

Foster Family Spotlight

**Scott & Janice
Ellis**



AGAPE STRONG
WORDS FROM
STEVE GEIB,
EXECUTVE
DIRECTOR/FOUNDER



DEAR AGAPE FAMILY
AN UPDATE FROM
FOSTER CARE



**FOCUS ON THE
RULES**
AN UPDATE FROM
LICENSING

NEWSLETTER



Agape
You Are Invited
To Join Us In Celebrating
25 Years
Of Serving
The Families And Youth
Of Southwest Ohio

ANNIVERSARY OPEN HOUSE

Friday, March 7, 2014
12:00Pm – 6:30Pm

2621 Dryden Road, Suite 202
Dayton, Oh 45439
937-439-4406 X22

www.agapeforyouth.com

AGAPE FOR YOUTH, INC. CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF SERVING

On behalf of the Agape for Youth, Inc. Board of Directors, staff members, families and youth, we invite you to join us for the Agape for Youth, Inc. 25th Anniversary Open House, ON Friday, March 7, 2014.

The Agape for Youth, Inc. office is located at 2621 Dryden Road, Suite 202, Dayton, OH 45439.

We look forward to having you join us for this celebration.

Save the Date

The 2014 Agape for Youth, Inc. fundraising gala “Agape Strong – From Adversity to Opportunity” will be on Friday, August 22, 2014 at the Dayton Racquet Club. There are sponsorship and donation opportunities available. Please contact Sandie at 937.439.4406 x 22 for additional information regarding the 2014 gala.

“Agape Strong “– Continuing our Journey of Serving

I don't know about you, but many of us couldn't wait to welcome 2014 with open arms. While the past year certainly had its challenges, it did have its victories as well, and was very good to great for Agape for Youth, Inc.!!

This year will mark the 25th Anniversary of Agape. We will celebrate this with an Open House on March 7th here at our office in Dayton. As I reflect on the past 25 years, I must say it has seldom been without, let's say, its share of “excitement”.

Now for a short trip down memory lane starting with 1989 up to 2014.....and I promise this will not be a year to year journey;

1989-Agape begins....on the Friday before I, my wife Sandie, and two children Stephen, age 2 ½ , and Emily, age 6 months, move from Petoskey, Michigan in a major snow storm.....and oh yes, I have dark brown hair. In 2014, Kaitlyn, arriving in 1990, Emily, and Stephen are all married and doing well...very good!!...and I no longer have dark brown hair!

1989-Clifford and Laretta Phillips become Agape's first licensed foster family, and now in 2014 remain active foster and adoptive parents with the agency.

1989-Agape ended the year with three staff, and five foster families. Today we have 22 staff members, and average nearly 80 foster families serving the youth and families entrusted to our care.

Some additional milestones include:

Agape selected in 2008 to receive a grant from MCCSB to provide reunification services to families of youth currently residing in foster care. Since then and for the past near six years, Agape has maintained an over 90% success rate of families who have completed this program and having their family reunited, remaining together.

Agape for Youth receives the 2010 Better Business Bureau Eclipse Integrity Award in the non-profit category.

In 2012, Dr. Pam Gulley brought to Agape a strength based initiative, ‘Agape Strong’, which moves the agency to a foundation of knowing and using our individual and collective strengths in addressing the ‘challenges’ we encounter. Enhances the culture of Agape, that includes our foster families, the reunification families, and youth we serve!

This past year, 2013 was marked with our first ‘sold-out’ fundraiser, receiving numerous grants, increased donations, and community support at an all-time high!! Also, our Reunification Services Program was recognized by the Ohio Association of Non-Profits Organization (OANO) as a finalist in its ‘Excellence Awards’, and this program was also featured by the Ohio Governor's Office on Faith Based Initiatives and Community in Bright Ideas Ohio.

As I promised not to go on a year to year recap, there is much I remain so very thankful for and would be remiss not to thank Agape's Board of Directors, our Staff, our Foster Families our Sponsors, our Donors, and the many who have served alongside us in the quarter-century journey....you are greatly appreciated.

Steve

FEBRUARY 13, 2014

AGAPE STRONG

Dear Agape Family,

Well, the amazing summer that I discussed in my last letter has obviously passed and we are having a full-fledged winter in Ohio for the first time in several years. If you are one who enjoys cold and snow you are pretty happy at this point. Despite the cold and snow the work at Agape continues as we seek to serve you and the children in your home with excellence.

Our first Family Fun Night was a huge success with several coming out to eat and get training while the kids had a great time with the staff. We have seen our Secret Santa Workshop come and go and we had nearly 300 come to the Christmas Party at the Boonshoft.

Despite his best efforts, Old Man Winter has not been able to slow us down and now we look forward to spring with much anticipation as Agape will celebrate our 25th Anniversary on March 7th. We have experienced amazing successes because of foster parents like Clifford and Loretta Phillips who have been licensed with us all 25 years.....Amazing!! We want all of you to know, those of you who have been licensed for years and those who have just joined our team and are waiting for your first placement, that we APPRECIATE you. It is your dedication, your commitment, and your hard work that changes the lives of children and families.

Now for the hard news, we need more people just like you who are willing to take these children in. We especially need our families to consider what age child they are willing to welcome into their home. We need families willing to work with children over the age of 12 as we get dozens, if not hundreds of referrals each quarter for young adolescents and teens and we simply do not have enough homes to find matches for these children. I used to remind my staff all the time “teens are CHILDREN too, and they need love, and nurturing, and structure just like younger children. Yes, they pose different challenges but many people would be surprised at how successful they could be working with a teenager. If you are willing to consider taking an older youth into your home I hope you will let Bruce or I know. We would love to be able to place more of these children.

DON'T forget that we have a beautiful 50" TV that we will be giving away in a few short months but you can still earn an opportunity to win the TV. All you have to do is refer a friend or family member or someone you know to Agape. When they call to get information you are automatically entered into the drawing.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about the support you are receiving from our staff, I would love to hear from you. Please remember, that we cannot address a concern that we do not know about. Together we will continue to grow stronger. I look forward to all that you as foster parents, with our support, are going to accomplish over the coming months. You may reach me at 439-4406 ext. 37 or email me at rstauffer@agapeforyouth.com

Sincerely,

Rodger

Education Update

As the new education coordinator, I have really enjoyed taking on a new roll at Agape for Youth!

The past two quarters, we have hired two new tutors who are able to help with our older foster youth who need extra help in science and math. Along with our reading tutor, we currently have nine youth who receive tutoring services.

At the end of the first quarter, 73% of our kids received C's and above. As a reward for their hard work, they each received \$5 McDonald gift cards.

We are currently working on the statistics for the 2nd quarter and are encouraged by kids who are improving in their grades!

I look forward to comparing 2nd quarter grades with the first quarter and sharing with everyone in the next newsletter!

Sandi

Sandi Wagner, LSW
Education Coordinator

Foster Parent Spotlight:

Scott and Janice Ellis received their first placement in August 2013. Scott and Janice have been licensed since July 2012 and are a foster to adopt home. They have no children of their own and their desire is to adopt. Going from zero to two kids can be a big adjustment and Scott and Janice handled the change great! They were open about the needs that they had and welcomed advice and help with challenges they faced.

Accepting a two and a four year old into their home creates a whole new environment! With openness to the challenges that came with both kids, Scott and Janice took the kids and loved them as their own. Despite the nerves of being new foster parents, Scott and Janice sought out the biological family and created relationships with the mother and grandmothers of the kids. Sending pictures and updates from doctor appointments was just one way they were able to build a relationship with the parents.

Creating relationships with birth parents can be nerve racking, but the reward that can come from it is not only for the parents, but for the children as well.

In January, the two kids in the Ellis home were reunified with their grandma. Because of the relationship that Scott and Janice built, they are able to still see the kids who were in their home for months and who captured their hearts with their personalities. Being able to work with the Ellis family has been rewarding for me as a Youth Specialist as well! Seeing Scott and Janice grow and mature as foster parents is something that is so encouraging for me too! I love that they were able to put aside their desire to have children and put the needs of the children first.

Because of the excellent work Scott and Janice did with their first placement, their name was passed along to the adoption unit of the county and now Scott and Janice are preparing their hearts and home for an placement of a 2 year old boy and 4 year old girl. They are so excited to see where this journey in foster care will take them and I am looking forward to continue to serve them as their Youth Specialist!

Sandi Wagner, Youth Specialist/Education Coordinator

AYC Update

Welcome to 2014!

We're excited to tell you that AYC is off to a great start! This year, we have decided to focus a lot of our energies on ***Independent Living Skills***. Each month, we have a quality lesson prepared to enrich the lives of our youth in care, as well as youth in our reunification program.

We have decided on our dates for the entire year, so make sure you check out the Agape bulletin board, when you visit the office.

We look forward to learning about areas, such as, Independent financial preparations, social media, nutrition and consumer awareness.

We're excited to also have special guest speakers who are willing to volunteer their time to teach us about different occupations and provide motivational insight.

At our last meeting, we took an assessment test of the Independent Skills the youth already possess. In December, we'll take a post-test for the skills the youth have learned since learning more through AYC. We always will have a few fun activities spread throughout the year.

If you have a youth in your home that is interested in joining AYC, now would be a great time to join! Please contact me at 937.439.4406 x 10 if you have any questions about AYC

Tiffani

Tiffani Stuart

Administrative Assistant/AYC Coordinator





Spotlight on Training

So far this year we have had several great trainings. Along with these trainings have been three new trainers as well as one of our own foster parents, Cameron Bowman, facilitating a foster parent to foster parent group. Our first training held January 4th was *Fostering Healing Resiliency and Hope for Traumatized Children*, facilitated by Mary Vicario and Carol Hudgins-Mitchell. The additional new trainer is Jordana Shakoor, who presented *Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Children.*, challenged foster parents to first look internally at themselves before moving on to the needs of children.

Upcoming trainings include Financial Education Classes for families and youth. These classes are provided as the result of a grant received from GE Money. The first in the series *Budgeting and Couponing* is scheduled for Thursday February 20th. This training will be facilitated by Nancy Slezak, from GE Money. You will be provided with handouts as well as tips to assist you with both your own finances as well as teaching you techniques to use with the youth. Remember it's never too early to begin teaching a child about the value of money and how to effectively manage it. Please note that there will be classes scheduled for our teens on money management as a part of this Financial Education Series. We ask that foster parents to please bring your youth to these classes for them, as well as attending the Financial Education classes scheduled for adults.

Please check your CPR and First Aids cards! The next class is Saturday March 1, 2014. Please note that there has been a location change and this class is now held at Maranatha Christian Fellowship at 4501 Wolf Road Dayton, Oh 45416.
Please note it is critical that you stay current with CPR and First Aid.

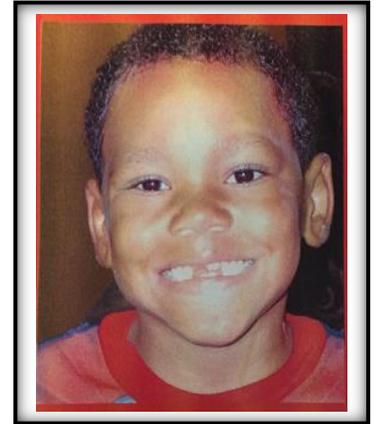
Mark your calendar for March 11th, the third session in the "Foster Parent to Foster Parent" series will be Additional information on this series can be found in Cameron Bowman's article in this newsletter.

We welcome Jim Still-Pepper on Saturday, March 15th as he will present two trainings. The morning session is "*Packing & Unpacking: How to Deal with the Baggage of Visitation*". How would you feel if you were only able to see the person you most wanted to be with for only 2 hours a week, or even just for a weekend and then have to be separated? How would you feel if you were forced to see the person you feared most week after week? So many factors and issues of culture are involved in our children's experiences with their birth families. We encourage you to attend and learn how you can most effectively learn to deal with the behaviors and emotions that accompany visitation. The afternoon session is "*Changing Your Mind: Helping Youth Transform & Renew Their Thinking*". How we "think", affects who we are and what we do and behaviors don't just happen they start in how we think and process life.

Watch the Agape website calendar and the Agape Facebook page for updates and for any changes that many occur in the training calendar.

***Please Note: The Monday, March 10, 2014 training with Dr. Pam Gulley has been cancelled and will be rescheduled later in 2014.**

Adoption Corner



We would like to introduce you to Marcus.

Marcus is 6 years old and love cartoons and playing outdoors.

Marcus is in need of a forever family that can provide him with structure and guidance to make his life complete.

Marcus behaviors can be challenging and he struggles in school where he is on a specialized education plan to help him focus.

If you are interested in receiving additional information about Marcus, please contact Shirley Pagan at 937.276.1665 or email at pagans@odjfs.state.oh.us.

"Oh I could never do what you do!"

How many times has a foster parent or adopted parent heard that? Well the truth is as I have discovered recently I could never do what you do. Really I couldn't! The things I heard during the very first discussion group training; those things you do every day I could never do.

Ever feel like you're bounced around? Feel like as a foster parent you're doing everything for everybody? Well, we are. I felt for years as a foster parent I may be slightly disconnected. Not from Agape but from each other. We see each other picnics, parties and trainings. We have brief conversations about what our kids are doing. But I always felt like I wanted more.

You as foster parents have the knowledge that I need. You are experienced in early morning temper tantrums over and over again. You as a foster parent have discovered techniques to help you handle ADHD, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and every other diagnosis in the books.

You figured out ways to finance vacations for kids who have never left their block. You know the exact distance and route between that psychiatrist in Xenia and Downtown Children's Cincinnati. You can make it there in 49 minutes and 13 seconds. I could never do what you do.

You see the new "From a Foster Parent to a Foster Parent" training is all about sharing knowledge, sharing experiences and sharing information be it big small or medium. Our peers, other foster parents do this day in and day out right beside me. You may have information that I need and quite honestly the information I want.

Why, because there are days I struggle.

When I first started this venture I worried that no one else felt the same. But after our first meeting in January I'm in awe. I could never do what you do. We all spoke of experiences that we're going currently, in the past and hope for the future. We shared! We built relationships that we hope continue not only into February but also into March.

In March we're going to offer ideas about personality types and how we can better relate to not only our children but also other people in our lives. We have all had a teacher that we could not get along with because they put a label on a child. Most of us have had that experience of returning a child to a biological family. We have all felt success. We have seen kids graduate. We have seen kids go home. And now we can all share those experiences with each other.

I can't wait to learn more about doing what you do!

Cameron

Cameron Bowman
Agape for Youth, Inc. Foster Parent /Trainer

Don't forget to Spring Forward March 9, 2014



Focus on the Rules

Safety for children is the primary reason children are in foster care. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services spells out what is considered a safe environment and this is reviewed by Agape for Youth staff regularly.

The following is an abbreviated version of Site and Safety rules.

Site and Safety Requirements for a Foster Home

A foster home shall be maintained in a clean, safe, and sanitary condition and outdoor recreation equipment on the grounds shall be in a reasonable state of repair. Hazardous areas shall be reasonably safeguarded.

Weapons kept on the grounds of or in a foster home shall be stored in an inoperative condition in a locked area inaccessible to children.

A foster home shall have a working telephone or be able to demonstrate to the recommending agency reasonable access to a working telephone for emergency situations. Emergency telephone numbers including fire, police, ambulance, poison control, the recommending agency, and each agency with a foster child placed in the home shall be posted in a prominent place in a foster home.

All locks to at least one door to any room or storage area inside a foster home in which a person could become confined, shall be able to be unlocked from either side

A foster home shall have a continuous supply of safe drinking water. The home must have working bathroom and toilet facilities located within the home. Garbage shall be disposed of on a regular basis.

A foster home shall have a working smoke alarm approved by "Underwriter's Laboratory" on each level of occupancy of the home. A foster caregiver shall have a written evacuation plan for evacuating the home.

All escape routes shall be kept free of clutter and other obstructions.

Household heating equipment used in a foster home shall be equipped with appropriate safeguards in accordance with the age and functioning level of any foster child in the home.

Unvented kerosene heaters may be used, if the heater has been approved by "Underwriter's Laboratory," and they are not prohibited by any local zoning ordinances.

A foster home shall have an "Underwriter's Laboratory" approved portable fire extinguisher in working order in or near the cooking area of the home.

Pets or domestic animals in or on the premises of a foster home shall be kept in a safe and sanitary manner in accordance with state and local laws. A foster child shall be protected from animals potentially dangerous.

Interior and exterior stairways accessible to children shall be protected by child safety gates or doors according to the child's age and functioning level.

A foster home shall provide a smoke free environment for foster children.

We encourage your adherence to Agape for Youth, Inc. policy and the ODJFS rules as they are in place for the protection of our youth in care as well as our foster families.

If you need guidance on any of the above rules just call 937-439-4406 ext. 12 or email bbridges@agapeforyouth.com.

Thank you for all that you do to help keep everyone safe.

Bruce, Bridget, Carmella, and Val