



Family Focus

Help • Hope • Here

WINTER/SPRING 2009

Multicultural Families Support Foster Care Efforts

Special Foster/Respite Care in the Multicultural Population

- » NVFS continues to see an increase in the need for foster homes for teens of all ethnicities.
- » NVFS strives to place foster children in a home that can meet their ethnic and cultural needs.
- » NVFS has seen a 50% increase in the certification of multicultural foster homes over the last year.

Northern Virginia Family Service's (NVFS) Special Foster Care program receives children from all different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. More recently, there has been an increase in the number of Hispanic children needing to be placed in loving homes, yet of the foster families who receive these children, not many are Hispanic. Although it is not imperative for children to be matched with families of similar ethnicities, sometimes it makes the transition easier and more comfortable for them. This is what Jimmy and Gude Bernardez of Alexandria, VA experienced after they received a 17-year-old Hispanic teenage boy into their home a few months ago.

The Bernardez family received their first foster children through NVFS about one year ago — a pair of bi-racial 11-year-old twins. When they learned about the 17 year old who needed to

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Training Futures Graduate Brings Considerable Experience to Job Hunt

Maha Zahir was skeptical at first when she was granted entry into the United States. She had much going for her in her home country of Morocco. After graduating with a degree in economics from a university in the capital, Rabat, she returned home to the countryside to help her father run his butcher business. Using her newly-minted business acumen, she put an end to lax business practices and made sure that she collected full payment from all of his customers. Profits more than doubled when she took charge, and her father expressed his gratitude frequently.

While studying, she had submitted her application for legal entry to the US. With a sister of hers already a citizen, her application was

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Maha Zahir at the Training Futures Graduation

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NVFS FACT

About 65% of our clients speak a language other than English as their primary language at home.

Upcoming NVFS Events

Stay up-to-date at www.nvfs.org

Road to Independence Gala: May 8

On May 8, 2009, NVFS will host its 11th annual Road to Independence Gala. Please consider joining us as a sponsor, patron or auction donor at our largest public event of the year. Visit www.nvfs.org for more information.

NVFS Golf Tournament: Oct 1

Save the date! New, reduced entry fees will help to make this year's golf tournament more accessible to people who just want to enjoy a great day of golf to the benefit of local families. This year's tournament will be held at Virginia Oaks in Gainesville. Start searching now for teammates to bring with you as your foursome will compete in a best-ball tournament with significant prizes awarded to the winners.

CARE Awards: November 12

Visit the new CARE (Companies As Responsive Employers) Awards website at www.careawards.net.

Volunteers Wanted!

VOLUNTEER MENTOR/TUTOR IN SPECIAL FOSTER CARE PROGRAM IN STAFFORD, VA. FOR 17 YEAR OLD-TEEN MOM.

Someone knowledgeable in Algebra I/III, Ecology, Spanish (if possible). Two hours a week for a minimum of 1 year. Evenings or weekends.

VOLUNTEERS FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS IN ARLINGTON AND MANASSAS, VA.

We need teachers and library assistants. Candidate should have experience working with children, enjoy working with people of different ethnic backgrounds; Spanish is not required, but helpful.

CLOCK TOWER THRIFT STORE ASSISTANTS IN FALLS CHURCH AND CENTREVILLE, VA.

To sort and tag donations of clothing, household items, toys and books; as well as assisting customers and receiving donations. Minimum age: 16. Evenings and weekends available.

Volunteer Contact: Monica Arispe
703.219.2193 | volunteer@nvfs.org

Good Works

People can reach out in many unique ways to support the communities in which they live. All of these efforts, in one way or another, have a profound effect upon families and children in our region. These are just a few examples of how our supporters have chosen to give back.

Giftng for Families Gift Card & Toy Drive

Booz Allen Hamilton and its employees donated nearly 2,000 toys and \$3,000 in gift cards & cash. Westminster School is a private school (K-8th grade) located in Annandale, VA. Their small school (population about 300), led by their Builder's Club, helped raise nearly \$8,000 in cash and gift cards in only 6 weeks to help support our Gifting for Families Holiday Initiative. That total represents about 18% of what we raised in 2008! During the current school year, the Builder's Club, under the guidance of faculty advisor, Mr. Dennis Miller, has also conducted a diaper & wipes drive as well as a clothing drive for NVFS. We appreciate the hard work of these young people to help make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate.

Annual Foster Care Holiday Party

NVFS' annual Foster Care Holiday Party was held at the Vienna Baptist Church on December 13. The party was a HUGE success due to the efforts of NVFS Board Member, John Allen. Mr. & Mrs. Allen sponsored the party, providing gifts for all of our foster care children. He and his family announced that they have decided to host the event annually!

We also want to recognize NVFS Board Member, Kevin Gillen and his daughter, Cortney, who asked that her parents take the funds that they would have spent on her Christmas gifts and use them to benefit our Foster Care Program. Cortney came to volunteer at the event and met with our Foster Care Families, so she could learn more about our work and how her very generous donation would benefit the program. Mr. Gillen also generously donated a suite from TD Bank for a Wizards game. Three families, who have been foster care families for over 20 years received this special holiday gift.

Foster Care

(continued from page 1)

be placed in a good home, they were unsure of the challenges they might face parenting a much older teenager. However, they knew they were capable of providing him a loving home that would be culturally similar to the one in which he was raised. When asked if she thinks it has made a difference for the boy, Gude replied, "Of course! When he tells me things like my cooking reminds him of his mother's, I know it has made a difference."

Recently, the Bernardez's hosted a birthday party at their home for one of their children. According to Gude, some of the Hispanic parents who came by to drop off their children began to question her about becoming foster parents when they noticed the three children were not her own. "They seemed very interested," she said. Gude believes that more Hispanic families would participate in the program if they knew about the opportunity. After seeing firsthand how it has made a difference for the 17-year-old boy they received a few months ago, Jimmy and Gude Bernardez know how important it is for families from the Hispanic community to come forward and fill the need for more multicultural foster parents.

NVFS works to welcome and reinforce the growing positive role that multicultural families are playing in our area.



In December, Healthy Families Alexandria held their annual holiday party, attended by over 200 guests. Above, a family graduating from the program receives recognition from Alexandria Mayor William Euille.

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The Adult Health Partnership staff members at Northern Virginia Family Service greatly appreciate the generosity and support from the following dentists in providing quality dental work at low-cost to our low-income and uninsured clients.

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Maha

(continued from page 1)

granted and she was faced with the decision to immigrate far sooner than she had hoped, particularly considering how well she was doing at her father's business.

Her friends pulled her aside and assured her that she had what it took to come to the US and succeed. After some reflection on the opportunities of living in the US, she made the voyage across the sea to begin a new life in Northern Virginia.

The first few weeks were particularly difficult, she shared. "I could barely recognize my own sister, because the way

work environments. After spending time in retail sales at Hecht's, she moved on to Home Depot, where she quickly was promoted to front-end supervisor. Her day-to-day duties included customer service troubleshooting, managing and training cashiers. While she was glad to be in a management position, she hungered to advance her career further.

After a couple of years in the US, Maha's situation became more challenging. Her father unexpectedly passed away, and his business had to be liquidated. There was simply no one that was able to assume the burden of the daily management of the business. Maha went back to Morocco for a few months to mourn and to manage that transition for her family. She then returned to the US with a renewed focus on her own personal and professional growth.

Soon afterward, her sister became unable to provide the same kind of support that she had given before, and Maha needed to provide additional financial support for her family. She recalled that she had applied for, and been accepted into the Training Futures program a couple of years earlier, but had been unable to enroll. She picked up the phone and contacted NVFS to see if that opportunity was still available to her.

After reapplying along with other qualified applicants for the 14th session, or cycle, of the Training Futures program, she was accepted and welcomed into a program which promised to set her further along her path of career enrichment.

Initially, Maha had pretty low expectations. She was having trouble getting her Moroccan university degree to be recognized here in the US by her employers. She thought that she'd be way ahead of the rest of her classmates and that the classes would be boring.

She now admits that she had much to learn. "I thought I was going to be such a good student, but a lot of my classmates were just as good, just as skilled," she explained. The 25-week program taught her more than she was expecting. Even years after acclimating to the United States and the English language, she found herself being chal-



Maha Zahir immigrated from Morocco in 2003, and has a degree in economics. She successfully ran her father's business in Morocco, and is looking to apply some of that experience to get into a management or teaching position here.

she greeted me at the airport was so different than how we would have done it at home." The social customs, language barriers and overall culture-shock kept her enthusiasm subdued.

After an initial adjustment period, with help and support from her sister here, and her father back in Morocco, Maha enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). It wasn't really her second language, she added; She already spoke fluent Arabic and French.

As her comfort with English grew, her sister's family helped even further by only speaking English at home. As a result, Maha was able to advance quickly in her

lenged to make her grammar and pronunciation perfect. "My teachers didn't let up," she says. "When it comes to work, you have to do your job."

Shortly after graduating from the program, Maha was pursued by Inova Fairfax Hospital to continue working in the position where she had excelled in an internship required by Training Futures. She recently began working in a full-time temporary position in their Case Management division as an office assistant. Due to her excellent track-record she built during her internship, she has high hopes for advancement within the hospital administrative staff. She also is serving as a part-time Arabic translator for Fairfax County Schools.

She credits Training Futures with giving her the exact experience she needed to take the next big step in her career. She recently remarked, "The teachers here are our support...they buck us up, and they give us guidance in everything. I'm very blessed to have this program."

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