

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON FOSTER CARE

Foster Parent Associations: Advocacy, Support, and Empowerment

Eileen Mayers Pasztor & Emily Jean McFadden

This article is dedicated to the founders of the U.S. National Foster Parent Association: the late Beatrice L. Garrett, MSW, U.S. Children's Bureau, and Helen D. Stone, MSW, formerly with the Child Welfare League of America.

ABSTRACT

Foster parenting in the United States dates back over 150 years, but it was not until the late 1960s that the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) was created. This article describes the factors that led to its birth, and the subsequent internal and external influences on its development, intentions and accomplishments. This case example examines dilemmas for this and other foster parent associations regarding membership, funding, advocacy, and outcomes, and recommends approaches to strengthen congruence between a foster parent association's goals and impact.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 19 and 20) mandates that alternative care be available to protect children from maltreatment by parents. In much of the world, a complex array of socio-economic and political factors has made institutions the principal method of care (Adie, 2005). In Western Europe and the United States, orphaned and destitute children were raised in congregate care until the mid-19th century. In the U.S., the transition to family foster care from group care began with a movement that sent hundreds of thousands of children to families seeking what often amounted to child labor (McGowan, 2005; Weaver, 2006). These foster parents were expected to treat the children "like their own," teach them a skill and trade, and send them off for independent living, typically at about age 16 (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991). In the U.S., it took over a century after the emergence of foster parenting as we know it today for the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) to be created, evolving from the

premise that fostering and birth parenting were different (Child Welfare League of America, 1975; Pasztor, 1985; Pasztor & Wynne, 1995).

This article (a) describes the NFPA's development and progress in relation to its mission; (b) considers organizational factors and socio-economic and political changes that have affected its progress; (c) proposes current and future issues the organization could address nationally and internationally to become more effective in meeting 21st century child welfare challenges; and (d) offers this analysis as a framework foster parent associations might use to review and predict congruence between intentions and impact.

Evolution of a National Foster Parent Association: Influences on Intentions

By the early 20th century, the American industrial revolution was in full swing, and able-bodied adults, including European immigrants and emancipated African Americans, could

replace child laborers in the Northeast, the South, and the fast-growing West. Child labor laws were created, a White House Conference on Children was convened in 1909, and the U.S. Children's Bureau and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) were founded to guard and protect children's rights and needs. Social workers, whose relatively new profession was grounded in a commitment to social justice, used information from the growing discipline of psychology to promote and advocate for the value of family life for children. A defining moment in the evolution of foster parenting may have been the 1936 *Social Service Review* article titled "Foster Home Care of Delinquent Children" (Jones, 1936) which suggested that foster parents must help children avoid the "institutional personality trait" by intervening "therapeutically."

Once foster parents were called upon to serve as more than just traditional parents, challenges of role clarity emerged. Within five years, *Social Service Review* published "Child Placement and the Family Agency" (Hanford, 1941), which posed a question that has yet to be answered: Are foster parents colleagues, clients, or something in-between? Journal articles began to surface linking role conflict and confusion with foster parent recruitment and retention problems, illustrated by Bohman's 1957 article documenting a dwindling supply of foster families in relation to a growing demand.

By the 1960s, foster parents and child welfare professionals alike recognized a need for advocacy, support, and empowerment. Concerns about inadequate financial help and minimal preparation for the demands of fostering were just two of the issues generating attention nationwide. Foster parents and foster care professionals began convening groups such as the National Foster Parents League of America in Mississippi, the Christopher Street Society in Michigan, and the National Federation of Foster Families in Westchester County, New York. In 1967 in New Orleans, Louisiana, the CWLA sponsored a National Conference on Foster Care, funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau and the New York Fund for Children. Recommendations from the conference included creating associations of foster parents, upgrading foster parenting as a child-care career, and improving training and education for foster parents (H. Stone, personal communication, 2005).

CWLA received a three-year demonstration project grant from the U.S. Children's Bureau to officially launch the NFPA. As described in the project's first newsletter, *The Foster Parent Reporter*, objectives were to:

- Help establish the NFPA, with local and state chapters.
 - Assist in the recruitment of additional foster parents.
 - Educate the general public as to the role of foster parenting.
 - Expand and improve methods of training foster parents.
 - Modify methods of education of foster care workers.
- Operate a national information exchange for foster parent associations and prepare and distribute a newsletter.
 - Publish guidelines for the development of foster parent associations.
 - Provide consultation as requested in regard to organizational methods, activities, and training.
 - Evaluate and report on the experiences of foster parent associations.
 - Determine whether foster parent associations were able to alter practices and policies considered counter-productive to sound foster care (CWLA, n.d., page 1).

Thus began the U.S. NFPA, inspired by Beatrice L. Garrett, MSW, Specialist on Foster Family Services for the U.S. Children's Bureau, and Helen D. Stone, MSW, Foster Care Project Director for CWLA, who envisioned an organization offering foster parents a voice that had been missing for decades. Committees were established; officers and ten regional vice presidents were elected; a national director was hired; and a home base in St. Louis, Missouri, was selected as a central location (H. Stone, personal communication, 2005). The first issue of *The Foster Parent Reporter* addressed the project's need to seek additional funds for liability insurance, professional advertisement campaigns, federal income tax rulings, and resources for Native American children in foster care (Child Welfare League of America, n.d.).

Evolution of a National Foster Parent Association: Influences on Impact

By the mid-1970s, premises about foster care that had been in place for decades were being dismantled. Children who were previously considered to be dependent and neglected were re-labeled as having "special needs" because the stresses of modern American life were producing more emotionally and behaviorally challenged children. An unskilled and overloaded child welfare workforce (National Association of Social Workers, 2003), often with unresponsive political leadership, had neither the ability nor the resources to recruit and support hard-to-find foster and adoptive families.

Several publications advanced the issues. Hunzeker (1973) wrote *A New Partnership: Foster Parent Associations and Liaison Social Workers* which outlined a role for agency support. In 1974, Stone and Hunzeker co-authored a book on foster parent associations, describing designs for their development. The importance of support for foster parents and foster parent organizations was also recognized by the American Public Welfare Association (APWA) in its *Standards for Foster Family Services Systems with Guidelines for Implementation Specifically Related to Public Agencies*. APWA wrote:

1. The Agency shall provide staff, funds, etc. to assist foster parent(s) in establishing and maintaining associations.
2. Foster parent associations' representatives shall be included in appropriate professional and community meetings as members of the team.
3. Foster parent(s)' association representatives shall be included as appropriate in program and budget presentations before boards, state legislatures, and other policy-making and governing bodies.
4. Foster parent(s)' association representatives shall work with other staff to improve education for fostering. (American Public Welfare Association, 1975, p. 13)

The Guidelines made specific reference to addressing language barriers for ethnic minorities regarding manuals, including access to information for grievances. They also emphasized the importance of defraying expenses for selected foster parents and staff to attend NFPA national conferences and other training opportunities.

With recognition that foster parents often needed extra parenting skills, the first national foster parent training program emerged: *Parenting Plus* (CWLA, 1975), funded by the U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This curriculum provided orientation to fostering in a 31-page workbook, accompanied by 16-millimeter films such as "Don't Condemn Me Until You Know Me" and "Walk a Mile in My Shoes," which addressed the issues facing the birth parents of placed children.

Also in the 1970s, Eastern Michigan University (EMU) developed *Seventeen Course Outlines for Foster Parent Training* (Ryan, Warren, & McFadden, 1976), with funding by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). At Nova University, an NIMH grant funded a model for the recruitment and combined preparation, selection, and pre-service training of foster parents (Pasztor, Burgess, Smith, & Fields, 1977). The Nova model provided the foundation for Child Welfare Institute's MAPP preparation/selection program in the 1980's (Pasztor, 1986), and the CWLA-disseminated PRIDE program in the 1990s (Leighton et al., 2003).

Growth of the NFPA and local and state foster parent associations was clearly connected to the development of foster parent education. As national training programs were disseminated around the country, foster parents became educated and empowered to develop connections and relationships of influence. They learned how to be co-trainers, providing support and empowerment for their colleagues. NFPA conferences became vehicles for introducing new training content, such as alternatives to corporal punishment for children that then became the norm. Trainers met at NFPA conferences to form a national foster parent education network, and began producing *IMPACT*, an "occasional" newsletter (Ryan, 1985). Some of these educators became formal advisors to the NFPA and state foster parent associations.

The organizational growth of the NFPA seems to parallel what McFadden (1980) and Ryan (1987) conceptualized as four stages of growth and development for individual foster parents. Typically, foster parents begin fostering as "Room for One More" families. They want to help children, and believe that their families can provide the necessary love and shelter. Their initial instinct is that the children placed with them would be treated as family members, these youngsters would adapt, and not much help would be needed from the child-placing agency.

With some training and agency support, these families can survive the first children placed, including separation, and they can move to the next stage. "Team Member" foster parents understand the differences between birth and foster parenting, and successfully accommodate the role challenges. Upon mastering the "Team Member" role, foster parents may evolve into professionalized or specialized "Team Leaders." Such foster parents help advise and support new foster parents or inexperienced caseworkers, serve as role models for birth parents, work actively toward implementation of permanency for children in their care, and know how to access a wide range of services in their communities. Through experience and extensive training, "Team Leaders" may become advocates, not only for the children in their care, but on a macro level. As "Advocates," they are willing and able to challenge conditions they perceive as unjust. Some foster parents retire from actively fostering new children and become full-time foster care advocates in their states, as well as nationally. For example, an early editor of the NFPA newsletter, *The Advocate*, began with his wife as "traditional" foster parents, and then took on additional foster children with special needs for whom they advocated in the community and home state of Texas. Later, he maintained in his home a national information and referral service for foster parents, while he served on national foster care committees. This personal/professional growth both paralleled and played a part in stimulating NFPA organizational development.

Similarly, due to cumulative education and experience, the NFPA organization developed additional functions. It moved from primarily support and education (the needs of "Room for One More" and "Team Member" foster parents) to the more complex tasks of "Team Leader" and "Advocate." As the organizational structure of the NFPA expanded, the public relations, informational, advocacy and support tasks, which once had been provided more or less informally, became part of the centralized organization's national office.

In the 1980s, social and economic conditions again influenced the scope of foster parenting and foster parent associations. The passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, (Public Law 96-272), initially reduced the population of children in foster care with the emphasis on family preservation and subsidized adoptions. Most states had some form of foster parent training, and foster parent associations were gaining respect. Still,

only a fraction of the 150,000 foster parents in the United States were NFPA members.

The early 1980s saw the introduction of forces with a lasting negative impact on foster care, foster parents, and their associations. The shredding of the social safety net during the Reagan presidency, combined with a lack of affordable and accessible child-care, made it difficult for families to care for their own children, much less to foster children with social, emotional, physical, and behavioral challenges. The tragedies of HIV/AIDS and cocaine use caused the population of children in care to climb. Further, the children staying in foster care were becoming an older population, and their needs and behaviors were more compelling. A growing number of teens were “aging out” of foster care without essential skills and supports for life on their own.

As children in care were documented to have special and, in some cases, extraordinary needs, foster parents (and caseworkers) needed commensurate skills and supports (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991; Pasztor, McNitt, & McFadden, 2005). But foster parent numbers were declining, as agencies tended to focus on recruitment without adequately addressing retention. Studies continued to document that foster parents discontinued fostering primarily due to a perceived lack of dignity and respect afforded by caseworkers (Behana, 1987; Pasztor, 1985; Pasztor et al., 1989; Pasztor & Wynne, 1995). Local foster parent organizations became mechanisms to air concerns and advocate for better working relationships. However, this was perceived by some agencies as being simply “gripe sessions” that were counter-productive.

By the late 1980s, depressed social and economic conditions continued to drive up substantiated child neglect and abuse reports, and the number and nature of children referred to foster care continued to grow and their care became more complex. Frustrated by the lack of political leadership for children by federal and state-elected officials, CWLA offered the NFPA an opportunity to return to its roots for collaboration. This offer included a funded office and staff at CWLA headquarters newly moved to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC from New York. In the invitation, CWLA wrote:

Foster parents are increasingly recognizing their potential as a powerful advocacy group for children in out-of-home care. Foster parents subsidize child welfare services by at least \$1,000 per child per year for basic living expenses, and the cost of paying for their volunteer time would be staggering. Clearly the time is right to increase the number of foster parents active in local and state associations, and increase the number of members for the NFPA. Let's work together to have a central location for information-sharing, for legislative advocacy, for technical assistance to the state associations, and to develop research and demonstration projects that clarify, strengthen, and

support the central role of foster parents in the delivery of foster care services. (Strom, 1989, p. 2)

CWLA saw a potential partner in the organization it had helped create in order to jointly address complex challenges, e.g., permanency planning, transracial placements, access to a greater range of services for children, collaboration with other organizations, and becoming part of the world community of fostering. However, the leadership of the NFPA, invested in its autonomy, and perhaps wary of being engulfed or co-opted, declined the CWLA offer. Two years later, a new NFPA president did agree to collaborate with CWLA in convening a National Commission on Family Foster Care. This partnership was the first time the NFPA joined with federal legislators, researchers, administrators, educators, and even youth-in-care, to address advocacy for family foster care policies, programs, and practices.

The National Commission published *A Blueprint for Fostering Infants, Children, and Youth in the 1990's* (1991). The Commission changed the historical label “foster family care” to “family foster care” to emphasize the family aspect of the service. It also created the term “kinship care,” which acknowledged relatives as a positive resource for children, different from foster parents but equally important (Stack, 1974; Pasztor, et al, 2003). Foster parent associations began to include kinship caregivers as part of their constituency.

The “*Blueprint*” could have enabled the NFPA to take a leadership role in advocating for detailed roles and responsibilities for foster parents, with commensurate supports, as full partners in child welfare services with their respective agencies. However, probably due to funding limitations and lack of coordination among NFPA leaders, members, and affiliates, the “*Blueprint*” was not embraced. The opportunity for advocacy leadership once again slipped away.

Another compelling issue arose, affecting both foster parents across the nation and the NFPA. Research on abuse and neglect in foster families (Bolton, Lanier & Gai, 1981; Ryan, McFadden, & Wiencek, 1988a; Carbino, 1991) documented the problems of handling suspected and documented maltreatment. As evidenced by Carbino (1991), the impact on foster families of agency responses to allegations of maltreatment was disturbing. Having children taken away abruptly, being cut off from communication with the agency, being interviewed incompletely or not at all, and being isolated for long periods without information or support, were all negative experiences that left foster parents with feelings of loss, injustice, stigma, and mistrust of agencies. Child welfare educators and others became trained in the dynamics and dimensions of the problem (McFadden, 1985; McFadden & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, McFadden, & Wiencek, 1988b). At state, regional and national conferences, foster parents attended workshops on dealing with allegations, shared experiences, and began supporting foster parents under investigation. Local foster parent

associations advocated for more humane procedures that would protect children while minimizing trauma to their foster families. As with other activities in which the NFPA participated, the initiative depended more on individual leadership and resources than national direction.

Foster parent associations did help impact the national issue of corporal punishment for abused and neglected children in care. As previously mentioned, foster parents were receiving education on its effects and alternatives at a time when many state agencies were writing or rewriting foster care policies. The NFPA took a strong position against the use of corporal punishment, (Bayless, 1990), which helped to shape enduring humane discipline policies across state jurisdictions according to Jake Terpstra, a former licensing and foster care specialist at the U.S. Children's Bureau (personal communication, 2005).

The passage of the controversial Multi-Ethnic Placement Act in 1994 (Bussiere, 1995) reflected advocacy on behalf of foster parents who filed lawsuits to adopt children of an ethnicity or culture different from their own. Foster parents testified before Congress that they were willing and able to adopt trans-racially, especially after long attachments with the children already placed in their care. The NFPA was also available to offer perspectives on the issue to the media (J. Terpstra, personal communication, 2005).

International Connections

Even in its formative years, the NFPA recognized the value of connecting with colleagues from other countries. Its original National Council of Advisors (which included U.S. child welfare organization representatives) was expanded in 1976 to include representatives from Australia, Canada, Japan, and Great Britain (Child Welfare League of America, 1976). The National Foster Care Association of Great Britain, inaugurated in 1974 with 100 local associations, reported that it had "managed to exert a great deal of influence on the child scene in this country," (Child Welfare League of America, 1976, p. 1). The National Council of Advisors chairperson noted: "by including representatives from other nations, the NFPA seeks to strengthen its advocacy of all children – everywhere" (Child Welfare League of America, 1976, p. 1). Japanese foster parents regularly attended NFPA's national conferences.

In 1989, the biennial Conference of the International Foster Care Organization (IFCO) was hosted in the U.S. for the first time, at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. This event introduced many NFPA members to the international foster care community. Foster parent association leaders helped plan the conference, which included a welcome by the NFPA president. Following this conference, NFPA officers, along with foster care educators, began attending IFCO conferences elsewhere in the world, at times participating on its board or committees, thus forging a continuing link with the global foster care community. In turn,

IFCO members from other parts of the world began participating in NFPA conferences in the U.S., providing valuable perspectives on international child welfare concerns.

While the NFPA and its state chapters were evolving, there were parallel developments in other countries with different socio-economic and political structures. One example of the international influence on foster parent associations and child welfare systems is the New Zealand Foster Care Federation, which hosted an IFCO conference in Christchurch during the mid-1980s. This federation includes both foster parents and foster care agency staff. At that conference, U.S. child welfare advocates were first introduced to Maori concepts of extended family, which formed a later conceptual basis for agency-based or formal kinship care and for family group decision-making in the U.S. It was the starting point of an international exchange of ideas among foster care advocates, helping to influence practice in the United States and other countries (McFadden, 1998; Worrell, 2001).

A Hungarian example illustrates the development of a foster parent association in a former Communist country. Prior to World War II and until the 1980s, family care of children was replaced by institutional care because the political context in Eastern-bloc countries valued the state over the family (McFadden, 1991). A shift back to family foster care began in the 1990s with Hungarian representatives joining IFCO. The U.S. PRIDE foster parent assessment and training program was transferred to Hungary by Dutch trainers who already had adapted MAPP and PRIDE for their country (Herczog, van Patee, & Pasztor, 2001). Similar to the impact of foster parent training in the U.S., the training (adapted in Hungary as FIKSZ) facilitated opportunities for empowerment and the growth of foster parents and an association, according to Dr. Mária Herczog, a senior researcher with the National Institute of Criminology in Budapest, Hungary (personal communication, 2005). By 1998, Hungarian foster parents and professionals were inspired and enabled to host a European IFCO conference, providing opportunities for historically isolated foster parents from Central and Eastern Europe to join Western colleagues. A focus continues to be the support of minority Roma (gypsy) children, historically over-represented in foster care.

The experience and institutional memory of the NFPA could be invaluable to foster parents and fledgling associations in other countries. However, due to lack of resources, language challenges, and the current domestic focus, such an expansion has not occurred. The NFPA must continue to build coalitions with international partners. It has a moral responsibility to advocate for implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Though domestic foster care issues are pressing, the NFPA should give attention to action on a global level. Moreover, there are compelling special circumstances for undocumented children in the U.S. who enter the foster care

system, as well as for those children who come from disrupted foreign adoptions. For these reasons, there is a need to network with colleagues from other countries.

Recent Developments: Following the Mission and the Money

From the “kitchen table” volunteerism of its early years, today’s NFPA has a paid executive director, an affiliate organization specialist and several other staff, and a 21-member volunteer board. There is an advisor to the president, and ten other volunteer regional advisors. There have been 10 presidents over the past 35 years, all coming from states with relatively small populations of youth in care, such as Mississippi, South Carolina, Oklahoma, and Iowa. NFPA headquarters, after a brief stay in Missouri, has moved with the individual preferences of its leaders, locating for example in Ohio and now in Washington state. Greater insights and professional and political influence might be developed if national NFPA leadership evolved also from states with significant populations of youth in care and larger congressional delegations.

The NFPA publishes a forty-page newsletter, *National Advocate*, with color and photos. While the focus is mostly on parenting, there is a detailed section on legislative activities. Disseminating the newsletter on its Web site would be more cost-effective, although that might be problematic because many foster parents may not have access.

The NFPA’s annual budget ranges from \$400,000 to \$500,000, with half the funding coming from projects funded by outside sources. Membership dues, paid by fewer than 2,000 individuals at \$35 per membership, and about 43 state foster parent associations, constitute just one-tenth of its budget. Its annual national conferences raise the remaining funds, according to its executive director, Karen Jorgenson (personal communication, 2005).

Sporadic program initiatives have contributed to some financial support and some program activities. The “Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents” project used literature to advocate for supports and provide solutions for foster parent retention. The NFPA has provided technical assistance to Los Angeles County for work on recruitment and retention. In recent years, the NFPA has collaborated with the American Bar Association, CWLA, and other organizations to develop a legal resource manual for foster parents and to provide related training. Case advocacy in school jurisdictions is a current focus for the NFPA, which can promote systems change and provides foster parents with skills to advocate for individual children.

With support from Casey Family Programs, the NFPA assisted with the development of a “tool kit” for National Foster Care Month—an information packet for developing awareness of the need for foster parents. The NFPA took the lead in developing a national campaign to further emphasize the need for fostering.

In 2005, when Hurricane Katrina affected thousands of foster families, the NFPA, working with the Foster Parent Associations of Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi donated \$10,000 for relief work, collected clothing and additional funds for distribution, and advised foster parents to directly contract the national office for assistance (K. Jorgenson, personal communication, 2005).

Future Directions and Recommendations

What might NFPA founders and leaders observe today about the Association they inspired almost 40 years ago? The NFPA continues to meet goals related to the exchange of information through newsletters and training for its participants, with both state and national educational conferences. The goal of providing support and empowerment has been fulfilled to varying degrees across different jurisdictions, depending largely upon local leadership. But as a voice for foster parents on behalf of at-risk children, its most compelling goal was to be one of advocacy; to “alter practices and policies that are counter-productive to sound foster care.” This achievement has proven to be more elusive. To accomplish this, the U.S. NFPA may have to make fundamental choices about structure and strategies. It should consider, for example, the limitations of being an individual-membership organization, and perhaps focus instead on the benefits of being an advocacy organization, collaborating with similarly-interested organizations toward systems change and focusing primarily on state and national legislation.

The policies and practice wisdom needed to foster healthy children and to assist their families have existed in the literature for years. There are decades of various commission reports highlighting foster care problems and proposing solutions: the 1977 National Commission on Children in Need of Parents, the 1991 National Commission on Family Foster Care, and the recent Pew Commission report. It is easier to study and report the problems than to implement interventions, especially in the absence of political leadership and will. A national foster parent association, mentored and supported by a coalition of better-resourced advocacy groups and foundations, especially those with political access, may be better positioned to achieve the needed systems change that has been documented for decades.

In light of the turnover of both child welfare line and administrative staff, foster parents in a national association are uniquely suited to offer institutional knowledge, continuity, and a steady voice for children in care. Further, as child welfare funding competes with other American priorities such as the war on terror, immigration reform, and tax cuts, foster parents can be powerful reminders of the importance of putting children first. They do it every day.

The NFPA could continue to be a niche provider for foster care information, training, and networking. But

ultimately, it should focus on the ability to promote legislation and influence best practice, which requires prestige, access to decision-makers, and grass roots membership support. Because NFPA's individual members represent just about one percent of the approximately 100,000 foster parents in the U.S., there is some question of its credibility as a membership organization having the ability to speak with a unified voice on key issues.

But as an advocacy organization, it could have a cadre of skilled advocates strategically placed in the large population centers where most of the county's children in foster care reside—California, Illinois, New York, and Washington, DC. In turn, they could connect with associates in neighbouring states. In today's environment, more decisions are being delegated to the states. Consequently, the NFPA needs a coherent state structure to be better able to influence state legislatures, with a national office positioned to provide technical assistance to state associations. Devolution to state levels from central national control can be an opportunity, not an obstacle. Indeed, devolution offers the opportunity for the NFPA to become more useful to and effective through state affiliates. The national association supports the states, and can call upon these state affiliates when it is necessary to mobilize calls to U.S. Congress. A model which links local, regional or provincial and national foster parent associations is likely useful in other countries as well.

Broader representation, to increase impact and speak with more authority, also requires greater efforts to achieve ethnic and cultural diversity in NFPA leadership. While children of color are disproportionately represented in most foster care jurisdictions, the leadership of the NFPA historically has not reflected that diversity, though progress is being made. Although attention is beginning to be directed to gay, lesbian, transgender, and questioning youth in care considered to be especially high risk (DeCrescenzo & Mallon, 2002; Mallon, 1997), the leadership of the NFPA needs to become more representative of diverse foster families. Foster parents affiliated with both public agencies and private treatment foster care agencies should be actively included. Youth in care, and their parents, should have representation as well.

The potential advantages of such a new national structure include that foster parents should not have to worry if they are discouraged from affiliation by their respective local agencies, or about potential retaliation if they affiliate with NFPA. Further, the time and energy demands of fostering abused and neglected children won't impede advocacy if the organization is able to take on that task on behalf of foster parents and the children and families they serve. The NFPA and state associations also must give careful thought to including kinship caregivers. Relatives are developing their own advocacy networks, and "grandfamily" or "grandparents as parents" groups can be powerful partners (deToledo & Brown, 1995). There is

common ground for advocacy. But attention and respect must be given to the differences between the acquired role of foster parent and the inherited role of kinship caregiver regarding legal, financial, casework support, and other issues (Pasztor, et al, 2003; Goodman, et al, 2004).

A national advocacy organization must have a federal presence, as well as connections in state or provincial centers of power. By building alliances, the NFPA can encourage strong support from better resourced organizations, "dedicated to raising public awareness, coordinating advocacy efforts, and building diverse alliances that strengthen foster care and community supports" (NFPA, 2006, Summer, p. 10). For example, health and mental health issues for both children in foster care and foster parents highlight the need for national attention (Pasztor, Hollinger, Inkelas, & Halfon, 2006). According to the Urban Institute, fully 25 percent of children in the system live with "aggravated" caregivers (Kortenkamp & Ehrle, 2002). Foster parents have the right to be in better health and mental health themselves, in order to provide quality care for the children. Financial supports and Social Security are needed for those who have donated their most productive years to foster caregiving. These are the kinds of issues that a national foster care coalition including the NFPA should address.

The late U.N. ambassador Adlai Stevenson said, "We can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we know the path which has led to the present." National foster parent organizations, both in the U.S. and other countries, may want to consider this NFPA history and example to make informed decisions about their organizations' structure and strategies. Foundations, corporations, researchers, academics, policymakers, and practitioners have provided decades of analysis and recommendations for foster care services. But, historically, foster parents have been left out of these discussions (National Commission on Family Foster Care, 1991). Foster care services might improve if thousands of foster parents were mobilized to speak with a unified voice, as Beatrice L. Garrett and Helen D. Stone envisioned almost four decades ago. If they had such a voice, national and international coalitions advocating for the well-being of children in care and the needs of their families could reach all of the original goals of the Foster Parent Association's founders: advocacy, support, and empowerment.

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Eileen Mayers Pasztor, DSW, is assistant director, coordinator of field education, and associate professor, Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California 90840. **Emily Jean McFadden**, ACSW, is professor, School of Social Work, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI. Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to epasztor@csulb.edu or the address above.

Manuscript received: September 12, 2005

Revised: July 28, 2006

Accepted: August 22, 2006