

**UNION COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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News Release

**Union County Foster Parent Association
Fall Festival to be Held on Saturday**

October 20, 2015, Monroe, NC – The Union County Division of Social Services, in partnership with the Union County Foster Parent Association, and author, Donna Foster will host a life book event for children in foster care and their families to bring attention to the need for foster and adoptive families in Union County during the Union County Foster Parent Association Fall Festival on Saturday, Oct. 24 at 3:30 p.m. at Image Church located at 4017 Weddington Road in Matthews. Image Church will provide the food, drink, and activities for the children and families.

Before children enter the foster care system they have been traumatized by the death of parents, homelessness, abuse or neglect. Entering foster care, the child is traumatized again by having to stay with strangers. The foster care system is working hard to lessen the trauma children may experience by recognizing children's fears and concerns. Foster care is more than shelter, food and education. Foster parents, adoptive parents and social workers are trained to meet the physical and emotional needs of the children in their care.

Some of the other needs of children are to not feel the blame for their family falling apart and understanding why their parents cannot presently take care of them. Healthy contact with their birth parents is crucial to the healing of their family. Children may have fears of darkness where they once experienced pain. Building trust with a child is a slow process. Helping children remain in contact with their healthy past relationships helps them to feel loved and remembered. These contacts help children to transition into a foster family where they can start building trust. A tool used to help children share and document their past, present and future is called a "life book." It is a therapeutic road map of their lives. It is a place to keep the truth and memories of happy times.

Author, Donna Foster and Shelby, the golden retriever main character of "Shelby and Me: Our Journey through Life Books" will visit with the foster and adoptive children. Foster will introduce Shelby and read some of Shelby's life story. Laughter and silliness is welcomed. Foster lives in Marshville, is a past foster parent for 17 years, presently works as a staff development trainer for the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and contracts as a national trainer for foster and adoptive parents.

“Shelby and Me: Our Journey through Life Books” is about a Golden Retriever name Shelby who shares her story of missing her birth family, entering foster care and then being adopted. The “Me” is the child Shelby is talking to. Shelby shares stories about her other friends in her foster family; a dog Bear who is in foster care, Jumping Jack rabbit who returns home and Sassy, a cat who was born in the foster home. Her other friends in her adopted home are a neighbor dog name Elly, a Shih Tzu dog, Toby who was adopted, and Mookie, an internationally adopted dog from Korea. Shelby talks about how the people in her life helped her to trust, grieve and to love. Shelby explains the difference between animal and human foster care and adoption. She asks children personal questions and the children have their own life books to fill in their information. While creating their life books, the child feels important and their self-esteem is heightened. The life books are owned by the child and go with them whether they are reunified with their family or adopted.

“Being a foster parent has been a gift to me because I have seen children smile again and trust once more,” Foster said. “I made sure they knew I was not separating them from their birth family. When a child entered our home, they knew our home would always be opened to them. They instantly became a member of our family. Today, I am still close to most of my foster children and have been blessed with grandchildren. Children need someone to be there for them during the worst time of their lives. I am thankful to have been there.”

If you are interested in being there when a child needs someone to care by becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent, please contact **Tamara Roesler at 704-296-4466 or Jackie Grignon at 704-296-4461.**

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