

The importance of FAPAs

For most people, relationships are important; for foster and adoptive parents this is probably even truer than for the rest of the general population. Joining a group of people who have experienced the same types of situations you are experiencing (or considering) allows you to have a sense of security and trust that you can confide in others who've "been there and done that" and likely even have some advice or support to offer in various scenarios. By joining a foster and adoptive association (FAPA), you are able to support and help one another in reaching goals and milestones with our children's needs and sometimes even with our own needs. Healthy, vibrant FAPAs should sponsor numerous events throughout the year that allow you to connect with your peers and allow the opportunity to fellowship with each other, rejoice and mourn with each other and support each other in this incredible journey we're all following. We get to share ideas and ask each other for advice. There should be opportunities to volunteer to help each other out or even to become a member of a committee.

Most types of associations conferences at the local, state and even national levels where you can participate and have the opportunity to learn about news and emerging best practices in our chosen "field", where we can hear about key performers and also meet and brainstorm with others who are trying to further the interests of the children in the system and the families who care for them. In a healthy and vibrant association you may even find a mentor to help you or you may be in a position to become a mentor to someone else. Giving back to other families who come after you can be one of the greatest rewards and benefits from being a part of a FAPA. Participating in forums, chat groups or discussion boards and support groups sponsored or facilitated by the FAPA is also a great way to grow your network of fellow foster and adoptive caregivers (and even sometimes your family). This allows you to use your fellow caregivers as sounding boards and often make some great friends with the same interests as you.

Another important reason to consider membership to a foster and adoptive parent association is to take advantage of their legislative and administrative resources. Healthy, vibrant FAPAs often have committees working on issues that their membership faces (have any of you had issues with Medicaid, ELC or needed help with the particulars of a case). Some associations even have panels of experts or seasoned veterans that you can contact for specific questions or advice on particular issues. Other benefits include information about seminars, training or certification classes that may be helpful for your particular family needs or resources that may help one of your children.

Most healthy, vibrant associations provide an enormous amount of access to resource information such as: case studies, best practices, emerging trends, articles, white papers and books written by experts in our "field".

Healthy, vibrant FAPAs do not take their membership for granted and work diligently to make their membership feel comfortable knowing that someone cares about them and is engaged with the processes involved so intimately in their lives. They also should provide good customer service and respond timely to requests, facilitate partnerships and collaboration and actively engage the involvement of the membership in the activities of the association. It is through the strength in numbers that each individual

voice of the membership gains a larger voice with the legislature, the Governor's office, the organizations that work for us (CHS, Boystown, BBCBC, and every other agency out there), and that we're each individually and collectively heard.

The Tallahassee Area FAPA needs its members to engage in the process – to be a part of the election cycle, to volunteer for committees and projects and to make their voices heard so that we can speak for the rights of the children and the families who care for them.

In two more weeks (September 23), the TAFAPA will have an election of officers for the Board of Directors. In order to be able to vote in this election, you will have to be a dues-paid member at least five days prior to the election. That means you need to be proactive now to make your dues payment (it's only \$25 per family for the entire year) if you haven't already and then be prepared to come to the monthly meeting on Tuesday, September 23 at 6:30 at the ELC of the Big Bend (food and childcare will be provided).

I urge each of us to think about the kinds of support we so desperately need as families charged with caring for such vulnerable kids and to let our voices come together to make a strong, healthy, vibrant FAPA that gives each of us what we need to do what we do even better!

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