

## Understanding the World of Foster Care

(Tenth in a series of articles about the lives of children in foster care)

*The world of foster care has many supports for the child who has been removed from his home and his biological parents. A permanency planning worker (PPW) from the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD), has primary responsibility for helping the family reunite or for finding a new home for the displaced child. However, there are many other professional and volunteer adults who support the PPW in order that federal and state regulations are followed in placing the child with new caretakers. One such volunteer group is the New Mexico Child Abuse and Neglect Citizen Review Board (CRB) which was legislatively created in 1983 "...to provide a permanent system for independent and objective monitoring of children placed in the custody of the Children, Youth and Families Department." Prior to any judicial review by the Children's Court, CRB shall review the progress of the child's placement and established treatment plan and shall submit a written report to the judge presiding over the case.*

### **Nine Months after coming into custody: Meeting with the CRB**

Janice came early on Friday morning to meet with Angela and Kevin. Today was a Citizen Review Board meeting and Janice had asked Angela, Kevin and Micah to attend. "Who else will be there?" asked Micah.

"There'll be lots of people," Janice responded. "All of the people who have been helping you will be there or will send a report for the Board to read."

"Why are we going?" Micah continued with his questions. "I don't need to talk to anybody else."

"Yes, you do. You especially need to talk to these people because they write a report for the judge and tell him how you are doing. You want them to know how well you are reading and doing math and talking to Dr. Sung. You also will want to tell them about your home here with Kevin and Angela."

An hour later, Micah walked into a meeting room with a long table. There were many people he knew: Angela and Kevin; Janice; Nick, his *guardian ad litem*; and Greg, his *CASA* worker. There were six other people he didn't know. Each person introduced him/herself by name and told what his/her particular role was in helping Micah. Five of the unknown people said they were on the Citizen Review Board and one, a lady he had seen before, said that her name was Mrs. Leach and that she was representing Micah's mother. She scared Micah. He turned to Janice. "Why is she here? Am I going home?"

"No." responded Janice. "She has some information that she is going to share with the Board about your mother. That's all." The old frightened feeling crept into Micah's bones. Could he trust it would be okay and he would be able to stay with Angela and Kevin? Mrs. Bryant, the chairperson of the CRB Board, asked each person at the table to talk about Micah and tell the Board how he was doing. Micah listened intently as each one shared that he was sleeping better, eating better, had a better attitude and was generally happier. They also shared that he no longer wet the bed. Greg even shared that Micah was pretty good at baseball which made him blush but also pleased him very much. There was also a written report from Dr. Sung.

When it was Micah's turn to talk, he didn't know what to say. He answered their questions but did so in a very low voice which made him hard to hear. Yes, he was happy with Kevin and Angela; he felt he was doing better with his school subjects; he was visiting with his sisters and he thought Dr. Sung was helping him. No, he wasn't going to school, but he knew how to read, write, add and subtract and was learning how to multiply. He also shared that he had a friend his age who lived next door and who he played with from time to time.

When it was Mrs. Leach's turn, Micah held his breath. Mrs. Bryant asked Janice if Micah should stay. "I think so," said Janice. "Micah understands that his mother has to take care of herself and get better and that might take a long time." Mrs. Leach then explained that Micah's mother had decided to terminate her parental rights (TPR) for Micah and his sisters. This meant that she would no longer have any legal rights, privileges, duties or obligations with respect to her children. The court papers had been filed and they were waiting for the hearing to be scheduled. When that happened, Micah and his sisters could be adopted. They would be available to be placed in a home with someone who loved and wanted them. Micah looked at Janice and then at the CRB Board members. All of them were smiling at him. He knew that he wanted to talk with Dr. Sung about it, too, and understand how he should feel.

On the way home, Micah told Janice that the CRB Board members were nice and he liked hearing what others thought of him. Janice told Micah that she was proud of him and the way he answered the Board's questions. She was also proud of the way he handled the news about his mom. "And by the way, Micah, I have a surprise for you. Here's a letter for you to read." The letter had his name on it and a postage stamp. He had never gotten a letter before, and he didn't quite know what to do with it.

"Let's read it after dinner," Angela suggested.

"Okay," answered Micah. With that decided, he put it in his pocket.