

NEWS & VIEWS



Keeping siblings together through strong partnerships with families and communities

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Neighbor To Family expands to North Carolina

Neighbor To Family now has programs in five states, after opening a new office in Waynesville, North Carolina in February. Waynesville is on the west side of the state, 30 miles west of Asheville, near the Great Smokey Mountains.

"We are extremely pleased to now have a presence in North Carolina, working with people who really want us there, and we hope to begin accepting our first foster children soon," says NTF President and CEO Gordon Johnson. "The officials in Haywood County have been very enthusiastic and supportive. They place a great deal of value on our programs."



Phil Sageser

Haywood County Social Services has contracted with NTF to develop a visitation center for birth parents and their children, and provide preparatory work while the state's licensing process is completed.

Coordinating the effort for NTF is the new Executive Director, Phil Sageser. Before joining NTF, Phil was the Regional Director of the Grandfather Home for Children in Asheville for three years. The agency is a residential treatment center for sexually abused children and coordinates foster homes for about 70 children.

Prior to that, he served as the Clinical Director at the Counseling Ministry of South Florida in Miami for 15 years. A Methodist Minister, Sageser holds a Ph.D. in Theology from Southern Methodist University in Dallas and a Master's Degree in Community Mental Health from the University of Miami.

Award celebrates the sibling bond

Neighbor To Family will celebrate the importance of the sibling bond at the Siblings of the Year Luncheon, Friday, May 25 at the Palmetto Club in Daytona Beach. Sisters Gail Camputaro and Linda Merrell will receive the inaugural Gordon Johnson Award, named in honor of the founder of Neighbor To Family.

State Senator Evelyn Lynn is presenting the award at the luncheon. It was Sen. Lynn who invited Johnson to bring the program from Chicago's Jane Addams Hull House to Daytona Beach in 1998 and spearheaded a bill that required a sibling foster care program. Serving as Master of Ceremonies will be Jack Levine, longtime statewide child advocate and founder of the new 4Generations Institute. Proceeds will be used to enhance the lives of the 100 abused and neglected foster children who are now in the care of Neighbor To Family in the Daytona Beach area.

"Gail and Linda serve as a wonderful example of the value of the sibling bond," says Johnson. "They have had an immeasurable impact on the lives of many thousands of Florida's children and elderly citizens."

Since 1983, Camputaro has served as the Executive Director of the Council on Aging of Volusia County. Early in her career, she worked on behalf of children, starting as a day care center volunteer. She helped develop the United Child Care administrative agency, which became the Child Care Resource Network, and was director for 12 years before joining the Council on Aging. Merrell's life work has focused on child welfare and health care issues, serving as a consultant for the Florida Community Health Action Information Network (CHAIN), a statewide coalition that promotes affordable health care. She was the Community Coordinator and Director of the Healthy Kids Program, which became Florida KidCare, as one of only three states to develop a model for uninsured children.



Sisters Gail Camputaro (left) and Linda Merrell, recipients of the first Gordon Johnson Award.

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Jake Breland, Amy Matt join NTF executive staff

Two new executive staff members joined Neighbor To Family recently in the Corporate Office in Daytona Beach, Jake Breland, Controller, and Amy Matt, Vice President of CQI (Continuous Quality Improvement), Risk Management and Training.

Breland, a former Federal Reserve executive, and a financial consultant for Neighbor To Family for the past year, was named to the new position of Controller in March. Breland duties including enhancing collaboration with all Vice-Presidents and Executives to meet the organization's budget and management goals, such as operational efficiency, financial accountability and compliance. As Controller, Breland will oversee the Finance and the Information-Technology departments.



Jake Breland

Breland has 35 years of senior executive level experience, including 28 years with the Federal Reserve System, holding positions such as Vice President of Banking Supervision and Regulations and Chief Compliance and Regulatory Examiner. After leaving the Federal Reserve in 1999, Breland was the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer for the Ohio Aerospace Institute in Cleveland until 2004, when he started his financial and management consulting firm. Breland is a graduate of Howard University, and the Stonier Graduate School of Banking at Rutgers University.

Matt joined NTF in January, and her position is new as well. Her responsibilities include improving training, risk management, quality standards and consistency in the implementation of the sibling model at all of NTF's programs.



Amy Matt

Before joining NTF, Matt had been the Director of Quality and Risk Management since 2004 at the Partnership for Strong Families in Gainesville, Fla. Prior to that, she was the Director of Quality Assurance and Training for the Missouri Alliance for Children, and served in other capacities with the agency, since 1999. She started her career with the Missouri Department of Social Services, serving as a Child Abuse and Neglect Investigator and a Family Services Counselor. She also worked as Legislative Policy Intern for the National Association of Social Workers. Matt earned her Bachelor of Science and Master of Social Work degrees from the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Branding study implementation is focus of quarterly meeting

Nighbor To Family is in the process of implementing the recommendations of a 2006 branding study that identified how NTF's programs and benefits were perceived by the state and local agencies who provide funding to NTF. The study was a major topic at the January, 2007 Board of Director's meeting and is set to be the main theme for the quarterly meeting in May that includes executive staff and program directors.

It is important for NTF staff and supporters to understand the results of the branding study, since it highlights not only our perceived benefits, but also some misconceptions about our services. The study, conducted by consultants Anne Curley of Curley Communication, and Susan Dreyfus, CEO of the Alliance for Children and Families, included interviews and surveys with about a dozen state and local decision-makers and managers, along with NTF foster parents and other employees.

NTF'S "brand" of foster care was most valued by our funding partners for its holistic philosophy that includes:

- Keeping siblings together.
- Not shying away from tough challenges.
- Helping birth parents become better parents.
- NTF's commitment to the values they share.
- A family team approach.
- Bringing biological and foster parents together.

What aspects of NTF's programs were valued least, or not communicated well? NTF's track record of getting its foster children into permanent care sooner, and its resulting cost savings, was not seen as a major benefit.

That is because annual state funding is usually based on the costs per day of keeping a child in foster care, says Gordon Johnson, NTF's President and CEO, "The study shows us that we have to find more ways to prove that our program is saving states potentially millions of dollars over a one-to-two year cycle."

The study's recommendations include keeping a sharp focus on providing professionalized, sibling foster care, while offering non-sibling services only to those communities that already have an established NTF sibling program.

Culture Committee makes rapid improvements to the child welfare and court system in Miami

Miami's child welfare system is being rapidly transformed for the better thanks to a new Culture Committee in the Miami area that includes judges and child welfare officials.

"It's a group of CEOs, judges and representatives from the child welfare community who come together to make sweeping changes in how we do business," says Mark Jones, Vice President of Florida Programs and the Executive Director for Miami, who serves as committee chairman. NTF Legal Counsel Lucy Pineiro also serves on the committee. "The committee doesn't just list problems, we propose solutions, and the improvement concepts are implemented almost immediately."



Mark Jones

The Culture Committee includes all the judges who handle child welfare cases, defense attorneys and officials representing the state's Department of Children and Families, the Community Based Care Alliance, Guardian Ad Litem, service providers like NTF and Our Kids, the area's funding agency.

The committee started in January and meets twice a month. A list of concerns, recommendations and status of issues is updated continually, and the committee evaluates if the changes are working. If not, adjustments are made.

One major accomplishment has been a recent change in court's calendar process. For over a decade, the child welfare court system in Miami has been overloaded, forcing agency staff to sometimes be in court nearly every day, sometimes for several hours a day. Case managers and attorneys were sometimes scheduled to be in three different courtrooms at the same time.

The proposals include several steps to rework the court calendar and to maximize efficiency so that the children can be placed in permanent homes quicker.

Other accomplishments include better communication between case managers, mental health professionals, attorneys and the judges. Judges have also asked for more measurable case plan goals, as well as more timely and consistent reports. Attorneys assigned to represent the interests of the children on behalf of the state are now working much more closely with NTF and other service providers so they are more familiar with each case.

"Everyone in the system, especially the children, are benefiting from these changes," Jones says. "It represents a major shift in the cultural norms."

Foster Mom offers tips for recruiting foster parents

Siti Dotson, a Foster Mother in the Atlanta area, recently was awarded her third \$250 incentive bonus for recruiting new Neighbor To Family foster parents. The bonuses come from a recruitment fund set up from donations and grants to encourage non-recruitment staff to bring in new foster parents.

Siti became a NTF Foster Mother in June, 2006. She currently has two foster children, five- and eight-year-old sisters. Her tips for recruiting foster parents?

"Most of the time, people ask me about it, so I tell them upfront there is an extensive background check," she says. "Then I tell them that Neighbor To Family keeps siblings together, and that usually gets them interested."

Siti also gives prospects the main phone number of the local office, as well as the name and number of the NTF recruiter.

May is National Foster Care Month and a perfect time to recruit new foster parents. For more information about the Foster Parent Recruitment Fund and the bonus program, call Karen Chrapek, Director of Donor Relations at 386-523-1440, ext. 124.

NTF Welcomes New Employees - Hired Jan. 1 to March 29, 2007

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Atlanta Foster Parents adopt six siblings

Rashika and Kenneth Briggs are proving what a little love can do. February 23 was a big day for the Atlanta-area foster parents, as their instant family became official with the adoption of a sibling group of six children, aged 3 to 10.

When the four boys and two girls were placed with the Briggs in June, 2004, they faced a multitude of physical and emotional challenges. Since then, they have dramatically improved thanks to the safe and nurturing environment provided by the Briggs.

"The first six months were kind of hard. We went from zero kids to six," said Rashika. "But after that, we just formed into a family. We never looked at them as foster children, even as we worked with the birth mother when she was trying to get them back. When that didn't happen, and they went up for adoption, my husband and I couldn't see any other way, so we adopted them."

Rashika worked as a paralegal before becoming a NTF Foster Parent. Kenneth is attending college while working as a Behavior Specialist for people with brain injuries.

"I encourage people to foster or adopt," Rashika says. "You would be amazed at what a little love and TLC can do for a child."

How you can help support Neighbor To Family

We need your support as NTF revolutionizes sibling foster care in America:

- Purchase a Precious Cargo Footlocker for a child for \$50.
- Donate to the Foster Parent Recruitment Fund.
- Donate toward the purchase of additional clothes, holiday gifts, field trips and more.
- Remember the Gordon and Deloris Johnson Endowment in your will.

For more information on gift opportunities, contact Karen Chrapek, Director of Donor Relations, at 386-523-1440, ext. 124.