

FOSTER PARENT PERSPECTIVES ON RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN
DEL NORTE COUNTY

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Abstract

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The project gathered the perspectives of current licensed foster parents in Del Norte County in regards to factors effecting recruitment, retention and support of foster parents by both social workers and in the community. Telephonic interviews were conducted with county licensed foster parents to gain a better understanding of their experience with becoming and continuing to be licensed to provide care for children. The information gathered from the interviews was placed in six categories; reasons behind becoming a foster parent, rewards of foster parenting, challenges to being a foster parent, barriers to licensure, relationship with agency staff and training . The survey information serves as a starting point for future work in improving the recruitment and retention efforts for foster parents in rural Del Norte County.

Key words: foster care, foster parent, recruitment, retention

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Introduction

Foster parents are a key player in the services that are provided to families working with child welfare services. The project gathered the perspectives of currently licensed foster parents in Del Norte County regarding the topics of recruitment, retention and continuing support by the social service agency and the community. Telephonic interviews were conducted with county licensed foster parents to gain a better understanding of their experience with becoming and continuing to be licensed. The information gathered from the interviews was placed in six categories which include reasons behind becoming a foster parent, rewards of foster parenting, challenges to being a foster parent, barriers to licensure, relationship with agency staff and foster parenting training . The survey information serves as a starting point for future work in improving the recruitment and retention efforts for foster parents in rural Del Norte County.

According to an overview report of the California foster care system, “Foster care is a primary piece of the child welfare services system...The purpose of foster care is to keep children safe while child welfare services are provided so they can be reunited with their families” (Foster, 2001, p. 1). Foster parents are key players in providing services for children placed in out of home care. Foster parents are the people who are working each day to make life better for a child who has been abused or neglected and can no longer safely remain in their own home (Iamafoster.com, 2015). An important part of their job is to remind foster children that it is okay to be a kid in a world where they often

are confronted with adult situations (Iamafoster.com, 2015). The system does not always take into account the information that the current foster parents can provide to improve the training, relationships with the agency staff and the overall experience of others who may want to enter the world of foster parenting. The goal of the interviews of the county licensed foster parents is to gain vital information from the perspective of the people who are doing the day to day work of providing care to the community's neediest children.

These interviews took place in Del Norte County, a small coastal northern California county, on the border with Oregon (Appendix E). Del Norte County has high poverty and unemployment rates which is similar to other small counties in the state. According to the United States Department of Labor, California has an unemployment rate of 6.9% while Del Norte County has an unemployment rate of 8.8% (US Department of Labor, 2015). When society is plagued by poverty and unemployment, people are working to provide for their own families and those same people may not have the resources to be foster parent. Single parent families and women working outside the home has led to less people being available to provide foster care (Barbell, K. & Freundlich, M., 2001) Foster parents are often from the low to middle class income bracket and the subsidy they receive to provide care is not enough to fully meet the children's needs (Barbell, et al, 2001). Foster care cannot be looked at as a problem for other people to handle. Children in need are the product of the larger problems that are happening in communities across the state like rampant drug abuse, domestic violence,

lack of affordable housing and the overall effects of poverty where individuals and families cannot meet their own basic needs (Berger, L. 2004). Foster parents are needed to provide care to children. They provide information to the agency and the community about the work they do and their role meeting the needs of children in care. They can be a bridge to identifying and then fixing the problems that keep people from opening their home to a child in need.

In 2013, Del Norte County had 98 children in foster care (Kidsdata.org, 2013). In a rural community like Del Norte County, there are a limited number of foster homes available to meet the needs of these children. The children enter care for various and assorted reasons and they do not enter care without the effects of the environments that they have been living in. The problem faced by the social service agency is that there may or may not be a foster family that is capable or willing to meet their needs. The aim of the dialogue generated from the interviews was to gather more information from the foster parents own perspective on their motivation, experiences and ideas to improve the licensing process. The hope is that this will lead to more people being recruited to become foster parents and those that are currently licensed will remain.

Foster Care Data

Providing Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a requirement of the fifty one states that make up the United States. The state CWS system has been referred to as “the safety net for children who have been abused and neglected” (Foster, 2001, p.1). Foster care is also known as “the 24-hour out of home care provided to children in need of temporary or long-term substitute parenting” (Foster, 2001, p. 1). The California Department of

Social Services (CDSS) is assigned the job of providing oversight for each of the 58 counties in the state of California (CDSS, 2007). California uses a county administered model for their CWS services and each of the 58 counties has established and maintains their own programs while CDSS provides support and monitoring (Howle, 2014, p. 5). They have primary responsibility to insure that the county CWS agency carries out the designated activities for the protection of children and families and consequently the work being done and the services offered will look different for each region of the state (Howle, 2014, p 5).

In 2013, California CWS agencies investigated 482,000 allegations of child abuse or neglect, substantiated 81,000 allegations and removed 31,000 children (Howle, 2014, p 5). There were approximately 58,699 children in out of home care in the State of California in 2013 (Kidsdata.org, 2014). Foster care is an ever growing need within the United States and within the State of California. Foster homes provide shelter to some of the state's most vulnerable children and youth. Foster parents are a vital partner in the success of children that are involved with social service agencies for the work that they do with abused and neglected children. The number of foster homes available in the United States and in the state of California has declined in the last ten years and foster parents of color such as African American, Native American and Asian are even more limited (Foster, 2001, p. 22). Being a foster parent is not always looked at positively by others who may not understand the importance of the work that a foster parent does each day on behalf of children and families. Foster parents receive children into their homes

that they know very little about, sometimes not even a name. These children often arrive with only the clothes on their back and no other belongings to call their own, may be ill due to the neglectful actions of their parents or caregivers, may have been exposed to environments where domestic violence was a normal occurrence and may have been living in an environment where drug use and manufacturing has been occurring.

Children in foster care are very aware of how they are perceived by other people due to the fact that they are placed out of their own homes and this has a direct impact on how they perceive themselves. Being referred to as the “F” word or “foster” child for some youth can be embarrassing and humiliating and is information that they try to protect (Zimet, M., 2014). Being a foster child brings with it feelings of being unworthy or damaged and this is the image that society needs to change to improve the image of foster care (Zimet, M., 2014). National CASA requested an on-line Harris poll to see how people perceive foster care and foster children which discovered that 83% of people had little awareness of the experience of foster care and only 11% had any positive perception of foster care or foster children (National CASA, 2009). The stigma of foster care is felt by the youth in care. Jason Lowe, former foster youth from California refers to being in foster care as being in exile from society and to change this perception, has started efforts to start a chapter of California Youth Connection for other youth like him in rural Calaveras County (Nicols, D. 2013). Having properly trained foster parents and a positive perception of foster care can help those children and youth who have to enter foster care have a better self-image.

Knowledge of the System

As a social worker with nineteen years of experience in county Child Welfare Services, I have had the opportunity of working with many different foster parents over the course of my professional career. These individuals and families have come from all different backgrounds and for a variety of reasons have opened their homes to help children and families in need. These people bring with them their own worldviews and they have a variety of skill levels. Some foster parents enjoy having babies and small children in their homes while other foster parents like the challenge of a teenager or want sibling groups or special needs children. Each individual has their own preference that fits into their lifestyle. They accept the challenge of having new people in their home and navigating the system to get services in place to help the child as well as have a social worker in their lives that may be asking them to complete a variety of additional tasks related to the child's care and have the child available for visitation each week with their parents. Being a foster parent is no easy task and over time some foster families make the choice to no longer open their homes. The reasons for this decision is not necessarily always known but it can be assumed that they become tired or burnt out from the twenty-four hour job of raising the community's neediest children who may present with challenging behaviors or crazy schedules. Some foster parents may adopt children from the foster care system and reach a point where they no longer have room in their home for any more children, even those that may only need temporary shelter due to licensing requirements (CDSS, Community Care Licensing, 2007).

Recruitment and Retention

Children in foster care in California come from two systems, the dependency system where they are a victim of abuse or neglect by their primary caregiver or through the juvenile justice system where the youth has broken the law resulting in removal from their family home if it is decided that the parents cannot provide adequate supervision (Foster, 2001). According to the report by Foster, over half of the children in care in 2001, were there due to neglect and that continues to be a primary reason for entry in to care currently as well. There could be a link to poverty, family violence, and substance abuse leaving families to cross multiple agencies within the system (Foster, 2001).

The reasons for an individual to enter into the world of foster parenting can be varied but includes things like filling an empty nest, wanting to adopt, getting a companion for an only child or caring for a relative's child (S. Rodger, et al, 2006). In research done by S. Rodger, a survey completed by 652 foster parents in Ontario, Canada, they found that the primary reason for people becoming a foster parent was to provide a loving home to child in need (2006). The foster parents who had a good relationship with agency staff did not report wanting to quit foster care (S. Rodger, et al, 2006).

In a qualitative study with foster parents in Canada, the researchers examined the motivation, support and retention of foster parents (MacGregor, T., Rodger, S., Cummings, A. & Leschied, 2006). In the focus groups completed for the study, the foster parents cited intrinsic reasons for wanting to be a foster parent like wanting to make a difference in the life of a child and a desire to have children back in their home as their

own have grown and to show their own children a life lesson like giving back to others (MacGregor, et al, 2006). Having a good relationship with the agency staff and having open communication was important in retaining foster parents as was having their opinion valued as a part of the child's team (MacGregor, et al 2006). There was recognition that social worker turnover damaged the relationship between the foster parents and the agency. Foster parents need to know that they can trust the social worker and that they are being shared valuable information about the children placed in their homes so that they can provide the best care (MacGregor, et al, 2006). Resource support, immediate assistance in a crisis, having respite care available for foster parents , training available to address the special needs of the children in care and having support available from other foster parents were also identified as motivating factors for retention (MacGregor, et al, 2006). These same factors were also considered when discussing recruitment efforts for new foster families (MacGregor, et al, 2006).

In a study done by Deborah Gibb and Judith Wildfire in 2006, they looked at the length of time that people were committing to being a foster parent after being licensed. With the research took three types of data including placement records for children, foster parent licensure and the individual foster parent characteristics (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2006). The focus was on non-relative care and they found that the median length of service was eight months in two states and fourteen months in the third state which was well below the time that many kids even spend in foster care (Gibbs, et al, 2006). The study found that approximately one fifth of the foster parents in the three states provided 60-80% of all foster care and the foster parents with the greater length of service is associated with

being older, living in metropolitan areas and being engaged in many foster parenting activities (Gibbs, et al, 2006). Within the three states in the study, 47-62% of the foster parents who were licensed had left foster parenting within a year of their first placement (Gibbs, et al, 2006).

Quality Parenting Initiative

The Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) was the result of a lawsuit in 2004 in the State of Florida that was brought against that state after it was discovered that hard to place foster children were being held overnight in office conference rooms or being moved every day or two to a new home because there were no permanent placements available for these children (Schauffer, C., 2012). Within Florida, the identified principles behind QPI were simple beginning with foster parenting being a brand that creates a clear picture and set of expectations in a person's mind which be either positive or negative. The negative view can lead to increased problems with recruitment and retention. To make changes to the foster care brand, all those working in Child Welfare Services (CWS) need to agree on roles and expectation of foster parents and they need to decide on a brand statement for foster care. Once a change is agreed upon, the CWS system needs to support the change (Schauffer, 2012). The QPI process needs to involve those that would be part of the change in the decisions on how the changes should be made including foster parents, child welfare staff, licensing workers, court staff and even parents and youth if possible. Once agreed upon, the changes should be made quickly with an agreement that the changes will be continuous. The idea is that efforts at

recruitment would need to wait until the agreed upon changes to what being a foster parent means had been made successfully (Schauffer, 2012).

In 2009, the California Department of Social Services and the Child Welfare Directors Association collaborated around Quality Parenting Initiative to strengthen the efforts around recruitment and retention of foster families in the state (California Department of Social Services-Quality Parenting Initiatives, 2007). The Youth Law Center looked at QPI as an answer to strengthening the foster care system in California. The goal of the process was to insure that children coming into care would have effective, loving parenting and to rebrand foster care, removing the negative connotation (Youth Law Center, 2012). Within California, the Youth Law Center identified three key elements of their change work with foster care which included defining the expectation of the caregiver, to clearly articulate these expectations and to align the system so that the identified goals can become a reality (2012). Within California, the major successes by programs who have adopted the QPI brand is that it reduced unplanned placement changes, reduced the use of group care, reduced the number of siblings being separated in care and made some successful improvements within the reunification process (Youth Law Center, 2012).

How the image of being a foster parent is viewed by those living in a small rural community like Del Norte can be the difference between finding quality people to be foster parents and risking not having adequate homes to meet the needs of the children who are in out of home placements. QPI offers a way for the agency to develop a positive image of being a foster parent with input from all the players like the foster

parents, foster youth, agency staff and the people who provide services to the children and youth in care.

Method

The method section addresses the process to determine how the focus of the questions for the interviews was determined, the nature of the choice to engage in open ended questions and dialogue with the potential participants and the identified process to gather the data. The eleven interview questions were developed to look at various areas of services and information related to foster parenting and the interactions with the licensing agency and the community (Appendix B). Open ended questions were utilized as a way to start a dialogue with the foster parents taking into consideration that they would all bring their own worldview and experiences to the conversation. The initial survey question was about how long each foster home had been licensed and was asked as a way to gauge the depth of experience. Being a foster parent is very different for people depending on where they are living, what types of children they take into their home or what support they perceive to be getting from those around them, both personally and professionally.

Implementation

The interviews collected qualitative data from the licensed foster parents of rural Del Norte County which is located in the Northwest corner of the state, sharing a border with Oregon (Appendix E). The list of potential participants included twenty-seven county licensed foster homes. The foster homes were sent an informational flyer (Appendix A) about the project and an informed consent form (Appendix C) by mail. The information let potential participants know that they would be receiving a telephone call

from a graduate student of Humboldt State University. The potential participants were allowed at least ten days between the mailing of the information about the project and the first telephone calls being made by the researcher. Each foster home that was contacted was asked to have at least one of the adults in the home who were on the foster care license to participate in the interview. To support and encourage participation in the project, the local foster care mentor mentioned the project on the Del Norte Foster Parent Facebook page, encouraging participation in the process by the county foster parents.

During the phone call, the informed consent form (Appendix C) was reviewed with the participants to insure that they understood their rights and were reminded they had the ability to decline to participate or to withdraw from participating at any time during the process. The participant was asked to give a verbal consent to participate and have their interview tape recorded. The researcher asked questions to insure that the participant understands the purpose of the interviews they were agreeing to participate in. The plan to insure the confidentiality of the participant was explained and any other questions about the project were answered. The interviews with the participants were scheduled in sixty (60) minute time blocks to be conducted over a speaker phone so that the information could be recorded by the iPad tape recording application. The interviews included eleven open ended questions (Appendix B).

Telephonic interviews were chosen over in-person interviews based first on the knowledge that foster parents are extremely busy people and their time is valuable. Their first job is to provide care for the children placed in their care. The use of the telephone was also considered to be a way to reduce any anxiety for the participants. The telephone

interviews were thought to be a way to increase honesty and to encourage the participants to be more forthcoming with their answers than if they were being interviewed in person. The telephone offers a buffer to allow the participants to say things that may be less positive or may be critical of the work of the agency staff. To address the potential issues or concerns about confidentiality, the researcher reminded participants that the information would only be accessible in the original format by the researcher and the university instructor until deleted.

Following the completion of all of the interviews, the information was reviewed by the researcher who listened to each interview, documenting the answers of the participants to the various questions. The answers from the interviews was reviewed for themes and then categorized. The interviews were deleted after the information was documented to insure the confidentiality of the participants.

Results

The survey of licensed foster parents was undertaken to collect qualitative data regarding the recruitment and retention of foster parents in Del Norte County. The result section will provide a summary of the answers provided by the participants to the interview questions. The participant list consisted of twenty seven county licensed foster parents. Fifteen interviews were completed and two people declined to participate in interviews. This translates into over 50% participation rate. The interviews were conducted over a three week period at various days and times at which the researcher was able to reach people by telephone. The interviews were scheduled for sixty minutes but when conducted, they averaged between fifteen to thirty minutes. The potential participants had to answer the telephone and participate in the interview at the time of the call or schedule a follow up time for the researcher to call back as the interview needed to be audio recorded. The researcher was not able to leave a message to have potential participants call back at their leisure when there was not an answer to the initial call due to the need to have the ability to audio record the interview in a private space. The remaining potential participants were not able to be contacted during the time when the interviews were being conducted.

The results collected information related to six main categories relating to foster parenting and becoming or remaining licensed, including reasons for becoming licensed, rewards of foster parenting, challenges of being a foster parent, barriers to the licensing process, relationship with the agency staff and foster parent training. The questions

related to stigma around foster parenting and whether a current foster parent would recommend being a foster parent to other people did not elicit a large amount of qualitative data. For some participants, the responses to these questions were yes and no answers without elaboration or they did not have any information in that area. The length of time in which the participants had been licensed providers was gathered to give perspective on the depth of experience for the pool of participants.

The range of experience for the county licensed foster parents was from three months to fifteen years of being a licensed to take foster children into their homes. With such a large span of time, the participants had various experiences with having foster children in their home from having never had a placement to having over fifty placements during their foster parenting career. The experiences of the various participant was wide and spanned a range of reasons as to why a person chose to enter the world of foster parenting including wanting to help a child in need, wanting to be available for a family member who may enter the foster care system, having a relative or close friend who at one time may have been involved in the system or having a family member or spouse who was adopted or had been in foster care in the past. The participants also indicated that they just enjoyed children or they had reached a point in their lives where they had time to give back to their community and their home was able to accommodate having children or they had experienced abuse and neglect in their own childhood, wanting now to make a difference for other children (Appendix D).

The participant's response to having barriers with the licensing process was different depending on the amount of time they had been licensed, ranging from no

barriers to several identified problems with the process. The perceptions of barriers to licensure were lack of accurate information at orientation, the financial burden to getting set up and a process that was difficult to navigate and not streamlined. There was feedback that the licensing worker is not approachable and a checklist of what will be expected during a home inspection would allow for completion of the requirements in one visit as opposed to several. The participants expressed frustration with the necessary training not being available in a timely manner to allow for the completion of the licensing process. However there was also feedback that the process was manageable and without complications.

Being a foster parent can be described as both rewarding and challenging as foster parents open their homes to children whom they may know very little about. The participants expressed things like being able to see a child grow and blossom, watching children be successful with the structure of foster care, being given an opportunity to support a child's social and emotional development, being a safety net for children in need, having an opportunity to nurture a child both physically and emotionally and providing a stable environment for a child being rewarding experiences for people entering the world of foster care (Appendix D).

The participants also noted that being a licensed foster parent has challenges including things like being able to work with a diverse population of people from the agency staff to the service providers to the biological families of the children, uncertainty for the future of the children that have been placed in their homes, lack of communication between the foster parent and the agency social worker about the case, the child's care or

the future plan. The participants express that the appearance of inconsistency in the rules for the parents around visitation, contacts and interactions, lack of normalcy for the children in care due to the expectations of the court and other service providers, lack of daycare funding available for foster parents and at times letting the children return to situations that they have little information about a child's well-being were also challenging.

Within Del Norte County, the majority of the licensed foster parent report having a good working relationship with the agency social workers and support staff. The participants did express that at times a particular situation or staff person may cause conflict but this is not viewed at as an agency problem. The main request from the foster parents was to have increased communication about the children in their care and the direction of the case, to be kept in the information circle about the children placed in their home and knowing what the social worker and/or agency expects of them as the care provider in the case (Appendix D).

Ongoing training is a requirement of being a licensed foster parent. Training can be completed in person or on-line. Many participants indicated that the trainings that they did attend were adequate and they had a positive experience. The participants' biggest obstacle to participating in the training that is offered in the county was the lack of child care being available to the foster parents. Other identified problems with foster parent training is the times and days that training is offered, lack of a variable schedule for training for those people who work outside the home and may be working when

training is being offered, getting a variety of speakers or presenters to provide the training and being offered other options if unable to attend in-person trainings (Appendix D).

Many of the answers to the various questions by the participants were similar and some participants did not have answers for all the questions based on their level of experience therefore each category does not have fifteen different answers (Appendix D).

Discussion

Foster parents are key players in the success of families who have their children in out of home care. The interviews of parents provided some basic information about foster parenting and how the agency can proceed with their efforts of recruitment and retention but they also shed light on some of the gaps in the current process. The interviews that were conducted had limitations but they were able to identify areas where improvements can be made in the current efforts being engaged utilized in the county. The project can be a starting point for future work to improve all types of out of home care being provided for the children of Del Norte County.

Foster parents provide day to day care for children whose parents are unable to do so. People who chose to be foster parents come to the decision for a variety of reasons but there is a theme of altruism. The main reasons for people going down the path of foster parenting is because they see a need in the community and they want to help those less fortunate than themselves. Some people have had their own lives intersect with the world of foster care by either coming from a dysfunctional or abusive family or because they know someone who has been adopted or they have extended family that is involved in the Child Welfare Services system. The results from the survey of Del Norte County foster parents are similar to those found in the literature where the motivation for becoming a foster parent was because they wanted to help children (Rodgers, 2006).

Communication is a key factor in keeping a positive relationship with foster parents and the CWS agency. Foster parents want to be a part of the team that is working for the best interest of the child and not informed after decisions have been made. Foster parents hold key information about the children that are entrusted to their care because they are with them twenty-four hours a day. They have been first hand witnesses to what these children are going through when they are removed from their homes and the people they know.

Becoming a foster parents has challenges in that there are a lot of upfront costs that need to be dealt with before someone even gets a license issued such as CPR and First Aide classes, purchasing the basic items to meet the licensing requirements like beds and dressers and maybe even a larger car if you need room to transport extra children. Foster parents need training to address the problems that they may encounter with the children that come into their homes. The children in foster care may have been exposed to the drug culture, experienced domestic violence first hand, or been direct victims of abuse and neglect. The children coming into foster care will have needs and they exhibit behaviors that are not experienced in a regular family setting.

Del Norte County is part of a contract with Humboldt County which is located to the south (Appendix E) to get foster and kinship education services through College of the Redwoods (College of the Redwoods, n.d.). This arrangement has meant that the Humboldt area office is in charge of setting up foster care training for Del Norte County. There have been problems getting trainers and scheduling for the county. The current and prospective foster families need resources like child care to be provided during

training time so that more of the foster parents can regularly attend. The foster parents have to pay for day care or only one of the foster parents get the chance to attend in a two parent household.

As systems theory highlights, it is a process of working with people in their environment and acknowledging the makeup of the community, its strengths, its weaknesses and its needs that will lead to change that will be able to be sustained over time (Robbin, S., Chatterjee, P. & Canda, E., 2006). The need for foster parents is a community issue and cannot be considered a problem for others to solve. Our society has a vulnerable population of children who are not able to fend for themselves. The easy answer to this problem is to be able to recruit and retain quality people who can be that safety net. By asking the current providers what is working for them, we can start to gain a perspective of how to build on the positive aspects of foster parenting, identify the areas of weakness and strengthen the process to recruit qualified people to join the foster parent ranks. The ultimate outcome will be that the county is able to retain those who have shown great skill and promise to meet the day to day challenges of foster parenting.

Limitations

The foster parents survey for this project was limited in that the interviews were only conducted with the Del Norte County licensed foster parents and the pool of participants was small. As the need for foster homes exceeds those available on the licensed list, the county also has a pool of relative and tribal homes. This additional pool of people may have been able to give richer detail on being a foster parent in the county. Relative and tribal foster parents may not have chosen to be foster parents but

join the ranks of out of home care providers by their personal or familial relationships with a child and their family. They are now providing care for foster children in their homes and navigating the Child Welfare Services system. Due to the limits on time to complete the project, only one set of potential participants was selected. The setting is also very rural; located in the Northwest most corner of California. This is a unique area and the information may not be applicable to larger communities or urban areas.

Completing research in a rural area can be challenging for several reasons including the graduate student researcher being an employee of the community agency that works directly with the county foster parents. There is always a fear that this could lead to the information the foster parents provide could negatively affect their working relationship with the Department. There can be a fear that even though the research is looking for themes in the information being provided, due to the size of the community, the information could be tied back to a particular person even with all of the safeguards that are being adhered to. The manner in which the information was gathered could have also been considered a limitation and had an impact on the data gathered. The participants engaged in a telephonic interview with the researcher but they may not have been as open as they could have been if they had completed a written or on-line survey. This potential limitation was weighed against not getting enough written surveys returned from the potential participants and the telephonic interview was chosen.

Recommendations

Child Welfare Services is a mandated practice in the United States and there is always going to be a need for foster parents when children cannot remain in the care of their parents. Having quality foster parents available for children in need should be a community goal and therefore as a social worker, it is important to build this precious resource. This survey of the county licensed foster parents can be a starting point for future changes to the recruitment and retention efforts by Del Norte County. The ultimate goal would be to increase the number of licensed foster homes available to meet the needs of the county.

The project focus has been on the licensed foster homes in Del Norte County and not including the county certified relative homes, tribal home or the non-related extended family members (NREFM) homes who also must go through an approval process. The reason behind this focus is that to become a licensed home to take any child that may enter foster care requires the applicant to be willing to attend training, get a physical, and meet various home requirements and to get CPR and first aid certified (CDSS-Community Care Licensing, 2007). There is a commitment to the process that can also be financial if a person needs to purchase items to pass the licensing inspection or to meet the physical or training requirements as well as pay for their fingerprinting for all adults 18 years of age and older living in the home. The certified homes are exempt from several of these licensing requirements because they are only allowed to take the particular child or sibling group that the approval is granted for. To continue this work on building resources, there could be surveys or interviews completed of the relative,

non-related extended family members and tribal placements that may give a different perspective on recruiting and keeping foster homes in the present day. Future researcher could delve more deeply into how to build a larger pool of potential placements for children by continuing the dialogue that has started with this set of telephonic interviews. Del Norte County also has four local Indigenous tribes and a joint effort could be undertaken with these tribal entities to increase resources for the Indigenous population in the community.

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Appendix A

Project Information Flyer

Foster Parents Perspective on Recruitment and Retention in Del Norte County

As a licensed foster parents in Del Norte County are being asked to be part of a research project that is designed to gather information about your job as a foster parent. The information from this interview will be shared with the Del Norte County Department of Health and Human Services in an effort to improve the recruiting and retaining of foster parents for the community.

If you agree to participate in the interview, it will be conducted by telephone and will be a total of eleven questions that will explore areas related to how people came to choose to become foster parents and their experiences as foster parents. The interviews will also explore the relationship with the county agency, what are the problems or barriers with foster parenting in the county and what can be done to improve the current relationships and increase recruitment of foster families in the county. The interview should last no longer than sixty (60) minutes.

The initial interviews will audio recorded and then later reviewed by the researcher for information and themes. Once the information is reviewed, the audio recording will be deleted and there will be no identifying information gathered to connect the information to the participants. The information gathered will be reported out as themes or trends and no specific quotes or statements will be used to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

The researcher will answer any questions you have about this study. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time. The process will have no risks and any discomfort should be no more than that encountered in daily living. The data collected will be placed on a zip drive that will be stored in a locked file cabinet for three years, at which point it will be destroyed. Responses are confidential and no identifying information will be used in the stored data, analyzing of data or written reports.

The researchers conducting this study are Julie Cain and Prof. Yvonne Doble. If you have questions later about your participation or about the study, you may contact Julie Cain at Julie.Cain@humboldt.edu or at (707) 954-1490. You can reach Prof. Yvonne Doble at Yvonne.Doble@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4365.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

Please retain this form for your future reference. Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been a foster parent in Del Norte County or any other county or state?
2. What initially brought you to want to become involved with foster parenting?
3. What are the things you find most rewarding with being a foster parent? Why?
4. What are the things that you find most challenging about being a foster parent? Why?
5. How do you view your relationship with the Department of Social Services? The social workers? The visitation staff? Why?
6. Although you may have a good working relationship with the Department and staff, what would or could improve you relationship with the Department; the social worker; the agency staff?
7. How do you view the training provided to the foster parents in the county? It is adequate to meet your needs with the children you have or have previously had in your care?
8. Do you have any suggestions on how training for foster parents can be improved in the county?
9. What were the barriers, if any, that you encountered when you first applied to become a foster parent? Do you have any suggestions on how those barriers could have been alleviated?
10. Would you or have you at any time recommended becoming a foster parent to other people? Why or why not?

11. A concern that has been expressed on a community level is that foster parenting or foster care has developed a negative stigma. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Do you have any suggestion on how the image of foster parenting can be improved?

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Foster Parents Perspective on Recruitment and Retention in Del Norte County

You are being asked to participate in a telephone interview about being a foster parent. The interview should last no more than one hour.

The interview will be eleven (11) questions and will be audio recorded. The audio recording will later be reviewed to look for themes of information. Following the review, the audio recording will be deleted.

To protect your confidentiality, we will not use your name and no direct quotes or statements will be used.

Your participation is voluntary and you can quit at any time, skip any question you do not want to answer or decline to participate.

The researcher will answer any questions you have about this study.

The Information collected through this project will be included in a master's project manuscript, which will be available digitally to the public through the HSU library.

The researchers conducting this study are Julie Cain and Prof. Yvonne Doble.

If you have questions later about your participation or about the study, you may contact Julie Cain at Julie.Cain@humboldt.edu or at (707) 954-1490. You can reach Prof. Yvonne Doble at Yvonne.Doble@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4365.

If you have any concerns with this study, contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Dr. Ethan Gahtan, at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545. If you have questions about you rights as a participant, report them to the Humboldt State University Dean of Research, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

Please retain this form for your future reference. Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix D

Interview Results
Reasons for becoming a foster parent
<p>To provide for a child in need Had family member/friend involved in Child Welfare Services system Family member adopted Wanted to give back to the community Enjoys working with children Brought in by a friend who was foster parent Had room for children in large home Give a child a better life Give a child a chance at life Wanted a larger family/ to adopt children Had been exposed to foster parenting by extended family/friends Unsure of reason</p>
Rewards of Foster Parenting
<p>Seeing children change/grow Helping kids move forward Helping kids be successful Promoting kids Watching children blossom with structure Opportunity to nurture a child physical and emotionally Provide child a stable environment Good feeling from helping children Learning something new from each child Giving babies/small children a better start in life</p>
Challenges of Foster Parenting
<p>Dealing with the Child Welfare Services office Licensing social worker Lack of communication between Social Worker and Foster Parent about the case The things kids have to go through in system-visits Lack of normal life for child Finding daycare for foster parents who work out of the home Inconsistency with the rules for parents Uncertainty of the future for the child Not always being in the loop regarding the child's case Working with bio-parents who undermine the placement and don't understand the foster parents role with the children Foster children have a hard time being a regular kid with all the services and things that are required</p>

Interview Results Cont.
Relationship with the agency
<p>Case by case depending on worker</p> <p>Not having enough experience to ask the right questions</p> <p>Good when there is communication and foster parent knows expectations and feel heard</p> <p>Increased communication would be a benefit</p> <p>Need concrete, direct information from the social worker</p> <p>Want to be kept informed about the case</p> <p>Feels it is good, positive</p> <p>Staff overworked and information not always shared timely</p>
Barriers to the licensing process
<p>Initial orientation meeting by Department was terrible</p> <p>Information about home inspection not provided up front</p> <p>Amount of upfront costs to becoming licensed- furniture, beds, supplies</p> <p>Paperwork/ application process is time consuming</p> <p>Having the PRIDE/Pre-Service class available on a regular basis</p> <p>Delay licensing when classes not available</p> <p>Foster parents to attend orientation to answer more real life questions about foster parenting</p>
Training
<p>Child care to be provided for foster parents to attend</p> <p>Getting more speakers to come to train from other areas</p> <p>Orientation was out of date and conflicting information was given out</p> <p>Positive experience with the CR training</p> <p>Classes provided at alternate times and days</p> <p>Want more than on-line training for those that cannot attend the usual days</p> <p>Training provided in county is adequate</p>

Appendix E

Map of California Counties

