

fostering perspectives

MAY 2018 • VOL. 22, No. 2

WWW.FOSTERINGPERSPECTIVES.ORG

Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

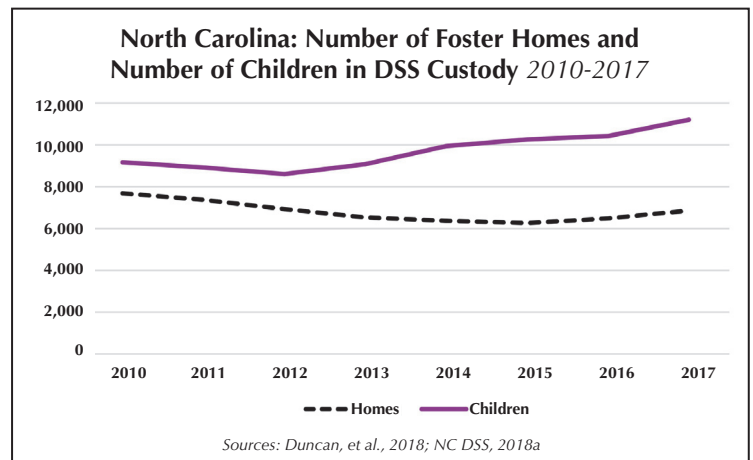
Resource families can help with recruitment, retention

Child welfare professionals have long known that resource parents can be powerful allies when it comes to finding new foster parents. Indeed, when they are creatively involved in an agency's efforts, current foster parents and kin caregivers may be the single best recruitment tool there is.

Given present trends in foster care, the time has come for us to truly put this knowledge into practice. As the figure at right shows, in North Carolina the number of children in foster care is rising steadily. Many other states are seeing this growth, which is due to a variety of factors, including the opioid epidemic.

This trend is expected to continue, at least in 2018. At the same time, as the figure also shows, there are fewer foster homes in our state today than there were in 2010.

This issue of *Fostering Perspectives* discusses these trends, explores what North Carolina and its agencies are doing to improve this situation, and suggests ways you can help.



Diligent recruitment of families for children in care in NC

Recruitment and retention of families for children in foster care matters a great deal. When we have enough foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers, it is easier to place children in their home communities and school districts. More siblings can stay together. Careful matching with caregivers is easier. Children awaiting adoption don't have to wait as long for forever families.

Knowing this, North Carolina built a network of county and private agencies to find and support resource families. For a snapshot of this network and other North Carolina foster care and adoption facts, see the box at right.

But there's a problem. Nationally, the number of young people living in foster care is rising. At the same time, many states are struggling to recruit and keep enough foster families. Ours is one of them.

What the Data Says

In North Carolina, the data shows a concerning trend. Between 2010 and 2016, the number of children and youth in foster care in the U.S. increased 8%, rising from 404,878 to 437,465 (USDHHS, 2015; 2017). In North

Carolina, the rise was greater. In July 2010, there were 9,167 young people in DSS custody in North Carolina. By July 2017, there were 11,204—a 22% increase (Duncan, et al., 2018).

As the figure above shows, during this same period, the number of foster homes in North Carolina actually dropped, moving from 7,684 in 2010 to 6,828 in 2017—an 11% decrease (NC DSS, 2018a).

This is not to say that North Carolina has not been focused on foster parent recruiting. In fact, between 2013 and 2017, our state's child-placing agencies added approximately 1,500 new foster homes each year (NC DSS, 2018c). But an equal or greater number of families have stopped fostering each year due to adoption and other reasons.

In 2015 during the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), federal reviewers concluded our state needed to improve its system for recruiting and retaining resource families. Reviewers found our state could not show that routine, statewide diligent efforts were being made to find families for children in foster care with special *continued next page*

North Carolina Foster Care & Adoption Facts

Foster Homes

6,895 foster homes as of Jan. 31, 2018:

- 39% were family foster homes supervised by county DSS agencies
- 61% were either family or therapeutic foster homes supervised by private agencies

Foster Care Agencies*

- 100 public/county DSS agencies
Listed here: <https://bit.ly/2H58UHQ>
- 78 private child-placing agencies
Listed here: <https://bit.ly/2GM3Zh7>

Adoption Agencies*

- 100 public/county DSS agencies
Listed here: <https://bit.ly/2H58UHQ>
- 43 private adoption agencies
Listed here: <https://bit.ly/2uDuSiz>

* As of March 19, 2018

Adoptive Homes

- 11,335 children adopted from foster care from 2007 to 2014

Sources: NC DSS, 2018b; USDHHS, 2017

Diligent recruitment in NC continued from previous page

needs, or to find resource families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children in care. They also noted North Carolina did not provide consistent standards for agencies to use in diligent recruitment, nor did it have a system for monitoring diligent recruitment.

Determined to Do Better

North Carolina is determined to improve. To drive needed changes, our state set about recreating its *Diligent Recruitment and Retention (DRR)* plan. The NC Division of Social Services, the state agency that oversees our child welfare system, began by enlisting the help of the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment and forming a workgroup with representatives from the NC Division of Social Services, county DSS agencies, and private agencies. It then held regional stakeholder meetings between October 2016 and January 2017 to get input on the plan. These meetings were attended by more than 200 people with ties to the recruitment of resource families, and included foster and adoptive parents, former foster youth, staff from county DSS and private agencies, GALs, and others.

The workgroup compiled the notes from these meetings and, with the help of the National Resource Center, crafted the plan. The NC Division of Social Services released the new DRR plan June 15, 2017. You can find it here: <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/publications/>.

New Expectations for Agencies

To ensure consistent and diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children statewide, the state's DRR plan includes two new expectations for agencies.

1. Local DRR Plans. Now, each county child welfare agency must create its own annual *DRR Plan*. (Private child-placing agencies are encouraged but not required to have a plan.) These plans must describe how the county agency staffs and supports recruitment and retention and the barriers it experiences. Every plan must be developed with input from an inclusive group of stakeholders (for example, resource parents) and must lay out concrete strategies for recruiting and maintaining a sufficient pool of ethnically and racially diverse families who can provide ongoing safety for and meet the needs of children in foster care. Agency plans must also show how they are using data to inform and monitor their efforts.

North Carolina's county child welfare agencies have already created their first annual DRR plans and submitted them to the NC

What about the Rise in Foster Care Placements?

Resource family recruitment and retention is vitally important, but it's only part of the equation. What is behind the rise in the foster care population?

Our national struggle with opioid misuse is one likely cause. Overdoses, a measure of the seriousness of this epidemic, have risen dramatically in recent years. In the U.S., overdoses involving opioids killed 33,100 in 2015, up 69% from 2008 (NIDA, 2017).

The jump in overdoses coincides with the rise in foster care. For example, of the 16 westernmost counties in North Carolina, 14 have seen an increase in the number of children in foster care. In Buncombe, the largest of these counties, there number has almost doubled since 2010.

Many children entering foster care come from homes where parental addiction began with painkillers and moved on to other substances. Lisa Sprouse, director of social services in McDowell County, says lately 90% of children placed by her agency have tested positive for two or more drugs (Bordas, 2018).

While agencies try to assist families and cope with the expanding number of children in care, leaders at the national and state levels are also taking action.

In October 2017, the White House declared the opioid epidemic a national public health emergency. In November, the president's commission on opioids released a lengthy set

of recommendations, and in March 2018 the White House convened a summit on the opioid epidemic.

The new Family First Prevention Services Act (H.R. 253) is also promising: although the effects will not be immediate, this law gives states more flexibility to spend federal money on critical services—including substance abuse treatment—that can prevent the need for foster care.

North Carolina has developed an "Opioid Action Plan," with seven goals, including reducing the oversupply of prescription opioids, increasing access for North Carolinians to treatment and recovery supports, and purchasing and distributing nearly 40,000 life-saving naloxone kits.

It is hoped that these and future actions will have the desired effects. In the meantime, the need to find and sustain high quality resource families is more urgent than ever.

For more on NC's efforts, visit <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/opioids>

Division of Social Services. These plans go into effect July 1, 2018. County agencies must update and resubmit their plans to the state every year.

2. Data Profiles. Each county DSS and each private child-placing agency must also complete a *DRR Data Profile*. This allows us to make data-driven decisions regarding diligent recruitment and retention of resource families. This profile must include information about the children in foster care and the families who care for them, including demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity), average time between the first inquiry and when families are licensed, the number of children placed out of county and/or with outside agencies due to lack of available families, and more.

County DSS and private child-placing agencies will be required to update their DRR data profiles quarterly and share them with the NC Division of Social Services every year. Receiving data from supervising agencies will allow the state to share comprehensive statewide data on an annual basis to help inform ongoing local and statewide recruitment and retention efforts.

Supporting Statewide Efforts

The NC Division of Social Services itself is working hard to help the state bring about improvement. It has been:

- Gathering and reviewing existing data and developing targets for resource parent recruitment and retention and
- Providing training on, reviewing, and monitoring county agencies' annual Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) plans to ensure they reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

The Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act (House Bill 630), also focuses on recruitment of resource families by requiring the NC Division of Social Services to grant or deny new foster home licenses within three months of application. The Division currently processes licensing applications well within this timeframe.

You Have a Role to Play!

We have described what agencies and the state are doing to improve resource parent recruitment and retention in North Carolina. But as a foster or adoptive parent or kinship caregiver, you are in a fabulous position to help as well! No one can speak more persuasively or with more authority than you about the rewards of caring for children in need. Even small actions on your part can make a big difference to this overall effort. The rest of this issue is filled with inspiration and ideas for how you can contribute.

You can really make a difference in your agency's efforts to recruit foster parents

An Interview with Foster Parent Sollenski "Sky" Webb by Jonathan Rockoff

I recently had a chance to speak with foster parent Sollenski "Sky" Webb. Sky is licensed through Methodist Home for Children, a private foster care agency serving youth throughout the Central and Eastern part of North Carolina.

Sky was born and raised in Snow Hill (pop. 1,595) in Greene County, North Carolina, where she has been a foster parent since 2015. Over those three years, Sky has successfully fostered three different teenagers while also raising her two biological sons.

Throughout our conversation I asked Sky about how she has helped her agency and her community by assisting in the recruitment of foster homes, and why it is important to her to get involved in this process. *(This interview has been edited for style and length).*

First, why did you decide to become a foster parent?

I was actually raised by my grandmother, who took me into her home when I was at a young age. She was also quick to take in other children that needed a safe place to stay. I learned a great deal from her and quickly saw the importance of helping others. As I grew older I had two sons of my own. I wanted to have more children, but I decided it would be better if I helped out kids in my area that needed someone to care for them. I then made the choice to become a foster parent.

Why do you think it is important for foster parents to participate in recruitment efforts?

I see my role in helping with recruitment as very important. I have seen there are several misconceptions about what being a foster parent is really like, mostly because people haven't seen it in action for themselves.

People make assumptions based off of stereotypes or things they have heard. I have overheard people making sweeping state-

ments about how all foster kids are "bad" and questioning my decision to provide foster care.

I feel a responsibility to go out to tell and show people in my community that kids in foster care need someone to care for them. I need to model it so they can see me and say, "If Sky can do it, so can I!" It is manageable, even for a single mother with two children of her own.

What can foster parents share about fostering that staff may not be able to?

I actually made the decision to become a foster parent myself after speaking with a foster parent in my community.

A foster parent can share experiences and give advice in a way a staff person may not be able to because they live it every day. It is one thing to hear about the intricacies of foster care from a staff person, but it means a little more coming from a foster parent. However, it's still important to have assistance from staff to help with coordinating events and answering questions.

What are some ways you have helped with recruitment?

I have held information sessions alongside staff where people from the community can walk in off the street and learn more. I've also spoken to prospective parents at TIPS-MAPP panel nights, posted flyers throughout my community, volunteered at agency events, and shared social media posts.

You've been busy! Are there positive recruitment experiences you can share?

I have helped recruit five licensed families from my community. I have really enjoyed having the chance to meet people and helping the amount of foster homes in my area grow, as I know there is certainly a need. I'm happy to share the truth about foster care and be a face for it. I always try to

be honest about my experiences and encourage people to foster teenagers.

I have also seen my biological sons mature and grow throughout this process. They are welcoming and open to all of the children that come into our home, which makes me proud.

Why is it important for foster parents to help with recruitment in more rural areas with limited resources?

I'm able to help the staff secure locations and make connections they wouldn't have normally had. I can find spaces for information sessions and know where there is foot traffic for flyers. I can gather up groups of people and help to spread the word quickly. I have a certain knowledge about the area where I live, since I've lived here my entire life.

When foster parents speak with you, what advice do you give them when they're choosing an agency to work with?

Go with an agency that you have a good feel for. Choose to work with the agency that is responsive, supportive, and meets your needs. Do not be afraid to "shop around" a little to make sure you have found the right fit.

How can foster parents get involved if they want to help with recruitment?

Reach out to your contact in your



"I'm happy to share the truth about foster care.... I always try to be honest about my experiences and encourage people to foster teenagers."

agency and let them know you want to get involved! Explain that you can help them and explain the benefits of getting foster parents directly involved.

What would you say to a foster parent interested in assisting with recruitment?

Get out there and help! There is likely a need for great homes like you in the town you live in. Understand the tremendous positive influence you can have on other people when they see you doing great work. Be a role model to the youth in your home, and to your peers.

Jonathan Rockoff is a Training Specialist with the Family and Children's Resource Program at the UNC School of Social Work.

Ways Resource Parents Can Help with Recruitment

Sky describes many ways she partnered with her agency to help with resource parent recruitment efforts, including participating in agency information sessions, speaking during foster parent pre-service training, posting flyers in the community, and spreading the word through social media. Here are a few more ideas:

- Coordinate with your agency to make follow-up calls to prospective foster and adoptive parents.
- Reach out to your friends, family, and neighbors.
- Advise agencies on how to be culturally sensitive in their recruitment efforts.
- Share information with the agency about the newspapers you read, radio and TV stations you tune in to, and places you shop so that agencies can target their community education efforts.



Well-supported foster parents can help agencies with recruitment and retention by Wanda Douglas

Recruiting and retaining foster parents is never going to be easy. Becoming a foster parent

requires a lot of time and energy. So does **being** a foster parent. But it can also be one of the most rewarding experiences of a lifetime.

Foster parents know this better than anyone, which is why—if they get the support they need—they can be powerful partners in agency efforts to recruit and retain resource families.

Foster Parent Leaders

When foster parents get the support they need, some will step up to help their agencies recruit and retain more foster families. One of the most powerful ways they can do this is by helping lead training and continuing education opportunities.

Let me give you an example. Recently, I was teaching MAPP. At the end of the class, I told the parents if they ever needed me or had any questions, to please call or email me.

One did. When she got her first placement, she had questions and just wanted someone to talk it through with. I listened, supported, and encouraged her.

Last week I was teaching another MAPP class when she came to visit. With hugs and tears, she explained that because of our conversation, she was able to get through her placement issue and continue moving forward. She ended by saying she got a new job supporting the work we do with foster families and our faith-based community leaders. In fact, a couple she knows well is in the class I am teaching right now.

I have been asked so many times, *How did you get started? Where should I start? What*

has it been like for you and your family? I have even heard, I have been thinking about fostering but wanted to talk with someone who had fostered first.

Whether you are in front of a classroom or not, word of mouth is an important way to help with recruitment.

A Trauma-Informed Approach Matters

Foster parents cannot change what has happened to children. But they **can** do something about the way they respond to children when they come into care. A trauma-informed approach enables foster parents to focus more on the *experiences* of the children in their care as opposed to just their behaviors.

It is a skill to be able to understand that most children just want to be seen and heard and not just calmed down for a moment. Trauma-informed training teaches this skill, allowing parents to see what has *happened* to the child versus what is “wrong” with the child. When they can take a trauma-informed approach, not only are foster parents better able to help children, but I believe they are more likely to continue fostering.

Foster Parent Needs

To attract and sustain foster parents, agencies must understand what they need. There are no tricks or magic formulas. Timing, transparency, and open, honest conversations are all key. So are the following factors.

1. Continuing education. TIPS-MAPP and other pre-service curricula are designed to help people make an informed decision about whether to become a foster parent. Although they mention trauma, these courses do not teach trauma-informed care or the skills and knowledge parents actually need to look after children and teens in foster care.

Once the licensing process is complete, parents want and need education on many different subjects. In-service training is where the most important training needs must be met. The training agencies provide foster parents after licensure should be timely, high quality, and ongoing.

2. Respite. This is an absolute necessity to the retention of foster parents. When parents are provided an opportunity to just take a moment to breathe, to rest from the day-to-day, it provides them with the strength they need to continue the work they do.

3. Recognition. Every person wants to be recognized for their efforts. Foster parents are no exception. A card, a certificate of appreciation, a lunch—any expression of gratitude goes a long way and helps parents feel valued.

4. Relationship. It is critically important for the agencies to know their parents personally. If agencies want foster parents to deliver quality service to the youth and families, a cookie-cutter approach to partnering with and supporting resource families will not work in the long term.

Taking the time to develop a quality relationship with foster parents helps children. When foster parents feel their agency knows them, they will be more open and more willing to express their needs and share what’s working and what’s not.

5. Respect. Parents must know that the agency they represent truly cares about them and the work they do. Theodore Roosevelt said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Agencies must demonstrate that they value foster parents and their many efforts.

6. Timely, concrete support. Foster parents can face challenges in so many areas: behaviors of youth in care, communication with social workers, stress related to court, transportation, shared parenting—the list goes on. If agencies cannot provide meaningful support when it is needed, they will find it hard to hang on to good parents.

Conclusion

Sabrina Clark, someone I have trained with in the past, says, “The foundation of both successful recruitment and retention strategies must involve true caring, compassion, and empathy for not only our youth in custody, but also those being recruited and retained for their care.” I could not agree more.

Wanda Douglas is a veteran foster and adoptive parent in North Carolina.

Some Courses Currently Co-Taught by NC Foster Parents

In some agencies, the following courses are co-taught by foster parents.

The RPC Curriculum. This course, officially called “Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents,” is designed to be co-facilitated by a mental health/child welfare professional and foster parent. It includes nine case studies of foster children from the ages of eight months to 15 years, as well as cases of secondary traumatic stress in parents. This is a very impactful training because many children in foster or kinship care have a history of exposure to trauma. To learn more: <https://bit.ly/2pRENlz>

Helping Youth Reach Self-Sufficiency. This is a great experiential training that provides foster parents with the skills to go back into their communities and teach other foster parents how to equip youth aging out of foster care with the skills they need to live independently. To learn more: <https://bit.ly/2vE77Yf>

TIPS-MAPP (Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence: Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting). Most of North Carolina’s child-placing agencies use TIPS-MAPP to provide the mandatory 30 hours of training for prospective resource families. If this course is delivered as intended—co-led in true partnership by a foster parent and a child welfare professional—agencies may have a much better chance of retaining licensed parents. To learn more visit: <https://bit.ly/2pQgZb3>



Your support system is a key to your longevity as a foster parent

by Jonathan Rockoff

For years I had the honor of working alongside some of the most selfless people

I have ever met, individuals who opened their homes and hearts to children with a multitude of needs. These unheralded heroes I refer to are the foster parents of North Carolina. They are without doubt one of the most precious resources in the child welfare system.

When someone makes the decision to become a foster parent, they embark on one of the most rewarding journeys they will ever take. Yet if they aren't prepared, this journey can be surprisingly brief. Consider this: one study of data from three states found that between 47% and 62% of foster parents quit fostering within one year of the first placement in their home (Gibbs, 2005).

What is it that enables some families to make it past that first year? In my experience, one of the most important factors is a strong support system.

Your Support System Is Key

During pre-service training, agencies ask prospective resource parents to think about who they have in their life that will support them as they face the challenges that come with fostering. Though this makes a lot of sense, many new resource parents don't realize how critical this is to their future success. Their vision of a support system is limited to someone to provide occasional respite, answer a question here and there, and be a sounding board.

A support system can be all these things, of course, but it can and should be much more. Each child in care is different. So is every foster family. Each has different needs and types of support that will empower them to succeed.

Family and Friends

Family and friends are the foundation of support for many resource parents. For example, I have seen a single mother with no prior parenting experience and a full-time job beautifully parent two children under the age of one in large part thanks to her support system.

While this was an extremely strong-willed and resilient parent in her own right, before accepting the placements, she already had an established and benevolent support system in place. She had a dear family friend and a sister nearby she knew she could rely on, even when times were tough. They were fully on board. She spoke to them before becoming a foster parent and explained what she would need help with. They told her they would help whenever possible, and they lived up to this commitment.

Community Groups

The community can also play a big role lifting resource families up. For instance, I have seen families rely on church networks for reassurance, guidance, and support. I've also seen businesses and volunteer organizations donate time and tangible items to resource families. At one appreciation dinner, various groups gave their time, food, gifts, and talents to give foster parents an enjoyable evening and to let them know they are valued by their community.

Here's another example. I knew several families that participated in a support group for foster and adoptive families called Mercy for America's Children (<http://www.maccares.org/>), which is based in Wake Forest, NC. Once they became licensed, this group gave families opportunities to obtain continuing education, participate in events and trips, and be a part of a network of other foster and adoptive families that could provide support and genuine empathy.

The Role of Agencies

Agencies' role in supporting foster families should not be overlooked, either. Agencies can best support their families by valuing them, providing trauma-informed training, listening to them, and being responsive.

Turnover is less likely when foster parents feel heard and backed by their agency.

I have worked with several families who felt comfortable reaching out to their supervising agency for assistance with challenging child behaviors, guidance, and to serve as a sounding board to constructively solve problems. The families that felt more comfortable openly communicating with their supervising agencies were more likely to stick around and care for more children over time.

Well-supported foster parents are also more willing to share their experience with others in the community, which helps with recruitment.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it may take **two** villages to raise a child who has experienced trauma. When a foster parent has a strong support system within their family, friends, community, and agency, they gain confidence, are empowered, and can focus on meeting the needs of their children.

I would encourage any foster parent who does not feel supported or who feels stretched thin to reach out to their agency and their natural supports. Regardless of when you read this, there are children in foster care in North Carolina who need you.

Jonathan Rockoff, is a Training Specialist with the Family and Children's Resource Program at the UNC School of Social Work.



To give our best to our children, resource parents need support from each other

by Bob DeMarco

When children have experienced trauma, we sometimes need to parent them differently. This can make all the difference for our kids, but it can also lead us to isolate ourselves from those who can support us. Left unchecked, this can lead to ineffective parenting and a generally unhappy home.

Really, social interaction is a lifeline for resource parents. Spending time with others who have also given of themselves through fostering and adoption can be a significant source of rejuvenation and fuel in your parenting "gas tank."

Parenting a traumatized child is akin to running a marathon. We might be able to go the distance alone, but our chances of

finishing well dramatically increase when there are people handing us water along the way and we are invigorated by the energy that comes from those cheering us on. Who knows? If we run with friends, it might even be fun

Friends Who "Get It" Matter

Last spring was pure chaos in our home. For some unknown reason, two of our kids lost their sense of safety and so they began to act out in an effort to gain control. They ran away, found and used matches, stole and hid kitchen knives, had tantrums, and hid from us.

We had the police visiting us, we had hospitalizations, and we missed work due to school suspensions and meetings. My nerves were frayed, my fuse was short, my blood pressure was high, and I

wasn't sleeping well.

During that time we were hanging onto God, our friends, and each other for dear life.

Having close friends who "get it" provided a much needed outlet to express our anger, frustrations, secret thoughts, fears, and plans. And, since our trauma-informed friends were not as close to our situation as we were, they brought an informed and more objective viewpoint as we struggled for calmer waters at home.

The storm eventually subsided for us, but now our friends are in their own storm, and we are able to support them as they struggle to stay afloat.

Excerpted from "Together in the Trenches," which appeared in Fostering Perspectives v. 20, n. 2 (May 2016)

Three small North Carolina counties join forces to support resource parents

Every child-placing agency in North Carolina genuinely wants to support foster parents. Why wouldn't they? After all, it takes a lot of time, money, and effort to find, orient, train, and license potential caregivers for children and youth in foster care.

But providing the ongoing training, appreciation events, and networking opportunities needed to support and sustain resource parents can be a challenge, especially for small agencies, which typically have fewer people on staff and less in the way of resources.

And yet where there's a will, there's a way. This article describes how three neighboring county agencies in Western North Carolina discovered they can support foster parents more effectively by working together.

Three Small Counties

The counties in question—Jackson (pop. 41,265), Macon (pop. 34,201), and Swain (pop. 14,434)—are relatively small. As the numbers below show, so too are their local DSS foster care programs:

	Resource Families	Youth in Foster Care
Jackson County DSS	16	65
Macon County DSS	28	60
Swain County DSS	7	48

As Macon's Stacey Messer explains, the idea to pool efforts and resources arose when she and the foster home licensing staff in Jackson and Swain realized they faced many of the same challenges. These included finding training resources, arranging for child care, and paying for training and other events.

"Also, being the only licensing workers in our counties, we didn't get enough time to spend with all of our families," Messer says.

"We decided to maybe not spread ourselves so thin and work together so we could offer more to our families."

A Monthly Support Meeting

Jackson, Macon, and Swain use a monthly meeting to support their resource parents. They gather on the third Monday of every month from 6:00-8:00 p.m. So far, Jackson and Macon have alternated in hosting. Swain, which joined the partnership only recently, will host in the future as well.

The meetings are attended by foster families supervised by the three counties, prospective foster families (including those involved in pre-service training), adoptive families, and foster families from private agencies in the area. Messer adds, "Of course, we invite the children. Because if the children don't come, the parents often can't come because they don't have child care."

Child care is key. When the group meets, they gather at a church that donates space that includes separate classrooms for child care. Separate, child-friendly areas for children make a huge difference, Messer says. "This gives the adults some time to have some adult time—to have it quiet so they can really get the most out of the training."

The agencies use county adoption promotion funds to hire staff from a local child care organization. Initially they used DSS staff for child care, but found hiring professionals worked much better for everyone.

Food is also important. Each meeting starts with a potluck meal. The hosting county DSS provides an entree and families are asked to bring a dessert, beverage, or side dish.

"This helps your group bond," Messer says. Contributing to the meal gives families a sense of ownership and builds community.

Like a Family Reunion

Messer says if you've ever been to a family reunion, you can picture what these meetings are like. They set out the food first. The children fill their plates and go to their separate area. Then there's a little socializing time when the parents are getting their food,

"We use this time to try to attach and bond with our families," Messer says. Families also take time to admire each other's children. "The parents come to show their children's progress and to brag on how they're doing. We celebrate things in this meeting, like if an adoption's happened or a family's gotten licensed."

Training

After the meal and some announcements, most meetings feature a training. So far, all have been free to the families and to the host agencies. Many have been offered by Children's Home Society and Children's Hope Alliance, private child-placing agencies that



Stacey Messer

provide post-adoption support under contract to the NC Division of Social Services.

Other training providers have included a lawyer and agency director (presenting on court timelines), a GAL, and a foster parent who is a speech pathologist.

To agencies struggling to find appropriate training for resource families, Messer says, "I would

encourage you to look around in your community. Who might have something useful to say or share with your families?"

Other Community Partners

Jackson, Macon, and Swain are clear that their success owes a lot to partners in their local community. These include Watauga Church, which donates meeting space, Macon Program for Progress Childcare, whose staff they hire for the monthly meeting, and Discover Church, which attends the meetings and also meets the needs of resource families for items such as children's clothing, book bags, furniture, bedding, and holiday gifts.

A Host of Benefits

Taking a joint approach to resource parent support brings a host of benefits to all involved. Agencies, for instance, get a reliable venue for sharing information with families. Because it is a shared effort, it also costs each county less.

Families, naturally, are the big winners. They get an easy way to meet training requirements, a night when they don't have to cook, and a chance to connect with others on the same journey. This feels good and translates into tangible support—for example, they get to know more people they can turn to for respite or babysitting, and more people they can call for advice and encouragement. This kind of support renews their energy for their important, demanding work.

Lessons Learned: What Didn't Work

These counties have tried a number of different approaches—not all have been successful. Here are a few lessons learned they would like to pass on about what doesn't work.

Lunchtime Meetings. Messer says the first thing they tried was a "lunch and learn" approach. "We found was that even if we provided lunch, this was just not a good time for families to come. We had very poor attendance. This does not work!"

Required Attendance. Messer says this sets the wrong tone. "We really want to have this be a choice for the families and something that they want to do. Making it mandatory really takes away the support aspects of the group."

Open Agendas. When there's no speaker and no plan or structure, meetings are more likely to become venting sessions. Messer says it really helps to have a plan for each meeting, whether that's a speaker or a project you're going to work on.

Providing Child Care Yourself. Messer strongly advises hiring professional child care professionals and emphasizes the importance of having adequate space that is child-friendly.

Thinking of switching agencies? Don't be hasty!

If they feel they are not getting the support they need from their agency or they are unhappy for another reason, foster parents sometimes consider switching agencies. They wonder: could things be better elsewhere?

It's possible, of course. But transferring agencies can be messy and bumpy for everyone involved, including the children. Before you take such a drastic step, here are some suggestions that could improve your relationship with your current agency and social worker and make a transfer unnecessary.

1) Determine the exact nature of the problem and communicate your needs. Often, issues can be addressed by identifying what you need from your agency and then articulating those needs. Many times it is natural to attribute "intent" to a worker's action (or lack of action) before you know their side of the situation. For example, if your calls have not been returned, you may jump to the conclusion that the worker no longer cares about your family. In reality, it is possible that circumstances beyond her control prevented her from responding to you. As you learned in pre-service training, "we all have strengths and needs." This includes your social worker. Sometimes, by simply communicating clearly about those strengths and needs we see in ourselves and in others, we can resolve the issue at hand.

2) Use the chain of command. Customer service is important to all agencies. Agency leaders want to know what your experience is (good and bad) and your ideas for making their services better. When faced with an issue you cannot resolve directly with your social worker, take the issue to the worker's immediate supervisor. If necessary, take the matter up with that person's supervisor, and so on. Hopefully, the issue can be resolved.

3) Make use of your agency's, community's, and North Carolina's resources. If you are not receiving the support you desire from your social worker, are there other options at your agency or in your community to get the support you need? Seek out foster parent associations and support groups in your area or the surrounding community. Start a foster parent association at your agency if there isn't one. If you are not receiving enough support from your social worker, speak to your licensing or training social worker about ways they can support you. On a state level, the NC Division of Social Services' NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network helps parents across the state navigate common obstacles. Should you encounter an obstacle to fostering or adopting, contact NC Kids toll-free at 877-625-4371. In cases where you would like the state's opinion and/or intervention,

What Does North Carolina Best Practice Say?

If you are seriously considering transferring to another agency, it can help to know what policy requires of both agencies and foster parents during this process. For example, there is a great deal of emphasis on transparent, honest communication between the "current" agency and the "future" agency about the foster family. The following is an excerpt of North Carolina's foster home licensing policy, which you can find in full here: <https://bit.ly/2q3PdrG>.

Best Business Practice for Transferring Families

1. Always encourage families to make the effort to communicate with their current agency about what their problems or concerns are and to see if there is a way to fix those problems. It's the old Golden Rule! "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!" Don't you want your families to approach you first in an effort to improve or fix things before just giving up and transferring?
2. If they have tried to make things right with their current agency and still wish to transfer, have the family talk with their current supervising agency and let them know that they are meeting with you in an effort to see if your agency is a better match.
3. Spend several meetings with the family in an effort to get to know them and for them to get to know you/your agency. Suggested topics of discussion during these meetings:
 - How long have you been fostering? How many children have you fostered or provided respite?
 - Have you transferred your foster care license before? If so, why, when, etc.?
 - What have you learned from your experience?
 - What are your family's strengths/needs in fostering?
 - What are you looking for in future placements?
 - What are you looking for in your next agency?
 - Share your experiences with Shared Parenting. What did you learn? What would you have done differently?
 - Have you had any investigations in your home during your time fostering? If so, what was that process like for you? How did you overcome those obstacles? Did you get support from your agency?
 - What was your most challenging/rewarding placement?
 - What areas of training do you feel you need in order to meet the needs of children?
4. If you have spent some time with this family, and you and the family feel your agency is a good match, have them sign a release form and send this to the current agency.
5. Once the release form has been received and you have reviewed the material from the agency, schedule a time to speak with the current supervisor of the foster family and discuss the following:
 - What was your experience in working with this family?
 - What are their strengths/needs?
 - Did they work in partnership with CFT members?
 - How did they approach Shared Parenting?
 - Would you place children in their home again? If not, why?
 - How did they treat children?
 - Did they attend and engage in In-Service trainings?
 - What does this family need in order to be a successful foster family?
 - What type of placement would be most successful for this family?
 - Is there anything else I need to know about this family?
6. Ask the foster family to provide you with new reference reports.

call their toll-free customer service line at 800-662-7030.

4) Weigh your decision carefully. Research the new agency you are considering. The agency may require you to go through many steps you have already completed for your current agency, such as attending its 30-hour pre-service training program. Know, too, that your current agency and new agency will also share information. If you have not attempted to resolve your issues with your current agency, your new agency may not be open to working with you until you at least try. Most importantly, consider the needs and well-being of any children placed in your home. Consider how the transition to a new agency may affect them; have a discussion with the agency that

has custody of the children about any possible effects on the children before moving forward with switching agencies.

The one thing to keep in mind if you feel you are not being supported by your social worker or agency is that to meet the needs of children, foster parents and agencies must work in partnership. Working together as partners first and foremost involves communication. If after communicating with your social worker and agency you decide it is in everyone's best interest for you to switch to a new agency, keep those lines of communication open with both your current and new agency. This will help to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Adapted from Fostering Perspectives v19, n2 (May 2015)



Waiting for a placement can be frustrating by Becky Burmester

As a veteran foster parent (two decades and counting), I am familiar with licensed foster parents whose homes

have remained empty. These foster parents frequently contact their social workers seeking placements, yet no children are placed in their homes.

They ask themselves: Why is this happening? There is supposed to be such a need for foster families. The other people in my MAPP class have foster children in their homes. What's wrong with me and my family?

To people in this position, the first thing I would say is that placements are subjective. Agencies work with the foster parents that are easiest to work with most frequently. Placements must also meet the needs of the child. The foster parent's need for a placement is secondary at best.

If you've been waiting for a placement a long time, look closely at the profile you have presented to your agency. What types of children, coming from what types of situations have you indicated that you could feel comfortable parenting? If you have real anger with birth families, you are unlikely to receive placements unless TPR has already occurred. If you want children of only a certain age or ethnicity and children dealing only with spe-

cific issues, placements may be few and far between.

What do you have to offer children, birth families, and your agency? Are you eager to work at shared parenting? Are you able to be non-judgmental of birth families? Are you flexible as to the type of child or children you will foster? If you already have children of your own, how carefully have you addressed the impact new kids will have? What about the impact of temporary new kids?

Foster parenting is really a rather strange vocation. The job description goes something like this: raise someone else's children for as long as necessary, work closely with the parents to assist in the children being able to leave your home, identify needs the children have, bug other people to help get the needs met. If the children cannot return to the birth family, help them transition to permanency in your home or someone else's home.

Yes, there is a tremendous need for good foster homes, because agencies want to have homes waiting for children, not children waiting for homes. Your home may be the perfect placement for only a very few children and those children may not be in the foster care system at this time. Be patient!

When time passes and no children are placed in your home, it's normal to wonder why.

In the Meantime . . .

If you find yourself waiting for a placement, here are some things you can do in the meantime.

Respite. Offer to provide respite care for your agency. You can provide a welcome breather to another foster family and get a taste of fostering at the same time. Respite can be for a week, a weekend, or longer.

Link to other foster parents. Build friendships with other foster parents from your agency and get involved with the children placed in their homes. You can demonstrate the type of positive experience your agency could expect to have if they would place a child with you.

Talk to your worker. If, after several months and honest soul searching you have not yet had a child placed in your home, ask your licensing worker to meet with you to discuss the reasons why you have not had a placement.

Maybe you are trying to fill a fostering parent niche that your agency does not need filled (e.g., infants of a specific race or gender who have not been exposed to drugs or alcohol). Ask and be willing to hear what the worker has to say.

Reprinted from Fostering Perspectives, v11, n2 (May 2007)



"Stay Interviews" can help keep lines of communication open by Rick Zechman

Report cards. Visits. Court. Shared parenting. Medical and therapy appointments. Children's achievements. The list goes on. Resource parents and their agencies have a **lot** to talk about!

Unfortunately, "immediate," urgent topics tend to crowd out time for discussing important, longer-term things such as resource parents' satisfaction with their role, their relationship with the agency, how they've grown, and what they need to keep going.

The "stay interview" is one solution to this problem. In a way, stay interviews are like the "exit interviews" businesses hold with employees who are leaving. But while exit interviews are about learning from someone who is on the way out the door, stay interviews are about discovering why people do what they do and how to hang on to them. They are a way for the agency to learn what resource parents love about fostering and how it can support them better.

See the box at right for some sample ques-

tions for a stay interview with resource parents. Stay interviews should be done on a regular basis—at least once or twice a year.

If you don't already have stay interviews with your agency, consider asking your worker to set aside time during a visit to talk not only about questions and concerns, but about what would help you be a better resource parent. For example, maybe you'd like training on a particular subject. Your agency may have other resource parents with the same need, which could lead to larger training opportunities. Or, the agency could connect you with someone with expertise in the subject.

Stay interviews are not a cure-all, but they are a way to strengthen your relationship with your agency and keep lines of communication open. If your agency consistently listens to you and tries to meet your needs, you're more likely to stick around. This benefits everybody—especially children.

Rick Zechman is an educational specialist with the UNC-CH School of Social Work

Stay Interviews with Resource Parents: Sample Questions

1. What will it take to keep you? What might make you stop working with us?
2. Tell me about an experience that made you feel you really enjoy being a resource parent.
3. Based on your experiences so far, what have you learned about your strengths?
4. What skills would you like to develop more?
5. How are things different than you thought they would be?
6. What is confusing for you at this point?
7. Of all the things you have done so far, what has been the most challenging?
8. How is your relationship with our agency? What could make it better?
9. How can we involve resource families more in our agency?
10. Would you be willing to help recruit other resource parents?

Resources for children struggling with perfectionism or anger

What my family found when we tried two titles from the “What to Do” series

by Lisa DeMarco and family

Like most parents, my husband Bob and I are willing to go to great lengths to help our children grow up strong, healthy, and happy. We did this with our four biological children, and we are actively doing it with our two youngest children, who spent several years in foster care before joining our family through adoption. In fact, I am constantly seeking out books, resources, and support that will help our youngest children overcome issues related to their past. Here are two I'd particularly like to share with you.

Tackling Perfectionism

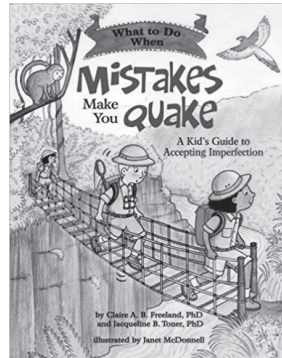
What to Do When Mistakes Make You Quake: A Kid's Guide to Accepting Imperfection (2015, Magination Press), by Claire Freeland, PhD and Jacqueline Toner, PhD, is an interactive workbook that guides children and their parents through the emotions underlying the fear of making mistakes using strategies and techniques based on cognitive-behavioral principles. It is recommended for children between the ages of six and 12. I worked through this book in a week with my daughter, who is almost 11 years old.

When Mistakes Make You Quake has a colorful and inviting cover picture of three children exploring the outdoors, which makes the book look fun and interesting. There is a short introduction for parents and caregivers, which sets a good tone and makes it clear how to get started. The book has nine chapters and 96 pages. It is recommended to do only one or two chapters at a time. The pages are filled with activities for the child to work on and black-and-white drawings that can be colored.

There are multiple examples in the book of situations where a child might fear making mistakes, and then very practical strategies to help overcome those feelings. I loved the book because it allowed me to talk with my daughter about some of the things she's dealing with in a way that wasn't threatening. It also gave me useful ways to counteract her worries.

Here are some of my daughter's comments when I asked what she thought of this book: “I liked to color the pictures. I liked the activities. I liked doing the activities with my mom, especially when she read it to me.” She also said that it was fun and enjoyable and didn't feel like doing homework. At one point, I found her working on the book by herself. She even gave a few examples of activities in the book that she enjoyed: one was about locating beetles and one was about a teddy bear. On the last page is a certificate of completion, which she readily filled out and then photocopied so she could keep it with her.

I definitely would recommend this book to parents and children with similar struggles. It is a nice way to deal with a common issue that affects our children.



Managing Anger

What to Do When Your Temper Flares: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Anger (2007, Magination Press), by Dawn Huebner, PhD is an interactive workbook for children ages six to 12. It guides children and their parents through cognitive-behavioral techniques used to treat problems with anger.

I worked through this book with my 12-year-old son, who generally doesn't like to do anything that even vaguely resembles therapy.

The cover of the book has a wonderful picture of a boy and his dog camping, and the boy is dousing the campfire with a bucket of water. The picture itself makes you want to open the book. Its 12 chapters and 96 pages are filled with black-and-white pictures that can be colored. The print is large, so nothing looks too overwhelming. The activities are engaging and thought-provoking, but not too intense.

The introduction to parents and caregivers is short and helpful. It gives insight to parents on how to effectively help our children who struggle with managing anger. It is recommended to cover only one or two chapters at a time, which worked very well for my son. The book helps a parent (or caregiver) and a child can sit down together and in a non-judgmental way explore issues that lead to angry feelings.

This book offers real world techniques for managing anger. It makes the analogy of anger being like a fire, and then suggests several “anger-dousing” methods. It also addresses recognizing “sparks” which may lead to anger, as well as what to do when someone intentionally causes sparks to happen.

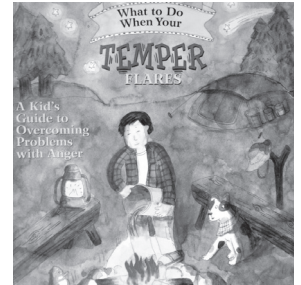
This book was equipping and encouraging. I especially liked working on it together with my son because it gave me tools to actually help him, instead of always getting frustrated with his angry outbursts.

He seemed to actually enjoy the book and even completed it without too much protest. (This, is very impressive in my home!) He liked drawing pictures and taking turns reading. We have been able to use examples and strategies from this book to help us in real life situations. We have found the “prickly ball” analogy particularly helpful. (You'll have to get the book if you're curious!)

This book was meatier than *Mistakes that Make You Quake*; I probably will go through it myself a second time, so I can continue to reinforce the things we learned together.

There are several other “What to Do” guides for kids. Based on my family's experience, they may be worth looking into if they touch on issues relevant to your kids. Titles in this series include:

- What to do When You Grumble Too Much:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Negativity
- What to Do When Your Brain Gets Stuck:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming OCD
- What to Do When You Dread Your Bed:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Sleep
- What to Do When Bad Habits Take Hold:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Nail Biting and More
- What to Do When You Worry Too Much:
A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety



“Perfectionism is a shield that we carry with a thought process that says this: ‘If I look perfect, live perfect, work perfect, and do it all perfectly, I can avoid or minimize feeling shame, blame, and judgment.’”

— Brené Brown



Writing Contest

Moving to a different school because of foster care

We asked young people in foster care, "Did you ever have to switch schools because you were in foster care? What was that like? What did you or other people do that made switching schools easier?" Here's what they had to say.

Haley, age 17

1

One of the hardest of the many challenges I have faced was transferring schools. I was just starting my second semester of sophomore year. I had just gotten used to calling that place home. Then one day my life was uprooted. I went from being in a decent-sized city to a small town. The change was drastic and overwhelming: I went from a school that was so big you could hide from your problems, to a school that was so small everyone knew everything about everybody.

Yet I was the new girl. The girl who was emotionally distraught. I was afraid and felt empty. The only way I really communicated was when I would write or sing. I didn't know how to fit in. . . .

[But] I learned so much from this transition: respect, value, honor, love, integrity, dignity. These things have helped to mold me into the strong and motivational figure I try to be in others' lives. Most kids are embarrassed to say they are a product of the system. Not me! In fact, I couldn't be prouder. It's changed my whole outlook on life. I now know who I am and who I was meant to be.

Yeah, the transition was hard, but the relationships I have been able to create have helped me to succeed and grow stronger in a positive manner. I am not a failure because I moved schools so many times. I am not a loser because I am a foster kid. I am a strong and dignified young woman with a dream to show others that they are incredible and they will make it!

HALEY RECEIVED \$50 FOR TAKING TOP PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

Transferring schools was one of the hardest of the many challenges I have faced . . . but the relationships I created have helped me succeed and grow.

Alesia, age 10

2

I switched schools in second, third, and fourth grades. It was sad because I had to lose all my friends and my math and reading teachers. These teachers were my favorite . . . It was not fun at all. Switching to all of these schools was very exhausting.

What made switching schools easier? Other people helped me with things I didn't know, like catching up on division, multiplication, and reading. Also, I spoke with my school counselors. I talked to them about how I transitioned to different schools and houses. . . .

Also, I am about to get adopted. I feel fantastic about it because I will no longer have to switch schools!

ALESIA RECEIVED \$50 FOR TAKING SECOND PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

It was sad because I had to lose all my friends and my math and reading teachers.

Kairi, age 11

3

I did have to change learning facilities because of foster care. . . . I was excited (but a little nervous) when I went into the building to meet my teacher, Mrs. Ross. When school started and I actually had to meet the other kids in my class, I felt like I was going to scream with anxiety! It helps that I am not shy at all and that I am a big-time people person. Within an hour, I was already best friends forever with the two girls at my table, Eva and Summer.

It felt like my teacher was helping me (but I knew she was not) with homework. All she gave us was reading, and I love, love, love reading!

It also helped that the fourth graders got to take a field trip to the Fair—not to ride rides, but to learn about North Carolina. It was really fun!!!

Eva and Summer really made it easier by being with me to show me around the school. They were the best friends anyone can ever have! Now, I am not saying that I did not make any other friends, but Eva and Summer stayed with me even when the going got tough. I know that sounds corny, but it's true!

KAIRI RECEIVED \$25 FOR TAKING THIRD PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.

When I had to meet the other kids in my class, I felt like I was going to scream with anxiety!

More on Switching Schools

I'm 12 years old and . . . I've been to nine schools. It was hard being at new schools. It was hard making new friends and talking to people and trying to fit in. Some people have known what I've been through and they try to help. — *Heaven, age 12*

I'm 12 and I've been to nine schools.

It was hard to fit in. [But Angela] talked to me and we became best friends . . . She is someone I can talk to. Words that describe her are sweet, funny, silly, goofy, smart, crazy, cool, loving, caring, friendly, generous, confident, and a hard worker. — *Tiffany, age 15*

The experience was scary and nerve-wracking because I was always bullied at every school I went to and never had any friends. I was looked at as "weird." I would never talk because I felt out of place because I had to keep going from school to school dealing with the same types of mean-hearted kids. I honestly felt that the only way to keep from making my situations worse was to not say anything to anybody. . . . Luckily I had a caring social worker. She took us shopping [and we] got our nails done together. She came by the school every once in a while to check on me and my sister. . . .

As time went on I felt much more confident and I made straight A's because I was focused and I didn't let those mean-hearted kids get to me. — *Gabriella, age 17*

THESE YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED \$20 FOR HAVING THEIR ESSAYS PUBLISHED.



SaySo + foster parents = A powerful team by Chaney Stokes

The success of SaySo is due at least in part to the support and involvement of North Carolina's foster parents. Now that we are in our 20th year, we need the involvement of

foster parents more than ever to help us support the success of youth in foster care. To help explain why, I'd like to share with you the story of "Kim" and her foster parents, the "Smiths."

Kim and the Smiths

Kim, who's almost 18, has been in foster care for the last six years and currently lives with the Smiths. They have taken good care of her and want to make sure she'll be successful when she's on her own.

Overall, things have been great between Kim and the Smiths. But as is the case with most teens in most families, things aren't perfect. The Smiths have a hard time trying to get Kim to make her meals, fold her own laundry, and do small household chores.

At the same time, Kim's been very active in sports, and is a decent (but not great) student. She wants to go to college, but has been heard to say, "As long as I'm good at sports, I'll definitely get into college."

The Smiths struggle getting Kim to think about and prepare for her future. When they talk to her about the importance of becoming independent and getting good grades, it feels as though what they say is going in one ear and out the other.

This makes them worry. They know that many youth leave care without the skills, connections, or support they need. They know that, as a result, compared to other young adults former foster youth suffer disproportionately from poverty, incarceration, homelessness, lower levels of education, and unemployment.

Finally, The BIG DAY finally arrives: Kim turns 18. It is time for Kim to enter the REAL WORLD and make her own way. Opportunities are waiting for her! Nervous and excited, she tells the Smiths she's ready to get started.

"OK, Kim," the Smiths say. "You will need to locate a job, a place to live, and achieve your educational goals. Also, you need some kind of transportation, and a savings account."

Finally, Kim realizes she does not know how to do many of these things. Mr. and Mrs. Smith knew all along that Kim would have a difficult time making it in the REAL WORLD. They just wish she had listened to them sooner.

Why We Do What We Do

Many young people are just like Kim. Talking and coaching from adults is sometimes not

enough to help them prepare for their future. Often, they need to see real life examples of what they will go through. They need to talk with peers about these situations, before they really commit to preparing for independence.

Caregivers, this is a problem SaySo can help you with! SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) is a youth-driven organization that can help support your efforts by creating a space where youth can find their own identity, focus on becoming independent, and advocate for their needs.

SaySo has created a platform for youth to educate the community and speak out about needed changes, while also supporting one another in their individual growth. SaySo has been recognized with respect in North Carolina and nationally as a youth-driven advocacy organization that prides itself on bringing the voices of youth to the table where it matters. Our founding members felt youth needed to be more involved in advocating and policy development for young people in substitute care.

SaySo understands the power in the voices of youth in care. We organize events to help youth with independent living skills and provide youth the opportunity to give back. This is done through training, leadership, shared learning, and advocacy.

Get Involved!

To be even more helpful to youth and their caregivers, SaySo is inviting foster parents to become more involved. For example, we are looking for adult supporters. These individuals support youth board members by providing transportation and chaperoning (if necessary) them when they attend SaySo functions. If necessary, SaySo, Inc. can even reimburse adult supporters for travel expenses so youth can participate at our

SaySo Helps Support NC's Independent Living Goals

All youth leaving the foster care system shall:

1. Have sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs.
2. Have a safe and stable place to live.
3. Attain academic or vocational/educational goals that are in keeping with the youth's abilities and interests.
4. Have a sense of connectedness to persons and community. This means that every youth, upon exiting foster care, should have a personal support network of at least 5 responsible adults who will remain supportive of the young adult over time.
5. Avoid illegal/high risk behaviors.
6. Postpone parenthood until financially established and emotionally mature.
7. Have access to physical and mental health services, as well as a means to pay for those services.
8. Have had the opportunity to participate in age- and developmentally-appropriate activities and experiences while in foster care.

events. For more information about upcoming events, visit www.saysoinc.org.

You can also get involved online by connecting with us on social media: like us on Facebook @saysoinc.

Together, caring adults and SaySo can help youth strive for success and become more than their situation. Join our efforts to help youth in care not only survive, but THRIVE!

To get connected, contact us at sayso@ilrinc.com or 919-384-1457.

Chaney Stokes is Program Coordinator for SaySo.

SaySo Updates

SaySo Celebrates 20 Years! On Saturday, March 3, 2018 over 250 young people and their adult supporters came together at Guilford Technical Community College to celebrate youth leadership, discuss issues relevant to youth in foster care, and celebrate SaySo's 20th birthday. This was an amazing event with many inspirational stories. Our keynote speaker, Brandon Porter, shared his personal journey and encouraged each of us to "be our own hero." Melinda Medina, alumna and co-founder, shared her story of resiliency and what it means to be a true leader. Other alumni and SaySo members present were Nicole Lyght and Roman Rys, who both contributed to the overall success of SaySo Saturday. This annual event has now become more and more of reunion for many alumni.

A New Chapter. SaySo Saturday was also a day to acknowledge the creation of a new SaySo Local Chapter - Nash County! We also acknowledged 27 other local chapters that have participated in SaySo events throughout the state. We would like to wish all our local chapters a Happy Birthday and are eager to see more local chapters get started. For a list of our local chapters, visit our website at www.saysinc.org.



With such a huge success this year, we are looking forward to 2019, which will be SaySo's 21st birthday! Be on the lookout for more information soon.

You can learn more by visiting www.saysoinc.org or by calling (919-384-1457) or emailing (sayso@ilrinc.com) us.



Improving NC's child welfare system: Update on the Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act

House Bill 630 (S.L. 2017-41) is strengthening NC's social service system

Known as Rylan's Law, the Family and Child Protection and Accountability Act will serve as the foundation for changes in how the North Carolina Division of Social Services (NC DSS) and the 100 county department of social services offices serve children and families. We are committed to keeping our readers informed about major developments to this important body of work.

Driver's License Pilot

Not having a driver's license can be a barrier to accessing education, health care, employment, and other important developmental activities. For youth in foster care, driving is not just a privilege, but a route to independence. The law directed NC DSS to create a two-year pilot program to help youth in foster care obtain learner's permits and driver's licenses. In response, in collaboration with county child welfare agencies, former foster youth, family partners, and other stakeholders, the Division created **Transportation Really Is Possible (TRIP)**, a program that launched on December 1, 2017.

All 100 North Carolina counties may participate in TRIP.

TRIP, in addition to the LINKS program, attempts to address this important need. TRIP can reimburse youth and caregivers on a first-come, first-served basis for costs associated with a young person obtaining a driver's license. Here are the criteria for this pilot program, which will run through June 30, 2019.

Eligible Youth

A youth is eligible for reimbursement of costs associated with obtaining a learner's permit or driver's license if they meet one of the following criteria:

- They are at least 14 ½ years of age but less than 21 years of age and in foster care as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9); or
- They were in foster care upon their 18th birthday and have entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program.

Eligible Caregivers

A caregiver is eligible for reimbursement through TRIP if they meet one of the following criteria:

- They are providing care for a youth in foster care as defined in G.S. 131D-10.2(9), who is at least 14 ½ years of age, but less than 18 years of age; or,
- They are providing placement to a young adult 18 years of age or older, but less than 21 years of age, who has entered into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with a county to participate in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program.

Eligible Costs

The following costs are eligible for reimbursement through TRIP:

- **Driver's Education.** Reimbursement may be provided for costs associated with driver's education offered through a public high school. Reimbursement may also be provided for driver's education through private driving schools for young people who cannot access driver's education through the public school system.
- **Learner's Permit and Driver's License Fees.** Reimbursement may be provided for limited learner's permit fees and driver's license fees in accordance with the NC DMV fee schedule.
- **Vehicle Insurance.** Reimbursement may be provided for insurance up to \$1,000 per eligible young person. This is a one-time cost and may not be provided to the same young person in both years of the two-year pilot program. County child welfare agencies must first apply LINKS Special Funds to a young person's insurance costs. Once a young person has received assistance with insurance through LINKS Special Funds for three months (up to \$650), counties may then provide additional support through TRIP.
- **Other Costs.** TRIP program funds can be used to reimburse vehicle inspection fees, registration fees, vehicle property taxes, and vehicle history reports (e.g., Carfax, AutoCheck) to help young people obtain their own vehicle. TRIP funds can also be used to provide incentives to caregivers to allow young people to use their vehicles for the road test needed to obtain a learner's permit or driver's license.



North Carolina is taking steps to remove barriers to driving for youth in foster care.

Additional Criteria

- Youth must have at least one goal on their Transitional Living Plan (DSS-5096A) that specifies the steps the young person must take to meet the criteria for which the youth is seeking support through TRIP.
- The youth, caregiver, and agency must enter into a written agreement that includes (1) the youth's plan to contribute toward ongoing costs associated with driving that are not or will not be covered by TRIP or LINKS, and (2) the caretaker's commitment to support the young person in gaining driving experience.
- Youth must also complete, as appropriate, educational components related to budgeting and understanding vehicle insurance.

For more information about TRIP, please review the Dear County Director Letter (and accompanying materials) dated December 7, 2017 at <https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/dcdl/2017.htm>.

The North Carolina Division of Social Services anticipates providing additional guidance for this program regarding the reimbursement of expenditures. The contact at the NC Division of Social Services for this program is Erin Conner (919/527-6351; e-mail: erin.conner@dhhs.nc.gov).

NC Teens in Foster Care

Teens and young adults make up more than a quarter of kids in care in our state. Of the 11,192 children in foster care on July 31, 2017, 3,216 (29%) were between age 13 and 21.

Source Duncan, et al., 2018





The Family First Prevention Services Act

Historic Reforms to the Child Welfare System Will Improve Outcomes for Vulnerable Children Summary by the Children's Defense Fund

On February 9, 2018, President Trump signed into law the landmark bipartisan Family First Prevention Services Act, as part of Division E in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (H.R. 1892). Family First includes long-overdue historic reforms to help keep children safely with their families and avoid the traumatic experience of entering foster care, emphasizes the importance of children growing up in families and helps ensure children are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to their special needs when foster care is needed. Family First builds on the original version of the bill passed in the House of Representatives in June 2016 (H.R. 5456).

In 2016, more than 437,000 children were in foster care. After years of decline, the number of children in foster care has risen steadily since 2012, with anecdotal evidence and expert opinion linking this increase to the parallel rise in opioid addiction and overdoses. Family First provides struggling and overburdened child welfare agencies with the tools needed to help children and families in crisis, including families struggling with the opioid epidemic.

The Family First Prevention Services Act redirects federal funds to provide services to keep children safely with their families and out of foster care, and when foster care is needed allows federal reimbursement for care in family-based settings and certain residential treatment programs for children with emotional and behavioral disturbance requiring special treatment.

Family First Includes

Federal investments in prevention for children at risk of foster care. The act provides federal funds under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, beginning in FY2020, to support evidence-based prevention efforts for 1) mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services and 2) in-home parent skill-based services. The services may be provided for not more than 12 months for children who are at imminent risk of entering foster care, their parents and relatives to assist the children, and pregnant or parenting teens.

Federal funds targeted for children in foster family home, or in qualified residential treatment programs, or other special settings. Federal funding is limited to children in family foster homes, qualified residential treatment programs, and special treatment settings for pregnant or parenting teens, youth 18 and over preparing to transi-

tion from foster care to adulthood, and youth who have been found to be—or are at risk of becoming—sex trafficking victims. The act requires timely assessments and periodic reviews of children with special needs who are placed in qualified residential treatment programs to ensure their continued need for such care. After FY2020 (unless the state opts to delay until 2022), Title IV-E reimbursement will be provided only for administrative costs for children in other group care settings, and not for room and board.

The new dollars for preventing children from entering foster care and restricting federal funds for group care take effect in FY2020 (or states may choose to delay until no later than 2022) so states can make necessary accommodations. The act recognizes adjustments will be needed to establish prevention services to keep children safely in families and in care that meet their special treatment needs. States have flexibility in defining the safety services they provide to children and families, and how they will ensure quality residential treatment for children with emotional and behavioral needs.

Additional investments to keep children safely with families

- Offers additional support for relative caregivers by providing federal funds for evidence-based Kinship Navigator programs that link relative caregivers to a broad range of services and supports to help children remain safely with them, and requiring states to document how their foster care licensing standards accommodate relative caregivers.
- Allows Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program funds to be used for unlimited family reunification services for children in foster care and an additional 15 months of family reunification services for children once they return home.
- Extends for five years the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program and the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program, including the Court Improvement Programs grants.
- Requires states to have statewide plans to track and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.
- Establishes a competitive grant program to support the recruitment and retention of high quality foster families to help place more children in these homes, with special attention to states and tribes with the highest percentage of children in non-family settings.

Helps address opioids and other substance abuse

- Reauthorizes and updates the Regional Partnership Grant program, which funds state and regional grantees seeking to provide evidence-based services to prevent child maltreatment related to substance abuse as an important step in addressing the recent spike in requests to child welfare systems due to opioids and other drugs.

Supports youth transitioning from care

- Extends the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program's independent living services to assist former foster youth up to age 23 (currently available to youth between ages 18-21) and extends eligibility for education and training vouchers for these youth to age 26 (currently only available to youth up to age 23).

Promotes permanent families for children

- Establishes an electronic interstate case-processing system to help states expedite the interstate placement of children in foster care, adoption, or guardianship.
- Extends the Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payment program for five years, which allows states to receive incentive awards for increasing exits of children from foster care to adoption or guardianship.
- Takes steps, including requiring a GAO Report, to ensure states are reinvesting in post-adoption services state dollars freed up by making additional children eligible for Title IV-E Adoption Assistance payments. To help pay in part for these new reforms, a federal income eligibility requirement for the adoption assistance payments for children under age two was established.

The Children's Bureau anticipates releasing additional guidance in October 2018 regarding implementation of this new law. In the meantime, North Carolina will begin discussions with counties and stakeholders to gear up for implementation.

Learn More

For more about the Family First Prevention Services Act, visit the Children's Defense Fund (<http://www.childrensdefense.org/policy/welfare/>), where you will find a more detailed summary and an implementation timeline for the Act.



A reader asks ...

I'm a foster parent in another state and I'm moving to NC. How do I foster in NC?

I am a licensed foster parent in another state and I'm moving to NC. How do I foster in North Carolina?

The licensing assessment and approval process differs in each state. The foster home requirements in each state are governed by standards set in accordance with the laws of that state. Therefore, it is not possible to transfer a foster home license from another state to North Carolina.

However, it is possible that North Carolina agencies could approve a family licensed in another state to receive credit hours for some of their more recent trainings. If you have completed TIPS-MAPP (*Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence-Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting*) training or an equivalent pre-service training in another state within 24 months, it is possible a North Carolina child-placing agency may assess and give you credit for the training being completed. The decision to accept credit hours is at the discretion of each agency.

Each child-placing agency in North Carolina must follow state guidelines, but may vary in the steps, additional requirements, and procedures they use within their agency to meet those guidelines. In an effort to help families through this process, we are providing you with specific steps to get you started.

Steps to Become a NC Foster Parent

1. Choose an agency to work with. This may be a county department of social services (DSS) or a private child-placing agency. Links to both types of agencies can be found later in this article.
- Whatever type of agency you choose, be sure to share during your initial inquiries that you are already licensed or have been licensed in another state. Ask questions about how that might affect with your licensure process in North Carolina.
2. Attend orientation at your chosen agency.
3. Complete NC's short online orientation for prospective foster parents (<http://ncswlearn.org/foster>)
4. Complete TIPS-MAPP or an approved pre-service course at your agency.
5. Working with your agency, complete a Mutual Home Assessment for foster home licensing. (*Note: this is not the same as an adoption home study.*)
6. Your agency will submit an application for foster home licensure on your behalf to the NC Division of Social

Services.

The following links provide additional information about the foster home licensing process in North Carolina:

- NC Kids Adoption & Foster Care Network: <http://bit.ly/2FVcX86>
- Listing of NC County Departments of Social Services: <http://bit.ly/2qO8xaw>
- Listing of NC's Private Child-Placing Agencies: <http://bit.ly/2G6xgCN>

When people learn I am a foster parent they ask how they can help children in North Carolina through foster care and adoption. What should I tell them? Where should I direct them?

Great question! Foster and adoptive parents are the absolute best recruiters of new foster and adoptive parents.

First, feel free to share your story and the path that brought you to being a foster or adoptive parent, including the agencies you have worked with.

Be realistic but positive when recruiting new families. Share positive stories about the children you have loved and cared for, highlighting the significant need for families who can love children unconditionally. Mention the particular need in North Carolina right now for families for teens and for children with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

You can also help dispel myths. For example, make it clear you do not have to be married or own your own home to foster and adopt. There is no age limit once you are 21 years old. Families can say "no" to a placement that is not a good fit.

If a family is interested, their first step should be to call an agency or attend a local orientation. Most agencies hold regular orientation meetings where families can meet staff and learn about next steps and requirements.

Making this first contact is a big step. Many families think about fostering or adopting for years before acting. You can provide support by offering to attend orientation with the family. Or, even better, offer to help your agency's orientation: talk about your experience, serve coffee, or just answer questions after the meeting.

Prospective parents really want to talk to real foster parents, not social workers!

fostering perspectives (May 2018)

Sponsors. NC Division of Social Services, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the UNC School of Social Work's Jordan Institute for Families.

Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Email: jdmcmaho@unc.edu.

Advisory Board. Nancy Carter (Independent Living Resources); Carmelita Coleman (Independent Living Resources); Bob DeMarco (adoptive parent); Kathy Dobbs (NC Division of Social Services); Cy Gurney (NC Administrative Office of the Courts); Jennifer Hull-Rogers (Person County DSS); Trishana Jones (NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence); Claudia Kearney (Center for Family and Community Engagement); Jeanne Preisler (NC Division of Social Services); Shirley Williams (NC Division of Social Services); Rick Zechman (UNC).

Newsletter Staff. John McMahon (Editor)

Mission. *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare professionals and foster, kinship, and adoptive parents and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system in our state can exchange ideas.

Disclaimer. The opinions and beliefs expressed herein are not necessarily those of the NC Division of Social Services or the UNC School of Social Work.

Printing Information. The NC Department of Health and Human Services does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services. 10,450 copies printed at a cost of \$977.59, or \$0.09 per copy.

Frequency and Distribution. Issues appear every May and November. Printed copies are sent directly to all NC county DSS agencies and to all foster parents and child-placing agencies licensed through the NC Division of Social Services. If you think you should be receiving a printed copy but are not, please contact us at the address above.

Online. www.fosteringperspectives.org

Subscribe Online. To be notified via email when issues appear online, go to <http://eepurl.com/brPe9b> and sign up.

References. See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.

Prospective parents really want to talk to real foster parents, not social workers!

The NC Kids program is a key resource for families interested in adoption. It provides basic information about becoming a foster and adoptive parent. NC Kids can be found online (www.adoptnckids.org) and by phone (877-NCKIDS-1).

There is also a short, self-paced orientation online at <http://ncswlearn.org/foster>. It explains foster care, describes the children in need of families, and tells you how to take the next step to becoming a licensed foster parent in our state.

We all have a responsibility to recruit new foster and adoptive families, sharing the need throughout our communities. Foster and adoptive parents are the best possible recruiters and we are so grateful for your ongoing help caring for children in foster care!

Response by the NC Division of Social Services. Have a question about foster care or adoption you'd like answered in "A Reader Asks"? Send it to us using the contact information in the box above.



Help us find families for these children

For more information on these children or adoption in general, call the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network at 1-877-NCKIDS-1 <www.adoptnckids.org>



Aiaya (age 12)

Aiaya is excited about meeting a family who enjoys doing fun things. She is described by others as a strong advocate for herself, determined and resourceful. She enjoys playing board games and participating in outdoor activities. Her favorite hobbies are dancing and singing in the choir.

Aiaya very much wants a forever family of her own. She will do well in a family that can provide her with the love, patience, and support she needs to continue growing personally, emotionally, and academically. Her forever family will need a strong understanding of Aiaya's love for her younger sister and be supportive of their connection.



Bethany (age 16)

Bethany is a creative and motivated girl with high aspirations. She's quite artistic, and especially enjoys painting. Storytelling has a place in her heart, too. She has a gift of engrossing others in her stories. Bethany is also discovering the joy of cooking, and has fun experimenting in the kitchen. She can also be found enjoying a good game of cards, mastering a puzzle,

or simply reading a book.

Bethany is a lovely young lady who dreams of having an adoptive home where she will have that amazing sense of belonging and acceptance that comes with having a sincere, nurturing family. She wants to be accepted and to be part of a loving family who will never let go and never give up on her.



Chelsea (age 16)

Chelsea is a witty and independent young lady with an awesome sense of humor. She loves working with young children and is an experienced baby sitter. She also enjoys being around animals, especially dogs. Like many teenagers, Chelsea likes to listen to music and hang out at the mall with her friends.

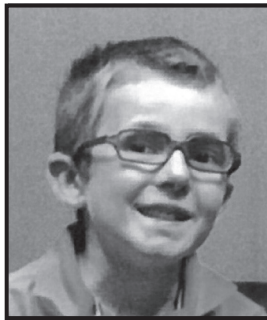
Chelsea has a strong desire to be adopted by a family that will love her unconditionally and who will understand what she's experienced. She would like to be the older child in her family. Chelsea will benefit from a family that is supportive of her family connections.



DaQuan (age 17)

DaQuan is a handsome young man with an engaging personality. He loves to be active. He truly enjoys extracurricular activities such as football, basketball, and soccer. When he isn't involved in a sport, you will find he likes to watch ESPN to catch up on the latest news in the sports world. DaQuan is an avid reader as well.

DaQuan feels it is not too late for him to be adopted because of his age; he wants to be a treasured member of a loving family. The family for DaQuan should also be open to allowing him to maintain connections to his birth family.

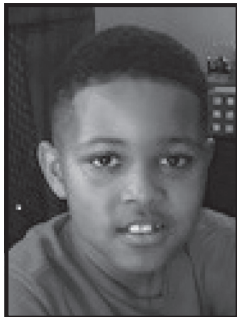


Robbie (age 11) and Toy (age 13)

Robbie and Toy are funny, playful boys who are full of energy. Robbie is a sweet and extremely kind-hearted free spirit. He has an excitement for life and being active. Robbie enjoys playing outside, playing with Legos, and playing board games. He enjoys sports and is usually most successful when he's involved in an organized sports league. Robbie also loves country music and singing along with the radio.

Toy is described by those who know him best as a funny and playful kid with a dry wit. He is a caring young man with a big heart who likes to go above and beyond to help others. Toy's favorite activities include playing basketball, building things with Legos, and playing with his Halo trading cards. Toy really likes to help fix things that are broken and learn how machines work.

Robbie and Toy desperately want to be treasured members of a forever family. They want and deserve a family who will love them unconditionally.



Royale (age 9)

Royale is an active, loyal, determined, and independent boy who has a great sense of humor. Royale is a natural athlete; he loves to be outside playing football or basketball, or going for a bike ride. He also loves to draw, color, make paper airplanes, and build things with Legos. Royale is in the third grade and his favorite subject is Art. His teacher says he has great potential. When he grows up, Royale wants to be a professional basketball player.

Royale is warming to the idea of adoption and is making great progress. Royale does best when he receives a lot of positive attention from adults, especially males. Royale is very devoted to his family, and continued contact with his siblings would be in his best interest. In the right family, Royale will surely blossom and thrive.

Writing Contest

First Prize: \$100 • Second Prize: \$50 • Third Prize: \$25

If you are under 18 and are or have been in foster care, please send us a letter or short essay in response to the following question:



Some great parts of school happen outside class. Tell us about a school play or performance, club, team, or field trip you've been part of since you've been in foster care. What did you like about it? What did you learn?

(Responses should be 200 words or less.)

DEADLINE: August 7, 2018

E-mail submissions to jdmcmaho@unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, CB#3550, UNC School of Social Work, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Include your name, age, address, and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards listed above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published, for which they will also receive an award.

Seeking Other Writing Submissions

Submissions can be on any theme. There is no deadline for non-contest submissions: submit your work at any time.



Join the Fostering Perspectives List!

To be notified by email when new issues appear online, go to <http://eepurl.com/brPe9b> and sign up.

Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your licensing social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. If you have questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit, ask your worker.

In-Service Quiz, FP v22 n2

1. What are North Carolina's new expectations of agencies regarding recruitment and retention of resource parents?
2. Name three ways Sky Webb has helped her agency with recruitment.
3. What are three ways agencies can support resource parents, according to Wanda Douglas?
4. Having a strong support system is so important to resource parents. Describe a time when you relied on your support system.
5. What strikes you about North Carolina's policy regarding foster parents switching agencies?
6. What is a Stay Interview?
7. What advice does Becky Burmester have for foster parents who are waiting for a placement?
8. Name three people you know who are not currently foster parents who might be interested in fostering.
9. What does this issue advise foster parents to tell people when they ask how they can help children through foster care and adoption? Where should you direct them?
10. The Family First Prevention Services Act is a significant piece of legislation. What do you think are the three most important changes it makes?

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 177
CHAPEL HILL, NC



A learning site for North Carolina's foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

The NC Division of Social Services is proud to offer fosteringnc.org, a learning site for our state's resource parents. This site features online courses, webinar recordings, videos and podcasts, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Free Online Courses Include:



Child Welfare Services: Overview, Key Terms, and Resources.

Part of the "Stakeholder Engagement Series," this 25-minute course gives a high-level overview and explains how you can get involved in strengthening child welfare services in North Carolina. <http://fosteringnc.org/cw101/>



A Resource Parent's Guide to Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD).

This 1-hour course provides basic information about IDD, the services you may need as a resource parent and where to find them, and best practices for parenting a child or youth with IDD.

<https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/>

Foster parents are encouraged to talk in advance to their supervising agency about obtaining training credit through fosteringnc.org.

Join the [fosteringNC.org](http://fosteringnc.org) List

To sign up to receive news and updates go to: <http://eepurl.com/cEiAYP>

Scan this QR code to go directly to the site



fostering perspectives

Jordan Institute for Families
UNC School of Social Work
Campus Box #3550
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550