

# Foster children in need of homes

by Marsha Shewczyk

Since the Tribe began its own foster care program the number of children in off-reservation foster homes has decreased from 220 in 1973, to only 5 in 1982. Children are no longer sent away to caring homes. There are homes in the community that care.

But there are never enough homes for children needing foster care. Children are continuously being assigned to foster homes through the court. If there is no foster home available on the reservation the children must stay at the Vern Jackson Home or the Group Home, depending on their age.

A child is assigned to a foster home only where there is no alternative. Counseling fails to alleviate the problems in the child's home. There is still drinking or abuse or drinking or abuse or behavioral problems. In those cases, counselors feel the child cannot return to such an environment.

A child's own home as a residence is the first choice made by foster care workers for any child placed in their custody. But if that is infeasible, the next choice is the home of an extended family member. These homes are again not always available or those homes that are available may not meet the needs of the child in the opinion of the case worker.

The final solution for placement of a child into a foster home would be to place him or her in a community member's home where the child is welcome and can feel at home.

It is unfortunate that children even have to be placed in foster homes, but if it allows the child to grow up in a more stable environment where he can learn self-respect and respect for others, then it is necessary. It is essential for the well-being of that child.

"We feel there are good people out there" who would be willing to help and take in a foster child, says director of youth services Dale Cochran.

These people would be "excellent resources for foster care," he feels.

There are both younger and older children who need homes. It is much easier to find homes for the younger children according to Cochran but the need is great for all ages. Currently five children are waiting to be placed in foster residences. They age from five years to ten years of age.

The amount of time to be spent at a foster home is determined by the court for each case. A monetary compensation is paid to the foster parent to help meet expenses of an additional member of the household. Tribal funds are used exclusively in the foster care program.

Children in the foster care program are introduced to would-be foster parents. They visit them in their homes and visits are gradually extended until the child moves home with the parents.

Visitation from the child's own parents is allowed. Cochran emphasizes, "We don't give up on the parents." There is a continual effort to reunite the family. If after many years this cannot be accomplished then the foster child may become a permanent part of the household. Each case is a little different.

The requirements for participation in the foster care program as a residence for children are not stringent. The home must simply be suitable for the child. It must have adequate facilities and a place for the child to sleep. The home does not necessarily have to have white-washed walls. What is most important, again, is the well-being of the child.

The tentative foster home is evaluated, and, if approved, the next step "is a simple process of matching up the house with a child," Cochran says. Family needs are considered in such aspects as ages and personalities. There is no desire to have the child bounced around from home to home. It is best if the initial arrangement works.

Although the Tribe has provided funds for the foster



Director of youth services Dale Cochran and his assistant Lola Sohapp encourage community members to take foster children into their homes.

Spilyay Tymoo photo by Shewczyk

care program in an effort to keep their children in Warm Springs, the individual tribal members are of great importance. Without foster families, some youth would have no homes on the reservation. The community members are essential to the program.

Community members who

would be interested in participating in the foster care program, providing homes for these children, are encouraged to call the foster care center located in the Vern Jackson Home. Cochran or any member of his staff can be of assistance in providing information. Staff supervisor for the foster care program is

Lola Sohapp and case workers are Arlene Boileau and Carol Muniz. The number is 553-1487.

Good homes will give children the chance to have a stable situation in which to get back on their feet again. Cochran is sure that there are many "good families that could give us a lot of help."

"We love it here..."

## Werners headed for Everett

by Donna Behrend

After spending the past thirteen years on the Warm Springs reservation, agency special officer Mark Werner is headed for the Puget Sound Agency in Everett, Washington. The Puget Sound Agency includes 12 tribes and about 60,000 people. Werner will assume his new position July 1.

Werner has worked for the state of South Dakota as a parole and probation officer and came to Warm Springs in 1969 to set up a parole and probation program for the tribal court through authority of the BIA. He provided a resource for state and federal courts that handled parole and probation cases.

"For some reason," says Werner, "the program dwindled out." In actuality, only four parole and probation officers were assigned to reservations, according to Werner.

In 1973, Werner was switched over to the criminal investigator/juvenile officer's position, "so I could go back to Wounded Knee, South Dakota for two weeks." Apparently, his parole and probation position didn't fit the situation in Wounded Knee at the time.

It was in July, 1980, that Werner became agency special officer to head up BIA law enforcement program here in Warm Springs and also on Burns/Paiute. Though Werner's major duties involve Warm Springs, he travels to Burns at least every two



Mark and Bunny Werner

monitoring PL 95-638 (self-determination) contracts and working with other law enforcement agencies such as the secret service, postal inspectors, IRS and AT&F (Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) departments.

As Werner leaves, so does his family—his wife Bernice "Bunny" and two teen-aged sons, Brett and Jerry.

Bunny has been tribal court administrator since August, 1981. Bunny came to Warm Springs in 1978 from Tacoma, Washington to work as executive secretary for Kah-Nee-Ta general manager.

After a "whirlwind" (four months) courtship, the Werners were married. In August, Bunny began working for the accounting department as secretary for contracts and budgets. Then in May 1979, she

transferred to tribal court as the juvenile clerk "for a very short time," because the court was being reorganized. She began serving as the judge's secretary in August, 1980 until she was promoted to court administrator in 1981.

Bunny says that changes have improved the court functions, helping court procedures to flow more smoothly. Public relations are an important facet to the court administrator's job. It's Bunny's responsibility to explain laws and the judge's decisions—which often times leads to arguments.

Both of the Werners have fond memories of Warm Springs and neither wants to leave. Bunny says, "I like the people, the style of living and the quiet life. One must go where one must go."

**Spilyay Tymoo**  
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