

fostering perspectives

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Critical Partners for Permanency

North Carolina is committed to permanency. It has declared:

Children and youth in the foster care program will experience stability in foster care and achieve permanency in a timely manner and youth who do not achieve permanency will transition successfully into adulthood.

As child welfare workers, judges, and others pursue this goal, their success often hinges on contributions made by the people who care for children and youth in foster care on a day-to-day basis: fos-

ter and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers. Resource parents are critical partners for anyone who wants to achieve permanency.

We celebrate this fact and want to provide information and resources to support their success in this essential role. That's why this issue is filled with stories and advice from birth parents, young people in foster care, and others about shared parenting, maintaining connections with siblings and natural supports, and other topics. We hope you find it helpful.

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You Can Support Reunification by Supporting Recovery

Resource parents are undoubtedly well-aware of the effect drug use has on families and on the children and youth in their care. They know that addiction affects the entire family.

In the U.S. in 2019, parental substance use disorder (SUD) was a factor for nearly half of all children who entered foster care. With the explosion of heroin and fentanyl use in the last few years, those numbers are no doubt on the rise. Fortunately, when foster and kinship parents and placement families possess a comprehensive understanding of the effects of addiction, they can play a powerful role in helping parents with SUD reunite with their children.

SUD and Foster Care Placement

It is a **fact** that addiction is a medical illness. Addiction is a brain disease. Parents struggling with drugs or alcohol can't just stop using, any more than someone with depression can just stop feeling sad.

Parents with SUD are often unaware of how their substance use impacts their judgment and decision making about their children. This makes it hard for them to evaluate their situation. They're likely unaware that they are neglecting their children's needs because their mind is altered and unnaturally obsessed with the drug. Left unchecked, addiction leads to a loss of self-control and risk-taking behavior and can put chil-

"Having the support I did meant the difference between success and failure for me."

— Lisa, reunified mother of two

dren in harm's way or leave them without effective supervision for long periods. All this can lead to a child's placement in foster care.

Placement is an abrupt wake-up call for parents experiencing SUD. Most struggle with what's happened and what to do about it. There are feelings of failure, fear, and hopelessness. They can be at a loss about how to "fix it" or who to ask for help.

Stigma is one of the biggest barriers to asking for help. Substance use disorder is often depicted as a moral failing or weakness. The story we get told is that these parents are choosing alcohol or drugs over their children and are to blame for their addiction, when the truth is they are struggling with a chronic health condition.

When parents experience stigma they feel judged, ashamed, or looked down upon. Stigma can also cause parents to minimize or deny the seriousness of their addiction. It can stand in the way of their seeking treatment.

Under federal law, child welfare agencies must try to achieve permanency within 12 months for children in foster care. A year can seem too short for parents who need to achieve numerous case plan goals such as finding employment, obtaining stable housing, etcetera, all while simultaneously completing treatment.

Lisa and Jami

What can resource parents do to support parents with substance use disorder? To answer this question, I spoke to Lisa and Jami, two mothers who overcame their addictions to reunify with their children after they were placed in foster care or with family members.



by Kelly Kirk

Lisa, 27, has two children who spent time in nonrelative foster care. Jami, 34, is also a mother of two. At one time her children were placed with family members. Today Jami is active in her recovery and works as a Peer Support Specialist mentoring others dealing with addiction.

While their stories differ, both Lisa and Jami had similar things to say about how resource parents helped them. Each felt supported by their children's resource parents. Both had a personal connection and enjoyed open lines of communication.

At the same time, they knew there were boundaries. Jami recalls her grandparents as "firm" when she tried to come around while she was still using. "But," she adds, "they were persistently encouraging."

"Even when I was nowhere to be found for a week, Grandma still called to tell me about my daughter's report card. They let me know it was okay for me to be where I was, and gave me the time I needed to get myself together. I knew they wanted me to be with my kids. That was comforting."

continued next page

NC Uses Course to Support, License Kin

by Brenda deLaet

Imagine yourself as a parent facing the usual day-to-day challenges and worries of raising children—ensuring they are sleeping, eating, growing, and learning is constantly on your mind. Then imagine something terrible happens, and you suddenly find yourself unable to care for them. Who will take care of your children? A child welfare worker tells you that there are experienced and well-trained foster families who could provide a temporary home. She also says you could reach out to someone in your own family.

For many of us, this would be an easy decision. I would call my sister. She and I live in different states and aren't in frequent contact, but if my children needed care, there would be no question. I would want them with her, not with strangers. No matter how capable, well trained, and experienced the strangers were.

Research supports what so many of us feel instinctively when thinking through the above scenario: placement with kin offers many benefits to children. When there is a safe, stable, and supportive family member able to take placement, it minimizes the stress and trauma of removal, and allows a child to maintain a stronger sense of identity and culture. A review of 102 research studies found that children in kinship foster care experienced fewer behavioral problems, fewer mental health disorders, better well-being, and less placement disruption than children in non-kinship foster care (Winokur, et al., 2014).

Caring for Our Own

Anna is a parent who understands this from both sides. She grew up in traditional foster care, moving between foster home placements and group homes until aging out of the system at age 21. Now married and the mother of her first child, Anna tells us that she decided shortly after aging out to seek custody of her two younger brothers. Working with the same child welfare worker who supervised her own case as a child, she was able to register for *Caring for Our Own* offered through Children's Home Society of NC.

Caring for Our Own is a 27-hour, kinship-focused support and training curriculum that, with the addition of three hours of supplemental training, meets the preservice training requirement for foster home licensure in North Carolina. In partnership with the NC Division of Social Services, Children's Home Society has offered *Caring for Our Own* 28 times since September 2020, graduating 202 families and 309 individual kinship caregivers with not only improved social support, but the information and training needed to pursue licensure.

Anna's youngest brother, age 13, was placed in her home before she completed *Caring for Our Own* in February 2022. Her other brother, age 15, was placed with her after she completed the training in June 2022.

Anna describes the past six months as both rewarding and challenging. She has had contact



Caring for Our Own improves social support for kin caregivers and provides the information and training they need to pursue licensure.

with her mother, and they continue to rebuild their relationship. Her mother has agreed to relinquish her rights if the boys are able to remain with Anna—setting all of them up for a positive permanency outcome. Anna feels kinship care gives children who must be removed from their home the best chance at normalcy, and she is grateful to be able to provide that for her brothers.

We should continue to prioritize and support kinship families. Placement with safe, stable, and loving relatives is good for children, good for families, and good for the child welfare system. Working together, we form a network of support that can better accomplish the goals we all share: improved child well-being, and safe and timely permanence for children.

Brenda deLaet is the Director of Permanency Training with Children's Home Society of NC.

Supporting Recovery *continued from page 1*

Jami's advice for resource parents? "Be compassionate, understanding, and communicate. Even when you don't understand why it's so hard to stop using drugs, try to understand."

Lisa shares that before she began treatment, "I felt the foster parents were looking down on me because of everything that happened. I thought for a long time they were against me and wanted to keep my kids."

After she started treatment, she started seeing things differently. "My head was clearing," she says. "I started to engage."

Shared parenting made a huge difference. Lisa says the foster mom would include her in activities with the kids.

"That lifted my spirits a ton! She also kept me in the loop about what was happening with my kids. And I could tell my kids were happier that we were all getting along. It should be all about shared parenting. Having the level of support I did meant the difference between success and failure for me."

Takeaways

If I had to name takeaways from talking with Lisa and Jami about how resource parents can support

parents in recovery, I would offer the following:

Communicate. Establish open communication. Make yourself available as much as you can, even if it's not mutual at first. "Knowing the people who had my children were willing to answer my calls meant a lot to me," Lisa says. Setting boundaries as needed is also important. Let them know you are there to help them keep their family together.

Reassure and Empathize. Make it clear their children are safe and well-taken care of in your care. Easing their minds allows them to focus on their own progress. Try to sympathize when they share difficulties with you. It isn't easy knowing your children are not with you because of your own actions.

Be a Cheerleader. Encourage parents to do the right things: go for treatment, reach their goals, practice self-care, and hang in there. It takes strength and courage to ask for help and do the work required to reunify. When they do well, consider giving an encouraging word.

Share Parenting. Keep parents in the loop on their children's day-to-day activities and milestones and include them whenever possible. Ask questions about their children and elicit their

input on parenting choices. Do what you can to ensure visits happen and go smoothly. Family time means a lot to a struggling parent. If parents give you clothing or toys for their children, make sure they see their kids with those things.

Celebrate Successes. When you see a birth parent hitting milestones or completing case plan goals, praise and encourage them to keep going. Many times the strong connection that exists between you will continue after reunification. With reunification being the ideal outcome for children, being supportive, non-judgmental, inclusive, and encouraging towards birth parents plays a huge part in outcomes for families.

The ultimate partnership is resource parents working hand-in-hand with birth parents. This helps ensure the resilience and well-being of the families resource parents so graciously assist. Be proud of the part you play in helping build families that are strong, resilient, and together.

Kelly Kirk is a Recovery Coach and Certified Peer Support Specialist embedded within Richmond County DSS. She has 8 years of personal recovery and serves as a Birth Parent on the NC Division of Social Services Child Welfare Family Advisory Council.

Shared Parenting Keeps Families Together: How Resource Parents Can Help

by Kate Schultz

North Carolina has a policy, commonly known as “shared parenting,” that requires resource parents to develop partnerships with parents or guardians of children placed in foster care. Shared parenting is outlined in detail in the Permanency Planning Services section of North Carolina’s child welfare manual, which can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3BnoJpR>

North Carolina includes shared parenting in policy and encourages it so strongly because it has so many benefits. Shared parenting builds relationships between the child’s parents and temporary caregivers and gives resource parents a chance to model positive parenting. It can facilitate healthy attachment between children and their families, improve children’s mental health, and enhance their sense of belonging. And it can strengthen reunification efforts.

It May Be Hard at First, but It Is Worth It

In the early stages of shared parenting it is not uncommon for everyone involved to feel uncomfortable. Common barriers to navigate include fears and assumptions about the other person and what they think of you, children’s behaviors around visits, the child’s confusion in loyalty to one or both families, and safety concerns.

Yet many of the uncomfortable and awkward aspects of shared parenting begin to melt away when the families involved commit to partnering for the child’s sake.

There is no “secret sauce” or one right way to do shared parenting. What works for one pair of families might not work for another. To help you find what works for you and the parents of the children in your care, I would like to offer a few ideas and suggestions. As you consider the following strategies, please always be sure to honor the case plan and any safety measures established by the agency.

Ways to Connect

- Share your phone number and email address. If needed, use apps such as Google Voice or WhatsApp to set up a phone number you use only for shared parenting.
- Send photos and updates regularly so parents know about and can celebrate the child’s milestones, report cards, progress, activities, etc.
- Make contact throughout the week. Frequent phone calls, video calls, etc. don’t have to be long to help both the child and their parent feel connected.
- Invite parents to parent-teacher conferences, school activities, extracurriculars, etc. Note that some agencies will also require a child welfare worker to be present.
- Speak positively and respectfully about the

Helpful Considerations for Shared Parenting

- Remember, the primary goal of foster care is reunification. Resource parents should do whatever they can to encourage reunification and set the child and their family up for success when that takes place.
- Be aware that generational trauma influences many families involved with the foster care program. The hurt is often deeply rooted: some parents with children in care were once in foster care themselves. They may be navigating years’ worth of their own trauma without support, guidance, or help.
- Choose a trauma-informed lens. When interacting with parents and guardians of the children in our care, consider the question “what happened to you?” instead of “what’s wrong with you?” Of course, we don’t need to actually ask “what happened to you?” out loud, but it is a helpful lens. Some families I’ve worked with as a resource parent have entrusted me with details of their past that brought me to tears, softened my heart towards them, and deepened my understanding and compassion when navigating my relationships with them.
- Evaluate your prejudices and assumptions. We all hold biases, conscious and unconscious. Putting in the work to break them down creates space to view things from a different perspective and allows us to be more open to partnering with children’s families.
- Put yourself in their shoes. Parents of children and youth in foster care may be haunted by questions such as *Where is my child? Did they make it to school on time today? Are they safe? Is my child afraid? Did they cry for me at bedtime?* It can be easier to have compassion for parents when we acknowledge their humanity and validate the fear, trauma, stress, and uncertainty they may be navigating.
- Keep in mind that it isn’t your responsibility to monitor or discuss the parents’ case plan with them. If that topic comes up, encourage them to speak with their child welfare worker or attorney. The primary goal of shared parenting is to support the parent/child relationship, not offer legal advice or do the job of the worker.



child’s parents. The kids need to see you on the same team.

- If it is safe to do so, maintain the child’s connections to grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, etc. Preserving these relationships can minimize trauma, facilitate healthy attachment, and reduce the child’s sense of loss.
- Seek parents’ guidance about the child’s preferences (favorite foods, activities, shows, etc.).
- Speak to them with compassion and respect. Remind them you are here for them and their child. You both have a shared love for and desire to see the child grow and succeed.
- Ask the school, daycare, etc. to make two crafts, one for you and one for the child’s parents, especially on Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and other significant holidays. Being included in these important memories and milestones in the child’s life means a great deal.
- Transport the child for visits whenever possible. You’d be amazed how much you can build a relationship with parents in the minutes before or after the visit.
- Acknowledge the family’s strengths frequently. Tell them and tell their worker. Parents have so many people telling them how to be better. It’s encouraging to hear genuine praise.
- Don’t be afraid to question what you’ve heard about children’s parents. Give them the chance to have a clean slate with you.
- Don’t be afraid to go the extra mile. It can make a world of difference to go above and

beyond what you think is expected of you as a resource parent.

Please remember that you don’t have to do all these things all the time to be successful in building relationships with the families you encounter as a resource parent. Pick one or a few things to try and start there!

If parents don’t respond the way you expect, don’t be discouraged. Often, families aren’t used to someone genuinely being in their corner. They may be caught off guard or even resist. Stick with it. It can take a while before shared parenting feels more natural, but it is incredibly worth it.

One Final Message

I want to leave you with one final message. While it’s important to build relationships and strive to co-parent and navigate shared parenting as much as possible, it’s also really important to establish boundaries that protect your mental health, personal life, and schedule.

You don’t need to be available to children’s parents 24/7 to have a successful shared parenting relationship. Establishing boundaries clearly and up front can help you avoid miscommunication, unintentional hurt, and burnout.

Don’t forget to take care of you!

Kate Schultz is a foster parent and Director of Operations for the Foster Family Alliance of NC.

Rewriting the History of Father Engagement by Derrick J. Byrd

When it comes to serving fathers involved with the child welfare system, it's likely you see dads who may be desperate, angry, lost, or worse—hopeless.

They've failed in relationships with their children, their spouse or partner, extended family, friends, employers, and others. Many have made bad decisions and mistakes. They experience further barriers from social services, child support, and the courts.

In some people's eyes these dads are dead beat, dead broke, and dead wrong. Many have accepted those narratives and deem themselves irrelevant and replaceable.

But where does that leave their children?

A Failure to Engage Fathers

Child welfare has a federal mandate to engage fathers. Yet the system mostly has focused on serving mothers. At one time, policies made the very presence of a father or father-figure in the home a barrier. Having a dad in the home made it harder for mothers and their children to get the support they needed. Even today, fathers often are not seen as a viable permanency resource for their children.

Despite efforts to correct the system's bias against fathers, it is still a serious problem.

Reason for Hope

But there is reason for hope. Fathers in North Carolina are experiencing a small but revolutionary transformation in how their roles as parents and child rearing partners are viewed and valued in many child welfare programs.

Consider the example of two fathers served by Guilford County DSS. Mr. P., a single father, speaks highly of his involvement with the child

welfare system. He says the agency, the child welfare worker, the guardian ad litem (GAL), and the courts all helped him achieve reunification when his 7-month-old son was placed in foster care.

At the time, Mr. P. was incarcerated, serving a 2-year sentence. He also had a drinking problem. He says even while he was incarcerated, Guilford DSS supported him as a father. The worker spoke to him regularly about how his son was progressing and sent him pictures.

Mr. P. also did his part, completing all the services he could while incarcerated. When he was released, the worker helped his son's foster parents establish a shared parenting relationship with him.

The child welfare worker also advocated in court for him to get custody of his son. Mr. P. says he's especially grateful the judge overseeing the case was willing to support him in his quest for reunification instead of adoption.

Unfortunately, after Mr. P. reunified with his son, his son's mother died of a drug overdose. Today, Mr. P. is considering becoming a legal guardian for his son's half-sibling.

Mr. J., another father, had a similar experience. His two young children entered foster care when their mother's struggles with substance use led her to neglect them. Although he was not physically with his children, Mr. J. realized his own drinking also contributed to the situation.

Mr. J. credits Guilford County DSS and his worker for the positive outcomes occurring for him and his children. He says he is a better person and father because of the services he completed and the overwhelming support and guidance provided by the worker.



Agencies Must Do the Work

These stories show us that when systems and institutions are willing to do the work, successful outcomes are possible for fathers and their children. But what is "the work"?

Before they can declare themselves father-friendly, organizations must:

1. Assess their readiness to work with fathers
2. Address biases, both personal and professional
3. Cultivate respect for men as fathers, and
4. Work with all their partners (courts, GALs, service providers, etc.) to develop a shared commitment to engaging, involving, and advocating for fathers.

As Jeremiah Donier, a member of Casey Family Programs' Birth Parent Advisory Committee reminds us, "Building a 21st century child welfare system means we are all in the same boat, paddling together in the same direction, and we finally reach the far shore—with wise intention and kindness to all families, including the full engagement and respect of fathers in the process."

Derrick W. Byrd, MPA, is Executive Director of Family Resource Center South Atlantic.



Promoting Child Well-Being by Engaging Fathers

Child welfare agencies are responsible for finding and connecting with fathers of children in foster care. But resource parents also have a role to play. Here are some ways to engage the dads of children and youth in your care.

Take your cue from the agency. Don't reach out without first consulting with your agency.

Focus on the first contact. Your first conversation or meeting is a chance to start building a positive, strengths-based relationship, free from judgments. Show dads you know how important they are to their children, and that there are some things only they can do for their kids. Reassure them by say-

ing, "I want to help you keep your family together."

Don't judge. Don't assume a father is irresponsible or neglectful even if he has been absent. Fear or other barriers may have kept him from being involved. He may have been unaware of the child's status. Especially if there is conflict with the mom, the father may have had little contact with his child. Cultivate and affirm his desire to play a role in his child's life.

Don't take sides. If there is conflict between the children's parents, stay neutral. If you have questions about how to do this, consult the child's worker or your licensing worker.

Ask dads what questions they

have for you. They may want to know: *Do my kids have a room to themselves? Who bathes them? What do you tell them about why they are in foster care? How do you let them know I love them?*

Ask them about their children. For example: *What do they like to eat? What allergies do they have? What do they need with them at bedtime? What are their school needs? What do you want the children to call us?*

Involve dads in decisions. In partnership with the agency, coordinate with fathers so they can attend medical appointments, school activities and meetings, church functions, birthdays, etc. At these functions, always introduce him as

the children's father. Ask doctors and school personnel to discuss the child's needs with the dad. This helps dads practice parenting and makes it clear resource parents are playing a supportive role.

Focus on strengths. It may take time to get a clear sense of a father's strengths. "Acknowledge efforts or progress he is making, from large accomplishments, like completing a substance abuse program, to smaller involvement, like attending doctor appointments or a basketball game with the child" (Kendall & Pilnik, 2010).

A version of this article first appeared in Fostering Perspectives vol. 17, no. 2 (May 2013)

Dads in Foster Care Need Support to Succeed by John McMahon

Being a parent is tough even under ideal conditions. Learning to parent while you are in foster care and still in high school is next-level hard.

Jonny was already a father when he was placed in foster care at age 16. His newborn son, Major, was living with his mother, who was also in foster care.

Jonny's start in foster was rocky. "Honestly, at first it was horrible," Jonny says. "I saw DSS as the bad guys."

Then something unexpected happened: Jonny's son was placed with him.

"It all turned around when I started living with my son," Jonny says. "Before I had Major I was getting in trouble in school. I was a troubled kid at the time. But when my son was placed with me, I looked in the mirror and said, 'I'm gonna get myself together.'"

Dr. Paris Brown, social work supervisor from the county that had custody of Jonny and his son at that time, recalls, "He grew up overnight. He had no trouble taking care of his son."

Jonny says the motivation he needed to take on the responsibilities of a father at such a young age came from his own mother and father. "I had two great parents. I was raised right. I'm not gonna leave my son. I feel I wouldn't really be a man if I wasn't in my son's life."

Jonny also gives credit to his foster mother, Ms. Elizabeth, for respecting his role as a father

When my son was placed with me, I looked in the mirror and said, "I'm gonna get myself together."

and letting him parent his son. "She let me mess up. She let me make my own mistakes. But she was also always looking over my shoulder, and she would give me advice if I needed help."

When he turned 18, Jonny chose to remain in foster care by enrolling in the Foster Care 18-21 program. He

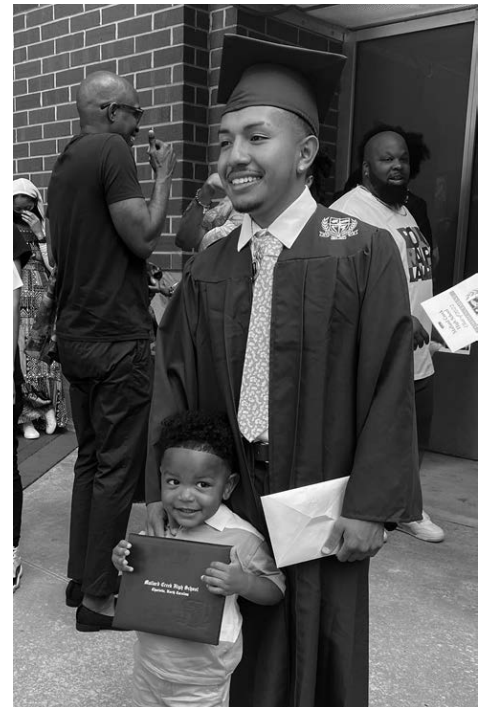
says the support and resources that come with that program have helped. And he appreciates that his child welfare workers Cartia and Paula are in his life to hold him accountable.

"It's good to have somebody looking over me to tell me, 'Jonny, you need to ...' and 'Don't be doing that.'"

Today Jonny, 19, and Major, 3, live with Jonny's dad. Jonny graduated from high school in June and works at Amazon. "I work third shift," Jonny says, "so during the day I can take care of my son. Then I switch off to my dad so my dad can get him some dinner and put him in the bed. Then I come back and get right back to it, taking care of him."

"I'm planning on getting my own spot, but not quite yet."

Dr. Brown, the social work supervisor, says Jonny's story shows what's possible when we support young people in foster care. But she gives most of the credit to Jonny. "For him to do what he needed to do to be on his own with his son is amazing."



Jonny and his son Major at Jonny's high school graduation.

Jonny is more modest. He says, "It wasn't just me. It was my social workers. I had great social workers. I had a great foster mom. Every kid doesn't get that blessing."

Ensuring Health for Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care

Free Health Insurance

Full Medicaid coverage is available for most young adults who aged out of foster care

What Is Medicaid?

- Medicaid is health insurance.
- Health insurance helps pay for your healthcare. This includes yearly checkups, sick visits, dental care, vision care, mental health services, and more.
- Many young adults who aged out of foster care qualify for full coverage Medicaid.
- There are many types and categories of Medicaid. The key is to get a type with full coverage.

What Do You Need to Do to Keep Your Medicaid Active?

- Tell the Medicaid caseworker about your status as an aged out foster youth. Don't assume they know.
- Keep your contact information (phone number, address) up-to-date with your Medicaid caseworker at the Medicaid office.
- Medicaid sends information by mail about program changes or things you need to do.
- You must connect with the Medicaid office yearly to keep your Medicaid.

- Are you between 18 and 26 years old?
- Did you age out of foster care at age 18?
- Did you have Medicaid when you aged out?

If you answered yes to all these questions, you may still be eligible for Medicaid.

Who Could You Call for Help?

- Your DSS Foster Care, LINKS, or Foster Care 18 to 21 worker
- The Child Welfare Department at DSS if your worker no longer works there
- The case worker in the Medicaid office at DSS
- NC Medicaid Contact Center (888-245-0179)

What You Could Say When You Call

"I was in foster care when I turned 18. I think I might qualify for Medicaid insurance."

What Else Should You Know?

- Medicaid coverage for those who aged out of foster care ends when you turn 26
- Prior to your 26th birthday, Medicaid should reach out to you to see if you can get another type of Medicaid. You can also contact them to ask for help before coverage ends.

To learn more visit



www.ncped.org/fosteringhealthnc



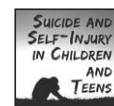
A learning site for North Carolina's foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

The NC Division of Social Services is proud to offer fosteringNC.org, a learning site for resource parents. This site features online courses, webinars, videos and podcasts, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Free Online Courses Include:



This 90-minute course explains what human trafficking is, how to recognize it, and how you can respond.



This 1-hour course explains suicide and non-suicidal self-injury in children and teens and teaches caregivers how to respond.

Foster parents are encouraged to talk in advance to their supervising agency about obtaining training credit through <https://fosteringnc.org/>.

To sign up to receive news and updates go to:

<http://eepurl.com/brPe9b>

Cindy Hamilton Asks, “Who Wouldn’t Want a Family?”

It’s clear where Cindy Hamilton stands when it comes to permanency for young people in foster care.

“Being raised in a family is not a privilege,” Hamilton says. “It’s an absolute human right.”

“I am a strong believer that every child deserves a permanent family through safe family reunification, adoption, or guardianship. I also strongly advocate that children have the right to be raised by their family if it is safe.”

Hamilton’s beliefs are based on experience. She has been a social worker serving youth and families involved in the criminal justice and foster care system for more than 30 years. She is also a licensed clinical therapist, trainer, and foster and adoptive parent.

Thanks to these credentials, Hamilton is often invited to help set the stage when North Carolina counties join our state’s Permanency Roundtable Program. Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services, this program seeks to achieve permanency for youth in foster care by convening stakeholders to address a youth’s immediate, critical need for permanency as they approach the age of 18.

Hamilton helps counties kick off their roundtable programs with a presentation on what she calls “permanency values.”

Members of the NC Division of Social Services’ Permanency Design Team found Hamilton’s message so profound they asked to have it shared with *Fostering Perspectives* readers. What follows was drawn from one of Hamilton’s recent permanency values presentations.

Permanence Is Not a Place

What is permanence? It’s not a place. Permanency is a state of mind, not a placement. Permanence is having the feeling that you are connected. It’s knowing there is someone who will answer your collect phone call in the middle of the night or miss you when you don’t show up to a family gathering.

The feeling of connectedness and the feeling of being part of a family is not a part of policy. There are so many kids who have been in a foster home for five years and every time a worker asks how their placement is going, they say, “It’s fine, I’m good staying here.” But what those young people don’t say is, every day they live on eggshells. Every day they wonder, “Is today the day I won’t be perfect enough and they’ll decide it’s time for me to go?”

It’s about Relationships

Human relationships are what our young people need. So when you’re thinking about the young people that you’re caring for, just remember that if everybody that is loving and caring for them is paid, that’s not the best way. Because the money goes away sometimes. And I’m not saying we’re

in it for the money. I hope you understand that.

But imagine feeling like you had not one person that was **choosing** to be a part of your life.

We Must Believe Permanence Is Possible

The number one difference between children in foster care who find a permanent family and those who don’t is the worker’s attitude about permanency. The worker needs to believe that the child deserves a family, and that permanency is possible for them.

It doesn’t make any difference who the governor is. It doesn’t make any difference who the president is. It doesn’t make any difference where your office is. What matters is the worker has to believe and be willing to do whatever it takes to find kids family.

I challenge us as foster parents to recognize that we can’t be THE person for **every** kid. We have to recognize that if we can’t be the person for a child, our job is to help them find that person.

Be Willing to Challenge Your Assumptions

If we know how to engage others and be empathetic and yet at the same time not judge, we stand a way better chance of this young person getting the family that they need.

I really encourage you to challenge the things that we believe about birth families. I think we tend to have a higher standard than we would for other people or even for ourselves. It’s like we feel we have to have them earn their kids back. When in reality, they’re going to love them long after we close our files.

Families aren’t going to be perfect. Yours isn’t and mine isn’t. And yet I think we oftentimes expect people—other people—to be perfect.

Birth parents often have had their own trauma. They’ve maybe been raised in foster care. They’ve maybe been physically, emotionally, sexually abused. And they’re coming with their trauma and now we’re adding on to it by their kids coming into care. People sometimes need a break. People sometimes need the opportunity to have things “good enough.”

You know, there are lots and lots of us that were raised maybe with a parent that drank too much, or there was domestic violence, or the house wasn’t always clean.

There’s probably a lot of us raised where our moms didn’t work or our dads didn’t work. And nobody moved us to foster care because of it.

But once you get caught in this system, your life is under a magnifying glass. And it’s really, really difficult to get everything right.

Kids Know What You Think

I think of foster parents as full-time caseworkers because you have these young people most of the time. So the way that you interact with them or the way that you interact with their parents or talk about their parents or their worker

or their GAL or any of their people—it matters.

You might think you’re saying all the right things about the birth parent. But if you’re thinking something different your face will show it.

And that’s what they’re going to remember. Way more is caught from parents, than is taught. I tell you this because I learned it the hard way.

This is Your Big Chance

As resource parents, we have these kids for a relatively short time. We have a responsibility to create the very best foundation they can have. If that’s what our intentions are and if that’s what we’re willing to do, we’ve got to do that. Even if it’s uncomfortable. I push you to be advocates for kids and to always speak your truth. It’s really not about us. The thing that’s going to make a difference in finding family for young people is how we are able to engage others—especially their families.

Want more? Visit <https://bit.ly/3LOzhQ2> to watch a full 2-hour presentation of Cindy Hamilton’s “Permanency Values Training: Who Wouldn’t Want a Family?”



No child should ever grow up in foster care. Permanency is vital for healthy development and well-being in all children and youth.

Permanency Roundtables

Permanency Roundtables are intensive, structured case consultations focused on bringing creativity and urgency to expediting permanency for children in care. North Carolina’s Permanency Roundtable Program seeks to achieve permanency for youth in foster care by addressing the youth’s immediate, critical need for permanency as they approach the age of 18. Achieving permanency through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or another lifelong supportive relationship is one way to mitigate the negative outcomes that are probable for youth who would otherwise “age out” without permanent families or positive connections. Roundtables help restore hope for these youth and increase the probability of their achieving permanency, even under difficult circumstances.

Permanency Roundtables are occurring in several North Carolina counties with support from Cindy Hamilton of Linear Consulting, LLC. County DSS agencies who would like to schedule a meeting with Ms. Hamilton to learn more about her “Permanency Values Training” for DSS staff, stakeholders, and partners in their county should submit requests to nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov or reach out to their NC Kids Consultant.



What Can Resource Parents Do If They're Not Treated Like a Part of the Child's Team?

by Gaile Osborne

I love that so many articles in this issue of *Fostering Perspectives* revolve around the idea that resource parents are critical to helping children and youth in foster care achieve permanency. I know from experience that resource parents are an essential part of the team for every young person in foster care.

But I also know there are times when others on the team don't see or treat us that way.

A Contrast in My Life

In my professional life I feel truly valued as a collaborator and a partner. I have a seat at many tables at the local, state, and national levels as I work to improve our education and child welfare systems. My opinion is asked for, heard, and many times helps shape the decisions that get made.

I make referrals to agencies for children all over North Carolina, coach parents, educators, and teams, and give presentations on trauma, IEPs, and other topics. When I email an administrator in a school system or a CEO of an organization or work with a team to secure services for a child, I am treated with respect.

Yet if I bring my professional knowledge and skills to the table in my role as a resource parent, I'm sometimes told I am "opinionated," interfering, or over-involved. When I ask questions or advocate for a child in my home to receive services that they desperately need, I run the risk of being told I am "out of my lane."

Sometimes my participation is subtly discouraged. Instead of being invited to a meeting with a timely email or phone call, I receive a letter that arrives too late. Or I might hear, "It's a quick meeting. You don't have to be there."

Sometimes the message is more blatant. I have asked in court to speak, only to be shut down by child welfare workers and their supervisors. My emails may go unanswered or my calls unreturned.

How is it that as a professional I am booked a year or more out to train, invited to the table to help find solutions, and fully respected, but as a foster parent I am so often left feeling defeated and isolated?

How to Respond?

Though it may sound like I'm complaining, I'm sharing these experiences to reassure you. If these kinds of things have happened to you, you are not alone. I also want you to know that the Foster Family Alliance of NC is in your corner. FFA-NC has been advocating for foster parents to be treated as respected professionals

How is it that as a professional I am a respected partner, but in my role of foster parent I so often feel left out and isolated?

for years. Our efforts even led the NC Foster Parent Bill of Rights to become law in 2021.

Drawing from my own experience, I'd also like to offer the following suggestions that may help the next time you feel you are not a respected part of the child's team.

Focus on what the child needs.

We all have our own ideas and priorities. But the only priority that should be at the table is the child's best interests. In many situations where teams don't agree or fail to collaborate, it's due to our own personal agendas and biases. Put those aside and look only at the child's interests.

Be courteous. Behave in a way that makes others want to work with you. Remain neutral and aware of your presence, body language, and tone at all times. Follow expectations and North Carolina child welfare policy. If you don't know something, ask. When appropriate, ask permission before speaking. If you overstep, apologize.

When you disagree, don't confront others in a mean-spirited way. Instead, ask for clarification. Ask the child welfare worker or supervisor to review your request and explain why the answer is different than you expected. Use words like, "Please help me understand..."

Appreciate other team members. Recognize and relate with team members and their positions. For example, guardians ad litem (GALs) are the child's voice in court, and they are in short supply. Child welfare workers and supervisors are stressed at a level we've never seen. Many are leaving for other positions or retiring. In some counties, staff are inexperienced or just out of school.

Share with others how you see your role. Remind the team you are an advocate for the child. If you are like me, you are passionate

about advocating. At times, I have to ask myself how I can advocate in a way that is less divisive.

Be professional. Send follow-up emails restating your understanding of conversations. Ask clarifying questions in a neutral way both verbally and in writing.

Find and offer middle ground. There are times when a compromise is possible.

Know when to sleep on it. I know firsthand that sending an email when you're upset or angry isn't going to go well. Get a good night's sleep so you can move forward in a positive frame of mind the next day. If the child is currently safe and you can wait a day, it's better for all parties.

Respect other team members' authority. Every single person in the child's life has an opinion. But we don't all have the same authority. Some make decisions from hour to hour. Others make decisions day to day. And others are charged with making long-term decisions about permanency. We must remember the child welfare worker is ultimately responsible for achieving permanency for the child.

Conclusion

Being a foster parent isn't easy. It's honestly the most difficult thing I have done. But at the same time, it's the most rewarding. It is not something you do half-heartedly. If you are like me, you throw yourself into the situation 3,000%. There's nothing wrong with that, but know you will come across situations where your dedication and desire to be involved aren't going to be appreciated or valued as much as you'd like.

In the end, my advice is to give your best for the child, regardless of the beliefs or acceptance of the team. You are an integral part of the child's life now and in the future. That's what matters.

Gaile Osborne is a foster and adoptive parent and Executive Director of Foster Family Alliance of NC.

fostering perspectives (November 2022)

Sponsors. NC Division of Social Services, Foster Family Alliance North Carolina, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program at the UNC School of Social Work.

Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o Jonathan Rockoff, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, 325 Pittsboro St., Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3550. Email: jrockoff@email.unc.edu.

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Editors. John McMahan & Jonathan Rockoff

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

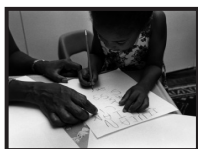
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Writing Contest Someone I Can Count On

In the most recent *Fostering Perspectives* writing contest we gave young people in foster care the following prompt: "They say having at least one adult that you feel close to and can really depend on can make a big difference when you are in foster care. If you have a person like that in your life, tell us a little about them and why they're special to you." Here's what they had to say.

1

Terah, age 15

I do indeed have an adult I feel close to and can depend on. Her name is Oshimma Daye, and she's my foster mother. She's extremely special to me and here's why.

Ms. O's honesty makes me feel comfortable to open up about myself.

"Ms. O," as I call her, is important to me because she is a genuinely good person. She's not the type to be two-faced with you and she's always honest. Because of this, we really click. Her honesty towards me makes me feel more comfortable to open up about myself. She's very accepting and if something makes me happy, it makes her happy.

O's a people-pleaser: she puts others' comfort before her own. She treats me like I've been here for years when it hasn't even been one. Any issues I have, she helps me solve them as if they were her problems. I love that.

Above all, "Osha" is so special to me because of her ability to see the good in everyone. She lets me be myself and she's truly the best foster mom I could've been placed with. I'm excited to see how our pair takes on life in the future!

Terah received \$100 for taking top prize in the writing contest.

2

Taelynn, age 20

I met Lori Daiker when I got admitted here at the Black Mountain Children's Home Independent Living program. From the first day I met her she was so welcoming and just always had a smile on her face. Sometimes I think that maybe all someone needs to make their day is to see a welcoming smile and to know that there's positivity in the room.

If I called Lori at 3 a.m., she would answer. If I just needed to rant or support or someone to remind me to pray, she was the one I called.

Another characteristic I genuinely love about Lori is that she is so easy to talk to. If I called her at 3 a.m., she would answer. If I just needed to rant or support or someone to remind me to pray, she was the one I called. Anytime I need motivation or someone to let me know that everything is going to be okay, Lori Daiker is the one to talk to. She has always been here for me from day one, and I will forever be grateful for that. She doesn't judge me. If anything, she understands. Lori has been through a lot. She is one of the strongest people I am privileged to have gotten to know!

Taelynn received \$50 for taking second prize.

3

Faith, age 16

My group home staff, Ms. Aly has done so much for me; she helped and continues to help me with my attitude, my actions, and my words when I get mad. It is hard, very HARD. She keeps me on

When you do decide to listen to what Ms. Aly is saying, it helps you.

track most of the time. When you do decide to listen to what she is saying, it helps you no matter how mad it'll make you. She tells you, "things to help you, not to hurt you." Ms. Aly is such a generous person. She is the one to give you the shirt off her back. I consider her family. She cares about the kids that come through the group home that cause major problems. Ms. Aly has recently gone back to school to obtain her CNA and had to cut her hours back drastically. I won't get to see her like I used to, and it makes me very upset; but I know how for six years she's worked with teens to get them where they want to be, and now she needs to do the same for herself. Ms. Aly, you do for us—now do you!

Faith received \$25 for taking third prize.

Holly, age 18

My brother shares the same blood that flows through my veins. He and I have been in and out of many unfortunate circumstances. My brother has been the only constant in my entire life. He has never abandoned me or neglected me. Both the mistreatment that I have faced and the smiling moments that I have had, I have shared with him. A time that usually has me feeling down is when the people in the foster homes make me feel alienated or neglected. I immediately find comfort in [my brother] because we both typically go through the same experiences and we can relate to one another. . . . I know I can rely on my brother to be there for me.

My brother has been the only constant in my entire life . . . Both the mistreatment that I have faced and the smiling moments that I have had, I have shared with him.

Holly's entry first appeared in the Nov. 2017 issue



Nurturing Natural Supports

by Jonathan Rockoff

Take a minute and think back to your childhood. Who were your strongest connections? Your biggest influences? It's likely the first people who come to mind were your primary caregivers. Whether you were raised by your parents, extended family, resource parents, or someone else, your primary caregivers helped shape the person you are today.

But let's not forget the others who motivated, supported, and impacted you along the way.

Natural Supports

Was there an aunt or uncle, grandparent, family friend, neighbor, mentor, teacher, coach, or religious leader who lifted you up? Who helped you understand the world and helped you make your way? Adults in our lives who are not caregivers but are nonetheless influential are our **natural supports**. Think about where you would be without your natural supports.

Like everyone else, children and teens in foster care, in kinship care, or who have been adopted all have and need natural supports. Unfortunately, young people involved in the child welfare system often move homes, schools, towns, and sometimes even states. When this happens, they often leave their natural supports behind. Through no fault of their own, they lose positive connections to stable, caring adults.

This is a big loss, because for children and youth in foster care, relational permanence matters. Louisell (2008) defines **relational permanence** as "lifelong connections to caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide a permanent, parent-like connection for that youth." Relational permanence is so important, in fact, that North Carolina has made it one of the primary outcomes of NC LINKS, our state's independent living program.

You Can Help

Foster, adoptive, and kinship parents are in a great position to help sustain and nurture natural supports and relational permanence for young people. Just because a youth moves to a different home, school, or town does not mean they need to lose meaningful connections. Make it your mission to seek out those natural supports that can continue to have a positive influence and build healthy relationships.

Even small steps can help. If the youth is old enough, ask them who they want to stay connected with. If they name a coach, teacher, or neighbor, let their child welfare worker know and tell the worker you would like to help the youth maintain the relationship. Sometimes this can be as simple as connecting the youth and their natural support person through text, FaceTime, or social media.

Reinforcing natural supports can also be a great way to practice shared parenting. Ask the birth parents who they think effective natural supports are for their child. They may think of someone the child has overlooked. Plus, by asking the parents for input, you are showing them you value their insight and guidance—you are acknowledging that they are the experts on their family.

Sometimes maintaining connections to natural supports even leads to permanency. People who aren't blood relations but who have a meaningful connection and commitment to the child can be a viable option for adoption or guardianship if reunification or kinship care are not possible.

I've seen this happen many times. A young person's nurse, family friend, or teacher will start out fostering them and end up adopting them. It can be a seamless progression from the role of natural support to forever family.

The great thing about natural supports is that a youth can never have enough. Never miss an opportunity to encourage every child and youth in your care to form positive and healthy relationships with caring adults. After all, you never know which connection could provide the support they need, when they need it the most.

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

Meet the SaySo Team

SaySo is on the cusp of turning 25 years old. SaySo, short for Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, was formed in 1998. We are North Carolina's youth advocacy organization. We have grown a good bit over the past year and are excited to introduce you to our team.



Ms. Jaleesa Bartley-Maye, Administrative Staff. When Jaleesa and her husband became foster parents in 2015, she decided to pursue a career in child welfare to further her passion for advocating for youth in the substitute care system. After adopting in 2018, Jaleesa and her husband continue to serve as foster parents. She has also authored and illustrated two children's books.



Ms. Carmelita Coleman, Executive Director. Ms. Carmelita is an experienced and passionate social worker with over 25 years working with youth, families, and child serving systems. Her vision for SaySo is to see SaySo more aligned with other national partnerships and growing in youth & alumni membership, local chapters, resources, and staff capacity.



Ms. Dekota Jeter, Young Adult Project Leader. Dekota has 10+ years of experience in this field. Experiencing foster care from ages 13-21, she was a part of numerous programs and participated in a great deal of volunteer work in her community, even after she aged out of foster care. She says, "I used my voice that was amplified

by programs like SaySo to build my confidence and speak out for myself. I use my experiences and resources to pay it forward to our current and upcoming youth and young people who are in substitute care. I am passionate beyond measure because when I see them, I see me!"



Ms. Tan McDougal, Special Projects Program Supervisor, has 30 years' experience working in various capacities with families, children, youth, and young adults. She enjoys serving others and helping them reach their fullest potential. She says, "I am passionate about working with youth and young adults to help them make successful transitions to adulthood. I strive to make a difference in the lives of those I serve."



Ms. Cherie Watlington, SaySo Operations Manager. Prior to joining SaySo, her work included assisting parents of youth in foster care. She says, "That work allowed me to see that many of the challenges these parents face could have been prevented if they had the appropriate supports when they were young. I choose to work with youth as a preventative measure to reduce the challenges they may face in the future. In the next few years I see SaySo having

the resources to reach youth on a national level."



Ms. Kourtney White, Program Coordinator. Kourtney is an NC native and has a background in nonprofit management and youth advocacy. Kourtney hopes to empower young adults to know their worth, access their potential, and be world changers. She says, "There is an untapped wealth of information, power, and wisdom that youth have to offer and it's up to us, as adults, to create those spaces for young adults to be heard." Kourtney stands by the phrase "it takes a village" and aims to see communities come together to create systematic change that supports vulnerable populations, especially youth in substitute care.



Mrs. Calvisha Wilson, Community Engagement Coordinator. Calvisha says, "SaySo is all about the young people. I enjoy that SaySo gives young people a safe place to be their authentic selves. I love that SaySo provides youth and alumni with experiences and opportunities they wouldn't typically have. My desire for SaySo is to develop a youth life coaching and peer-to-peer mentoring model."

SaySo

SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), is a statewide, North Carolina-based association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

Web: www.saysoinc.org
Tik Tok: [saysoinc](https://www.tiktok.com/@saysoinc)
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Resource Parents Promote Healing and Resilience by Supporting Sibling Connections

by John McMahon

In her 17 years as a foster parent, Kathy Willis has learned a lot. One of the most important lessons? Being in foster care is not easy.

“Children come into care due to trauma,” Willis says, referring to the abuse and neglect that typically precede foster care placement. “Then by placing them in care, we’re yanking them out of everything they know. Placement is almost an additional trauma to these children.”

This is why Willis is passionate about maintaining and honoring connections between siblings in foster care. “Keeping brothers and sisters together is so important,” she says. “Children gain a support system by being together.”

Research supports this idea. Studies show that when placed together with at least one of their siblings, children experience an enhanced sense of safety and fewer emotional and behavioral problems.

They may also experience better outcomes. For instance, studies have linked joint placement of siblings to increased placement stability and to greater likelihood of permanency through reunification, adoption, or guardianship.

In fact, keeping siblings connected makes such a difference it is required by law. The federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) mandates agencies make reasonable efforts to place siblings together unless it is contrary to a child’s safety or well-being to do so. And North Carolina’s Foster Care Children’s Bill of Rights (G.S. 131D-10.1) states that for children and youth in foster care the first priority should be

placement in a home with a sibling and that they should have access to “appropriate communication measures” to maintain contact with any sibling who does not live with them.

Connected While Living Apart

Back in 2019, Kathy Willis started caring for half a sibling group that had been split up: two brothers were in her care and two more brothers were in a different foster home. From the outset, Willis made sure the two sets of siblings visited each other frequently. She also tried to bring the boys together every way she could, including by providing respite for the other foster family so all four boys could be together.

This situation altered earlier this year when the parents of the other brothers retired from fostering. Kathy Willis saw this change as an opportunity.

Today Ms. Willis is parenting three of the brothers. The oldest, age 18, is enrolled in North Carolina’s Foster Care 18-21 program and lives in another placement.

According to Willis, the initial adjustment to this new arrangement wasn’t easy for everyone—especially the 18-year-old. “At first he felt like he was all alone,” she says. “But then we started having day visits and weekend visits. He needed to feel that connection.”

Things have settled down, Willis says. “He knows he is not alone and is being very successful right now.” He’s working with his foster father



Kathy Willis

and has earned several promotions on the job.

Thriving Together

As for the three boys in her care, Ms. Willis says things are going very well. “We model for them what a healthy family looks like. We provide the tools they need to begin to heal.”

“We actually have cards we work with that allow the children to talk about things like, *How are you dealing with grief?* or *How do you deal with stressors?*”

“And because they feel secure with their siblings, they’re able to open up. One will share something and the others will say, ‘Oh, my gosh, don’t think about it that way! You need to think about it this way.’ There’s so much processing that goes on! They’re so much healthier because they’re together.”

Staying Motivated

Kathy Willis says exchanges like these and other small daily successes help keep her motivated and focused on maintaining and honoring sibling connections.

“Sibling relationships provide continuity of important attachments for the children we serve. Those attachments help us move towards healthy relationships. And isn’t that our goal? We provide children the best tools so they can make healthy decisions to help heal and ultimately to become resilient. And resiliency is something we all need.”

Ways Agencies Can Support Sibling Placements

- Siblings should have the same worker, if possible.
- Place children in homes as geographically near to each other as possible.
- When a family is recruited to foster sibling groups, don’t fill up the home with individual children just because the beds are there. Some programs provide a stipend for families without placements, as an incentive to remain with the agency and keep beds open until a sibling group needs placement.
- Siblings can be placed in stages, so the foster home is not overwhelmed and each child can integrate into the family.
- Provide extra supports to help the family deal with logistics—transportation, assistance with tasks such as school registration, day care, etc.
- Make services such as training and respite care available and accessible.
- Encourage/start support groups in which resource families can share and learn from one another. Families who have adopted sibling groups have the capacity to act as mentors, support networks, and recruiters.
- Make sure resource families, especially kin, receive all the financial support to which they are entitled.
- Ask community members and businesses to help support resource families by donating or providing at a lower cost items such as vans, bunk beds, etc.
- If siblings must be placed separately, maintain the sibling relationship through joint therapy sessions, shared vacations, shared respite care, and by placing siblings in the same neighborhood or school district.

Reprinted from *Fostering Perspectives*, v. 14, no. 1 (Nov. 2009)

Marti, age 16

My siblings mean the world to me because we were there for each other through all the ups and downs that we experienced with our birth mom. They are the only ones who understand me. I was the mom most of the time because I am the oldest and they would always tell me what was on their mind. I miss growing up with them. I wish on a star every night to see them again soon. It never comes true.



I wish on a star every night to see them. It never comes true.

There are four of us. We haven’t been a major part of each other’s lives for eight years now. They have a different dad than I do and he don’t see how much I care about them. Honestly, I don’t think he cares. The most important thing is that they are happy and have what they need. My brothers and sister mean everything to me and I would do anything in my power for them. I want them to know that I love them with all my heart. I will see them again one day soon—I promise.

Reprinted from *Fostering Perspectives*, v. 14, no. 1 (Nov. 2009)



Foster Family Alliance-NC Update

Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is excited about the growth and support we experienced on every level over the past six months. FFA-NC has partnered with new organizations to make our support more robust and to learn exactly what is offered across our state. We've also grown, expanding from two to five staff members. Ultimately, we have to give the kudos to you, our partners, for helping us secure funding and participating in various ways.

As the executive director of FFA-NC, I have conversations daily about resource families in North Carolina. I never miss an opportunity to tell others about your amazing work and the strength you demonstrate in sometimes very difficult circumstances. You directly support some of our most vulnerable children and youth. Thank you for your dedication and service. Thank you for your feedback and being a voice for change. I am honored to walk this walk with you and humbled daily by the perseverance and heart resource parents have.

This foster care journey has been hard, but it is truly the most rewarding experience. I have seen healing occur for my adoptive children that I wasn't expecting to happen. I've seen babies who have been exposed to substances thrive. I've seen families reunited thanks to collaboration by organizations statewide!

Please let FFA-NC know if you ever need help, support, or just an ear to listen. You can reach us via email (info@ffa-nc.org), phone (800/578-7770), or on our website (<https://www.ffa-nc.org/>).

*— Fostering with you,
Gaile Osborne*

What Does FFA-NC Do?

We want to be your one-stop-shop for all things foster/kinship/adoptive parenting. Whether you are wanting to connect just to get on our newsletter list, learning about the steps to becoming a foster parent, discussing a parenting situation you are experiencing, or just needing to hear another voice on the other end of the line that understands your journey, we are here to help. Every person employed by Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina has direct experience of foster, kinship, or adoption care in our state. Most currently have children placed in their homes, and many of us have adopted. We live your life and want to help any way we can.

Join us at Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina so we can support you on your journey. <https://www.ffa-nc.org/membership>

Did You Know?

Did you know as a North Carolina foster parent you are eligible to get Non-Emergency Medicaid Mileage Reimbursement? To do so, you must contact the NC Department of Health and Human Services in the county in which you reside. Ask for the Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation contact in your county. From there, you should receive a contract to be reimbursed at 29 cents per mile for any Medicaid billable services.

Think about using this if you are doing weekly therapy appointments, doctor visits, medication management, etc. Every little bit adds up. If you are having difficulties securing this service, please email Gaile Osborne at gaile.osborne@ffa-nc.org.

Training

Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina offers training you can use towards your required training hours. At least once per month, we are offering online training on topics relevant to resource families. See the calendar here: <https://bit.ly/trainingwithFFA-NC>

Volunteer Opportunities

We are looking for volunteers across North Carolina. If you are interested, please reach out to our volunteer coordinator via this form: <https://bit.ly/volunteerwithFFA-NC>

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act

Joint guidance from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services about implementation of the foster care provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was released on June 23, 2016. This link (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html>) will guide you to a 28-page guidance document as well as to two Dear Colleague Letters. The document delivers a strong message that the unique needs of children in foster care must be addressed. These provisions went into effect December 10, 2016, at which time state and local child welfare and education agencies began conversations about their shared responsibility to support the school stability and success of students in foster care. The foster care provisions of ESSA, coupled with the school stability provisions of the Fostering Connections Act, envision shared responsibility for school stability and success between child welfare and education agencies. This joint guidance offers details about the requirements under the new law, provides examples from around the country about what's working to support students in foster care, and is a critical resource in implementation efforts.



Here's a webinar explaining it all: <https://bit.ly/ffa-ncessa>

Advisory Boards

We are currently recruiting people to be on our advisory boards. We have one for foster parents, kinship parents, adoptive parents, and professionals. We hope to recruit in the future for former foster youth and other areas we want feedback. If you are interested, please fill out the form here: <https://bit.ly/advisoryboardsffa-nc>

Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is constantly looking for partners to help reach all 100 counties in our state. If you know of an organization, workplace, agency, etcetera that might be interested in partnering with us, please contact Connie.Holt@ffa-nc.org. No matter how big or small the relationship or organization, we are prepared to share our information and how we can collaborate to meet the needs of you, our resource parents.

Post-Adoption Support in North Carolina

Have you adopted in the past? Do you need support now? NC DHHS has contracts with multiple agencies across North Carolina to provide post-adoption support. Please see the information here to guide you on whom to contact in your county: <https://bit.ly/ffa-ncpostadoptive>

Resource Family Curriculum

Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is in the process of launching a daytime RPC training.

What is RPC training? The Resource Parent Curriculum (RPC) (officially titled *Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents*) is an eight-module workshop designed to educate resource parents on the effects trauma has on the children in their care. If you are interested in signing up, please fill out the form found here: <https://bit.ly/ffa-ncrpcsignup>

Know Your Region

NC DHHS has divided our state into seven regions. We have support groups for every region and for the whole state. If you are interested in signing up, please visit our website resources page, where you'll see a map of North Carolina and the links for regional support. <https://www.ffa-nc.org/resources>

Online Support Group

Also, we have a resource parent only support group online at North Carolina Foster Parents via Facebook. Come join us!



Seeing and Working with Your Own Biases by Jodi Franck

Resource parents are a bridge to help children get back to their families. That's why shared parenting and maintaining and strengthening connections between children and their caregivers are so central to resource parenting.

But to do this well, you need to be able to see the good in families and understand how important children's families are to them. That's why it's so important to understand and guard against implicit bias.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is defined as unconscious favoritism toward or prejudice against people of a particular ethnicity, gender, or social group that influences one's actions or perceptions.

Unconscious is a key word here. With implicit bias, you have a prejudice but don't know it. Even if you mean well and consciously reject racism and other biases, implicit bias can lead you to unwittingly act in ways that result in discrimination.

It happens all the time. For example, "experiments show that people are more likely to hire a male candidate for a science position, rate the athletic ability of a person higher if they believe the person is African-American rather than white, and rate the verbal skills of a person higher if they think the writer is a woman rather than a man" (Handelsman & Sakraney, 2015).

The key thing to remember about implicit bias is that it affects everybody. No matter how well-intentioned, no one is immune.

Awareness Is Key

The good news is, as we become aware of them, we can overcome our implicit biases and mitigate how much they affect us. Areas where implicit bias may show up as you work with children and youth in foster care and their families include:

- Race and ethnicity
- Poverty
- Age
- Gender
- Sexuality/Transgender
- History (e.g., prior involvement with CPS, criminal records, past drug or alcohol use).

The first step in reducing your implicit biases is to NOTICE them. When you experience a negative thought or feeling about someone, slow down and think about it. Are you making a judgement? Can you stop and let yourself treat this person as an individual?

Eight Tactics

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) gives eight tactics that can be used to reduce implicit biases. To help us remember, they use the acronym IMPLICIT:

- I** *Introspection*: Set aside time to understand your biases by taking a personal inventory of them. This can be done by taking a test such as Harvard University's Implicit Association Test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>).
- M** *Mindfulness*: Once you understand the biases you hold, be mindful that you're more likely to give in to them when you're under pressure or need to make quick decisions. If you're feeling stressed, pause for a minute, collect yourself, and take a few deep breaths.
- P** *Perspective-Taking*: If you think you may be stereotyping people or groups, imagine what it would feel like for others to stereotype you.
- L** *Learn to Slow Down*: Before jumping to conclusions about others, remind yourself of positive examples of people from their age group, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This can include friends; colleagues; or public figures such as athletes, members of the clergy, or local leaders.
- I** *Individualization*: Remind yourself that all people have individual characteristics that are separate from others within their group. Focus on the things you have in common.
- C** *Check Your Messaging*: Instead of telling yourself you don't see people based on their color, class, or sexual orientation, learn to use statements that embrace inclusivity. For example, Apple Inc.'s inclusion statement circles around the topic of being different together: "At Apple, we're not all the same, and that's our greatest strength."
- I** *Institutionalize Fairness*: Embrace and support diversity at work. The AAFP suggests individuals use the Equity and Empowerment Lens, which is designed to help organizations improve planning and resource allocation to foster more equitable policies.
- T** *Take Two*: Overcoming unconscious biases takes time. Understand that this is a lifelong process and that deprogramming your biases requires constant mindfulness and work.

Understanding and guarding against your implicit biases can make you a better bridge to help children get back to their families.

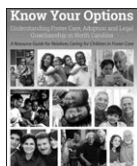
Jodi Franck is Foster Home Licensing Manager with the NC Division of Social Services.

Resources to Build Stronger Partnerships for Permanency



This free 1-hour course explains why North Carolina prefers to achieve permanence through reunification or kinship care, the importance of shared parenting and helping youth maintain connections with people that matter to them, and the role kinship care can play in achieving permanence. Hosted on FosteringNC.org, NC's learning site for foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers.

<https://ncswlearn.org/wp/fosteringnc/permanency/story.html>



Know Your Options

This guide outlines the resources, supports, and benefits available to kinship caregivers in North Carolina. Explains the foster care, adoption, and legal guardianship processes and includes a helpful chart that compares different types of kinship placements.

<https://bit.ly/3dtQPDB>.



Guardianship: Pathway to Permanence

This free, 1-hour course provides NC resource parents information about guardianship. Explores differences and similarities between adoption and guardianship and includes interviews in which NC guardians explain why they chose this pathway to permanence and what it has been like for them. Hosted on FosteringNC.org

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



Youth Perspectives on Permanence

Don't miss this memorable 2-minute video, in which young people from NC share their thoughts about what permanence means to them.

<https://bit.ly/3IVOmOQ>

Kinship TFC Pilot Helps Families and Strengthens Partnership between Public and Private Agencies in NC

by Amy Lawson and Alice Moore

Achieving permanency is a team effort. In North Carolina, all 100 counties have a public child-placing agency—usually the county department of social services, or DSS. Every child and youth in foster care in North Carolina is in the temporary custody of one of these public agencies, which are responsible for ensuring they achieve safe, timely permanence.

DSS agencies rely heavily on private out-of-home care agencies for help with this task. The longstanding partnership between our agencies, New Hanover County DSS and Boys and Girls Homes of NC, is a good illustration.

Our agencies partner in many areas, including family foster care, therapeutic foster care, and adoption services. For example, when New Hanover DSS cannot find a foster home for a child needing placement, they often call Boys and Girls Homes. When children can't reunify with their parents or find permanence with relatives, sometimes they achieve it through adoption by their Boys and Girls Homes foster parents.

Our agencies are always looking for new ways to work together to achieve the best possible results for children and families. One of our most recent efforts focuses on supporting kinship parents in an effort to improve permanency for youth.

Kinship TFC Pilot

In 2020, New Hanover DSS and Boys and Girls Homes partnered with the Family Focused Treatment Association to pilot a therapeutic foster care (TFC) program specifically for kinship families.

Thanks to this new program, five kinship families were licensed to provide TFC for youth in New Hanover DSS custody and seven youth obtained permanency through guardianship. In addition, the pilot helped four youth from Gaston County reach permanency—the relative family that obtained guardianship of these youth was initially licensed by New Hanover DSS but was able to transfer their license to Boys and Girls Homes. So far, over 45 New Hanover youth have been served by the Kinship TFC program.

Nonrelative foster parents typically do a lot of reflection before beginning their foster care journey. Kinship families, on the other hand, often have limited time for reflection and may receive little or no training before they find themselves caring for a youth in foster care. Because they have had less preparation, many are unsure how the system of care works. For these and other reasons, kin families often need more support.

In the Kinship TFC program, kin families get this support from two child welfare workers—

We are always looking for new ways to work together to achieve the best possible results for children and families.

one from New Hanover DSS and one from Boys and Girls Homes. This extra support comes in handy when youth are struggling in school or have behavioral needs. Although the program calls for workers to contact kin families once a week, Boys and Girls Homes is often in touch with families multiple times a week.

Reconnecting with Extended Family

Sometimes agencies struggle to find permanence for children, which can cause them to spend years in foster care. When this happens, Boys and Girls Homes helps New Hanover DSS search for and engage extended family members. Partnering in this way opens new doors to permanence. When another agency calls using a different tone and approach, it gives extended family members a chance to make a fresh start.

Supporting Shared Parenting

In North Carolina, foster parents are expected to develop partnerships with the parents or guardians of the children in their care. This is called shared parenting. Shared parenting is crucial because it helps ensure children's needs are met and can even expedite permanency.

But foster parents are sometimes fearful or intimidated by shared parenting—especially when first meeting the child's family. To make it easier, New Hanover DSS and Boys and Girls Homes make sure the foster family's TFC worker is at the table during shared parenting. The worker is an advocate for the kinship family by being a neutral party in what can often be a demanding situation. Building rapport with parents and kinship families, the worker can help bridge the gap, creating a partnership that benefits the youth in care.

While implementing the Kinship TFC program, we learned that shared parenting can be extra difficult when a child in foster care is being cared for by a relative. In a kinship placement, family roles often change drastically—an aunt or a grandmother suddenly finds herself in the role of "mom" regarding day-to-day care of a child. This can be hard for everyone.

But the Kinship TFC program also showed us that with open communication and a focus on what's best for the child, families can get past these difficulties. We have seen some beautiful shared parenting experiences that continue after the child returns home and results in a long-term partnership. For an example, see the course *Critical Partners for Permanency*, which features a New Hanover DSS foster parent! You can find that course on <https://fosteringnc.org>.

Making Connections

During our Kinship TFC brainstorm meetings it was extra helpful having Boys and Girls Homes there because they often knew the kids from previous involvement with them in their foster homes. They offered great ideas, identified people who were connected to these children, and helped the team "think outside of the box." Even when no kinship placements were identified, Boys and Girls Homes reached out to relatives to inquire about their willingness to be a support for the youth in care. Even if permanency could not be reached, Boys and Girls Homes helped youth build lasting relationships that would assist them as they transition to adulthood.

Conclusion

As advocate and foster care alum Josh Shipp says, "Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story." It truly takes a village to help children in foster care become successful young adults. New Hanover DSS and Boys and Girls Homes are fortunate to have such a strong partnership to make this happen. Together we have learned that kinship care, when implemented with the proper supports, often creates positive outcomes for youth.

Amy Lawson, MSW, LCSW, is Director of Therapeutic Foster Care at Boys and Girls Homes of NC. Alice Moore, MSW, is Foster Care Licensing Supervisor at New Hanover County Health and Human Services.

More on Kinship TFC

In 2019, the Family Focused Treatment Association (FFTA) received a \$950,000, three-year grant from The Duke Endowment to deliver a kinship therapeutic foster care (TFC) model. The goal is to help children and youth remain in their family network with kin who will receive the hands-on support they need to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of those in their care.

FFTA is working with the following North Carolina public and private agencies to deliver Kinship TFC in this project: Methodist Home for Children, Wake County Human Services, Children's Hope Alliance, Cabarrus County DHS, Boys and Girls Homes of NC, and New Hanover County DSS.

The project offers a Learning Community for participating agencies to reinforce the knowledge acquired in training and provide support, technical assistance, and coaching. FFTA is partnering with the UNC School of Social Work and Child Focus to offer the Learning Community and support to pilot agencies. Child Trends, a leading research organization, is evaluating the project.

FFTA is committed to sharing its learnings from this pilot with stakeholders across North Carolina and beyond. Please direct questions about the project to Erica Burgess at eburgess@ffta.org



Help us find families for these children and youth

For more information on these children or adoption in general, contact the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network (tel: 877-625-4371; email: nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov; web: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/child-welfare-services/adoption-and-foster-care>)



Aiyana, age 16

Aiyana is an adorable young girl. She can brighten up any room she enters. At first, she comes off as shy, but when she is comfortable her bright personality shines through. Aiyana has a breath-taking smile. She is funny and intelligent. Aiyana desires to find happiness and joy every day and makes friends easily. Aiyana

is a straight-A student who enjoys all school subjects. After school, Aiyana attends Theater club and also participates in Track and Field. During her downtime she is usually drawing and letting her creative juices flow. When she grows up, Aiyana aspires to be a teacher or caretaker of young children.



Cody, age 16

Cody is a very shy and intelligent young man. He loves political science, history, and discovering conspiracies about the world. Cody also enjoys being outside. He especially loves the mountains and riding his bike. Cody dreams of being successful, going to a 4-year university, and positively impacting the world. Cody has a strong desire for a supportive and loving family. He expressed a desire for a home that is in a safe

community where he can freely play outside. Cody thrives on schedules and structure; he prefers to always know what is planned for his day in advance.



Kaliyah, age 16

Kaliyah is dynamic, energetic, and described by her teachers as bright and articulate. She has an adventurous spirit, which should be encouraged by her forever family. This well-rounded young lady has interests that include dancing, shopping, arts, crafts, and computers. Like many teens her age, Kaliyah enjoys keeping up her appearance, especially with her hair and clothes. She loves to laugh and enjoys making

others laugh with her. Kaliyah is a natural leader who can express herself and provide others with direction and guidance. Kaliyah has strong familial ties, which her forever family will need to accept and support. The ideal family for Kaliyah will be committed and able to meet Kaliyah where she is emotionally.



Makala, age 17

Makala is a confident and strong teenager. She is socially intelligent and enjoys laughing and cracking jokes. She really cares about her friends and shows great loyalty and support to them. Makala is described as outgoing, beautiful, kind, and helpful. She enjoys English and being a part of ROTC in school. Her favorite sport to play is softball. Makala's favorite activities are skateboarding, reading, and photog-

raphy. She enjoys going to the beach, watching movies, and eating pasta. Makala aspires to one day join the military.



Christopher, age 15

Christopher is an energetic, charismatic, and respectful young man. He loves music and has aspirations of being a rapper or music producer when he is older. He currently writes his own music and performs it in his room. He is an active young man and enjoys spending time outside playing basketball and football with friends. A rising 10th grader, Christopher enjoys school and his favorite subject is PE. Christopher does well with peers and adults alike

and makes friends easily. Christopher is spiritual and attends church twice a week with involvement in the Youth Men's Group. Christopher deserves a family who will love him and provide him with structure and consistency. He does well with other children in the home and enjoys spending one-on-one time with his caregivers.



Johnathon, age 15

Johnathon is an easy-going young man who has been described by others as bright, lovable, and a hard worker. Johnathon can be soft spoken and shy but opens up when he is doing something that he loves, such as playing video games. He enjoys drawing, building with Legos, music, and loving on dogs. Johnathon prefers playing indoors to outdoors but has recently expressed an interest in playing baseball. Along with a good cheeseburger, cereal and pizza top his list of favorite foods. Johnathon will be a great addition

to the right loving home. Johnathon would do best as an only child in the home. Johnathon would benefit from a loving family that can provide structure while making him feel safe and secure. Johnathon desires to have a family who will interact with him one-on-one and provide him with stability. Having a dog in the home would be a plus!



Luke, age 17

Luke is a strong-minded, intelligent, and funny young man. He is interactive, talkative, and enjoys joking around. His favorite activities are playing basketball, video games, and watching action or adventure movies. Luke has grown to be a great person with a good attitude. He is very respectful and always there to lend a hand to someone who needs help. When Luke is not playing basketball or playing his video games you can catch him diving into a good book.



Samson, age 14

Samson is a fun-loving young man in search of a family. He loves to make others laugh and brings happiness into any room. Samson is intelligent and can be persistent when going after things he wants. Samson has been described as brave and a protector of those that he cares a lot about. Samson likes video games, playing basketball, and spending time outside. His favorite place to vacation is the beach. He loves a good meal, with his favorite things to eat being pizza and burgers. Samson is looking for a family who will

embrace him and treat him as their own. He would do best in a household that can provide him with stability, structure, and guidance. Samson is looking for a family who will not give up on him when things get tough. Samson has asked for a family who will take him to church and allow him to maintain a connection with his sisters.



A reader asks ...

Can young adults in North Carolina remain in foster care past age 18?

Absolutely! Research tells us that young adults who age out of foster care at age 18 face more obstacles than their peers who have not experienced foster care. Staying in foster care can help them overcome these challenges as they transition to independent adulthood.

Why Stay in Foster Care Past Age 18?

Studies show that, compared to youth who age out at 18, young adults who remain in foster care are much more likely to have a positive housing, employment, and education status. They are also less likely to experience economic hardship, food insecurity, homelessness, psychiatric hospitalization, and criminal justice system involvement.

Findings like these inspired Congress to pass the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-351), a law that gave states and tribes the option to provide title IV-E foster care payments to youth up to age 21 if those youth meet certain education, training, or work requirements.

NC's Foster Care 18-21 Program

Our state's extended foster care program is called Foster Care 18-21. No matter what county they live in, if a youth turns 18 while they are in foster care in North Carolina, they have the option to enter this program.

The goals of Foster Care 18-21 are an extension of the outcomes sought by NC LINKS. The program seeks to ensure every enrolled young adult experiences permanence, stable housing, educational success, economic security, pregnancy prevention support and parenting support, normalcy, and health and well-being support.

Foster Care 18-21 program services and benefits include Medicaid coverage, educational grants or scholarships for attending a public community college or university in North Carolina, access to LINKS services, and ongoing case work that includes:

- a Transitional Living Plan;
- monthly contacts between the young adult and their worker;
- quarterly assessments of the young adult's home; and
- assistance with annual credit checks.

The program also provides placement in a home approved by the county child welfare agency. The placement can be a licensed foster home, college or university dormitory, or an approved semi-supervised housing arrangement. Please note that all placements must be approved by the agency director.

Foster Care 18-21 placements are supported

by monthly payments at the standard foster care board rate. Payments may be made to a foster parent, placement agency, relative, or host family. They may also go directly to the young adult if it is in their best interest, financial management is a goal on their Transitional Living Plan, and the county works closely with them on budgeting.

Enrolling

If a young person is in foster care on their 18th birthday, they can enroll at that time or at any time before they turn 21. They can even leave the program and re-enroll, as long as they are not yet 21.

Eligibility requirements for Foster Care 18-21 are shown in the box below.

Young adults who live in a county other than the one where they were in foster care as a minor can contact either county to request enrollment. The county the young adult contacts must initiate Foster Care 18 to 21 services by entering into a Voluntary Placement Agreement with the young adult.

If an enrolled young adult moves from one North Carolina county to another, their case can be transferred to their new county, if it is in the adult's interest and the counties involved agree

Spread the Word about NC LINKS & NYTD

NC LINKS is the program our state uses to provide independent living and skill-building services to young people. Anyone under age 21 who was in the custody of a NC county child welfare agency at age 14 is eligible to receive LINKS services.

NYTD is the National Youth in Transition Database. Each year, NYTD conducts a survey that asks youth and young adults about their foster care experiences. Taking part in the NYTD survey is important because the government uses the results to decide what services young people receive when they are in foster care.

Please encourage anyone you know who is eligible to participate in LINKS and the NYTD survey! If you have questions or need more information, please contact your local department of social services or North Carolina's LINKS Coordinator, Tori Marshall (Tori.Marshall@dshs.nc.gov).



Lyrika Evans
NC LINKS and
Foster Care Assistant

As someone who spent time in foster care as a youth and young adult, advocating for positive changes for myself and my peers has always been one of my goals. One way I advocated was by completing NYTD surveys.

Please take a moment to explain the importance of completing NYTD surveys to your young people and the positive impact it can make on the future of other young people in foster care!

with the transfer. Eligible young adults must never be denied or wait for Foster Care 18-21 program services during collaboration between counties or for other reasons that are not associated with eligibility.

Young adults in Foster Care 18-21 can even live out of state. In these situations, the agency providing Foster Care 18-21 services must follow ICPC regulations and contact their state ICPC consultant to determine if the receiving state will provide supervision and services.

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 found on page 7 in this issue.

Who Is Eligible for Foster Care 18-21?

Young adults are eligible for Foster Care 18 to 21 if they meet the following criteria:

1. In foster care on their 18th birthday, and
2. Age 18 or older but not yet 21, and
3. Meets **one** of the following criteria:
 - a. Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or
 - b. Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education; or
 - c. Participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment; or
 - d. Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
 - e. Incapable of completing the educational or employment requirements due to a medical condition or disability.

- Criteria a - e are intentionally broad.
- Agencies are encouraged to be creative when determining eligibility.

Eligibility determinations are based solely on the young adult without regard to their parents, legal guardians, or others in the home from which the young adult was removed as a child, or any parent or relatives with whom the young adult currently resides.

Writing Contest

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

If you are or were in foster care in North Carolina, please send us a response to the following:



We want young people in foster care to be able to do things their peers who are not in foster care get to do—for example, go on school trips, learn to drive, attend prom, etc. This is sometimes called “normalcy.” **Tell us about a time your foster parents or your worker did a good job creating normalcy for you.** (Responses should be 200 words or less.)

DEADLINE: Feb. 1, 2023

E-mail submissions to jrockoff@email.unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children’s Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, 325 Pittsboro St., 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 v26 n1

1. What would you say to a young person in your care to persuade them to participate in NYTD surveys?
2. Name five things resource parents can do to support parents coping with substance use disorder.
3. What are natural supports, and how can resource parents maintain and strengthen children’s connections to them?
4. Name three things you took away from the article “Cindy Hamilton Asks, ‘Who Wouldn’t Want a Family?’”
5. Gaile Osborne offers ideas for what resource parents can do when they aren’t treated like part of the child’s team. Name three.
6. Explain implicit bias and give two examples of it based on research.
7. Name four things resource parents can do to engage fathers of children in their care.
8. What should young adults who aged out of foster care at age 18 do to find out if they can get health insurance coverage through Medicaid?
9. What are some of the possible benefits of remaining in foster care past the age of 18?
10. List five of the things Kate Schultz asks resource parents to consider as they engage in shared parenting.

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UNC School of Social Work
325 Pittsboro St.
Chapel Hill NC 27599-3550

National Adoption Month

November 2022

Small Steps Open Doors



November is National Adoption month! We use this month to honor families who have adopted and raise awareness about the urgent need for adoptive families for children and youth in foster care.

When reunification is not possible and an alternative plan is required, adoption is one way to achieve permanency. Right now there are hundreds of children and youth waiting to be adopted from foster care in North Carolina.

This year North Carolina families are especially encouraged to share their hearts and homes with older youth who are waiting to be adopted and at risk of aging out of foster care.

How can you encourage others to learn about adoption?

- Ask your local department of social services how you can help
- Participate in local and state events celebrating adoption
- Share books, articles, blogs, and other materials related to adoption
- Spread awareness through social media—for example, post videos about adoption or information about orientations for people interested in adoption
- Watch adoption-related movies with family, friends, and others
- Give money to or volunteer for organizations that support adoptions
- Send letters to attorneys, child welfare workers, judges, resource parents, and others thanking them for being involved in the adoption process
- Retell your child’s adoption story to them and celebrate their heritage

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