at the Shaftsbury Methodist Church.

For more information contact: Amy Prentiss-Rogers at (802) 343-6310 or Jill C. Bouton at (802) 223-4744

Upper Valley

KINSHIP CARE SUPPORT GROUP

Meeting the first Thursday of each month, 1-2:30 pm 2458 Christian Street, Wilder, VT (next to Dothan Brook School on Route 5)

For more information contact: Judith Bush, ACSW (802) 356-9393 x 2 or jbush@together.net

POST-PERMANENCE SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

Post Permanence Services are available to adoptive and guardianship families. For information regarding services in your area please contact:

NEWPORT, ST. JOHNSBURY AHS Districts

NKHS Northeast Kingdom Human Services

P.O. Box 724, Newport, VT 05855

Karen Hack, Supervisor, (802) 334-6744 x2140

khack@nkhs.net

ST ALBANS AHS District

NFI, Northeast Family Institute

12 Fairfield Hill Road, St. Albans, VT 05478

Kriss Lococo, Regional Manager, (802) 524-1700

Kristenlococo@nafi.com

BARRE, BENNINGTON, BURLINGTON, HARTFORD, MORRISVILLE, RUTLAND AHS Districts



EASTERSEALS

641 Comstock Road, Suite 1, Berlin, VT 05602

PPSP Manager, Lynn Bessette, Program Manager

(802) 279-4241 lbessette@eastersealsvt.org

BRATTLEBORO, BURLINGTON, MIDDLEBURY, SPRINGFIELD AHS Districts

LUND

P.O. Box 4009, Burlington, VT 05401

Melissa Appleton, Supervisor (802) 864-7467

X2019 C: 782-3311 melissaa@lundvt.org

Transracial/Transcultural Parenting Workshop

With

Carol Bick

Saturday, June 10, 2017

Lund

50 Joy Drive, Burlington, Vermont

9:30 am – 4:00 pm



For More Information go to

The Vermont Adoption Consortium at <https://www.vtadoption.org>

or contact Catherine Harris at

(802) 241-0901 or Vtadoption@vermont.gov

or go directly to registration at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/transracialcross-cultural-parenting-workshop-tickets-33778507425>

Upcoming changes in DCF's Permanency Program:

After almost 20 years working on behalf of Vermont's families, Kathy Brancaccio is retiring at the end of May. We here at DCF-FSD are sad to see her knowledge, efficiency and compassion go AND wish her the very best in this well-deserved next chapter!

However, we are pleased to introduce Heather Gauvin who will be a great fit as Kathy's successor. Starting on May 30th when you contact the Permanency Program with questions you will hear from Heather regarding the Guardianship and Adoption Assistance Programs.

Questions regarding subsidy benefits can be directed toward Kathy until May 23rd and then as of May 30th Heather at 241-0876.