

Foster parents love tough job

By Jen Osborn
Staff writer

Dale Pate said her husband's co-workers often tease him about his chaotic household.

"Do you know how many kids are at your table tonight?" she said the men often ask.

Though the Pates know not everybody understands their drive to be foster parents or where they find the energy, they themselves understand the need for the services they offer.

For the past two years, they've opened their home as a temporary stopping place to countless children whose ages range from 2 days to 16 years old.

Another Hoke County couple, Carrie Singletary and her husband Tracy, have had about 35 foster children in their house since 1971 when they moved to North Carolina from New York.

"From that time on, my house has not been empty," Singletary said.

Helping children, loving them and teaching them has become one of her greatest joys in her life. Many come to her with a variety of emotional problems they took on their own troubled households, she said.

"They have their own set of problems," Singletary said. "They're all different. But most kids these days go through the same things. They have good days and bad days just like you and I. I can understand that."

Knowing she can help them overcome the troubles they face, makes being a foster parent worth all the work and headaches, she said. She has to work fast, because sometimes she has only a few days to make an impact on a child's life. Then he's gone as quickly as he came, leaving the foster family to pick up the pieces.

Letting go

"When I get to the point I don't cry when a foster child leaves, I have to stop," Pate said. "It's hard not to love that child to a deepness that you can't cry. I become their mother. My husband becomes their father."

Pate explained that although she's always been confident in the court's decision to send a child back to his parents, it was difficult watching the kids leave at the beginning.

"Seeing them come and go... We learn to cope by saying, 'This is a stopping point and we're here to show them there is love,'" Pate said.

Maybe it's easier because it seems the kids are never really gone.

"I've been very blessed," Pate said. "Every child I've had, when that child returns home his parents say they can contact me. And they do. I get letters, phone calls. I see them on the streets. It's not like they've left but they're just away for a while."

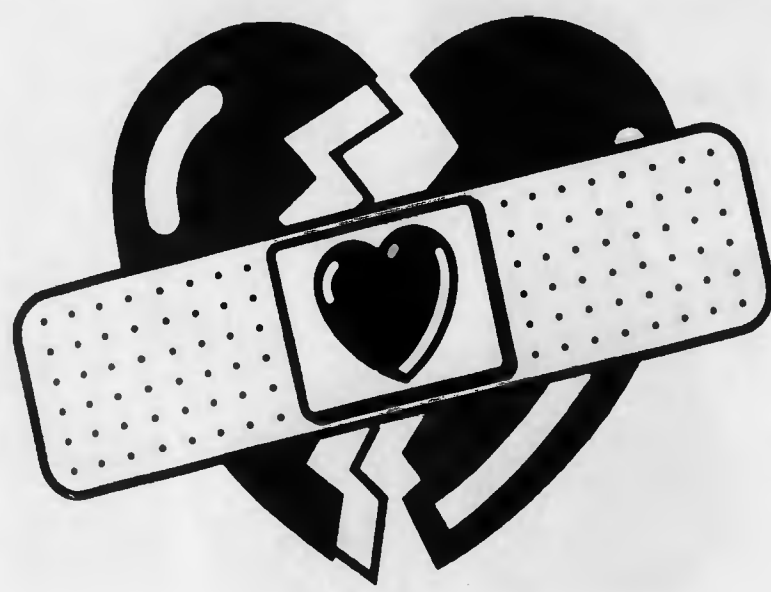
Like Pate, Singletary is grateful the foster children in her care have been given the go-ahead by their parents to visit often. Many, she said, are still part of her life. Two are grown with children of their own. Singletary said she sees them every day when she helps babysit their kids. One foster child even calls constantly for advice or just to chat.

"She calls me if her kid gets a bump on her," Singletary said. "They never do anything until they call me."

Having a good relationship with the children and letting them know the door is always open has helped

make the transition easier, Singletary said.

"I don't think any have left and said, 'I'm never going back there — even to visit,'" Singletary said. "They all come back to see me."



Difficult but rewarding

Foster care isn't always about smiles, hugs or tears of joy. Often, children in need of foster care have serious problems, have been abused and no longer have trust for others outside their own world. And foster parents are usually the ones expected to work miracles in the short time — sometimes as little as a couple of days — that the child is in their home.

Though they might seem rare, those miracles do come.

Pate said one of many rewarding experiences she's had as a foster parent came when she had a 3-year-old boy who wouldn't speak and was withdrawn. Pate said she made up her mind that she wouldn't pressure him, she would let him speak in his own time.

"When he wanted something he would just point," Pate explained.

In a few days, she became accustomed to his silence and was surprised to hear him speak to her in the quiet kitchen on a Sunday morning.

"Momma, I want juice." Those were his first words. I was so excited," she said, explaining that she finds foster care one of the most rewarding experiences she's encountered.

Sibling rivalry

Before taking another child into their home, many foster parents struggle with questions of how to make ends meet with only a \$250 a month supplement, how to deal with school problems and homework, what correct disciplinary measures should be taken, or what sleeping arrangements should be made. But one of the biggest considerations is how their biological children will react to another child in need of constant attention.

Yet Singletary and Pate both say their own children have been happy to have new friends and family members.

"They (my kids) love it," Singletary said. "Sometimes they say I give too much. Sometimes they say I'm too lenient. But I just tell them, 'I know you know better because I taught you. But some of these kids don't know because nobody taught them.'"

The children, too, see the need for foster care. When they are asked to

take in a foster child, Pate says she sits down with her family, they ask questions of one another and of social services, and decide if they can take on another household member. Mostly, she said, her kids realize that

child's) sake."

For women like Singletary, who has contributed so much that she was recognized for her foster parenting efforts in 1991 by Gov. Jim Martin, the work can be a godsend.

"I think if I didn't have these children I don't know if I could even walk," Singletary said. "They keep me moving. They keep my brain stimulated. They keep me going."

Necessary help

Though abuse is often thought of as the reason a child is taken from his home, Moss said it's not always the case. In fact, in the past few years, Moss said there's been an increase in substance abuse among parents — addictions that strip all attention and finances away from any children in the house.

"Most of the recent cases we've seen that as a major problem that leads to neglect," Moss said.

A lack of resources in Hoke County, such as low-cost housing or high wage jobs, also can put parents into a position of not being able to take care of their own children. So the courts, not social services, make a decision based on all available evidence to pull a child from or return a child back to his home.

Before that can happen, Cromartie said the parents must prove that whatever problems caused the removal of the child from the home have been

these children need help and are excited to welcome new people.

"Their highlight is to see a foster child coming through the door," she said. "They get to learn their differences and coping the different needs the children have."

Getting involved

The Pates and the Singletarys are

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two of only about eight foster families in Hoke County. According to the Department of Social Services that coordinates the local foster care program, more foster parents are desperately needed.

Single people or couples within the 21 to 65 age range are eligible to provide foster care and must go through a process of speaking with social workers, having home visits and inspections, filling out questionnaires, submitting to a medical exam and being fingerprinted for a criminal history check. All of this is done, explained Susan Moss of the Hoke County Department of Social Services, to ensure the safety of the foster children involved.

"We must feel they (foster parents) are able to cope with the multiple problems these children have," Moss said.

Once logistics are out of the way, the hard part — child placement — comes. It's not always easy. After becoming attached to a child and being a major part of his world for a few days, a few weeks or a few months, it's time to move on.

"We definitely ask a lot of foster parents to take children in, love them and then give them up," Moss said.

As many foster parents confess, it's a job that tugs at the heartstrings and makes them want to contribute more.

"It's very rewarding," Cromartie said. "According to my foster parents, they wouldn't do anything else. Sure you get attached but they know they're doing good for their (the

taken care of, that there is a good source of income and that proper counseling has been sought.

Until the case can return to court the foster parents and social services also follow a plan and a timeline. Always, Cromartie said, the goal is to return the child back to his home environment and weekly, supervised visits to biological parents are made.

"It would really be great if we didn't have any children in foster care," Moss said. "They really need to be with their own families. But sometimes that's just not possible."

If biological parents don't regain stability or no longer make an effort to get back their child, after about a year parental rights can be taken away and the child put up for adoption.

"Nine times out of 10 the foster parents are going to want to adopt the child if they've had him a year," Cromartie said.

"There's a real trend moving in that direction for foster parents," Moss added.

Moss and Cromartie agreed that not everybody is cut out for foster parenting. People who are lonely and in need of companionship or those who think they'll make a few bucks by taking in society's unwanted children are simply fooling themselves.

"You have to have love, patience and most of all you have to have Christ in your life to deal with these kids," Singletary said. "Then you can probably make it. No problem."



Conference player
Hoke High's softball coach Tracie Taylor presents a plaque to pitcher Shannon Maxwell who was chosen AAAA Conference Player of the Year. This season Maxwell had 86 strike outs and a .437 batting average on Hoke High's fast pitch softball team.

Homebound menu set

Menus for the older adults nutrition program for the week of June 17-21 for the congregate and home-delivered meals programs are listed below.

Monday, June 17
Barbecued Pork Rib Party on Hoega Bon w/Margarine
An Gratin Potatoes
Cold Pickled Beets
An Orange
Milk

Tuesday, June 18
Spaghetti w/Meat Sauce
Green Peas
Tossed Salad w/French Dressing
French Bread w/Margarine
An Apple
Milk

Wednesday, June 19

Chopped Barbecue Pork on Hamburger Bun
Blackeyed Peas
Coleslaw
Purple Plums
Milk

Thursday, June 20
Fried Chicken w/Gravy
Whipped Potatoes
Mixed Vegetables
Dinner Roll
Orange Juice
Milk

Friday, June 21
Sliced Baked Ham
Potato Salad
Collard Greens
Stewed Tomatoes
Cinnamon w/Margarine
Sugar Cookie
Milk

Students enjoy grad party

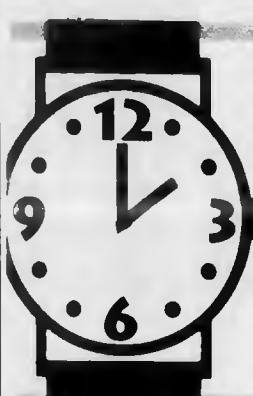
The following businesses gave donations to the Project Graduation: Raeford Lions Club, Raeford Woman's Club, Silver Grove Church, Hoke County Schools Maintenance Department, City of Raeford Maintenance Department, Raz Autry, 360 Degree Communications, Short Stop #14 Food Mart, Daniels Exxon, Hoke County Extension Homemakers, Candle Stick Crafts, Golden Designs and Southern Health Care. Project Graduation was a drug- and alcohol-free party held Friday night after graduation. Seniors and their guests danced, played games and watched movies from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Organizers declared the event — held for the first time in several years — a success.

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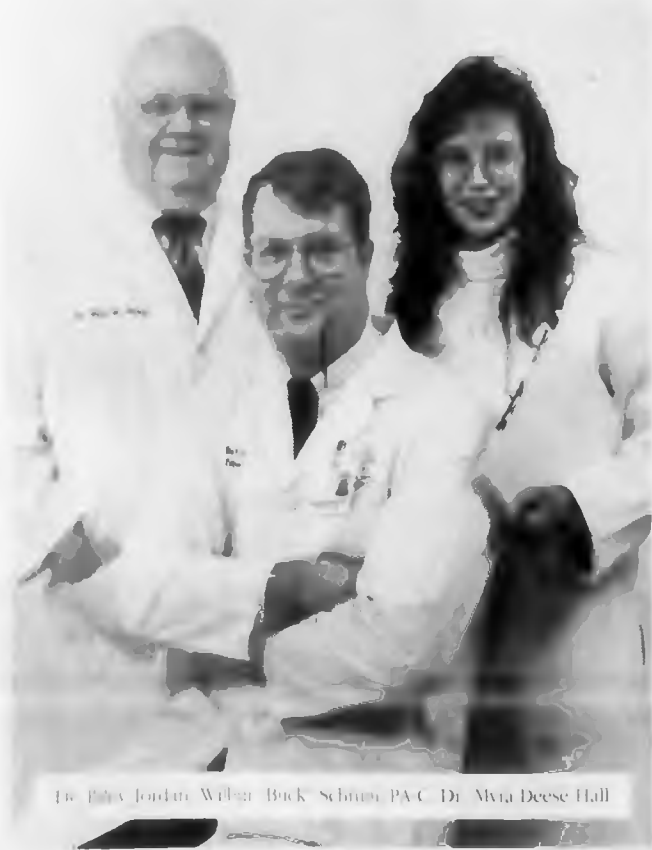


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Few decisions are more important than selecting a physician for your family. There are several questions you should ask before making this major decision.

Is the physician convenient to where you live and work?

Centrally located in Raeford, the Moore Regional Family Care Center is a short drive for residents of Hoke County, Red Springs, Wagram and southern Cumberland County.

Does the doctor have the proper expertise and experience?

Our physicians and physician assistant specialize in family medicine, including care for children. Their medical training has been seasoned by years of treating all sorts of problems.

Are appointments available when you need them?

Because we're open 8 am - 6 pm Monday through Friday and 8 am until noon on Saturdays, appointments can be scheduled around work and family activities.

Does the physician participate in your health plan?

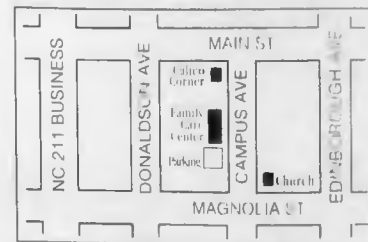
We accept just about every type of health

insurance: CHAMPUS, Medicare, Medicaid, Blue Cross, Provident and Healthsource. Please call if your plan isn't listed.

What link does the doctor have to specialized care?

If the skills of a specialist or hospital are required, our physicians can refer patients to Moore Regional Hospital. In addition, Pinchurst physicians in general surgery, urology and behavioral medicine keep regular office hours at the Family Care Center in Raeford.

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