

FOSTER CARE



Ann Fenner, right, and her husband Nolle at home with their foster daughters Erin, left, and Ebony, and their sons Dameyan and Marlon.

By BRAD MARKIS for The Washington Post

# Foster Care Program Faces Hard Times

## Economic Pressures Increase Need; Budget Cuts Reduce Aid Available

By WENDY COLE

Washington Post Staff Writer

The 45-year-old woman looks forward to a picnic soon with her son, two daughters and a social worker. It's been more than a year since she has seen her girls and at least four years since she last saw her boy.

The woman, Charlotte, is retarded and unable to care for her children, who have lived with an Upper Meri-boro foster family since 1976. "I miss them. I haven't seen them for so long, it ain't funny," said Charlotte, whose last name is being withheld at the request of social workers.

But her children are happy and

Charlotte says she doesn't mind that her daughters, aged 15 and 12, will be adopted by their foster parents. She knows the family well. It is one of four foster homes, three of them in Prince George's, in which she herself has lived during the past seven years since she separated from her husband, an alcoholic, with whom she and the children lived in Seat Pleasant.

The foster care program has been a blessing for Charlotte and her family, and is becoming a refuge for an increasing number of children in Prince George's.

Social workers insist foster care is a last resort, used only when other

measures to keep a family together fail or when a child is in danger of harm at home. But during the first five months of this year, the number of children in foster care in the county increased by 10 percent over the first five months of 1981; in part as a result of family stress caused by unemployment of other economic problems.

Through May, 118 children were directed to foster care by the courts, which make the final decision in each case. For 36 of the children so far this year, it was at least the second foster home. In all, about 700 children currently reside in Prince George's foster homes. In Maryland,

Prince George's ranks second only to Baltimore County, which has 4,200 foster children, in the number receiving care.

But the problems in Prince George's go beyond the growing caseload.

Seventeen out of about 40 staff positions in the division of adoptions and foster care were lost this year because of funding cuts in federal programs such as Title XX, which supplements state money used to pay for county social services. Although the cuts have hurt the division, foster home-finding supervisor Carol Stemann hopes for new full-

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By VANESSA BARNETT ILLIUM—The Washington Post

Carol Siemens conducts a class in Hyattsville for Prince George's residents interested in being foster parents.

## Requests for Foster Care Rise During

CHILDREN, From Page 1

time and two contract positions recently authorized by the state will ease the workload. Throughout the department, social services lost a total of 47 employees.

In contrast, Montgomery County has 12½ fewer staff positions in its Social Services Department. Five of the cuts were in the 27-member foster care division, but the state has provided money to reinstate three positions, according to Mary Lou Hurney, chief of child welfare. The division, she said, should have little difficulty handling its foster care caseload, which totals 682 and has decreased somewhat since January.

Ironically, while fewer Prince George's workers struggle to care for more foster children, the county faces the prospect of losing still more federal money if it cannot reverse the trend and cut its caseload. Nell Vincent, director of Prince George's adoptions and foster care division, said all the states were instructed this year by the federal Department of Health and Human Services to reduce their foster care caseloads by 30 percent in stages over the next four years.

This may become an unusually difficult task unless the economic climate improves. Vincent said Prince George's workers are seeing more cases of severe child abuse and neglect which can be traced to the deterioration of the economy.

Parental stress triggered by prolonged unemployment or the pressure of unpaid rent and bills can lead to hostile behavior toward a child, she explained, adding, "If you have a job, you're not as prone to

beat your child. When a situation becomes stressful, that's when the family breaks down."

In Prince George's, 1,185 fewer families received welfare checks this fiscal year through the federal Aid to Families With Dependent Children program (AFDC). Last year, AFDC payments went to 8,300 families. In the same period, the number of food stamps recipients dropped from 13,000 to 11,000.

Families evicted from their homes also look to foster care as the resolution, at least for the short term. Referring to the weekly calls he gets from parents hoping to place their children in foster homes, Phil New-

"We try to keep [children] out of foster care. Once a family has broken up it's hard to get them back together," said Paula Horowitz, director of intake services, which refers community inquiries to the appropriate social services divisions, including foster care.

Day care, homemakers' services and adult counseling are seen as measures that can improve home situations and keep children out of foster care. But in the past year, funds for these services have also been cut.

When these attempts fail and children must go into foster care, they go to homes like that of Ann Fenner, who became a licensed fos-

**"P.G. workers are seeing more cases of severe child abuse and neglect which can be traced to the deterioration of the economy."**

ter mother in 1979 and receives a stipend of just over \$200 per month for each child. Five months ago she and her husband, a Greyhound bus driver, welcomed two sisters, Ebony, 8, and Erin, 13.

The girls fit right in with her two sons, aged 3 and 7, Fenner said. "It couldn't be better," remarked the District Heights resident, adding, "The second day they wanted to call me 'Mommy.'"

"To me, it was like a challenge," said Fenner, explaining why she became a foster parent. "I always wanted girls and I was sure there were some girls out there who needed a home."

Fenner, who is identified here with her maiden name to ensure the privacy of her foster children, had

son, supervisor of emergency shelter services, said: "They see no resolution to the problem. They can't afford an apartment. They've exhausted their resources. . . . They've hit bottom and feel they are failures. They see foster care as the way to keep kids from suffering the consequences of being in the streets."

But a shortage of case workers, funds and foster parents frequently prevents foster care workers from handling such cases, which may not qualify as emergencies.

In addition, the emphasis in foster care has shifted to establishing a permanent plan for children when they leave home, rather than providing a temporary respite from parenting for overburdened adults.

Foster Care

# Shelters for children dwindle as need grows

By JOAN BABBAGE

While facilities for abandoned and abused children are becoming scarcer, the need for them is increasing and has reached a crisis stage in northwestern New Jersey.

Group homes and shelters are at a premium and there are not enough foster homes, especially for teenagers, according to social agency directors.

They cite the high divorce rate, the economy and the fact many unmarried teenagers are keeping their babies rather than giving them up for adoption as some of the reasons for the increased strain on facilities.

With the aim of improving juvenile services, the state Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) is conducting a Foster Care Assessment Program, which is being funded by both the state and federal governments.

Nancy Fritsche, program director, noted a group of 35 volunteers is serving as a task force and will spend a year gathering data throughout the state.

"I don't think many people realize 48 per cent of the children in foster homes are teenagers," she said.

In the 19th Century, she noted, abandoned youngsters were placed in almshouses.

"Then we graduated to foster homes, which have served as a panacea for years with the result that many kids have been drifting without any sense of permanency, going from one foster home to another," she said.

Mrs. Fritsche said DYFS hopes to set up a permanent plan, such as adoption,

## Lack of facilities for teens is called particularly acute

for each child as quickly as possible and also improve the quality of foster care.

"Foster homes will always be an option, but we need more training for foster parents and more financial help for them," she said, noting the pay scale is \$145 a month for children aged 5 and younger, \$155 for those from 6 to 9, \$171 for 10 to 14 and \$181 for 15 to 18.

Juvenile problems, including abandonment and abuse, are so acute in Morris County that a coalition of social agency professionals has formed an advocacy group, Committee for the Future of Families and Children in Morris County (CFFC).

According to chairwoman Susan Neigher, the group is putting together a resource directory of services for area children and their families.

Neigher, senior clinician of Children's Services at St. Clare's Hospital in Denville, said she is also working as a volunteer for the DYFS task force to assess foster care in the northern part of the state.

"I believe there is an urgent need for the establishment of preventative services to keep families together," she said.

Joan Schroeder, director of Morris County DYFS, said the local agency tries to find relatives, friends or teachers who will provide a temporary home for abandoned or abused youngsters.

"We don't have enough foster homes for teenagers, and only one residential group home, Plaid House, which has facilities for 24 girls."

James Hennessey, director of the Morris County Youth Shelter, a Juveniles in Need of Supervision (JINS) facility, said he believes there is a great need for residential facilities for teenagers.

"We can only accommodate 10 youngsters at a time. We cannot keep up with the need. Many kids are staying here longer than they should because there is no place for them to go, which is outrageous," he commented.

Marjorie Schaerer, director of the Morris County Children's Shelter, said that home's capacity is 15.

"The shelter is okay on an emergency basis, but our goal is permanent placement for children. With the federal budget cuts, it is difficult to provide care. We do the best we can," she said.

Joseph Ciccone, director of DYFS in Sussex County, said although foster homes are available for small children in his area, the problem is that there are not enough facilities for teenagers.

"When kids get in trouble, very often their families don't want them. We do not have enough foster care and no shelter for teenagers," he said, noting the county's rapid growth has created a need for

more social services to help children and their families.

Mary Ann Earhart, district manager of DYFS in Somerset County, said her area does not have enough foster homes or residential facilities, despite the fact that the need is increasing.

"If foster parents are willing to take teenagers — and most of them are not — we tend to overload them," she said.

Vicki Gurski, director of the county's JINS shelter, said the privately-funded facility is able to accommodate a few abandoned youngsters.

"We like to have youngsters stay with relatives whenever possible. Foster homes are a last resort," she said.

Jean Menges, director of DYFS in Warren County, said she is optimistic, despite the fact that foster care is needed for children of all ages in her area, as well as a residential home for teenagers.

"We have started an education program for young mothers and fathers to inform them how to be good parents. Our goal is to try to keep families together whenever possible," she said.

"We have begun preventative programs for very young parents so they will understand the basics of child care. We keep looking for new ways to do things. That is what keeps me going. There is a lot of work to be done," she acknowledged.

Cynthia Parks, DYFS director in Hunterdon County, noted she has been lucky in placing abandoned and abused youngsters in foster care, adding the county has a JINS shelter with a few beds available for abandoned adolescents.

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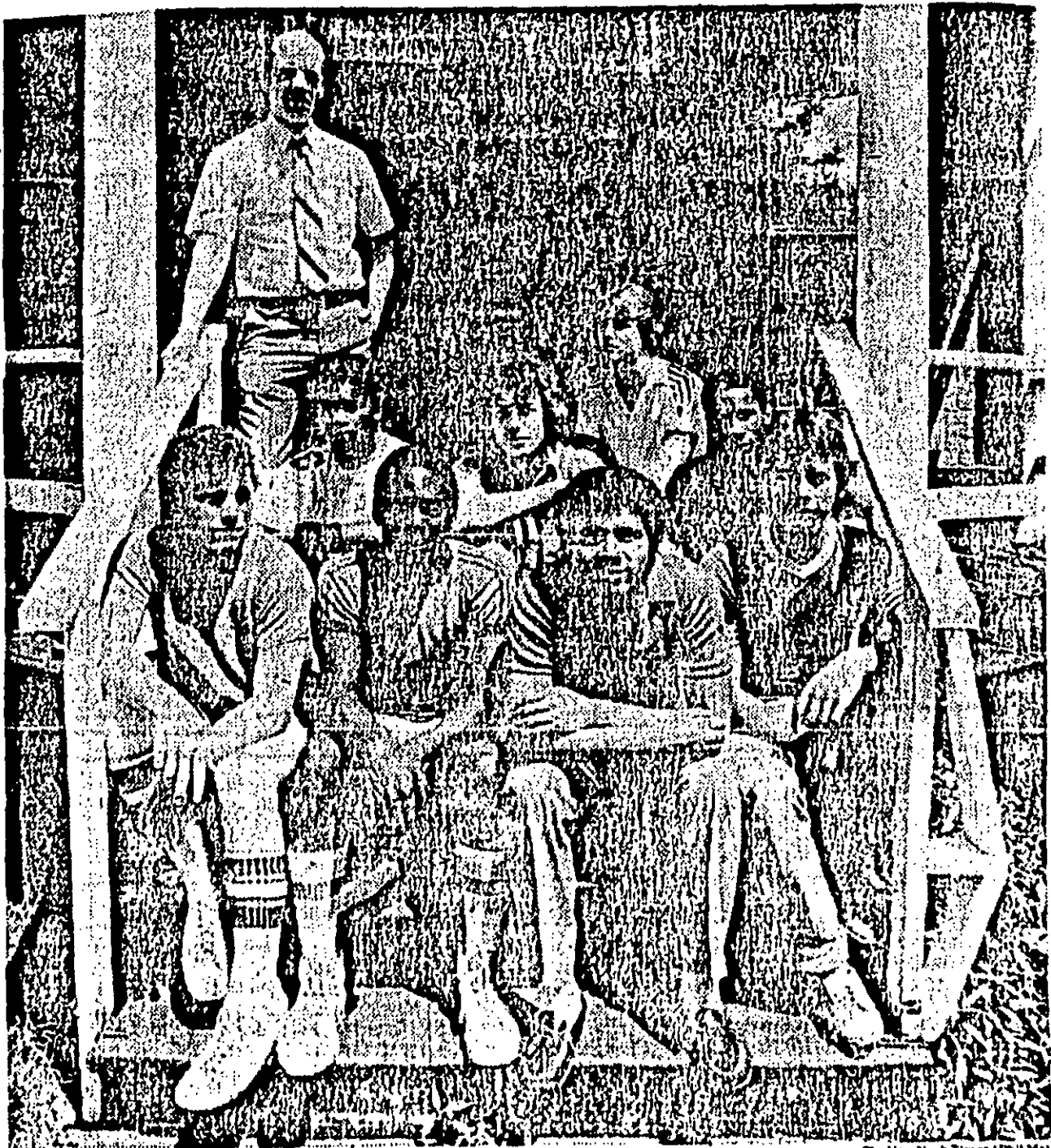
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THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 1981

# Courts, the Congress and Citizens Are Redefining the Concept of Foster Care

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The New York Times/Phil Matt

Timothy Flannel, supervisor of the Rochester Group Home, which is largely government funded, with some of the residents. The 14 to 19-year-old youths come from homes where there are family problems.

















