

LOCAL

Friday, December 29, 2006

Foster kids get a little help from friends

■ Foster Friends has awarded more than \$22,000 in grants to give children a chance at a normal childhood.

By CYNTHIA JEFFRIES
Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — Patricia Murray wanted to visit her parents for Christmas, but she didn't dare tell her children that.

With airfare costing \$400 per person, the \$1,600 price tag to get her family, which includes two foster children, to her parents' home would have been too much of an expense for Murray and her husband, Larry.

So she kept her desires to herself.

"I didn't want to disappoint them," she said.

As it turned out, she didn't have to.

A few days before Christmas, Murray, her 11-year-old daughter, Erin, and her 5-year-old twin foster children, Ana and Juan, left for a seven-day trip to Murray's native Bahamas, where her parents live. Her husband stayed in Greensboro.

The trip was made possible in part because of a \$600 grant the Murrays got from Foster Friends of North Carolina, a Greensboro-based nonprofit organization that helps children in the Guilford County foster care system do the things other children do.

For Ana and Juan, that meant helping them spend Christmas with their soon-to-be new grandparents. The Murrays are in the process of adopting the twins.

"This is such an awesome organization, and I'm glad that they were there for us," Murray said. "My children are spending Christmas with their grandparents. That is what families do."

Foster Friends has been in Guilford County for about a year. It was the brainchild of 39-year-old Melissa Fourrier, a former marketing and family recruitment director for the Children's Home Society in Greensboro.

While working there, she met a boy in 2004 who, in a way, planted the seed that made her want to help foster children.

"Some of them do not want to open up and share their stories," she said. "It can be a hard life. But this young man shared his story with me. I asked him what he missed most, and he said it was feeling like a normal kid."

Normal kids get to go to summer camps, she said. Normal kids go to the prom. Normal kids participate in sports and the school band. And normal kids visit their grandparents.

"We provide the board payments (room and board) and that's it," said Beth Harris, a Guilford County social worker. "We'll do the basic, but DSS (the Department of Social Services) doesn't go above and beyond that."

But Fourrier thought that children in foster care needed more than the basics. They needed activities and opportunities that many other children who had not been separated from their birth families had.

See Foster, Page B2

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about Foster Friends of North Carolina, go to www.fosterfriendsnc.org

Continued from Page B1

They often needed things that foster parents could not afford.

"A lot of the foster families are not well off themselves," said John Shore, the director of the Guilford County Department of Social Services.

So Fourrier set out to do something for foster children.

By August 2005, she and the other founders of the organization — her husband, Henri Fourrier, and Rick and Peggy Adelman — had formed Foster Friends. By January, they had raised enough money to pass out their first grant to a foster child who wanted to join his junior high band.

Almost a year later, the organization has handed out more than \$22,000 to 97 foster children in Guilford County.

The group has helped foster children go to summer camps; purchased high school senior portrait packages, yearbooks and prom dresses and shoes; paid for school field trips and sports or music lessons; paid



H. SCOTT HOFFMANN/News & Record

Thanks to a \$600 grant from Foster Friends of North Carolina, Patricia Murray (center) was able to take her twin 5-year-olds Ana (left) and Juan along with her daughter Erin, 11, to the Bahamas.

for tutors and college application fees; purchased school supplies and eyeglasses and dozens of other things.

"There was a little boy who was deaf who needed special

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Here are a few of the grants that have been handed out by the Greensboro-based Foster Friends of North Carolina. Since January, more than \$22,000 has been awarded to 97 foster children. The awards have varied from \$10 to \$500 per child.

Only the first names of the foster children are used to protect their identities. All the children are from Guilford County. The grants are paid directly to the supplier.

- Anthony — purchased a special bed for him that was not covered by Medicaid
- Byron — rented a clarinet for him so he could perform with his middle school band
- Dakota — sent him to a YMCA summer camp

- Erin — paid her fees so she could attend a summer horse camp program
- Jaquira — helped her buy a cheerleader's uniform and sent her to a cheerleading camp
- Joella — purchased the cap and gown for her high school graduation and the invitations
- Melanie — helped her buy prom shoes and her prom tickets
- Ronald — paid his fees so he could go on an eighth-grade class trip to Washington
- Tabier — paid for reading and tutoring help for him
- Tiffany — helped her buy a prom dress and her prom tickets

Source: Foster Friends of North Carolina

ter care in Guilford County. Plans are to expand to the 13 counties in the Piedmont Triad by 2008 and to all 100 counties in the state by 2011.

Fourrier and her friends are

working on a book about the life of children in foster care. The book, which will contain artwork and essays from children who have experienced foster care, will be available in November.

Shore, the Guilford County DSS director, plans to hike the Appalachian Trail to raise money for Foster Friends. He will start on his hike in March, about a month after he retires from the DSS.

Foster Friends plans to start a mentoring program, which is expected to begin in April.

"There are so many assumptions made about the children who are in foster care," Fourrier said. "They are like every other boy and girl."

"When you see the names and statistics, it's one thing," she said. "But when you see them and connect the two, it's very different. They want to have people who love them. They want to feel like someone believes them. They want to feel and do things just like everyone else."

Contact Cynthia Jeffries at 627-4881, Ext. 126 or cjeffries@news-record.com