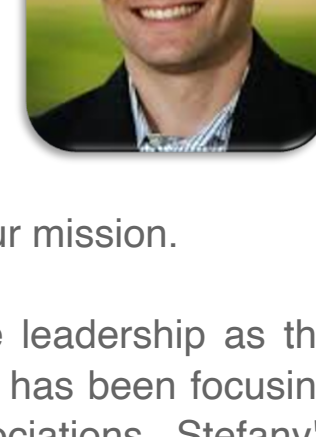


The MASSB Minute

Message from the Chair



Greetings, everyone. This month we have another opportunity to recognize and celebrate everyone who is involved in foster care. National Foster Care Month underscores the profound significance of social workers, volunteers, and individuals deeply invested in the welfare of our foster care community. In fact, this month serves as an important reminder of the invaluable role each of us plays in supporting children and families within the foster care system, exemplifying the heart of our mission.

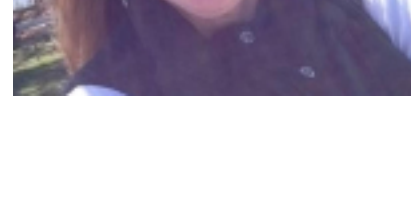
In this spirit, I would like to acknowledge Stefany Lang, whose leadership as the Executive Director of the Maryland Resource Parent Association has been focusing on increasing the number of active Local Foster Parent Associations. Stefany's unwavering commitment to advocating for the needs of resource parents and foster children resonates profoundly during this month of reflection and action.

Furthermore, I would like to extend heartfelt appreciation to Tony Lawrence, a member of the St. Mary's County Advisory Board, whose personal journey through the foster care system offers another opportunity for reflection and action.

As we navigate the complexities and challenges of the foster care environment, let us draw inspiration from Stefany and Tony's remarkable contributions and journeys, encouraging all of us to contribute to a brighter future for every child and family touched by the foster care system.

Best, Tony

Congratulations to Gloria Brown-Burnett, Prince George's County Director, who was recently selected as the Deputy Secretary for Operations at DHS. Thank you for your leadership in Prince George's County and good luck in your new position serving all Marylanders!



Stefany Lang
Executive Director MRPA
Advisory Board Member, Calvert County

"Anyone who does anything to help a child in his life is a hero." — Fred Rogers

Welcome to the MRPA!

I am Stefany Lang, the new Executive Director of the [Maryland Resource Parent Association \(MRPA\)](#). I am thrilled to share my journey and the progress we have made in the past eight months. With over a decade of experience as a foster, adoptive, and guardianship parent, I bring a unique perspective to this role. My primary goal in my first year was to increase the number of active Local Foster Parent Associations (LFPAs) in our state. Currently, we have 24 counties, but unfortunately, nine of them are inactive. This could be due to a lack of support, interest, or simply a lack of awareness about the benefits of having a local association.

I am proud to report that we are making significant strides in achieving this goal. Currently, I am working closely with three counties (Baltimore, Charles and St. Mary's) to recruit parents and restart their local county associations. The presence of both local and state associations is crucial for the retention of foster parents in our state. These associations provide a sense of community, support, and resources that are invaluable to our resource families.

In addition to revitalizing the LFPAs, another important aspect of my role is to ensure that our foster parents have access to quality training. It is essential to keep them updated on the latest information regarding trauma support and the benefits available to children in foster care. By providing new and updated training opportunities, we empower our foster parents to provide the best possible care for the children in their homes.

However, we have encountered some challenges along the way. One of the main hurdles has been fostering collaboration between the local departments and associations. It is crucial for these entities to work together as a team, as this synergy directly impacts the support provided to our resource families. By fostering a culture of collaboration, we can ensure that our foster parents receive the support they need and deserve.



Community Connection

Tony Lawrence
Member, St. Mary's County Advisory Board



"Growing up in Foster Care"

I value the blessing of foster families (resource families) who are willing to bring a child or teen that they do not know into their home to care and provide for them when the child or teen's parents are unable to do so. Foster families provide parenting for the child/teen when they need it the most. Also, foster families give children and teens the opportunity to experience what living with a suitable family feels like.

There are advantages of growing up with a foster family at such an early age. I entered the foster care system when I was 6 days old. My foster family was the only family I knew. I always felt that I belonged. I was able to form relationships with other children throughout the state who were going through the same pathway in life (foster care) that I had to go through. Our lives would have not been intertwined if it was not for me being in foster care. My foster parents have passed, but throughout the years I have been blessed to stay in contact with their siblings and have found 12 foster care children who were in my foster family. I have remained in contact with them, and it has helped to strengthen our relationship with one another as young adults. I consider them as my brothers and sisters because we were raised under the same roof at one point in time in our lives. Foster families helped me by showing me how special I was despite my situation.

There are many great things that I can speak upon on being in foster care; however, there are some disadvantages of living in the foster care system. I was at a disadvantage when it came to reading comprehension and math. It was a challenge for older foster parents in their 60s to cater to each child's needs educationally. My foster father worked at the hospital as a security officer from evening to midnight to be able to provide beyond what social services could provide for each child. During the school year, my foster mother was the one home each evening doing homework with us. There were 5-7 children/teens in the household at any given time. While my foster father was at work, not only was she the only one helping us with our homework, but she also cooked, cleaned, bathed us, and prepared us for school the next day. She had a lot to do each day, but I can tell she enjoyed being a foster care parent because she did all she could with a loving smile. When my foster care father was not working on the weekend, he too was very active in each of our lives. There were shortfalls due to their age and my foster mother mainly taking care of 5-7 children/teens throughout the week which caused me to be delayed in reading and math. I wouldn't trade what I've endured, though, because it pushed me to overcome my weaknesses and strive for success in all that I do.

My adopted family has positively affected my life in more ways than one. It took a village to help raise me. They poured love, respect, and discipline into my life. They instilled in me to always do my best in everything that I do no matter how hard the task may be. This simple phrase has such a significant impact because it has brought me through so many tough situations. If I would have given up, I wouldn't be the man that I am today. It was not easy adjusting to a new family. They made my transfer from foster care to having a forever family at age 8 a wonderful experience. An additional bonus with my transition was that my adopted family allowed me to periodically stay in contact with my foster parents. The bond I shared with my foster parents was deeply meaningful to me and they did not want to take it away. When it came to school, they encouraged me through my weaknesses. There were many intensive nights of being at the kitchen table studying with my parents and my uncle, staying after school for tutoring, and attending the Sylvan Learning Center each week to bring me up to grade level on reading comprehension and math. It was a lot at the time, but I can now look back, and I am extremely thankful for my family and the village who helped raise me. I appreciate them not looking at me as a failure but as a boy who had great potential to be anything I wanted to be.

Fast forward to today, the following are some of the accomplishments I have achieved over the years. In 2017, I graduated from Virginia State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science. I currently work at the Patuxent River Naval Air Station as the Sustainment Deputy Assistant Program Manager Systems Engineer and Sustainment Class Desk on the MQ-25 Stingray Unmanned Carrier Aviation. In celebration of "Foster Care Month," I am deeply honored to mark yet another significant milestone in my journey. On May 20, 2024, I will proudly receive my Master of Science degree in Information Systems Engineering.

If I could give any advice to any child/teen or adult in the foster care system, I would tell them,

"Do not allow what you see now to determine the final outcome of who you will be in the future. You can be the best version of you by investing in yourself, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Be the authentic 'You' that you want others to look up to. Live life to not live for the moment, but to leave a legacy behind. If I can do it, so can you."

The best advice I can give to the MASSB board members is to continue emphasizing the importance of the child welfare system to provide what is in the best interest of the child and staying abreast on laws that are being passed regarding children in care. The MASSB Board members are doing a phenomenal job in working towards their vision to create a future in Maryland where every individual and family has the chance and support to be self-reliant, free from abuse, neglect, and financial struggles. Thank you for all you all do!

Birthday Boxes for Youth in Care

Carroll County DSS Foster Care and Adoption

Thanks to the non-profit, Cat's Closet, and [Carroll Periodontics, Endodontics & Implant Dentistry](#), youth in care get to celebrate their birthdays with Benny's Birthday Box. They receive one dozen cupcakes from [Starry Night Bakery](#), a box of party supplies, and a small gift to celebrate with their family, their classmates, or anyone they are willing to share a cupcake with!

Great Idea!



There are over **390,000** children and youth in foster care.

Approximately **20,000** youth are emancipated from foster care without a permanent family.

In 2021, **77 %** of eligible youth in foster care, ages 14–21 years old, left care without receiving the federally funded services necessary to prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

Mark Your Calendars!

****Community Meeting July 12, 12pm-1pm, "Virtual"**
Conference Preparation and Round Table Discussion

****Fall Conference October 3-4**
Network with MASSB Members from across the state as we focus on poverty in Maryland. We'll learn from experts and participate in an impactful "Poverty Simulation". Hosted by Kent County at Washington College.



Professional Development Opportunity

2022 MASSB Board member, **Andre Lingham** (Center for Elder Justice and Education), presents:

"Strategies for Effective Elder Abuse Investigations"

This conference aims to bring together Adult Protective Services professionals, advocates, law enforcement and experts in the field of elder abuse prevention to share knowledge, strategies, and best practices for effectively investigating and addressing elder abuse cases. Please e-mail trustee@massbfoundation.org if interested in attending.

Date: June 10-12, 2024

Location: DoubleTree by Hilton Columbia, Maryland

Conference Website: <https://www.elderabuseconference.info/>

Registration: \$350

What's going on in your county?

Have an idea to share? We'd love to include your success stories in the MASSB Minute. Email trustee@massbfoundation.org

www.massbfoundation.org

Our mailing address is:
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