

Fostering: Loving those kids you want

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

"If they had an emergency and needed a home for seven kids at once, I'd take every one of them," says Patricia Sullivan.

Foster mother to two boys from the Orchard's Children's Services in Southfield, Sullivan has fostered 14 children in past years. Corey, the one who stayed with her the longest, was the only one adopted.

In an orange-gold neat brick home on a curving, tree-lined street in Pontiac, she nurtures young ones who need her. While her 7- and 12-year-old foster sons play table games in the kitchen, she shows the cory brown and gold furnished living room with its army of framed portraits.

Each starts back smiling; children, grandsons, nieces, nephews and foster children alike. And for each she can spin a tale.

"The boys with me now came in November," she said. "I have a license with the Orchard's, their children need special attention."

Sullivan loves the boys, but loves the little babies she once sheltered in a special way too.

"Giving loves comes natural," she said. "They have their needs. One little boy needed eye surgery and had a patch on for awhile. Now it's all corrected and he's a beautiful kid."

SULLIVAN limits herself to caring for four children at any one time and she has taken that many at once. "The problem with many children is they're not wanted. I want every one of mine and enjoy them too."

"I take them fishing and teach them to use a reel, take them to the park, and even look these two to Georgia with me for spring break."

An accomplished seamstress, Sullivan makes nearly all her own clothes. Another love is cooking. "That works out fine, because these kids love to eat and I love to cook," she said.

Her own children are grown and away save for a young handicapped son who lives at home. "I love having the kids and they need someone," she said. "Some have been neglected or their mothers have had breakdowns, they need."

Barbara and Malcolm Lingenfelter of Clawson, who will celebrate their eighth wedding anniversary on Sept. 4,

have fostered two teen-age boys. The first was a youth they knew was having problems and needed to be out of the family home.

When he left, after more than two years, they decided they would take another teen-age boy. "It just seemed too quiet when Michael left," he said.

James (not his real name), 17, has been with the family for 18 months and has adjusted very well.

LINGENFELTER was born in Detroit and his wife is from Alpena. They met on a blind date, and came to live here after their marriage. He works as a machinist and she works part time nursing a quadriplegic girl, 12, who was a drowning victim.

"I help her mother and do therapy on her," she said. "There are a number of volunteers who do patterning with her to get her to crawl, and talk to her and all, Kelly's real smart."

Presently, the Lingenfelters are considering taking another foster child but in their small home, it would have to be another boy.

"If we move, we make take two foster kids," she said.

"We've enjoyed having the boys here, and I would take teens again. The experiences we've had with our two, we've found they're not any real trouble."

If you ask Allison Lingenfelter, 5, who she listens to, she points to James. Her parents say the pair are great friends and he helps his little foster sister regularly.

"He taught her the ABC's," the mother said.

When the couple decided to take on a foster child through an agency, they were only 23 and 24 years old. "They almost didn't want to give us one," he says.

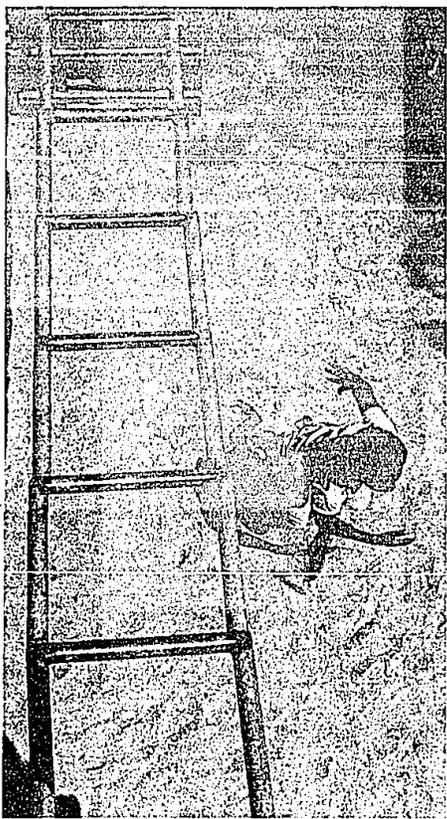
The Lingenfelters are proud that James will graduate from high school next year and point out their previous foster son also graduated and his now getting radar training in the U.S. Navy.

"We keep in contact," she said. "We plan on visiting him in Florida soon."

AS A FOSTER parent, Lingenfelter thinks James finds she and her husband too strict at times. "But he's does well carrying a three point average since he's been here."

"He scored high on the ACT and is on the basketball and football teams."

"Sometimes a child can't live at home because of circumstances, but not because they're bad."



It takes more than just wishing

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FOSTER parents are the kind of amazing people, who, upon suddenly receiving their

denly receive very own \$1 million would opt to add a new room to the house or buy a camper.

Suzanne Franklin, community program organizer for the Orchard's Children's Services in Southfield, says this is because they are family oriented and given a choice would spend every spare moment home with the family.

"I don't cease to be amazed at what motivates these people, they're very ethical. They're dealing with a stranger and with the anticipation of trouble."

Laura Velton Triceberg, casework supervisor for the Christian Family Services, also in Southfield, says foster parenting is really a semi-profession, a real skill "more than just being a kind family."

Both the Orchard's and the Christian Family Services are part of the Interagency Foster Parent Training Network of Oakland County, a relatively new set-up for providing training for foster parents and more.

Also included in the network presently are: Detroit Baptist Children's Home in Royal Oak; Catholic Social Services of Farmington Hills; Michigan Department of

Social Services; foster care; Oakland County Juvenile Court; and foster care; St. Vincent-Sarah Fisher Home, Farmington Hills; and Family Services, Pontiac.

"THE NETWORK was the brainstorm of Anna Macielinski of the Department of Social Services," says Triceberg.

"In April, 1983, an inter-agency foster parent training network was developed to minimize the duplication of effort by individual child placing organizations in providing training to licensed foster families."

Triceberg says to get a license for foster care is not difficult, but it

takes time. "There's a lot of paperwork, especially for families who will take other children, siblings, groups, or black children."

"The network tries to do more than train. The parents but to improve the image of the foster parent and without duplicating efforts. Before networking, the agencies trained separately, Eastern Michigan University had good classes but, but funding, but by fall 1983, we had classes going all over Oakland County, free of charge."

At one such class, parents brain-stormed about their role as foster parents.

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Another coastline explored

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Scharfenberg and her husband, James, a General Motors advertising executive, raised four children in the suburbs. Doris Scharfenberg was "well past 40" when she started her career as a freelance travel writer.

THESE DAYS, she works at home in an upstairs bedroom converted into an office with well-stocked bookshelves and a Radio Shack computer terminal.

"I must say that the past five years of my life have been very exciting," Scharfenberg said. "Everyone should be able to go into middle age and upwards with the things that I've experienced."

As for the future, Scharfenberg, who is president of the Midwest Travel Writers Association, said, "It's possible that I'll do a book on Wisconsin, but that's not for sure yet."

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