

fostering perspectives

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

Keeping Placements Stable

When youth enter the foster care system it is imperative that we minimize their number of placements and achieve stability. When youth are in stable placements, their outcomes improve greatly.

Working towards placement stability is a total team effort. Birth parents, resource parents, social workers, Guardians ad Litem, judges, and more all play a key role in keeping youth in secure environments where they can thrive until permanency is reached.

In this issue of Fostering Perspectives, we want to offer insight and stories from individuals with professional and lived experience. This issue's contributors share what they do to keep placements stable, the effects of placement instability, how to support resource parents, and much more. We hope you find it helpful.

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Preventing Disruptions from Day One by Lanitta Berry and Erica Burgess

Perspectives from a Child Welfare Professional and an Adult with Lived Experience in the Foster Care System

Erica: Placement stability for youth who are experiencing the foster care system is a major priority for North Carolina child welfare stakeholders. There is an emphasis on placement stability because the more moves a youth has, the more detached they become from their family, community, culture, and goals become harder to obtain. As resource parents, you can do your part to prevent disruptions by being prepared from day one of a new placement so you can feel confident in meeting the needs of the youth placed in your home. It is important that you take some time to prepare yourself, family, home, and community for each placement before they enter your home. Each youth and their circumstances will vary greatly, so take the time to think through what you will need to make this experience successful for you, the youth, and their family.

Things to consider before each new placement:

1. Do you have the space in your home ready to welcome a new placement?
2. Is your support team ready to step in? Think about who will be there to support you.
3. Have you adjusted your work or personal schedule to allow time for the additional appointments and activities that the youth will have?
4. Have you researched childcare options

based on the age of the child or youth you will be caring for? Will you need daycare or before/after school care?

5. Are you familiar with the medical, dental, or mental health providers in your area that accept Medicaid?
6. Have you prepared a list of questions that you need to ask the youth's social worker to ensure you can meet their unique needs? Ask questions about school, physical and mental health needs, visitation, permanency plans, the youth's likes or dislikes, religious practices, etc.

Remember, when youth are removed from their homes it's a chaotic event for everyone. It may feel hard to receive answers to all of your questions, but still necessary to have as much information as possible to make informed decisions. Having key information upfront can decrease the possibility of later disruption. It's very unfortunate, but there are times when youth are moved from a foster or kinship home due to a scheduling or childcare issue that could have been resolved prior to the youth moving in.



Lanitta Berry

Lanitta: Another area to thoroughly assess prior to a youth moving in your home are your own personal biases. When we operate with bias, it can make others feel like they are not being seen for their true selves. When a youth feels they are being stereotyped, it can lead to a negative environment that can make it very difficult to form a trusting relationship. This is a recipe for disruption. It is important that all resource parents check their biases prior to a youth moving in their home.

To combat personal bias, consider trying the following strategies:

- Internal self-reflection about your thoughts and beliefs
- Expose yourself to various people and cultures
- Challenge your own irrational beliefs
- Think empathetically and respond genuinely

Erica: Once you feel comfortable accepting the youth in your home, the next step would be preparing for day one. The first day really sets the tone for the relationship you desire to build. This day may feel overwhelming but make sure to focus on the youth while figuring out logistics. Many logistics can be taken care of prior to the youth's arrival. When the youth walks through your door your focus should be on them. It will be scary moving to a new

Preventing Disruptions

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home so ensuring the youth feels safe, supported, and comfortable from day one is essential. Having a welcoming space that incorporates age appropriate items can help youth feel at ease. Some resource parents may have a welcome basket with hygiene items, books, snacks etc. while others may choose to write a personal letter to welcome the child into the home.

Often when a youth arrives at your home they may have questions about their parents, school, friends, siblings or other relatives. You may not have all the answers they are looking for, but remember to follow up on the other questions with their social worker as soon as you can. Helping a youth get answers to their questions is an important part to building your relationship and demonstrating you are a caring and trustworthy adult. Lastly, be patient and understanding. The youth is likely much more overwhelmed than you are.

Lanitta: As a former foster youth, it was challenging for me to navigate being placed in foster care with my daughter while trying to look towards the future. There were times when I felt like I did not matter and did not have any say over the trajectory of my life. What made it easier was having a trusted adult in my corner while nurturing and aiding in my emotional and physical development. My first foster mom bonded with me and my daughter from day one by treating us like “family.” She asked simple questions about my likes, dislikes, and experiences to get to know me. This led to many great conversations which created a long lasting connection. The whole experience of being in care with her taught me the power of choosing your own definition of family and who gets to be a part of it. I felt comfortable in her home because she taught me how to overcome obstacles in my path.

Erica: You will quickly realize that as a caregiver you will experience the highs and lows of parenting. At first, many resource parents experience a “honeymoon period.” This typically lasts for a few weeks or months. During the honeymoon period things may seem stable. Just keep in mind that this period will likely diminish as you begin to set your routine, rules and expectations. This is normal, and although it can be unpleasant to transition out of the honeymoon period, it is bound to happen. To help prepare you for the more challenging times and support the youth, consider the following:

1. Ensure you have the training you need to meet their needs and seek out additional training if needed. FosteringNC.org and Foster Family Alliance both have ongoing training to support resource parents. Foster Family Alliance also has support groups in each region.
2. Understand developmental milestones for the youth in your care. Understanding “typical” development can help prepare you for what to expect.
3. Take an individualized approach to each youth in your home.
4. Become and remain trauma informed and parent with a trauma lens. To learn more be sure to read the article on page 6 about Resource Parent Curriculum.
5. Help the youth stay connected to their family and culture.
6. Address any of your safety concerns early on. Don't hesitate to report any behaviors that may be concerning to you.
7. Report any concerns or issues that you are having with your social worker and advocate for services. Services that can often be helpful are individual therapy, family therapy, trauma focused therapy, occupational therapy, educational supports, and medication management to name a few.
8. Work in partnership with your team including birth parents, other relatives, social workers, medical providers, mental health providers, guardians ad litem, and the youth.
9. Listen to the youth and incorporate their voice. Engaging them in enrichment activities can be just

as therapeutic as enrolling them in a paid service. For example: sports, art classes, music, youth groups, etc.

10. Take time for yourself. Regular breaks or respite will help to promote your own self-care and allow you the time and space you need to continue providing quality care.

Lanitta: Growing up in care was never “easy,” but I was eventually able to find a sense of “normal” with my first foster mom. We both came to an understanding. We were both experiencing something new. For me, it was being a mother and being in my first foster home. For her, it was the first time having youth in her home. Since we were both in new situations we had an understanding that we had to be patient with one another.

Something I remember seeing that helped me was her vulnerability. When you are in foster care, it feels like adults have all the information which can cause an unfair power dynamic. I knew my foster mom was vulnerable with me and in return I started to open up more and allowed myself to be a part of her family. I was able to participate in activities with her like outings, trips, going to movies, and traveling to her hometown.

This helped me feel safe and normal in her home and led to me living with for the majority of my time in care. She taught me skills that helped me transition to independent living when I turned 18 years old. After turning 18, I began my journey of graduating high school and starting higher education while maintaining transportation, employment, and housing. The fundamentals of my success today can be traced back to the relationship with my foster mom and the skills she taught me to live independently.

Erica: There are situations that will arise where disruption is inevitable due to circumstances outside of your control. If a situation arises where a youth needs to leave your care it is important that you think through your approach. Often, disruptions occur quickly and can be very challenging for everyone. If a child or youth can no longer remain in your home it is necessary to allow the social worker time to find another appropriate home. Some agencies ask for a 14 or 30 day notice and resource parents should respect this request unless there is a safety concern. During this time you can support the team by giving suggestions about treatment services, sharing about the youth's preferences, and offering to speak to the new caregiver. Resource parents need to show youth they have their best interest in mind, and that starts from day one, and doesn't have an end date.

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Tips for Resource Parents Assigned a New Social Worker

Change is a concept that naturally comes with competing perspectives. There are times when change is good, and times when change can cause setbacks. In child welfare, we strive toward positive changes when working with families to create safe and healthy environments. Yet, we want to minimize change by keeping children within the same school and the same placement if they have to enter the foster care system. We also strive to have a stable workforce where there is reduced social worker turnover. Unfortunately, staff turnover in the child welfare system continues to be an issue, causing unintended consequences and challenges for resource parents.



Crystal Mitchell

could outline the child's school, doctor, dentist, and therapist with important information such as next scheduled appointments, prescribed medications, and any outstanding needs. Outline what the current family time plan is, such as in-person visits with parents or other family members. Include any other important dates such as extracurricular schedules or upcoming family vacations.

Advocate

If the youth you are caring for have pressing needs or there is an issue that requires prompt attention from DSS, do not hesitate to let your new social worker know. You should highlight this information during your first scheduled home visit or contact with the new social worker. Explain the need and why you need the assistance of the social worker in navigating the steps forward.

Offer to Help

Ask the new social worker if there is anything you can do as the resource parent to assist them during their transition to the case. Scheduling a needed appointment for the child, transporting the child to scheduled family time, or simply sending an email to a provider to introduce the new social worker electronically are all helpful gestures.

Preparing the child

Inform the child they have a new social worker. Share his/her name and let the child know when the social worker will be visiting the home. Help your child think about what they want to tell or share with the new social worker during their initial visit. It may be as simple as showing the social worker their favorite stuffed animal or as involved as making sure the social worker knows what is important to them in the permanency process.

Be Patient

Realize there are different ways social workers are assigned new cases. The new social worker may be an existing DSS employee who is assigned one new case. They also may be a new social worker to the agency who is assigned multiple new cases at one time. Understand the social worker is relying on reading the case record and speaking to the supervisor to learn about the family. The social worker will also take time to speak with the parents and all other important team members. The social worker will need time to fully understand the case.

Also understand each social worker has their own approach and style in their social work practice. You should not expect the new social worker to mimic the same approach as the former social worker.

The relationship between a resource parent and social worker is important. As a resource parent, the social worker is your first point of contact

when you have information to share or you need clarity. As a social worker, the resource parent is the source of information about the child and their current needs. Mutual communication is important. A change in social workers during the course of a case is a significant change. As the resource parent, you have the ability to positively impact this change leading to a smoother transition for everyone involved.

Crystal Mitchell, MSW is a Human Services Program Manager at the Orange County Department of Social Services

**Thank you to Orange County DSS foster parents who provided input for this article.*

A change in social workers during the course of a case is a significant change. As the resource parent, you have the ability to positively impact this change leading to a smoother transition for everyone involved.

When staff does turnover, how can you as a resource parent navigate and aid in the inevitable disruption this causes? Below, you will find some tips to assist you during this transition:

Know the Plan

When a change in social workers is planned, you should be given details about when your social worker's last day is and formally introduced to your new

social worker. We refer to this as a "warm hand-off." If this is not possible, you should be given a point of contact at the agency until an ongoing social worker is assigned. If the departure of your social worker is sudden and there is a lapse in clear communication, call your licensing social worker, a DSS supervisor, or a DSS program manager for clarity.

Communicate

Tell your new social worker the best method and times for communicating with you. Ensure they have all your contact information including your phone numbers and email address. If you are comfortable with text messages to communicate small details, please let them know. If there is a time in your day when it is easier to have conversations about the child in your home, inform them. If there is an emergency need to contact you, what is the first number they should call? Think through these logistics and make sure you share the details with the new social worker. It is also important to ask the new social worker these questions as well—having a clear and open communication plan is key!

Share Information

You will likely know more about the youth than their new social worker. Be prepared to provide the new social worker with a summary. Prepare a one page document that outlines important information such as educational, medical, behavioral health, and family information. This document

Online Resources for Resource Parents

National Foster Parent Association
Supports foster parents in achieving safety, permanence, and well-being for the children and youth in their care.
<https://nfpaonline.org/>

Resources for Foster or Adoptive Families
Center for Parent Information and Resources. Information and resources for foster or adoptive parents on raising or caring for a child with disabilities.
<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/fosteradoptive/>

Support for Foster Parents
AdoptUSKids. Describes the basic aspects of fostering, including partnering with caseworkers, meeting the child's needs, preventing burnout, and learning resources.
<https://bit.ly/3wIBvIm>

10 Resources for Foster Parents
Annie E. Casey Foundation. Resources to help you parent children in your care and navigate the child welfare system. Includes blog on keeping siblings together, a site on raising grandchildren, a magazine by parents who have experienced the system, and more.
<https://bit.ly/3mdZqyr>

Families and Caregivers
National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Examines the effect of trauma on children throughout development and provides resources to guide parents. <https://bit.ly/3udNb7J>

Foster Care
Sesame Street in Communities. Helps children in out-of-home care cope with separation from their parents, placements in care, and reunification.
<https://bit.ly/3cDYjEZ>

Laura, Foster Parent Partner
Helping new foster parents get started & navigate services, safety, & families.
<https://bit.ly/4201loj>

Maintaining Longevity as a Foster Parent



Barbara Young

While exploring the idea of becoming a foster parent, a mentor described foster parenting as a roller coaster ride, and it has stuck with me ever since. I never fully understood what she meant until we became a foster family ourselves. As a big fan of roller

coasters, I always think about the nervous anticipation, the exhilarating drops, the fast-paced turns, and especially the “airtime” – when you feel like you’re floating for just a few seconds! It really gets my heart racing in a good way. When we compare foster care to a roller coaster, there are some awesome, heart racing moments and there are lots of

Remember that you are making a difference in the lives of youth and families in foster care!

moments when we are just coasting along, and then there are the sudden dips or sharp turns that really throw us for a loop.

So how do we prepare for the dips, the big drops, the sharp turns - the challenges? How do we maintain longevity as foster parents when foster parent turnover is common? How do we keep going when it starts to get really hard?

One thing we can do is create a self-care plan now, so you don’t have to do the hard work of creating a plan when you are barely keeping your head above water! It was my 11th grade English teacher that suggested I think of the 5 W’s – who, what, when, where and why?

1. Who can help? Who is in your support network? Friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, other foster parents, the parents of your children’s friends, your licensing worker, the foster care social worker, Guardian ad Litem, counselors, therapists, the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina, etc. Organize their contact information in one place, so it’s easy to access.
2. What can your support network do? Do they have any “specialties”? Can they deliver meals, provide gift cards, pick up groceries or do your laundry? Can they watch the kids for a few hours while you rest upstairs? Can they listen, offer support and advise when requested or needed? Your agency contacts can offer trainings, resources and referrals to support you while you support the children and youth in your home.
3. When do you need support? Are there spe-

cific times of the day or week that are most challenging? If you’re unsure, try to start tracking the tough times. Do they happen daily? Just in the mornings? Just after school? When they happen, who are the people you can call for help with just a moment’s notice? Who needs to be your scheduled helpers? Do you have a back up plan? And maybe even a back up to your back up?

4. Where? Will they come to your house? Will they meet you at the park so the kids can play and you can catch up with another adult? Will they plan an activity with the children for a morning/afternoon/all day providing you with needed respite care?
5. Why? Because we learned it in our pre-

service training – you can’t pour everything you have into another person without filling your cup too! So plan ahead, set time aside for you to FILL your cup! That may mean

asking for HELP, asking for SUPPORT, and/or asking for RESOURCES!

So, it’s usually at this point that foster parents say something along the lines of “I’ve got this.” Or “We’re doing fine.” Until they don’t have it. I know, I’ve been there too. Shortly after a new child joined our family, I’d get the excited comments and questions from family and friends asking how things are going. In the beginning, my pat answer was always “Oh, we’re just adjusting to our new normal” which usually meant I was almost drowning, but too proud to ask for help. Foster parenting is HARD and we signed up for this so it’s kind of like we asked for it!

I’ve come to learn after years of being a foster parent that it’s hard for us as foster parents AND it’s hard for social workers, for Guardians ad Litem, for birth parents and, it’s especially hard the children and youth in foster care. So, seek support from those who can support you and give yourself a little grace. Not every day will be a great day where you’re getting good “airtime” just floating along, so be prepared for the sharp turns and big drops by:

1. Creating your Self-Care Plan now.
2. Creating a “Feel Good File” – Seriously, write down the good stories and experiences and save them! Save the positive notes and emails! Then when times are challenging, go find that file to give yourself some encouragement to keep going.
3. Remember your 100% today and your 100% tomorrow may look really different from each other. Like Alexander’s mom from the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* says “Some days are

just like that.” And that’s ok because tomorrow is a new day.

4. All families, youth and children have strengths AND needs! Being able to identify a NEED is a STRENGTH! Your licensing worker should NOT be the last person to know that you have needs. Talk with them and give them the opportunity to support you too!
5. Let go of the things that are out of your control. Focus on the children and youth in your home and be the best foster parent they’ve ever had for as long as they’re with you – whether it’s a few days, a few months, a few years or forever. Love them, care for them, provide for them, and keep them safe.
6. Take time to grieve. Our family always took long breaks between placements because we needed time to feel the emotions, work through our losses, and heal – even when we knew the children were in a good place.
7. Encourage connections between children and their siblings, birth family and friends to add to their sense of stability. As a new foster parent, I was worried about connecting with their birth mom, but engaging in shared parenting made everyone’s life easier, not harder.

Everyone needs encouragement, so keep up the good work! It can be difficult to think about your longevity as a foster parent when you’re just trying to make it through the day, but with each day you are gaining valuable wisdom, insight, and experience. Remember that you are making a difference in the lives of youth and families in foster care!

Barbara Young is a former foster parent, a Family Partner with the North Carolina Child Welfare Advisory Council, and a Co-Trainer of Leaders in TIPS-MAPP and Deciding Together.



To learn more about becoming a Guardian Ad Litem scan the QR



Kinship Caregivers and Support

“It wasn’t an option.” Four simple words that perfectly sum up what it means to be a kinship caregiver.

I recently had the opportunity to talk with Tom and Teresa of Garner, NC about what kept them going as kinship caregivers when things got tough, draining, and seemingly like too much to handle.

They almost in unison told me when they had the opportunity to become licensed kinship caregivers for their teenage niece, “it wasn’t an option.” They were going to do what they needed to so their niece would live with them and not go to a stranger’s home.

Of course, being a kinship caregiver is much different than being a traditional foster parent. Tom and Teresa already had a close relationship with their niece and had known her for her whole life. A clear advantage to kinship care. They knew about her likes, dislikes, temperament, and history. That by no means meant it was easy though.

Going from the fun aunt and uncle to the primary caregiver of a family member who was gone through extreme trauma was a major and challenging shift. Their niece came with mental health issues, guilt, shame, and confusion. The family dynamics also changed. Tom and Teresa shared that one day they were being thanked by their niece’s parents for caring for her, and the next they were accused of “taking their daughter.” A different and difficult component of kinship care.

Tom and Teresa told me “it wasn’t an option” because they knew how difficult life would be for their niece if she entered foster care and was placed with strangers. She was very withdrawn, had suicidal ideations, and had a hard time attaching to

people. “She would have been moved multiple, multiple times,” Tom said. With all the challenges they laid out before me I asked the simple question of “what kept you from giving up?” They gave me a simple answer back: “Support.”

It was their licensing agency, Methodist Home for Children. It was their very engaged and involved Guardian ad Litem. It was the therapist who was a perfect fit (it took a few tries of finding the right one). It was the training they received to help them better understand their nieces trauma and how that impacted them as her caregivers. It was the rest of the family rallying behind them, and it was their own perseverance.

Tom and Teresa’s niece recently turned 16 and their adoption has been finalized. An official shift from “aunt and uncle” to “mom and dad.” That’s how their niece introduces them to people now, and she’s proud to do so. At a recent parent-teacher conference at school she shared how happy it made her to be able to introduce people to her “mom and dad.” Simple things we take for granted mean everything to her.

We know that youth in kinship care tend to have better outcomes than youth placed in traditional foster care (Casey Family Programs, 2020). Another reason Tom and Teresa knew “it wasn’t an option.” I could hear the pride in their voices as they told me about all of the progress their niece has made. She feels both physically and psychologically safe in their home. She doesn’t have to worry about being hurt, and if there is an argument, good feelings are quickly restored. She’s gaining confidence, she is coming to peace with her past through hard work at therapy, and has a safe and stable home. Tom

and Teresa also marvel about their own personal growth through this experience.

All of the kinship caregivers I’ve had the pleasure of meeting are all extremely strong-willed people. They step up. They will tell you that “family takes care of family.” They’ll also all tell you they need strong support systems put in place. Kinship caregivers shouldn’t feel isolated and alone. They need effective supports to be successful and thrive. It’s not an option.

Casey Family Programs (2020, August). To learn more you can visit www.casey.org using this QR code:



Benefits of Kinship Care

A systematic review of more than 100 studies found that when compared with children in non-relative foster care, children in kinship care have:

- More stability in placement and greater likelihood of remaining with siblings.
- Lower rates of both re-abuse and institutional abuse.
- Better behavioral and mental health, exhibited by fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors, better adaptive behaviors, fewer psychiatric disorders, and better emotional health.
- Higher likelihood of achieving permanency through guardianship with their relative caregivers to maintain life-long connections with their family if they are unable to safely return home.

You Can Be Their Yes.

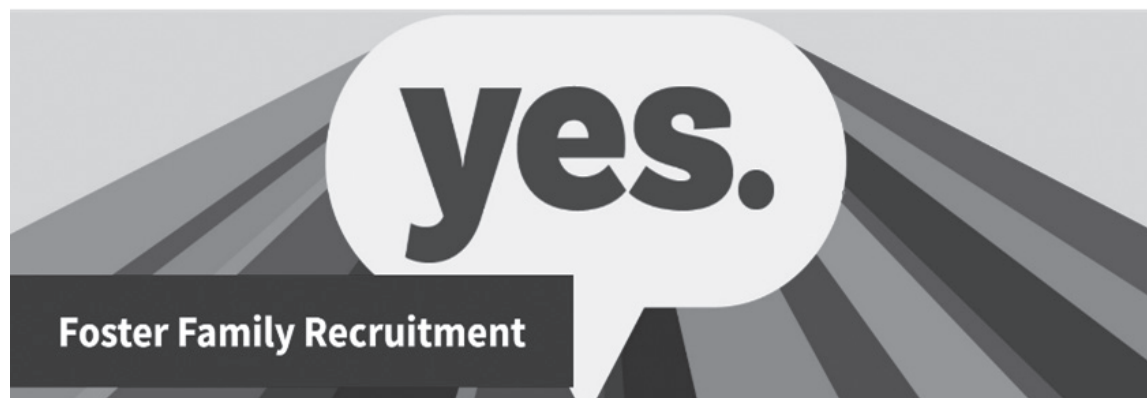
Recently, the North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services unveiled a new resource parent recruitment campaign aimed at identifying and educating high quality foster, adoptive and kinship caregivers throughout North Carolina. This new initiative is simply and appropriately called “You Can Be Their Yes.”

As youth who have experienced trauma continue to come into care with complex needs, it is important that North Carolina continues to seek out, identify, train, and support dedicated resource parents. To this end, part of this new recruitment campaign is a webpage located at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/fostering>. This new webpage has several resources, a list of private licensing agencies including their catchment areas,

information about how to become licensed, an orientation for new resource parents, and more. All of this information has also been translated to Spanish and is easy to access.

They can share the ups and downs, resources, and the supports that are effective and meaningful.

Due to the nature of foster care, adoption, and kinship care, there will likely continue to be a need for new resource parents willing to be someone’s “yes.” If you’re a current resource parent, think about who you may know who can answer the call and step up for a child in need of support, guidance, and nurturing. If you’re considering becoming a resource parent, check out the new webpage to learn more. You don’t need to have all the answers to be a great resource parent. As long as you can provide stability and support, you can give the one answer these children and youth need to hear: yes.



It is often said that experienced resource parents are one of the most effective tools for recruiting new resource parents. After all, seasoned resource parents can give an honest assessment of what the realities of caring for youth are on a daily basis.

Resource Spotlight: Resource Parent Curriculum (RPC)

By Dr. Ilana Berman and Dr. Kelly Sullivan

What is RPC?

“Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Resource Parents” is often referred to as the Resource Parent Curriculum, or RPC. This program is specifically designed for resource parents to learn parenting strategies they can use immediately with the children in their home who have experienced trauma. The curriculum was developed by over 30 experts at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and is delivered by skilled facilitators including mental health professionals, child welfare professionals, and individuals with lived experience.

Typically, the workshop is conducted in two-hour weekly meetings for eight weeks. This allows participants time to reflect on and apply the concepts to a child in their home, bringing back real-life experiences to address within the group.

How is RPC beneficial for caregivers?

While other trainings for resource parents may include information about trauma, RPC provides a space for a “deep dive” into this complex subject. The curriculum includes information on how trauma impacts social, emotional, and neurobiological (brain and body) development. This workshop also provides a unique opportunity to understand challenging behaviors and the emotional

reactions (e.g., anxiety, guilt, grief) of youth.

After the workshops, parents often report experiencing a shift in how they think about their children’s emotional and behavioral responses. This helps them feel more informed and in control about how they respond to the youth in their care. RPC also provides a meaningful space for caregivers to explore their own emotional experiences throughout their caregiving journey. For example, parents often find themselves reflecting on their own childhood experiences and their impact, as well as on how they have parented in the past.

How RPC can help with placement stability?

Workshops are designed to be empowering and supportive and to provide parents with strategies that help children heal from the effects of trauma. We have received feedback from past participants who refer to RPC as the “most powerful training they have ever experienced” and some have opted to take the workshop multiple times.

Studies have shown that caregivers who have participated in a workshop feel more confident in their ability to parent their child and that they are more willing to care for a child with disruptive behaviors. We believe these results, ultimately, lead to improved placement stability. It’s natural to approach an unfamiliar program with hesitation,

yet the majority of caregivers who attend the first session quickly see the workshop’s value and continue with the majority of the remaining sessions.

How to access RPC?

The Center for Child & Family Health trains facilitators yearly free of charge thanks to funding from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The North Carolina Child Treatment Program maintains a roster searchable by county of those trained to facilitate the workshop for caregivers located here: <https://www.ncchildtreatmentprogram.org/program-roster/>. Also, the Foster Family Alliance of NC is currently offering workshops for caregivers in Wake, Cumberland, Orange, Johnston, Durham and Mecklenburg counties in which they can receive a \$250 stipend. Additionally, this spring, 22 workshops are scheduled to take place with newly trained facilitators, many of them virtually. While access to RPC is improving in NC, it is not yet statewide. Interested caregivers without easy access should reach out to their licensing, adoption, or child welfare agency to request local investment to train facilitators.

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What Do Resource Parents Need to Understand About Collective Trauma?

by George Ake, Ph.D

Foster, adoptive, kinship, and therapeutic caregivers are constantly working to understand how new developments in the child welfare field impact their responses to children in their care. They have to keep their ears and eyes open to hear about the latest interventions, supports, and concerns to make sure they are providing the best trauma-informed care possible.

One term that has recently re-emerged that resource parents are working to better understand is “collective trauma.”

Collective trauma was coined in the late 1970’s by a Kai Erikson following the Buffalo Creek Flood in West Virginia killing 125 people and leaving 4,000 people homeless. He explained collective trauma as the “...blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality” (Erikson, 1976). Since that time, sociologists have primarily used the term to talk about the impact of trauma on societies and that it extends past the event and works its way into our discussions about events and is a “crisis of meaning” (Hirschberger, 2018).

One of the most recent examples of events

like these that likely have people searching for an understanding of collective trauma include the onset of COVID-19 and the tremendous and ongoing negative impact of the virus on the entire global population. Others have written about how events like COVID-19 impact everyone, but that the impact may look different for different groups. Bonner states that “...cultural trauma affects a subset of the population that’s been targeted because of who they are. Collective trauma, on the other hand, is a horrific event that affects society as a whole” (Brantley, 2022). This would help differentiate the ways that some groups have experienced large health disparities and access to care in the wake of COVID-19.

What does this mean for resource parents? It means that there are some tragic events that impact large groups of people and the way they make meaning of it is important.

What does it change about the ways resource parents care for children? It means that in addition to really using a trauma lens to understand the very specific events children might have been exposed to, caregivers may need to think about how larger events impacting large groups of people might

contribute to responses to trauma reminders. It also means that caregivers need to be careful not to assume that how they have responded to large-scale events (such as COVID-19) will be the same way that children in their care will respond. In keeping with SAMHSA’s definition of trauma, even if we are exposed to the same events, every person experiences these events differently (SAMHSA, 2014).

Some of the best resources available to explain the differences in trauma exposure types, impact, and supports come from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.nctsn.org) and I would highly encourage resource parents to dive into the products here to better understand these differences.

George Ake, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Center for Child and Family Health at Duke University

How One Agency Supports Resource Parents and Keeps Placements Stable

Everyone involved in the child welfare system plays a key role in keeping placements stable and preventing disruptions. It starts at the beginning when licensing agencies match youth with resource parents that will be the best fit for them. It continues as agencies, resource parents, guardians ad litem, and other team members identify youth needs and work hard to meet them in an effort to keep youth stable until permanency can be reached.

We spoke with Iredell County, North Carolina's permanency planning and licensing teams and asked them "What do you do to keep placements stable and support your resource parents?" The information below is what they shared with us:

We provide assistance 24/7 and:

- Answer the phone when called to offer immediate support
- Allow resource parents the opportunity and a safe place to vent about frustrations
- Regularly review key pre-service training topics like trauma triggers
- Assist with transportation, child care, and appointments
- Update the Foster Parent Handbook with current information to support the complex needs of children in foster care

We provide innovative and on-going trainings that meet the needs of working parents including:

- Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)
- Together Facing the Challenge
- RPC (Resource Parent Curriculum)
- Training on Cultural diversity, shared parenting, behavior management, attachment, grief and loss, and more

Seeing resource parents as partners by:

- Brainstorming together different approaches that meet the individual needs of families and youth
- Regularly seeking out feedback from resource parents on how to improve our services
- Keeping resource parents up to date on meetings, court hearings, and appointments
- Providing resource parents with information on the foster care process, next steps, and expectations

Connecting families and youth to services such as:

- Therapy
- WIC, SNAP, and TANF
- Summer camps, after and before school programs, tutoring, and other community engagement opportunities

Caring for and nurturing resource parents by:

- Promoting self-care opportunities
- Encouraging and coordinating respite
- Supporting them to take foster care "day-by-day"
- Connecting resource parents to one another through support groups
- Focusing on strengths as opposed to needs

Highlighting the amazing work resource parents do every day by:

- Spotlighting resource parents in a bimonthly newsletter and via email
- Having current resource parents share at TIPS-MAPP panel night to have open and honest conversations with prospective resource parents about topics like shared parenting, effective strategies, and more

All of these strategies contribute to the overall success of children in our custody. When we do that, we are supporting resource parents and keeping placements stable.

If you're interested in learning more about how Iredell County implements any of these resources or strategies, contact Shayna Rouson, Permanency Planning Administrator II at Shayna.Rouson@iredell.nc.gov.

Special thanks to the Iredell County Permanency Planning and Licensing teams for contributing to this article including LaQuetta Brown, Taylor Burris, Veronica Dees, Tonya Knox, Rebecca LaManna, and Shayna Rouson



SaySo Turns 25! History has been made!

SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out) is officially 25 years strong!! 25 years of youth advocacy, youth leadership, and youth voice representing youth in the substitute care system in North Carolina.

Do you know why SaySo uses the term substitute care? We use the term substitute care because not only do we support teens in foster care, but also those who have been adopted as teens, are in kinship care, group homes, and mental health placements.

SaySo is the second oldest youth advocacy organization in the country. In March, SaySo had over 415 people registered to attend our annual membership conference and birthday celebration. At this momentous event we had a few surprise moments. We had a special video greeting from Governor Roy Cooper, in person attendance from NC Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kody Kinsley, celebrity guest speaker Pretty Vee, and record attendance!

Over the past few months, SaySo has celebrated a few more notable moments. We were invited to the Governor's mansion not once, or twice, but three times in the past six months! We held our first Day on the Hill Advocacy Day where alumni of SaySo gathered and met with North Carolina House and Senate representa-



tives. We were able to advocate for SaySo so we can provide more programming and support opportunities for youth in care.

Additionally, SaySo was able to host our second Page Week in one fiscal year. This meant more young people got an opportunity to experience learning about the importance of government and civic engagement up close and personal.

SaySo is continuing our theme of growing and glowing at all our upcoming events. We invite any youth ages 14-24 to please follow us on social media and come attend an event in your area.

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.



To learn more about SaySo, scan the QR Code:





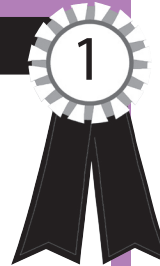
Writing Contest

In the most recent Fostering Perspectives writing contest we gave young people in foster care the following prompt: **“Tell us about a time your foster parents or your worker did a good job creating normalcy for you.”** Here’s what they had to say.

Hailey, age 16

There is nothing normal about foster care. It’s not normal to be four years old and woken up in the middle of the night by a woman you barely know telling you to grab your coat. It’s not normal to have to leave behind your mom, your driveway full of chalk drawings, and your sense of belonging. It’s not normal to be dropped off at a stranger’s house to stay the night in an unfamiliar bed without your favorite pink blanket. And yet, that’s where I found myself. The best thing that my foster parents gave me was the gift of normalizing my grief. When I cried, they held me and told me that they were sad too. When I missed my mom, they said, ‘of course you do,’ and asked me to share stories about her. When I lashed out in anger, my foster mom pulled me in for a hug and agreed that what was happening to me was really unfair. My foster parents made room for me in their home and they made room for all of my confusion, sadness, and loss. And in doing so, I felt safe and seen and normal.

HAILEY RECEIVED \$100 FOR TAKING TOP PRIZE IN THE WRITING CONTEST.



Danielle, age 19

My foster parents have made my life so normal. I grew up in and out of foster homes in another state, and then moved here with my grandfather. However, his wife wasn’t very good with children. I grew up having to take care of her. When I came to live with them, it was hard to transition from a caretaker to being taken care of. But they did it. They plan things with me, as if I was their own child. Family game night? I had to play. They helped me pick a car out to make sure that it was safe. My foster mother even put her phone number on a sticky note and put it on my dashboard in case I got in a car accident. To celebrate me graduating high school, they took me on a cruise! This was a family tradition, as they did it with all five of their girls. My foster sister took me in as a sister, which helped. I am now a part of their permanent family!

DANIELLE RECEIVED \$50 FOR TAKING SECOND PRIZE.



Bre, age 12

When I was in foster care my foster family took me to Tybee Island as a vacation with all of my foster family’s relatives. We stayed in a big beach house. In the room I stayed in there were bunk beds. I met two girls my age. They are now my forever friends and cousins. That was my first time seeing the beach ever! I had the most unforgettable time possible. We swam in the ocean and played games. They all treated me as their own. I am so thankful for the amazing memories and a foster family (now my adoptive family!) that loved me so much. And knowing that as a six year old I was safe and got to go on vacation like a normal kid.

BRE RECEIVED \$25 FOR TAKING THIRD PRIZE.



Faith, age 10

When I first came into this home I was really scared, but my foster parents made me feel at home. They brought me with them on family vacation. I felt at ease. I felt like this was the perfect home. They let me call them mommy and daddy too. I even got my very own room filled with toys and clothes. They cared for me like I was their real daughter. They fed me lots of food and even got me to school on time. Then I got adopted!!! The visits with my birth family were in their hands now. I saw my birth daddy and brothers and sister for the first time. I had a confusing time, but now I am living a happy life.

Maddison, age 15

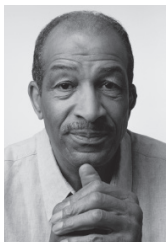
I have been in foster care for four years and I am still in the system. I have been with the same family since day one and I feel as if things continue to become more “normal”. The first time I felt that my foster parents had made my situation feel normal, is when they started introducing me to people as their “daughter” instead of “this is Maddison, a girl living with us for a bit”. It made situations with other people less awkward and uncomfortable. My family has made my whole situation as normal as they can make it. Involving me in their family gatherings, choosing to take me on vacation with them instead of respite, trying to let me be a teenager and have freedom as much as I can considering my situation.

Kayla, age 17

My name is Kayla and I am 17 years old. The people who showed me “normalcy” are my foster parents. They show me normalcy every day in everything we do. The time that was my favorite with them is when they took me and some other kids wakeboarding for the whole day. We got to do so many water sports and we really enjoyed our time together. I thank my foster parents for taking me in on short notice and loving me like their own. I thank everyone for helping us kids in need and giving us a second chance at life.

Matthew, age 15

My foster mom makes me feel normal every day. She treats me like one of her own kids. She also helps me when I need it most; explaining rights and helping me get better at controlling my anger. She also wants me to live with my family. I love my foster mom.



A reader asks ...

What services and resources should I be aware of to assist a teenager in my care?

NC LINKS

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program assists young people successfully transitioning into adulthood by reducing barriers and providing financial support, resources, and services. North Carolina LINKS (NC LINKS) services are based on the Federal Chafee Program. Young people ages 14 to 21 are eligible for NC LINKS services if they were in foster care after turning 14. If a young person exits foster care via any permanency plan after the age of 14 (reunification, custody, guardianship, KinGap, adoption, or age out at 18) they are still eligible to receive NC LINKS services until their 21st birthday. If a young person in foster care has a personal reserve of more than \$10,000 or if they are undocumented residents they are not eligible for NC LINKS funds.

The goal of the NC LINKS program is for young people who have experienced foster care to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Sufficient economic resources to meet their daily needs;
2. Safe and stable place to live;
3. Academic or vocational/educational goals that are in keeping with the youth's abilities and interests;
4. A sense of connectedness to persons and community; every youth should have a personal support network of at least 5 responsible adults who will remain supportive of the young adult over time;
5. Avoidance of illegal/high risk behavior;
6. Postpone parenthood until financially established and emotionally mature;
7. Access to physical and mental health services, as well as means to pay for those services;
8. Ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities.

Transitional funds up to \$3,000 per eligible young person per state fiscal year (amounts are based on funding availability)

Transitional funds are available to help youth and young adults age 14, but not yet 21, who are in foster care or were in foster care at the age of 14 or older.

Transitional funds can be used for goods and services that support the accomplishment of the NC LINKS program outcomes including, but not limited to:

- Appropriate attire for work, school, or extracurricular activities;
- School equipment (including computers);
- Assistance with transportation;
- Expenses related to age or developmentally

appropriate activities;

- \$500 incentive to youth or young adults who complete high school, GED, 2-year degree, 4-year degree, or a vocational credential;
- Up to \$650 to assist youth or young adults with vehicle insurance in accordance with state regulations;
- Up to \$1,500 match towards the youth or young adult's purchase of a vehicle (for the purpose of transportation to school, work, etc.)

NC LINKS Transitional Funds cannot be used for rent, rent deposits, room and board, or down payments on housing.

Housing Funds up to \$1,500 per eligible young adult per state fiscal year (amounts are based on funding availability)

These funds are available to young adults who aged out of foster care at 18 but are not yet 21 years of age. This includes young adults in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. Housing funds must only be used for:

- Rent
- Rent deposits
- Room and board arrangements
- Down payments on housing

Educational Resources

The Foster Care 2 Success (FC2S) website <https://www.fc2success.org/programs/education-training-vouchers/> helps North Carolina manage college funding for the ETV and NC Reach stipend for youth in foster care.

Educational Training Voucher (ETV)

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 addressed the challenges faced by young people from foster care by designing programs to help them transition to adulthood. Drawing from best practice of FC2S's work with foster youth, the Education Training Voucher (ETV) Program was designed as a federally funded, state-administered initiative to provide funding and support for post-secondary education in 2002. Eligible students in North Carolina may receive grants of up to \$5,000 per year for up to five years or until their 26th birthday. ETV funds can be combined with other grants or scholarships to minimize or eliminate the need for student loans.

NC Reach is a state-funded scholarship offered to qualified applicants for up to 4 years of undergraduate study at North Carolina public universities and community colleges. Students are awarded available funding after all other financial aid, public funds and scholarships have been processed and applied to their account. NC Reach also provides comprehensive student support to help students navigate their post-secondary education.



North Carolina is committed to ensuring every child and youth grows up in a family that can provide them with the love, hope, and stability they deserve.

Additional Resources:

Youth Villages LifeSet Program <https://youthvillages.org/about-us/locations/north-carolina/>. This program model is designed to assist young people ages 17 to 22 through their intensive, community-based program that acts as a bridge from foster care to successful adulthood for young people who turn 18 in foster care.

Children's Home Society of North Carolina's Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SaySo) program provides comprehensive and professional training, leadership opportunities, awareness of resources, and life skill activities for transition-age youth and young adults between ages 14 and 24 involved in the NC LINKS program as well as adults serving those young people in local child welfare agencies.

Fostering Health NC is contracted by North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) to assist with developing resources surrounding health and well-being for children, youth, and young adults in foster care. Additional information is available at Fostering Health NC .

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 15 in this issue.

How to Advocate for Youth Resources by Kate Schultz



Kate Schultz

Research suggests that nearly half of licensed foster parents will quit after just one year of fostering. However, the need for quality, loving foster homes is continually increasing. Access to appropriate resources, supports, and interventions can make or break a placement. When resource families feel supported and equipped to meet the needs of the children in their care placements are stabilized, disruptions are minimized, and outcomes for youth are improved. So, why are foster families leaving in droves? Let's evaluate some of the barriers to support:

Awareness: Many resource families and social workers simply aren't aware of what's available or how to access necessary resources. This can cause families to feel ill-equipped to handle challenging situations and behaviors that can ultimately result in disruption, consequences at school for the child, etc.

Referral Time: Some families are required to go through lengthy processes to prove the need for a service. This could cause a significant time lapse from the moment a referral is submitted to the time the child is seen by a specialist.

Agency Approval: Many agencies must approve referrals or attend initial appointments which can delay the process.

Lack of trauma-informed care: Implicit bias and a lack of trauma-informed systems of care can lead to children being labeled or underserved. Often in school settings, children can be misunderstood and receive consequences for behaviors that aren't appropriate interventions due to their trauma histories. Youth already have so many hurdles to jump through while navigating trauma and life in foster care. It's imperative that their resource parents and social workers know how to overcome barriers and advocate for resources and support. Below are some resource parents tips for advocating on behalf of the children in your care:

Document everything: Keep track of doctor appointments, diagnoses, behaviors, consequences, developmental milestones, grades in school, or anything else that will be helpful. The more information you have about the

child, the more prepared you will be to advocate for a specific service.

Communicate: Keep the social workers, GAL or CASA, and other necessary parties in the loop about your concerns and what you need to be successful. The social worker can't assist or support you as the resource parent if they don't know what your needs are.

Know what's available: Some communities have more resources than others, but a little research can increase your awareness of what's available and help you feel more empowered to support the child in your care. There are numerous community organizations in North Carolina that are available to assist families in identifying and securing interventions. Some of these include, but are not limited to, NC LINKS, SaySo, Foster Family Alliance of NC, your child's GAL or CASA, education lawyers, education advocates, and ECAC (Exceptional Children's Assistance Center).

Be professional: Be mindful of the details you share about your child and stick to the facts that are relevant to the type of support you are advocating for. For example, teachers don't always need to know the child's full trauma history in order to support them better in the classroom. Communicate through the proper channels (i.e. phone, email, in person, etc.) and follow the recommended chain of command. Advocacy is much more effective when boundaries are respected.

Advocacy is hard work, but it is worth it because the children in our care are worth the time, energy, stress, and sometimes tears it takes to get the help we all need to be successful. It can be draining, so don't forget to take care of yourself while also doing everything you can to take care of them!

Kate Schultz is a resource parent and the Deputy Director of the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina



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

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

Free Online Courses Include:



Preparing for and Responding to Disasters

This course teaches North Carolina resource parents how to keep children and youth safe before, during, and after disasters.



Critical Partners for Permanency

This 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.

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

Join the fosteringNC.org List

To sign up to receive news and updates scan this qr code:



Message from Foster Family Alliance of NC by Gaile Osborne FFA-NC Executive Director



Gaile Osborne

What an amazing time to be working for the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina! It's an honor and pleasure to be able to represent resource parents in different capacities across the state. There's so much excellent work going on all over NC!

We have been participating in Youth Input Sessions across the 7 regions of the state. The sessions are attended by youth (ages 14-21), caregivers, and social workers. We are receiving valuable feedback on LINKS, services, resources, and the good and bad experiences of being a youth in the child welfare system. We are grateful for this opportunity to listen and learn.

Training is always in high demand! Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is passionate about bringing training that directly impacts caregivers. We have been focusing on topics such as trauma, sex trafficking, IEP/504 support for children in care and, much, much more. Visit our website www.ffa-nc.org to see the resources we offer.

May 6, 2023 was our most recent Teaming with Teens event. The topic this quarter was "Substance Misuse." At this session we had many great presenters share information about identifying youth who may be misusing substances, resources, how to effectively support a youth with a substance use disorder, and more! Keep your eyes open for information about our next event happening in the 3rd quarter of 2023.

May is National Foster Care Month. Since 1988, the U.S. government has issued annual proclamations in recognition of National Foster Care Month to show appreciation and gratitude to foster parents across the nation. Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina joins this celebration in thanking you for all you do for the children and families you serve. We recognize the amazing effort and life changing work you are doing daily. Thank you for your dedication and determination.

North Carolina currently has over 5,500 licensed foster homes. However, the reality is that just two years ago, North Carolina had just over 7,000 licensed foster homes. As a state, we are in a position where we need more homes on a daily basis. Currently, around 28% of youth in custody are in relative placements. With more than 10,000 children in custody, we are in dire need of foster homes. The number one recruitment tool is YOU! It's the conversations and interactions that you have on a daily basis with your co-workers, your church families, neighbors, and friends. It's the intimate one-on-one conversations that lead to more families signing up to foster. If every family who fosters would recruit one more family, North Carolina would be able to have enough families to serve the children in need.

Some of the biggest needs for our licensed homes include clothing, diapers, equipment, and formula. We have written a grant sponsored by Dogwood Health and opened a clothing closet for foster and kinship providers in western North Carolina called The Giving Tree of WNC. Immediately, it became clear we had a need for more services like this. Foster Family Alliance then opened another clothing closet and started financially supplementing five others with more planned for the near future. We are thankful for our partners who have helped make this happen.

Advocating is at the heart of who I am. Systemic change is truly one of our biggest priorities and our biggest desire at FFA-NC. We cannot accomplish this without you. Many of you participated in the resource parent needs assessment that came out in April. From the assessment, we were able to identify areas of need, conversations began and ultimately, we are foraging for change at the policy level. Daycare overages that foster families are having to pay, length of time to get licensed, timelines in the court process being missed, stipends, training, and much more were identified through the needs assessment. We are diligently working with the NC Department of Health and Human Services to discuss the needs and means to support our families better. We understand that serving you effectively supports your own recruitment efforts. We are honored and personally know the changes needed for resource parents to be successful in their role.

One of the biggest joys I have in being a foster parent is shared parenting. Reaching out and across lines that are uncomfortable, in places you never imagined being, and ultimately loving the parent of a child in your care should be an honor. I find myself trying to figure out ways to creatively engage in shared parenting. Many of you have shared ideas and we want to support you in this part of the journey. Your ideas have included journaling daily events to provide at visits, pictures, life books, jail virtual phone calls, providing transporta-

tion, and numerous other ways to allow the birth parents to still participate in their child's life. The sky is the limit with shared parenting. Thank you for reaching out and walking alongside birth parents.

Serving the children in our homes proves to be a heavy lift at times. The uncertainty, the court processes, and all the other "stuff" seems to overshadow and stress our hearts and minds. As a resource parent for over 12 years, I have often said that the easy part is loving and serving the children in our home. The incredibly stressful and sometimes impossible lift is everything else. At Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina, we don't have the answers to everything nor can we change the system with one ask, but we can and will walk this journey with you. Whether it be a late night message online or a phone call asking for support, we will listen and guide you through rough waters. We will encourage you, check in with you, and ultimately listen to your celebrations and frustrations. Feel free to find us online at ffa-nc.org, email us at info@ffa-nc.org, find us on social media.

I sincerely thank each of you for your dedication to the children of North Carolina.


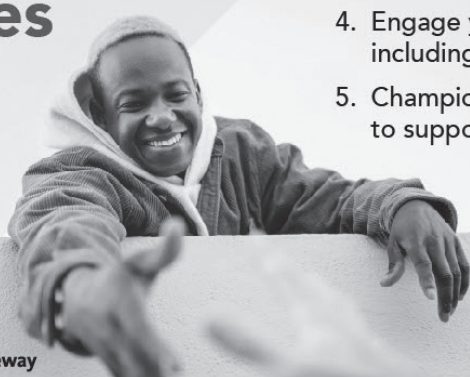


FFA-NC is looking for volunteers for committees, the Board of Directors, and other areas. Please fill out our application, which you can find here: <https://www.ffa-nc.org/membership> or by scanning the qr code:





TIPS TO

Strengthen Minds & Uplift Families



1. Nurture youth's well-being early, often, and continuously. Don't wait for the signs.
2. Talk about mental health as needs and strengths rather than problems or issues.
3. Recognize what culture has to offer. Incorporate traditions, practices, and community.
4. Engage youth. Ask what types of supports they need—including traditional and nontraditional options.
5. Champion the well-being of families and caregivers to support youth's mental health.

 Children's Bureau
 Child Welfare Information Gateway

National Foster Care Month
childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth

Connecting with Fellow Resource Parents: An Empathetic Ear and a Wealth of Knowledge

by Rochelle Johnson

We talk a lot about providing a broader safety net for the kids and families that come into our lives through foster care, but it's important to broaden our own network of support. There are a variety of organizations throughout North Carolina that provide not only training, but support groups and social events to introduce you to fellow resource parents.

Resource parents have a unique parenting role, and most of us have struggled with stressors relating to our kids' trauma, navigating the system, fostering a relationship with their parents and family, and the secondary trauma that caring for children in foster care presents. Talking with parents with similar experiences can provide you with local resources, and more importantly, someone who has a deeper understanding of your position as a resource parent.

If your community has a local organization for foster and adoptive parents, sign up for their newsletter to take advantage of new opportunities to connect. Joining a support group is a great

first step to meet other parents, while also sharing your experience in a private and encouraging space. Some groups are now coming back to meeting in person, but many still meet virtually, which makes it even easier to participate from the comfort of your home.

As you learn more about other parents' experiences, you'll likely find insight and comradery in your support group. These groups can explore many parents' worries, fears, and obstacles, but can also be a celebratory space for the wins and special moments we experience with our kids.

Support groups are also a great way to uncover resources and tips. At times, we may not even know the specific questions to ask as we unravel various parenting, mental health, educational, bureaucratic, or interpersonal challenges! Listening to another parent's process reveals useful strategies, local support organizations or reading resources.

In addition to support groups, many organizations provide training and social events in the community such as annual celebration parties, local park play-

dates, and potlucks. Attending these events will allow you to naturally build stronger support networks, as well as give your children opportunities to meet other foster and adoptive children in the area.

If you are not aware of a resource parent organization in your community, a quick Google search may help. There is also a myriad of private Facebook groups that serve North Carolina resource parents broadly, as well as region-based groups for your area (visit the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina website for more information). Sign up for your local organization's newsletter, and make sure to follow them on social media to stay in the know.

Once you're aware of events available in your area, take the plunge and attend! It's one of the first steps to building a new community that may meet your needs as a resource parent.

Rochelle Johnson is on the board of Fostering Families, serving Durham, Orange and Wake County. Visit www.fosteringfam.org for more information.

The Value of Parent Support Groups in the Foster, Kinship, and Adoption Community

by Tracy Whitney

Foster, kinship, and adoptive caregivers are looking for safe spaces where they can get support and training for the challenges they face every day. Parent support groups can be a valuable tool for building connections, increasing parental confidence, and increasing knowledge about the unique needs of the children and their parents.

Through our work at Creating a Family we have done a deep dive into academic research on peer-to-peer support and learned from our experience and research that parent support groups are one of the most effective and cost-efficient ways to support foster, kinship, and adoptive parents.

Here are just a few of the known benefits that effective parent support groups can have for resource parents:

- Improved quality of family life.
- Decreased anxiety.
- Decreased stress.
- Increase in parenting confidence.
- Feeling understood and a sense of community.
- Increased awareness that they were not alone.
- More likely to access resources.
- Improved family functioning.
- More efficiently meet their children's needs, with greater confidence and hope.

- Increased awareness of the importance of self-care.
- Decreased internalized blame.

Foster, adoptive, and kinship parents attend support groups for a variety of reasons. All parents hit road bumps when parenting. Foster, kinship, and adoptive families are likely to hit more of these bumps along the way. When they face a crisis with their children, these parents and caregivers benefit from being with others who "get it." Raising a child exposed to trauma or neglect can be an isolating and lonely journey. Parents and caregivers need the camaraderie and encouragement that these communities offer. They need to know they are not alone.

Parents and caregivers may also recognize that they need additional education and training, whether for a particular issue or general information about the age and stage of parenting they are facing. Unfortunately, it is hard to predict ahead of time which parenting skills they will need until the child or youth is living in their home. Attending a parent support group that provides skill-building or training can fill in the gaps.

Finally, foster and kinship caregivers seek out parent support groups because they want to learn in a safe space where they will not be judged for what they do not know. They may often feel like they are "under a microscope" with the many visitations, ther-

apies, and caseworker check-ins that fill their calendars. That feeling of being watched can inhibit learning for some resource parents or caregivers. A parent support group offers a peer-to-peer learning environment. The sense of equal footing with peers who "get it" can open them up to increased learning. After all, it is not just our children who learn better when they feel safe.

The most effective parent support groups are spaces of empathetic understanding where parents and caregivers choose to learn and grow together, even when that information may stretch their skills or beliefs.

Tracy Whitney is a Content Manager and runs support groups with Creating a Family, a North Carolina based nonprofit organization whose mission is to strengthen foster, adoptive, and kinship families and the professionals who support them by creating expert-based, trauma-informed resources, community support, and training.

The Impact of Placement Disruption from Someone with Lived Experience

by Jessica Frisina and Ares

Being placed in foster care is a traumatic experience for children and youth. Moving from placement to placement while in foster care is an unfortunate reality for many, furthering the depths of trauma.

However, experiencing placement stability in care can have lasting positive impacts on a child's behavior, attachment, educational performance, and permanency outcomes.

When I worked in a County DSS agency as a foster care worker, I had

the opportunity to work with a young man named Ares. He was 13 when he entered foster care and exited care at 18. Ares is now 23 years old, studying Communications at North Carolina State University. He is a strong advocate for those with lived experience in foster care. I spoke with him about how placement disruptions impacted him. Throughout his time in care, he was in 6 foster homes, 1 group home, and 1 failed pre-adoptive home.

What were some of the strengths of the resource parents that helped you and your resource parents be successful?

There were times where the environment was more positive because the parent was in it for the right reason. For example, there was a parent who went out of her way to meet my needs and observed my struggles. She worked with me and validated my feelings.

Foster parents who encouraged and supported me to chase my goals led to more positive experiences. Parents who allowed flexibility in their

schedules to show up for my track meets and support me made a difference.

What were some of the areas of concern that led to your placements disrupting?

Being placed with strangers after experiencing trauma was a shock to my body and mind. I was also a stranger to them and there needed to be some initiative on both sides to establish trust. I needed parents to keep a high level of patience with me as I was trying to learn who I was. When par-

ents had unrealistic expectations of me, this sometimes led to disruptions. For example, one parent expected me to get funding to attend my track meets. It was important for me to be able to participate in normal activities for my age.

Foster parents who did not support activities such as drivers' education or getting my permit, robbed me from learning skills I needed to transition to adulthood. I always felt like I had to play catch up in that aspect, where I had to learn how to cope with my trauma at the same time as learning how to become an adult.

How did placement disruptions impact your educational experiences?

I was in 6 different schools while in foster care - 3 middle schools and 3 high schools. This disrupted my ability to easily establish friendships. Running track and field helped provide me a safe space to learn who I was and release some of my negative energy. I started running track when I came into foster care, and it was the one thing that was con-

sistent for me. My foster placements, social workers, schools, therapists, and friends all changed multiple times, but track was my constant positive outlet. This motivated me to attend college on a track scholarship and focus on my education.

How did changing placements impact your social and emotional well-being?

I became easily frustrated and felt alone, often feeling a loss of identity. I am an outgoing person but throughout foster care I was very shy around others. Moving placements kept me from being my true best self. I was insecure when others noticed I was in foster care as I wanted to be a normal kid.

What is important for resource parents to understand about the impacts of placement disruptions?

Don't underestimate the severity of the trauma children and youth in foster care have been through as well as the potential they have. Resource parents should bring back their intentions to meet a child where they are and create a safe space. Parents should work to establish trust with communication so youth can feel safe to open up to them. Mutual understanding between resource parents and youth lessens disruptions. Be curious and work to understand them as a whole person. Take a step back to ask how a youth got where they are, and how their experiences have led to their present self.

If you are a youth or young adult in foster care who is currently or has previously experienced trauma related to a placement disruption, please reach out to your social worker to discuss any needs for support or resources.

Jessica Frisina is the Foster Care Coordinator with the Division of Social Services in the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

Ares is a former foster youth with lived experience who now attends NC State University studying Communications



Ares, former foster youth

ENSURING HEALTH FOR YOUNG ADULTS FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE

Full Medicaid Coverage Is Available for Most Young Adults Who Aged Out of Foster Care

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO TO KEEP YOUR MEDICAID ACTIVE?

- It's important to tell the Medicaid caseworker about your status as an aged out foster youth.. Don't assume the worker has this information available.
- Keep your contact information (phone number, address) up to date with your Medicaid caseworker at the Medicaid office.
- Medicaid sends information by mail informing you of program changes or things you need to do.
- You must connect with the Medicaid office yearly to keep your Medicaid.

WHO COULD YOU CALL FOR HELP?

- Your Foster Care, LINKS, or 18 to 21 Social Worker at Department of Social Services
- The Child Welfare Department at DSS if your SW is no longer working there
- The Case Worker in the Medicaid office at your local/county DSS
- NC Medicaid Contact Center @ 888-245-0179

For more information, visit Fostering Health NC by scanning the qr code:





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>)



Josalynn (age 12)

Josalynn is a sweet young lady who is looking for her forever home. Josalynn is bubbly, social and inquisitive and describes herself as beautiful, smart and pretty. Josalynn is friendly and easily makes conversation with those she encounters. She enjoys watching shows on the Disney channel and spending time on her electronic devices. Josalynn likes attending school and her favorite subject is math. Josalynn needs a family who will be committed to her and provide her with a safe and loving home. Josalynn will do well in a home that is structured and provides her with boundaries.



Jack (age 16)

Jack, who's looking to find his forever home, is a bright and creative young man. Jack enjoys playing with Legos, action figures and blocks. Jack's hobbies are building, drawing and coloring. He enjoys attending community events, going camping, riding horses and watching movies. His favorite shows are cartoons, Ninja Turtles and Minions. He loves to dance and listen to music. Jack will eat almost anything, but his favorite foods are cheeseburgers, nuggets and pizza. Jack is described as sweet, kind, and funny. Jack loves surprise gifts and can be loving and helpful. Jack has expressed wanting to be adopted by a family with animals. He needs individuals who are nurturing, active and supportive and provides unconditional love.



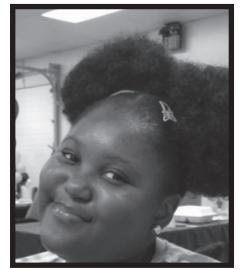
Joshua (age 13)

Joshua is a fun-loving teen who has a great sense of humor and loves adventure. He is a natural born leader who would benefit from lots of activities and socialization. He loves being outdoors, especially at the beach. Joshua also enjoys playing video games and spending time with his friends. He is very health focused and loves working out. He has a love for sports, especially basketball and football. Joshua would benefit from a family that will provide support and advocacy in the academic setting. The ideal family dynamic for Joshua is a single parent home where he is the only child. He will continue to make great strides in a home that provides him with structure, firm boundaries, support, and activities that allow him to be active.



Jedidiah (age 10)

Jedidiah who goes by "Jed" is active and curious and loves the outdoors. He loves to stay busy and thrives off of one-on-one attention from his caregivers. Jed enjoys playing with chalk, bubbles, painting and building things. He is very inquisitive about his surroundings and likes to ask questions often. Jed has been described by those who know him best as a fun kid to be around that you can't help but to love. He is creative, honest and sensitive and wants to be a superhero when he grows up. Jed desire to be in a home with parents who will spend time with him and shower him with an abundance of love.



Ja'naria (age 16)

Ja'naria is an outgoing young lady who is described as an "energetic and playful adolescent." Her caregiver says "Ja'naria has a smile that lights up the room." She is quite witty with a great sense of humor. A social butterfly, this young lady loves to engage with others. She loves the arts and has shown great interest in dance and cheerleading. Ja'naria is very smart, self-reflective above her years, and is kind to others. She enjoys dancing and singing and loves to travel. Some of her favorite foods are Oreos and Chick-Fil-A. Ja'naria says that she is ready to have a forever family. She thrives on structure and having a set schedule and responds best when there are clear and consistent expectations and rules.



Anthony (age 17)

Anthony is a loving, affectionate, funny and resilient young man. He enjoys beach trips, playing video games, basketball, music, and watching superhero movies. His favorite superheroes are Spider-Man and the Hulk. Anthony hopes to work in the music industry as a music producer. Anthony loves school! His teachers describe him as a smart and well-liked teen. When asked about adoption, Anthony shares that he would like an active family that allows him to participate in sports and will introduce him to new and interested learning opportunities. His forever family will need to understand that Anthony desires love, support, and patience. He will do best in a family that is consistent and structured. His ideal family dynamic would be a two-parent or single-family home where he is the youngest child with male siblings only.



Azykeria (age 15)

Azykeria a very endearing teen. She can be described as bright, intelligent, and funny. She has a bold personality, which she utilizes to advocate for herself and those around her. Azykeria always has a positive disposition which allows her to make and maintain bonds easily. She does well in school but does not have a favorite subject. She enjoys anything with water and her favorite sport is swimming. Azykeira enjoys getting her hair done, dressing up and getting her nails done. Azykeria states that she loves to make herself feel and look good so can "slay" the day! She would like to travel to new locations and would like to explore these places with her forever family. Azykeria hopes to have a family that supports all her endeavors and will never leave her regardless of the situation.



Heather (age 17)

Heather is an energetic 17-year-old who enjoys fashion. She loves her accessories such as her colored wigs and makeup. Heather also likes to draw, sing, and dance and she also enjoys watching the Twilight movie series. Her favorite foods are French fries, fried chicken, tacos, and lasagna. Heather wants to be an actress and singer when she grows up. Her goal is to attend a performing arts school to better prepare for her future. Heather shares that she is ready for a forever family that she can call her own. Heather's forever family should be calm and patient with structure and consistency. Her family should be understanding of her past and push her to reach her goals while loving her for who she is. The desired family dynamic for Heather is a two-parent or single female home where she is the only child.

North Carolina is committed to achieving permanence and well-being for youth! Fostering Perspectives contributes by featuring profiles of young people seeking permanence through adoption in every issue. This is just one of many recruitment efforts continuously undertaken by the NC Division of Social Services and the state's public and private child-placing agencies. Since 2015, 17 of the young people featured in Fostering Perspectives have been placed with a forever family. Another seven have placements pending.

Please continue to share this page with others and help us find families for children and youth who need them.

Thank You to John McMahon for Decades of Dedication

On December 1st, 2022, colleagues, friends, and family gathered to celebrate the retirement of John McMahon. It was a wonderful event full of tributes to John's long career at UNC Chapel Hill. Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson spoke to John's incredible contributions to child welfare in NC during his tenure. John, who is a graduate from the University of North Carolina, has dedicated 30 years of his career to improving the lives of children and families across our state through his work at the Family and Children's Resource Program (FCRP), part of the UNC Chapel Hill, School of Social Work.

One of John's roles at FCRP was as editor of many publications, including *Fostering Perspectives*. For over 25 years, John facilitated an advisory group with community stakeholders, families, and youth with lived experience to plan, write, and edit this publication. *Fostering Perspectives* is read state-wide and frequently cited by the Federal Children's Bureau, national resource centers, and academic and advocacy groups across the country.

John also led the effort to help NC Division of Social Services launch an online learning portal for resource parents, www.fosteringNC.org. John's vision of free, easily accessible, high-quality support and training for all of North Carolina's resource parents is now a reality. The site features free on-demand courses, webinar recordings, and videos about critical topics for resource parents. It also provides answers to FAQs and resources.

In the 30 years John has worked at FCRP, he has participated in countless projects that benefit the public. John's work has impacted thousands of resource parents, social workers, and agency leaders who have had the pleasure of working with him. He is admired and appreciated not only by his colleagues at FCRP but also by national, state, and local partners. He is unfailingly kind, helpful, and

reliable, and as such, we believe John epitomizes the spirit of engagement and service of our public university.

Readers from around the state and across the country frequently write to thank and commend John McMahon for the articles in *Fostering Perspectives* as well as for the information and courses provided in *FosteringNC.org*.

While John will be truly missed, we are thankful for all he has done for children and families in NC. At the end of the evening on December 1st, John was inducted into the "Order of the Long Leaf Pine" by the governor of NC, Roy Cooper. This is the highest honor possible given for service in NC and no one is more deserving of this recognition than John McMahon.



John McMahon

"I have deeply appreciated all your years of leadership and stewardship of the *Fostering Perspectives* Advisory Board! Thank you for driving to and from the mountains and offering us sustenance as you convene with the folks in the Triangle"

– Director of Youth Exposure to Domestic Violence & Special Projects

More testimonials about John's Work

"Thank you for all your hard work, dedication, and such professional publication [*Fostering Perspectives*]"

– Foster Parent Reader

"Whenever I traveled out of state or convened with other jurisdictional partners and introduced myself as being from NC, often the first words from counterparts in adoption and foster care in other states was "we love *Fostering Perspectives*. We send it to our resource parents and use it in our state whenever possible." I do not know that there is a higher compliment! Thank you to John for providing such amazing leadership and organization. I know it has been a labor of love"

– Adoption Facilitator

"Soon after deployment on www.FosteringNC.org of the new online course *Grief: How Resource Parents Can Cope and Learn from Loss*, John McMahon received the following email "Thank you so much for this training on grief! My husband and I have been foster parents for 15 years and this is the first time I have ever seen any mention of addressing grief when a child moves."

– Foster Parent

fostering perspectives (May 2023)

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

Contact Us: *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o Jonathan Rockoff, Family & Children's Resource Program, 325 Pittsboro Street, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599.

Email: jrockoff@email.unc.edu

Advisory Board: NC Permanency Design Team

Newsletter Staff: Jonathan Rockoff (Editor)

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

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

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Online: www.fosteringperspectives.org

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

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

Writing Contest

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

Please send us a response to the following question:



We want all young people in foster care to feel safe in their foster home. When you feel safe in your home it allows you to feel happier, healthier, do better in school, and reach out for help when you need it. What do your foster parents do to help you feel safe? (Responses should be 200 words or less.)

DEADLINE: Aug 1, 2023

E-mail submissions to jrockoff@email.unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, 325 Pittsboro Street, CB# 3550, Chapel Hill, NC 27599. 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 v27 n1

1. What are two strategies Lanitta suggests to assess your own personal biases?
2. What are two tips Crystal has for resource parents when they are assigned a new social worker?
3. Who does Barbara suggest looking to for support as a resource parent?
4. What are two benefits of kinship care?
5. How does the Resource Parent Curriculum (RPC) help with placement stability?
6. How does Iredell County highlight and recognize the efforts of their resource parents?
7. What are two ways that resource parent support groups can be beneficial for resource parents?
8. What is one example of collective trauma?
9. What does Kate recommend that resource parents document while caring for a youth?
10. Describe how having multiple placements impacted Ares' education.

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— HAPPY —
NATIONAL
FOSTER
CARE
MONTH
— MAY —

May is National Foster Care Month, this is an important time to raise awareness on issues related to foster care and to celebrate those who are dedicated to serving our children, youth, and families. Each May, during National Foster Care Month, please take the time to recognize foster parents, family members, volunteers, mentors, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and other members of the community who help children and youth in foster care maintain and strengthen connections. Use this time to renew your commitment to ensuring a bright future for the more than 423,000 children and youth in foster care nationally and celebrate those who make a meaningful difference in their lives.

Today there are over 12,000 children in foster care in North Carolina. Sadly, these children must leave their homes due to crisis situations, and they look to loving adults in our communities for the things their own families are unable to provide at the time. The need is great for foster families to support these children during the transition, while they await reunification with their family of origin, guardianship with relatives, or adoption. This month, let us take a holistic and culturally responsive approach to embody this year's theme, "Strengthening Minds, Uplifting Families."