

Aviva Children's Services Volunteer and Visitation Programs  
for Child Protective Services

# Kids at Heart

## FALL 2006



## Visitation Program Is Vital to Helping Keep Families Together

by Cathy Tullgren

Can you remember a time when you were a child that your parents were late picking you up from school? Or, maybe when you came home from school, no one was home and you had to wait for a long time, not knowing where your parents were and having no way to contact them? Can you remember being afraid? Did you have fearful thoughts about what might have happened to your family? Were you afraid you might never see them again?

These are all familiar feelings experienced every day by children in the foster care system. Foster children worry about their parents. They constantly wonder when they will see them again. They cry because they miss Mom and/or Dad and want to have some assurance that they are okay.

Sometimes foster children are also separated from their siblings and their worries are compounded over concerns for their brothers and sisters as well. Children, even when they have been abused, love their parents and want to see them on a regular basis. Most long to go home to what is familiar to them. Mandates in the Child Welfare Act require states to provide visitation to separated families. All of these are reasons that we have an established visitation program to serve CPS families.

The goal of Aviva's visitation program is to provide foster children and their families with safe,

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**Aviva  
Children's  
Services  
Mission Statement**

*The mission of Aviva is to enhance services that improve the quality of life for children who are victims of neglect, abuse, and poverty, and who are in the care of Child Protective Services.*

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L-R: Aviva Children's Services Visitation Staff— (Standing) Jennifer Chambers, Katie Barry, Eleanor Springer, Cathy Tullgren, (Seated) Jessica Banales

## Supervising Visits Has Its Own Rewards

by Katie Barry and Julie Hagan

Being a Visitation Supervisor for Aviva Children Services is extremely rewarding. We enjoy being visit supervisors because we feel that we are making a difference in someone's life. We love picking up the children from their foster home and seeing how excited they are when they see us because they know that they are going to get to see their parents. We really like to build relationships with the children and let them know that we are someone that they can trust. The children are safe with us.

We love driving the children to the visit and also visiting with them— asking how their week has gone and what they would like to do at the visits with their parents. We enjoy seeing the parents that really want to try and are doing everything they can in order to get their children back. It makes the visits a lot of fun when the children and parents both want to be there. Being a visit supervisor is incredibly rewarding and we love every minute of it.

## Aviva Children's Services Staff



**Anne Sankey**  
Executive Director

**Claudia Sandoval**  
Volunteer Coordinator

**Bonnie Demorotski**  
Volunteer and  
Community Resource  
Coordinator

**Cindy Lingel**  
Life Book Project  
Coordinator

**Marnie Pollard**  
Bags for Kids Project  
Coordinator

**Cathy Tullgren**  
Visitation Program  
Coordinator

**DJ Dailous-Smeltzer**  
Admin. Assistant

## Innovative Approach Helps Make Visitation Work

The foster care article in our Spring 2006 newsletter looked at the demographics of foster children in our state, highlighting the challenges of, and resources for, the CPS teens as they face life on their own without family support. We spoke of the valuable assistance a mentor can provide during this transition and asked your help in referring prospective mentors to the Aviva Volunteer Program.

In this issue we look at the younger foster children who struggle to cope with the fear and anxiety



by Anne Sankey,  
Executive Director

created by separation from their families. Quality parent-child visitation is essential to easing some of their pain.

There have been swings in

child welfare visitation philosophies and procedures, which until recently, were viewed as a reward for the parents who were cooperative in following their caseplans for rehabilitation.

New laws proclaim visitation to be the right of the child and its provision as the legal obligation of all child welfare agencies. The result is an unprecedented demand for supervised visitation, a demand that Cathy Tullgren, Visitation Program Coordinator for Aviva, is meeting with innovation, success and a heart for the children and parents we serve.

## Aviva Volunteers Recognized at Tohono Chul

As a member of SAVMA, the Southern Arizona Volunteer Management Association, Aviva participated in its Volunteer Recognition Day held at Tohono Chul Park on April 23, 2006. It was a lovely day at the park, in which Aviva thanked volunteers, such as the couples pictured below, who put time and love into their work for Aviva.

Sue and Ed Hertberg  
help make families' holidays brighter.



Sam and Harriette Stein  
deliver Harriette's handiwork  
to kids in need through Aviva.

•••••  
• If you have article  
• contributions or ideas  
• for our Spring 2007  
• issue, please contact  
• Bonnie at  
• 327-6779, ext. 13.  
• All articles and photos  
• by Aviva staff unless  
• otherwise noted.  
•••••

## Valued Volunteers Help Children in Many Ways

Every year we ask you to donate time or another treasure of yours. Here are a few of the folks who make a difference.

Cy Hiltner and his wife take computer parts home to refurbish them. Our computer tech, Tess, bundles them for our families. Thank you, Hiltners.

Ivan Hanna and his woodworking club have made trucks, trains and teddy bear crayon holders for years. Thank you, Ivan, and all of your fellow woodworkers.

Linda Taylor of Raytheon has been the chief organizer for years—collecting money for the children they sponsor. Thank

you Linda, Lisa, and Raytheon employees for your generosity.

Thank you Diane Gebhart for the great idea!—big four-foot red fuzzy stockings with furry cuffs and each child's name in glitter, stuffed with shoes, then clothes, then toys.

Thank you Cherie Fowler, Ken Wickert and the entire MISYS staff for the thousands of dollars that you give.

Although we wish we could name you all, we have highlighted only a few of the wonderful people that Aviva is blessed to know. You make all the difference to these special children whose lives are shattered right now.

# Sun Riders 2006 Holiday Toy Parade Celebrates Silver Anniversary!

This year's parade, to be held on Sunday December 10, will be the 25th anniversary for the Sun Riders Motorcycle Club. The group works hard to put on the largest toy parade of its kind in the Southwest, which is exciting. But what is even more exciting for Aviva is that all of the toys and proceeds from the registration fees and raffle ticket sales collected go to support children in Child Protective Services care.

Please join us this anniversary year to celebrate with the Sun Riders and encourage them with your presence along the parade route.

## PARADE ROUTE

Register Online at [www.sunridersmc.org](http://www.sunridersmc.org) or at Beaudry RV the evening before at a special event to kick off the parade.

On event day, register from 8 to 11 a.m.

- Begin at noon at Tucson Community Center
  - East on W. Cushing Street
  - North on S. Church Avenue
  - East on Broadway Boulevard
  - South on Country Club Road
    - East on 22nd Street
    - South on Alvernon Way
    - West on E. Irvington Road
- End at Beaudry RV at 3200 E. Irvington Road

Volunteers are also needed at TCC early on Sunday morning, December 10 to help collect the toys and to assist with registration and lining up the bikes for the parade.

At the end of the parade volunteers are needed to collect all the stuffed animals that rode in the parade, as well as staff the food and beverage booths and assisting club members. If you are interested in information about the Sun Riders or the event, please visit [www.sunridersmc.org](http://www.sunridersmc.org). If you are interested in volunteering or Aviva, call Bonnie at 327.6779 ex 13.

Hope to see you at the parade.

## Wrappers Needed!

\*\*\*December 11, 2006\*\*\* 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. \*\*\*1700 E. Broadway\*\*\*

Aviva needs your help wrapping the toys received from the Sun Riders' Annual Toy Parade.

This is a great holiday volunteer opportunity and a lot of fun. We schedule wrappers for one-to two-hour shifts or longer.

Refreshments will be served. To join us, please call Bonnie at 327-6779, ext. 13.

## SUN RIDERS PARADE AIDS PROGRAMS

Just how does the money that the Sun Riders raise for Aviva help kids? One way is through a unit that CPS has set up called "In Home Care." Just as the name implies, it is designed to work with parents in the system to help keep their children in their homes. This program is intended for families whose problems are not caused by abuse or intentional neglect, but rather by poverty. If the children aren't endangered by staying in the home, a CPS case worker will ask the parents to voluntarily work with her/him to help remedy whatever is the root cause of the problem.

Folks sometimes just don't make enough money to provide a nice, clean house, or to pay utilities, or insurance on a car and also afford the gas for it, or to pay for food, clothes and any other expense associated with raising healthy children. CPS gets called out usually when the children are reported for having head lice or because they aren't showering and changing their clothes. Again, this isn't necessarily the desire of the parents—they just don't have enough money to go to the laundromat or they don't have a washer.

They might not even have running water or electricity. As hard as it is to imagine, there are a lot of folks who live way outside of Tucson without any utilities. They aren't hitting or abusing their children, they just aren't providing a safe environment for them.

That is where Aviva and the Abused Children's Fund come in. We are able to provide cleaning supplies, money for laundry, lice kits or whatever is necessary. Some of the families need shoes and clothes, and because we have the funds the Sunrider's Club provides, we are able to purchase \$15 gift cards in bulk. Thanks to Payless Shoe Source, these come with a built-in 30% discount, which makes the card worth \$20 in shoes. We are able to purchase beds, which seem to be one consistent request from the majority of families. We give these families food vouchers, clothes that have been donated, the shoe cards, or gift cards to other stores to help them get what the children need.

We have paid the co-pay for prescriptions, for extra glasses for a near-sighted 8-year-old who keeps losing them, and for

special sporting equipment like the running shoes for a teen in track and a baseball glove for another who made the team but didn't have his own glove. We have paid for flowers for a child in the hospital and for another one who earned the way to a Phoenix Suns game with his good grades but didn't have money to buy lunch or a souvenir. We paid for two sisters to get their hair braided in cornrows and have bought guitar strings and a skateboard for two teens who "didn't think they should get anything like that because their mom was so poor."

The list goes on, but you get the idea of the variety of things we are able to pay for and supply to these children. The need is so great in Tucson for the "In Home Care" units that there are now four of them with five to seven case managers in each unit. Each of the case managers carry 13 to 18 cases. This effort is the result of Governor Napolitano's mandate to keep families together. We are hopeful that it is working and feel comforted about the part we play on behalf of the community and especially the Sun Riders.

# Bags For Kids Volunteers Are Dedicated!

*Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.—Helen Keller  
This eloquent sentiment captures the spirit of teamwork and volunteerism that  
so many child-centered programs depend upon.*

The Bags for Kids Program, (BFK) is no exception to this sentiment, thanks to program founders Carol Punske and Sandy Loomis. BFK and the Annual Sew-A-Thon began with the compassionate recognition that children in crisis have the right to transport their possessions in luggage rather than garbage bags. However, to turn such awareness into lasting change, Carol and Sandy could not accomplish this alone—they needed a dedicated team to carry out the work. Aviva Children’s Services would like to acknowledge each member of that compassionate and hardworking team who, over the past eight years, has turned the BFK Program into a “well oiled machine.” These team members were kind enough to reflect on their experiences over the years, and to share with us, what the project has meant to them. In 1999, Carol Punske of Child Protective Services and Sandy Loomis of The Community Partnership of Southern Arizona witnessed the unnecessary humiliation of a child. In the midst of a traumatic removal from his home, a boy’s belongings scattered onto the pavement after the trash bag he was using as luggage burst open. Determined to put an end to the clear disregard for children’s dignity, Carol and Sandy went to work, gathering volunteers to make duffel bags for children in transition. Although they shared a strong conviction for the project, neither was prepared for the scale the project took on, nor did they predict how passionately the community would embrace this cause. Feeling the need to jumpstart the project with a “sewing day,” Carol remembers putting the word out for a few volunteers. She expected about 10 people to show up. The following Monday, after the newspaper learned of the event, Carol said her voicemail was full. She remembers one message in particular—a call from a man who said that he grew up in foster care and knew from personal experience, why foster children needed luggage. Although now in his 60s, he still remembered the box he used to transport his belongs. It said: “Tom’s Fruit Stand.” After receiving so many calls, Carol and Sandy realized they would need some sort of meeting hall large enough to host the event.

Pat Healy of the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) joined the collaborative effort when she agreed to house the event at the Community Resource Center. She notes that she too was unprepared for the 100 or so volunteers who arrived. Volunteers were lined up, ready to sew, holding equipment in their arms. Although fabric donations had arrived too, they had

not been cut to size so no one could begin sewing! Pat remembers frantically running around to each office in the multi-acre facility, grabbing every pair of scissors she could get her hands on. Needless to say, these dull office scissors were not exactly easy on the volunteers’ hands. In spite of that first exhausting year, Pat has remained loyal to the project ever since. Over the years, Pat has worked on her strategy—no more running from building to building. On event day you can hitch a ride in her golf cart as she taxis volunteers and supplies to their destinations!

Ronda Chance, also with DDD, is another BFK champion. As a Sew-A-Thon Line Leader, she supervises several rooms of volunteers. This position requires her to delegate tasks, offer assistance, and to make each volunteer feel valued. Many would describe Ronda as having grace under pressure. Often, she takes on the overflow of eager, yet “non-sewing” volunteers. Remarkably, she finds a job for everyone and her station takes on a quiet hum of focused productivity. Ronda is incredibly generous with her time and her talents throughout the entire year. Ronda reflected on her interactions with the individuals who actually received the bags. She learned that being able to carry their personal belongings with them in such an unstable time in their lives was one of the few comforts they had. For that she says, “My work is validated.” After the first event, the core team members realized they needed to solicit the help of more volunteer team leaders who were skilled in the art of sewing.

As a result, Nancy Arenas came on board. In addition to her tireless volunteerism outside of the BFK project, she became one of the first official Line Leaders. She says “I always wanted to do volunteer work and Aviva’s projects, including the Bags for Kids Project, were a good place to start. I enjoy knowing that children benefit from what we are doing.” In cooperation with the Ott YMCA Women’s Club, Nancy volunteers throughout the year, providing necessities for Tucson’s abused and neglected children. Nancy gradually enlisted the help of several of her Women’s Club acquaintances.



Carol Punske



Ronda Chance



Nancy Arenas

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# Aviva Children's Services – 2006 Holiday Program

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY NOVEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>.**

Please complete this form and return it to: Aviva Children's Services  
Holiday Program  
1735 E. Ft. Lowell, Ste. 4  
Tucson, AZ 85737

OR fax it to: 327.6052

I wish to participate in the Aviva Children's Services 2006 Holiday Program and will do the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor a family by providing Christmas gifts for a family consisting of \_\_\_\_\_ family members and providing the family with a \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Grocery store gift certificate.

\_\_\_\_\_ I want to deliver the gifts directly to the family.

\_\_\_\_\_ Send a monetary donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ so that holiday food vouchers and gifts for needy children and families can be purchased.

\_\_\_\_\_ Send a monetary donation in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ so that gifts can be purchased for teenagers living in an independent living program.

\_\_\_\_\_ Drop off an unwrapped toy(s) for a child(ren) or a gift certificate for a teenager.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

If you choose to sponsor a family, Aviva staff will contact you by November 15, 2006, with information, about the family.

\*To sponsor additional families, please put information on a separate piece of paper.

Call Bonnie at 327-6779, ext. 13, if you have any questions.

# Start a Family Tradition and Spend the Holidays with Aviva Helping Someone Less Fortunate

## Santa Crew Wanted!

Hard-working, able-bodied volunteers with vans or trucks are needed to deliver large amounts of Christmas presents to needy families the week of December 19-23. A brief training session will be held at the Aviva office. Want to join the Santa Crew?

Call Bonnie at 327-6779, ext. 13, or email her at

[bonnie.demorotski@avivatucson.org](mailto:bonnie.demorotski@avivatucson.org).

The 2006 holiday season is fast approaching and we are inviting our past holiday sponsors and new holiday sponsors to participate in this year's program in the following ways:

♥ Sponsor a family (or families) by providing gifts for all family members and a gift certificate to a grocery store.

♥ Purchase a gift for a child or teenager. Drop it off at Aviva.

(We never seem to receive enough teenager gifts.)

♥ Send a cash donation so that Aviva can purchase holiday food and gifts for needy families without sponsors.

♥ Send a cash donation for purchasing Christmas gifts for teenagers in shelters, group homes, or independent living programs.

The need is great. Last year Aviva fed hundreds of hungry families during the holidays and provided gifts for thousands of children whose holiday would have otherwise been bleak—thanks to generous community donors.

To participate in our Holiday Sponsorship Program for this year, please fill in the sheet on the back of this form and return it to Aviva no later than November 7, 2006.

Please call Bonnie, 327-6779, ext. 13 or email [bonnie.demorotski@avivatucson.org](mailto:bonnie.demorotski@avivatucson.org) for more information.

# Volunteers Make a Difference!

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Sylvia Roberts is among such friends. Sylvia has helped with the Sew-A-thon for the past four years and is currently a Line Leader with Nancy. When asked why she helps out, Sylvia said that the work she does is for the kids. She feels rewarded by the friendship and fellowship of the work and by making a difference in each child's life. Besides the sew-a-thon, Sylvia sews trendy girls clothing throughout the year for children in CPS care.



Sylvia Roberts

her mother sew for children in care, Linda is now a Line Leader. Linda said that she likes to give back to the community and knows that what she does benefits the children. Linda recalls one year getting quite a kick out of watching one of the husbands who was hard at work. She observed his meticulous efforts to square up each piece of fabric perfectly with a "drywall t-square." Linda describes the event as an occasion where everyone is made to feel welcome and as a really fun day filled with good fellowship, a bit of joking, "and the food is good, too!"



Janet Downing and M.C. Kolker

Janet Downing and M.C. Kolker are also Women's Club acquaintances. Both have been Line Leaders for about five years and undeniably they make a great team. Over the years, it seems that their room has evolved into a "serging specialty" room. People are now bringing their sergers to them hoping to learn how to use them! When asked what motivates them as Line Leaders, Janet said she enjoys hearing the continuous

laughter that fills their room. M.C. replied, "Its very simple; many kids continue to need bags, and for that reason, the project is worthwhile."

Marge McKain and Linda Scheel have also partnered up as Line Leaders. Many of the youth who attend are often directed to their room, where Marge and Linda patiently show the kids how to decorate or cord the bags. Marge says that she has always enjoyed being involved in the project. She said she has always wanted to work on behalf of disadvantaged kids and the BFK Program helps to fulfill that desire. Marge just loves it when the women come together, help each other, and simply enjoy themselves. The 2007 Sew-A-Thon will be Linda Scheel's fourth event. She heard about the Sew-A-Thon one day when she and her mother were dropping off back-to-school supplies at Aviva. They inquired as to what else Aviva had going on and were told about the Sew-A-Thon and the need for blankets. Linda and her mother have been involved ever since. In addition to the adorable fleece blankets that she and



Linda Scheel



Marge McKain

Pam Kline became involved in 2003, after seeing the event announced in the newspaper. She jumped right in to help—literally! Observing that one of the event coordinators was overwhelmed at sign-in, she immediately began recording



Pam Kline

donations and assigning volunteers to rooms. In addition to her role as a Line Leader, Pam has made herself an invaluable BFK advocate. With seemingly endless energy, Pam continually shares her creative ideas and has successfully solicited donations of fabric, volunteers, and funding. Pam is responsible for obtaining a \$500 grant from Wal-Mart, which has been used to purchase sewing machines for continued event

use. As she does all of this, Pam sets a great example of volunteerism by involving her two teenage children whenever possible. Pam is an incredible asset to the BFK project.

Bebbe Caruth has been attending the Sew-A-Thon for 3 years. Last year she found her niche bringing coffee and donuts to each sewing room in the morning and then making those rounds again with Egees and cookies in the afternoon. She says the volunteers enjoy that special attention and she loves to provide it! As a CPS worker for 21 years specializing in the Young Adult Program, Bebbe sees the Bags For Kids impact daily on the teens in that unit. She shared that the kids feel like someone cares about their "stuff" by providing the bags for a move. The workers in the Young Adult Program even try to match the bags to the child's personality. Bebbe says the teens are using the bags in their day-to-day lives too, for laundry, storage, or in some cases as toy bags.



Bebbe Caruth

*"The child must know that he is a miracle, that since the beginning of the world there hasn't been, and until the end of the world there will not be, another child like him."*

Pablo Casals

# Sew-A-Thon Shows Kids Love

Aviva Children's Services, a non-profit agency, is asking the community to help sponsor the **2007 8th Annual Bags for Kids Sew-A-Thon.**

Compassionate and hardworking volunteers will work from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., making sturdy, colorful, hand-sewn bags for foster children. In such a simple way we can ensure that a child's self esteem is preserved, even while in the midst of a crisis. The event will be held

**Saturday, January 20, 2007**

at the **Community Resources Center (ATPT),**  
**4710 E. 29th Street, Building #7.**

Please **pre-register for the event** and order raffle tickets by calling **327-6779 ext.16.** Provide the information requested on the recording or you may send an email to **[bfk@avivatucson.org](mailto:bfk@avivatucson.org)**. Please be aware that these are message sites and your call or email will be returned only if requested. Check out our website to view pictures of our previous Sew-A-Thon and check back as the event gets closer to view pictures of the great things that will be raffled off this year at **<http://www.avivatucson.org>**.

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:** to cut fabric, sew and/or decorate bags, and to string the cording through the bags.

**SUPPLIES NEEDED:** Bolts of fabric of medium weight or in pieces at least 1 yard in size. Some lightweight fabric can be used as well. New scissors, cording for bag drawstrings, sergers and portable sewing machines in good working condition.

**CORPORATE SPONSORS NEEDED:** to provide food and beverages for volunteers at the event.

**EVENT FAVORS NEEDED:** such as sewing kits, gift certificates or sewing supplies.

**RAFFLE ITEMS NEEDED:** such as gift baskets, services, weekend getaways, gift certificates.



Sew-a-thon participants having fun!

*The Bags For Kids Project is a collaboration between the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona, the Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities, Child Protective Services and Aviva Children's Services.*

**VISITATION** continued from page 1

consistent, happy and enjoyable opportunities to visit together. Visits may take place in the CPS offices or in a public place such as the zoo, a park or a restaurant. In some cases, visits may take place in the family home. Activities during visits usually involve playing games, reading books or other activities families enjoy when they are together.

Donations contributed to the Abused Children's Fund at Aviva often help enhance visits by providing families with money for opportunities and activities they otherwise could not afford.

Visit supervisors are trained paid staff who transport children to and from their visits, supervise the visit while helping parents interact appropriately with their children, and document what happens during the visits for the case manager and the court.

Visit supervision is a very rewarding experience. We employ

visit supervisors who come from many different life experiences. Some are students looking for experience in the field of social services in preparation for future careers. Some are retirees seeking new experiences, that are different from their previous careers. Others are stay-at-home mothers desiring part time, flexible work. A few work in visit supervision as a second job. All desire to make a difference in their community and are concerned about the welfare of children and their families.

If you think you might be interested in joining our staff, or if you know someone who possesses skills that would qualify them for the visit supervisor position, please visit our website at **[www.avivatucson.org](http://www.avivatucson.org)** to view the requirements and a detailed job description. Email us at **[avivaadmin@avivatucson.org](mailto:avivaadmin@avivatucson.org)** or call 327-6779 x12. We will be happy to speak with you!



# Volunteering for Programs Creates Lifelong Friendships

## Adventures in Mentoring a Foster Child

by Allison Fehringer, volunteer

My adventures with Ruby\* began in May 2005. New to Tucson, I was looking for volunteer opportunities and while surfing the web, I saw that Aviva Children's Services needed mentors. As a teacher, I decided against a mentoring position and chose to be a "special friend" (an adult friend and role-model who visits a child weekly—about the same role as a mentor) instead. I was matched with Ruby—a sometimes quiet, dark-haired, brown-eyed, bubbly, fun 10-year-old. Ruby is a wonderful child—curious, happy, playful, creative and easy-going. I am much the same, which has made our time together effortless, as we both are happy just being together, or doing the occasional "adventuring."

Due to scheduling constraints this last school year we began hanging out at her home every other Wednesday and having a night out every other Friday evening. On Wednesdays, I leave work in time to be at her house by 5 p.m. By then, she has finished her homework and any chores she is responsible for. I am fortunate to get along with her house parents and the other children in the home, and am always welcomed with smiles and plenty of hugs.

Ruby and I take turns reading to each other, playing the keyboard, playing house or store and playing board games. I leave by 7 p.m. so that she has time to shower and get settled down for bed.

On Fridays, we have a monthly movie night and head to the latest G-rated film that she hasn't seen. Sometimes, we head to stores to window shop or go out to dinner—I usually try to take her to a restaurant that is ethnic or themed that she hasn't been to before.

Once a month I try to take Ruby somewhere special. We've been hiking to Seven Falls and visited the Children's Museum, where we saw the traveling Insect Zoo. We swam and ate dinner at my brother's house where Ruby is now a sought-after playmate of my nieces! We may also see some sort of play or musical, as she's very interested in drama.

Although I had reservations about being a friend to a foster child, it has been a rewarding and wonderful experience. I worried about behavior problems, whether we'd get along and if we'd have anything in common. I have found out that, as she REALLY wanted an adult friend, as many of these children do, she has made an effort to get along with me as well. I feel much like her aunt, happy to be with her and spoil her with fun and friendship. She has been so well-behaved and we have enjoyed all of our time together.

Even though there is 20 years difference in our age, I find that it's easy to let loose and just "be a kid again"—seeing everything from a 10-year-old child's perspective. I would definitely recommend this experience—to give so much to a child for just a few hours a month!

\* Ruby's name has been changed to respect her privacy.

## Telling the Story of a "Beautiful Child"

by Laura Markowitz, volunteer

As I worked on my first Life Book project this year, I often felt like a butterfly catcher, trying to capture loving, encouraging pieces of Sara's\* past so that I could collect them to help her remember and reconnect with the good things in her life.

Marnie Pollard, previously Aviva's Volunteer Coordinator, told me that children in foster care often don't have anyone to help them cherish their "firsts"—steps, words and first day of school. No one is helping them to remember the good times, like birthday parties, which are still happening in the midst of traumas. It's also important to write honestly about the traumatic things that have happened, but in an age-appropriate way.

After my training, Life Book Project Coordinator Cindy Lingel and I met with the child's case manager and I was given the bare facts about Sara's life. She was 9 years old and her parents had relinquished their rights so that a loving family could adopt her. Having been in and out of foster care nine times and currently in a foster-to-adopt family, Sara still had a lot of problems adjusting.

I set up my laptop computer at the adoption agency and spent several weeks deciphering the case file. I gleaned as much information that I could from reports from school psychologist evaluations, counselor, police and case manager reports.

Sara enjoys drawing, loves animals and easily makes friends. She was scared to go to sleep at night and had tried to jump off a second-story balcony three times. Sara's family had been in the "system" since her birth, so there were numerous accounts of neglect, as well as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The second file held reports filled with care and concern about Sara. With the case manager's approval, I wrote and asked the teachers, etc. in that second file if they would send a letter to Sara. One day, I found a gem—a report about Sara's great-grandfather. I sent him a letter. Including him, six people wrote back, delighted to have the opportunity to tell Sara how special she is. A few sent photographs. The great-grandfather invited me (accompanied by Cindy) to listen to the story of Sara's family tree. After that meeting we had photos of Sara as a little girl, and copies of sweet letters she had written to this person who clearly cherished her. These were perfect additions to her Lifebook.

However, I felt there were still some missing pieces. With the case manager's approval, I contacted Sara's birth mother who met with me for two hours. I didn't want to help the birth mom make excuses for her behavior, but to help Sara understand where her birth mom was coming from so that, maybe someday, that understanding will help Sara heal. Those pages will be added when Sara is older as it becomes age-appropriate.

My favorite part of writing the Life Book, though I've never met Sara (it was decided that right now she doesn't need another temporary person in her life), was being able to tell her life story in a positive, loving way. I hope she can hear the main message: "You are beautiful, and what happened to you wasn't your fault."

\* Names and some events have been changed in order to respect Sara's privacy.



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# Wish List

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**Donations may be dropped off at Aviva Children's Services  
Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.**

## **Holiday Gifts and Stocking Stuffers All ages birth to 21 years old**

*Suggestions include:*

- Crayons and coloring books
- Hot Wheel cars
- Jacks, jump ropes
  - Baby toys
  - Combs and hair accessories
  - Flashlights
- Fancy pens and pencils, small note pads
  - Candy, gum
- Cologne or perfume
  - Legos
- Balls, board games
- Dolls and all the accessories
- Cars and trucks
- Action figures
- CD players, radios and clocks
- Picture frames and photo albums
- Hair styling tools
  - Disposable cameras
- Puzzles, books
- Fisher Price play sets for toddlers

## **Agency Needs**

- Clothes for boys and girls sizes birth to 16
- New socks and underwear in every size.
- Gift cards to shoe stores or department stores
  - Baby formula and wipes
- **Furniture**
  - Cribs or bassinets
- Twin beds or bunk beds
  - Dressers
  - Table and chairs
- Sofas and love seats

## **Life Book Project**

- Decorative paper
- Card stock

## **Bags for Kids**

- Yarn
- Fabric of medium or heavy weight
  - Cording
- Sewing machines in working condition

**THANK  
YOU!**