



Our mission is to empower families raising children with mood, behavioral and emotional disorders, by providing support, training and advocacy skills and collaborating with community partners to improve the system of care for children.



Happy New Year!

Dianne Shaffer, Executive Director

Happy New Year! I hope everyone is surviving the

chaos and excitement of the holidays. It's a wonderful time to make some personal resolutions and a fresh start! We have done exactly this at ASK.

Kathy Howard, who has served as one of our wonderful Family Support Partners for the past 2 years, is now the Family Support Team Leader. She will continue to work with families, collaborate with Valley Center and Portage Community High School, as well as serve as a resource and coach to her fellow Family Support Partners.

I am also excited to announce that our Administrative Coordinator,

Kate Gross, will now be working with us full-time and has taken on the role of Development Coordinator. This position is extremely important so that we can continue to offer services to families in Kalamazoo County.

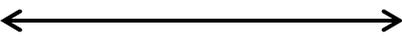
It is with a heavy heart that I inform you that our Board Chairperson, Val Dalton, has resigned from our Board of Directors. She and her husband have moved to warmer weather in Atlanta, GA. She has been a wonderful leader and support to me throughout my first year as the Executive Director of ASK. We will miss you, Val.

We have also made a couple of changes to our support group schedules, in order to improve our services to families and the community. Check out page 3 for details & keep your eyes open for those an-

nouncements in upcoming newsletters, on our website, and on our Facebook page.

Finally, we are thrilled to announce that the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health has officially commenced implementation of its new Family-to-Family Initiative. The Federation will provide information and technical assistance to organizations offering family-to-family support and as a local chapter, we are excited to be part of this initiative.

We are looking forward to the upcoming year, reaching more families and sharing in their successes. In this issue we've shared some personal experiences and successes with the child-welfare system, as well as personal points of inspiration; we hope you enjoy!



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Christine Eckrich Family Support Partner

Kathy Howard Family Support Team Leader

Mary Beth Mapes Family Support Partner

Ginger Skidmore Family Support Partner

Mackenzie Hunter Youth Involvement Coordinator

Four Simple Steps to a Peaceful New Year

Ahhhhh....it's a new year. You're refreshed, revived, energized and excited, right? Right.... If you're like most, you're wiped-out, exhausted, battle-weary, & confused. We've heard it time and again, "2009 will never end!"

It has been a long, hard year in many ways. The flailing national economy is only magnified here in Michigan and our world is war torn; our futures are uncertain and our 'presents' are overwhelming. It's no wonder that many of us these days find ourselves a little more irritable, a little less patient, a little less compassionate, and a little less happy; we certainly notice it a whole lot more in others.

So what can one person do? There are some very simple and easy things that we can each do to make this world a better place; like a pebble tossed into a pond, small actions can have very large impacts.

1. Focus on You (Self-evaluate) Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." How are you? Each day, when you face the world, what do you tell it? Do you indulge negativity? Emotions and attitude can be contagious; they shape you, your community, and your world. Sometimes the best thing you can do in a day, for yourself and for your fellow human, is to make a conscious choice to be positive, peaceful, and forgiving. Visit http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/positive-thinking/SR00009 for more information on the actual health benefits of positive thinking, as well as tips and resources to help you begin to implement positivity into your life.

2. Focus on Family (Prioritize) Often we are so overloaded with jobs, school, activities, friends, etc., that we forget to nurture the relationships that should sustain us. Nothing in life means more to a person

than the security that comes from knowing they are valued; this especially holds true for children. Our primary jobs as parents are to love, support, and nurture, and we certainly need to be present and engaged to do that. Time is a precious gift; careful consideration should always be given to where you choose to invest it. Check out http://www.ymca.net/resources\_for\_families/resources\_for\_families.html; from New Year's resolutions for families, to useful & quality tips & links for parents, I can't stress this enough - THIS PAGE ROCKS!

3. Focus on Community (Volunteer!) Speaking of good investments, volunteering is a phenomenal way to raise your spirits and positively affect your world; it's also a fantastic way to



**Question:** I feel like I am constantly yelling at my kids. I want to stop, but nothing else gets them to listen to me and do what I want them to do. Can you help me to figure out a better plan?

**Answer:** Sure! Yelling at kids focuses only on the negative things that they do. When we focus on the negative, we overlook the positive things that our kids do. No matter how badly behaved our kids can be on some days, they still have positive things that can and should be acknowledged. Kids will work to get attention (good or bad) from their parents. If the attention that they primarily get from us is when we correct them, then they will do a lot of things that need correction.

Picture yourself like an eagle soaring above the earth looking down. Look at your children in this way. Make special note of the good things that your child does. They need not be huge things, but simple things like brushing one's teeth, tying shoes, zipping coats, saying "excuse me", putting toys away, bringing home schoolwork, playing quietly, or treating a sibling nicely during play time. Those are all very positive things your child may do, don't ignore them! Turn it around; instead of yelling at the negative, cheer on the positive. When kids know that you no-

tice the positives and are verbally cheering those positive things on, the negative interactions will decrease.

Does this mean that if I am positive with my kids, they won't need correction? No Way! Positive parenting includes correction as well. The amount that you will need to correct however, should be decreasing over time.

<http://www.positiveparenting.com/index.html> is wonderful resource for parents offering various lessons and tools that can help you to proactively and effectively guide your child's behaviors.

If that doesn't work, or you feel like you need more resources, information, or support, why not check out on of our support groups, or give us a call?

Ginger Skidmore, Family Support Partner



## FOSTER CARE

Being in care can sometimes be unfair.

You go in and you come out, Wondering what it's really about.

All of the rules, and different schools

You never know when you will be a good jewel.

All of your life people tell you "Oh you just MIGHT"

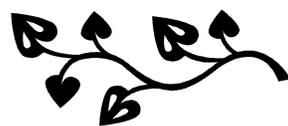
But we know that might isn't always possible.

Standing up for what you believe in-Makes an impossible, possible.

This why Foster Care is a place to go to get better- And not judge the weather.

Don't say you want to be the old you, Make the NEW YOU!

**Written by:**  
Angel, 15  
Kalamazoo Wraps,  
Calling All Youth  
Advisory Board  
Representative



## A Personal Story Involving Foster Care

Christine Eckrich, Family Support Partner

Last year in December 2008, as I found myself reminiscing about the year at end, I am ashamed to say that there was very little I could find to be thankful for; quite honestly, I had no hope for the future.

Year 2008 brought my family much destruction and devastation with periods of extreme affliction and unexplainable burdens to bear. We were in the middle of coping with my daughter's diagnosis of anorexia nervosa, that at that point was serious enough to threaten her life.

My 67 year old mother, who had been diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's with advanced demen-

ting deeper and deeper into the bowels of senility.

My children's father had abandoned them completely, choosing his own addictions to drugs and alcohol (and everything that goes along with that) over them; he was rotating in and out of rehab and jail in multiple states. As a direct result of his total abandonment, we lost the only home my children had ever known to foreclosure and were eventually evicted while my daughter lay in Bronson hospital fighting for her life.

I came home from the hospital one night to find our belongings on the front lawn and my neighbors going through them. We ended up living in

a homeless shelter in downtown Kalamazoo.

Now once again it is the end of the year and a beginning of another. I have looked back at 2009 many times, I am ever thankful for the blessings that have been bestowed upon my family, as well as for the trials we have been able to stand tall through. We certainly have a long way (and I do mean a *long* way) to go, but I am very proud of my children for the work that they have done this past year. I'm amazed at how differently I feel this year, and I can attribute many of those feelings to a little boy named Dawson.

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ASK provides refreshments and **CHILDCARE** during all ASK support groups, doors open at 6:15!

# Jan/Feb 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				Kalamazoo New Year's Fest 	1 ASK Offices Closed	2
3	4 ASK Parent Support Group 6:30-7:30pm	5 PAG/CAY 6:00-7:30pm	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 PAG/CAY 6:00-7:30pm <b>Engage Their Brains!</b>	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27 ASK Family & Provider Luncheon, 12-1pm	28	29	30
31	1 February ASK Parent Support Group 6:30-7:30pm	2 PAG/CAY 6:00-7:30pm	3 Location TBD Call ASK for Details!	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16 PAG/CAY 6:00-7:30pm	17 Location TBD Call ASK for Details!	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	<b>SEE BACK SIDE</b> for details regarding listed events. <b>Post &amp; Share this Calendar!!!</b>					

ASK Parent Support Group with a general focus is held on the **1st Monday of each Month** at **Prince of Peace Lutheran Church** ~ 1747 W Milham Rd, Portage  
For more information, call Christine @ 532-9387

Kalamazoo Wraps Parent Advisory Group (**PAG**) & Kalamazoo Wraps Calling All Youth (**CAY**)  
Meet the **1st & 3rd Tuesday** of each month at **Bronson Gilmore Education Center**, 7 Healthcare Plaza, Kalamazoo

ASK is now hosts a monthly parent support group, as well as quarterly training opportunities for families and the community. Please contact us at (269) 343-5896 with questions regarding updates, cancellations, or alterations to this schedule. Or, visit our website at [www.askforkids.org](http://www.askforkids.org) or our Facebook Fan Page.

**Educators, parents, grandparents, and struggling readers....do you know how the brain processes language?**

**-Free Workshop-  
“Engage Their Brains!”  
7-9pm on Jan 19th  
At KRESA  
1819 E. Milham Rd**

Contact Heidi Turchan @ (269) 345-2661 or by email at hturchan@sldcenter.org for more information or to schedule a workshop for your group



**FRIENDS**  
National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention

The FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP and the FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is pleased to bring to you Stories of Parent Leadership, excerpts from interviews of six parent leaders who work in their communities and nationally to help family support and child abuse prevention practitioners and organizations: <http://www.friendsnrc.org/cbcap/priority/storycorp.htm>

Discover all of the AWESOME, family-friendly events happening in YOUR community this season @ [www.discoverkalamazoo.com](http://www.discoverkalamazoo.com)

**CALLING ALL YOUTH!**

*Are you a young person between the ages of 11-17 who feels like life is happening around you?*

Calling All Youth (CAY) is your chance to speak up and be heard by adults, teachers, government, therapists, counselors, juvenile justice, schools and all of the authority figures in your life.



**IT'S TIME YOU HAD A VOICE!**

For more information contact Mackenzie Hunter At (269) 343-5896

Help us accomplish our mission; **become our fan!** YOU TOO can improve the mental health system of care for youth and children by accessing and sharing events, updates, links, resources and more!

**facebook**

Our community has much to offer parents and families of youth with mood, behavior, and emotional challenges; family input is **ESSENTIAL** to continue to improve the system of care for children.

ASK's Family & Provider Luncheon is an opportunity for parents and service providers to meet and collaborate in a casual, proactive environment.

*Bring a sack lunch and your VOICE!* on January 27th from 12-1pm  
Arcus Depot Conference Room ~ 414 East Michigan Ave, downtown Kalamazoo  
Contact ASK for details at 269-343-5896



A family-friendly performing arts celebration in downtown Kalamazoo on December 31, 2009.

New Year's Fest provides **28 different entertainers** who perform inside 9 buildings surrounding Bronson Park.

For more information, visit <http://www.newyearsfest.com/>

**P2P Parent Network Meetings:**  
*Support, Resources & Networking*

1st Thursday of each month (Sep-May), 6-8pm  
1st Presbyterian Church  
321 W. South Street, Downtown Kalamazoo

**Free Childcare is Provided with an RSVP** to 269-345-8950



Parent to Parent of SWMI provides supportive programs for parents of children with disabilities and special needs. We promote opportunities for children to fully participate in society through support and education we give to families and communities. To learn more, visit [www.p2pswmi.org](http://www.p2pswmi.org)

**Are you a parent or caregiver of a child with a mood, emotional, or behavioral challenge?**

**Are you passionate about improving the system of care for children's mental health?**



**Consider joining Kalamazoo Wraps Parent Advisory Group!**

*Childcare and Refreshments are provided*

For more information, contact Kathy Howard at (269) 343-5896

Funding by Greater Kalamazoo United Way, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and contributions from supporters and friends.



## Raising Grandchildren

Mary Beth Mapes, Family Support Partner



Fourteen years ago, I thought I had it all figured out. My family was living in Arizona, I was back in college, and our youngest was in kindergarten. Life was good. Then we got a call on January 12, 1996. It was my frantic 17 year old daughter, with her 4 month old baby; they were at her father's house in Minnesota. She sobbed as she told me that she "couldn't stand to be a mother any more"; she wanted me to come and get the baby.

Just four months before in September, she delivered a beautiful baby girl who was supposed to be adopted by a loving family that we knew. At the last minute my daughter changed her mind.

Now there we were on the phone. My daughter hysterical, and my ex-husband and his current wife in the process of moving into separate homes on their way to a divorce. As I tried to calm my daughter down, the police arrived and placed the baby into protective custody. I really couldn't blame them; the whole situation was total chaos. What's a mother to do?

Well, this mother was on a plane to Minnesota within 5 days. I picked up my granddaughter

(Al) from protective foster care and my husband and I proceeded to adopt her. The whole process took about 1 year, with interviews and a lot of waiting.

Because she was my granddaughter the process went quiet smoothly, and fortunately for us, my husband's company offered adoption reimbursement at that time. The adoption was the only thing that went smoothly. As soon as we brought Al home, that January so long ago, we noticed that certain things were not the same with her as they'd been with our four older daughters.

By the time Al was 5, after going through many doctors, we discovered that she has Bi-polar disorder, ADHD, Tourettes Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Affects, and Hashimoto's Disease (a thyroid disorder). At 9 1/2 she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. I tell you all this to let you know that adopting Al has been a roller coaster of anger, frustration, and dreams put on hold; it has been one big old up-side down life changing experience. It has also been full of immense joy and love. If I had it to do again, would I? ABSOLUTELY!

*Personal Story Cont'd* Dawson is a 2 and a half year old little boy with his own story to tell, even though he is too young to know it. He was adopted by my brother and his wife, who also have a 7 year old son named Dalton. They have tried for years to give Dalton a sibling.

Dawson was an innocent child going through the foster care system who desperately needed a stable, loving home. His biological father was in prison and his parental rights had already been terminated. Dawson's biological mother was charged and convicted this past September of concealing her pregnancy, killing her newborn baby daughter, and disposing of the body in a garbage can.

Biological mom has been sentenced to 18 years in prison. Eighteen years, for the length of time her baby daughter would have been a minor. Needless to say, her parental rights to Dawson were terminated Dawson used to belong to the state. I am proud to say, he is now ours.

The foster care system is a long, complicated and often frustrating process. But without it, many innocent children of all ages would never have a chance to have *any* security, or a home that provides the love and attention that we all need. Foster homes can work. Dawson is my proof. There is nothing like the "fearless" giggles of a child to give anyone "hope".

My family cannot help but see the workings of a higher power in the path that brought Dawson to our family, in the way that he arrived, and at a time we needed each other the most. He is a little spitfire full of energy, and a courageous bundle of joy. He has already given us more than we could ever provide to him. There is a quote from one of my favorite movies of all time, 'So Dear to My Heart', about a boy and a lamb that states, "nothing is born afraid." Think about that for a minute.

NOTHING IS BORN AFRAID - our fears are learned, not inherited.

*Resolutions Cont'd* spend quality time with friends and family. There are thousands of opportunities in this community alone, to the degree that most *anyone*, with any interest, any skill-set, and any commitment level, can certainly find an opportunity to help others. <http://volunteerkalamazoo.org/ui/Main.aspx> is an amazing resource for our community with a database for you to explore volunteer opportunities based on *your* criteria, check it out!

### 4. Focus on Environment (Be Responsible)

Did that heading make you cringe? Are you tired of the word 'green' yet? Most people certainly am, but what's scary is that media-overkill of the *word* could be overshadowing the *message*. The fact is we all have a responsibility to be good stewards of our bodies and planet. The reality is that it can be mighty hard to do! Luckily, there are millions of little ways that we can each participate in good stewardship, without being overzealous environmentalists or adding undue stress to our daily lives. Walk, shop locally, recycle, donate, conserve; it *does* make a difference and it does feel good! <http://www.thedailygreen.com/> is an environmental 'kick in the pants' full of great tips, resources, and reminders.

Make a decision to be happy, healthy, and responsible; bit by bit we can make a change.



I have learned that we cannot become prisoners to the crippling burdens we may be forced to bear in our lifetime. We have to jump right in and plow our way through the afflictions given to us and have faith that "hope" is at the other end. We may not like or agree or have any control of the outcomes in life all the time, but sometimes, that hope comes in packages we could never imagine!! Everyone has a story, just as awful as everyone else's. What we choose to do with the knowledge given to us from our stories is what makes us all different. I often wonder how I would be looking back on 2009 if it weren't for the much needed breath of fresh air bestowed upon my family in the form of a little boy in the foster care system named Dawson.





advocacy services for kids  
414 East Michigan Avenue  
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007

Please visit us at [www.askforkids.org](http://www.askforkids.org) for valuable information about our services, links to resources, and an archive of our newsletters.

You can also opt-in to join our electronic mailing list to receive updates about ASK and community events.

If you no longer wish to receive this publication, please email us at [mail@askforkids.org](mailto:mail@askforkids.org)

## Please consider supporting ASK!

Donating is easy.

- 1) Fill out the form
- 2) Make checks payable to: Advocacy Services for Kids
- 3) Mail to the address shown.

Name _____	
Address _____	
City _____	State _____
Email _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> \$10 Student <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Regular <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Family <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Contributing <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Sponsoring <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Donor <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Corporate <input type="checkbox"/> \$_____ Other	<p><b>Would you like to be placed on our mailing list?</b> You may cancel at any time</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, via my postal address <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, via email <input type="checkbox"/> No thank you <p><b>We like to acknowledge our donors in our newsletter and/or website.</b> Would you prefer to remain anonymous? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p>



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What a great way to support ASK by doing what we all normally do anyway, SHOP!



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