

A photograph of several children holding hands in a grassy field. The children are wearing colorful clothing: a red shirt with a green star, a blue shirt with a yellow sun, and a green skirt. The scene is outdoors with tall grass and a soft, warm light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white rectangular box in the lower half of the image.

EVERY CHILD NEEDS A CHAMPION.
EVERY CHAMPION
NEEDS SUPPORT.



Foster Parent Support & Development

Your Hosts



Mike Heath
Julie Wallace



Agenda

- Inspiring & Engaging Foster Parents
- Creating and Implementing an exceptional customer response system
- Proven Support & Development Strategies
- Discussion about why foster parents are our best recruiters
- Cultivating foster parent strengths and skills
- Encouraging & supporting self-care



Support & Development

Why Foster Parents Leave

“Foster parents begin with a love of children. Most of them leave not because they cannot face the challenges of handling troubled youngsters, but because they fail to receive support from the system.”

Keeping Foster Parents Inspired & Connected

- Once Foster Parents receive their Foster Parent License....why is it important for you to keep foster parents connected to your agency?
 - What strategies do you utilize to keep your foster parents connected to your agency?
- Why is it important to keep foster parents connected to one another?
 - How do you keep foster parents connected to one another?



Recruitment and Support and Development Are Interconnected

- If people have positive experiences, they naturally become Recruitment and Retention Resources for your agency!
- However, if individuals experience negative experiences, research informs us that they will share those experiences with others.
- Therefore, it is essential that prospective foster parents and licensed foster parents families have positive interactions and experiences to share!



Customer Service Matters

- Americans tell an average of 15 people about a poor service experience, versus the 11 people they'll tell about a good experience.
- After one negative experience, 51% of customers will never do business with that company again.
- Feeling unappreciated is the #1 reason customers switch away from products and services.



Customer Service With Prospective Foster Parents

- At first contact – think about some things to consider when interacting with your potential foster parents.
- The qualities of a good follow-up plan, for after the event occurs or after first contact.
- Informational meetings--how do yours look? Is there room for improvement?
- Keeping folks informed and engaged throughout every stage of the process



Customer Service With Current Foster Parents

- What is your agency as a whole, doing to treat foster parents like gold?
- What is your child welfare unit doing to have a customer service attitude and approach toward your foster parents?
- What does your Recruitment Team (even if that's just you) doing to treat your foster parents like valued members of the team?



Support & Development Strategies

- What are effective support and development strategies?
- Communication
- Providing Respite
- Treating as members of the Child's Support Team
- Feeling Respected
- Sharing Resources & Support Services
- Encouraging Self Care
- Any additional thoughts, ideas or suggestions?



Foster Parents Rock!

- Foster Parents are Absolutely the Best Recruiters of Prospective Families....Why is this the case?
- How can your agency incorporate Foster Parent Champions or Foster Parent Rock Stars in your Recruitment Plans?
- How can your agency express appreciation to Foster Parent Champions or Foster Parent Rock Stars for their amazing support?



How Foster Parent Champions can Inspire All of Your Foster Parents

- Share their lived experience at information sessions
- Check in with parents during the licensing process
- Mentor new foster parents
- Gather input from foster parents about their needs and share with the agency
- Partner with agency staff to provide trainings
- Other thoughts?



Reflection:

Take a moment to list the challenges
foster parents face.

Foster Parent Challenges

- Allegations
- Difficult interactions with birth parents
- Lack of privacy
- Grief & Loss
- Myths of Foster Care (just do it for the money, sensational news stories, they must be “Saints,” etc.)
- Challenging behaviors
- Public scrutiny
- Demands on time (meetings, therapy appointments, school issues)
- Missed work
- Stressors on marriage/ bio children
- Unpredictability of lifestyle (hard to plan things)
- Held to a higher standard
- Sadness
- Overwhelming feelings
- Feces smearing
- Threat to bio kids
- Powerless to make decisions

Areas Needing Support

- Grief and loss
- Input on decision making
- Accurate and complete information sharing regarding children
- Feeling adequately prepared to meet the needs of children in care
- Compassion Fatigue/Burn out

Development

Cultivating Foster Parent Strengths

- Think about our foster parents as professionals.
- Provide opportunities for professional development and growth.
- Provide updated resources (high quality services such as new therapies, new providers, new educational options)
- Use the data collected for recruitment to inform support and development as well
- Individualized Training Plans
- Debrief with families after a child leaves



Development Strategy

Example: Foster homes for Teens

- Have the conversation
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Educate on needs
- Dispel misconceptions or stereotypes
- Provide access to trainings/information to increase capacity
- Provide respite opportunities w/a new demographic

Self care is next....

Questions about what we've covered so far?

Comments?



Self Care Strategies

- Taking time between placements
- Utilizing respite
- Taking advantage of Prudent Parenting to do things like carpooling to enable nights off
- Connect with other foster parents, either in person or in a FB support group (agency can hold trainings for groups and make it a connection event)
- Conduct Stay Interviews to know what foster parents need



More on Self Care

- Provide resources and supports about Mindfulness
- Build connections with Community Champions/Partners; such as the YMCA, YWCA, Fitness Centers, etc. would be willing to provide foster families with discounts
- Do your foster parents like to read? Well, the Coalition has a wonderful library full of parenting resources!
- Help create opportunities for Moms' Nights out, Dads' Nights Out, Date Nights, etc.
- What other ideas have been beneficial at your agency?



More on Self Care—Foster Parents' Lifestyle

- Meditation/prayer
- Yoga
- Awareness – if you don't know what stresses you out, you can't change your reaction to it
- Walking
- Sleep, and rest
- Surroundings/environment– are there elements of tranquility and contentment? If not, what can be done to add those?
- Create personal relationships that are nurturing



Recap the Key Points regarding Support and Development

- Relationships are key – keep foster parents connected to each other, and to your agency
- Use a customer service model when supporting your foster parents
- Your Foster Parent Champions or Rock Stars can play many roles
- Give your foster parents the tools they need to do their work
- Think of your foster parents as professionals when considering “development”
- Encourage self-care strategies



Wrap Up

- Questions?
- Additional thoughts or Suggestions?
- Are these ideas realistic to implement at your agency?



Thank you for Participating!

- We hope that you have some practical strategies that you can incorporate in developing and supporting prospective and licensed foster parents.
- Remember, Recruitment and Development and Supporting foster parents is not One Person's Responsibility...It takes the Entire Agency from Initial Inquiry....all the way to Licensing and Beyond!
- Thank you for supporting and developing foster parents at your agency!! **Foster Parents Rock and so do all of YOU!!!**



Resources

**For additional information or resources contact:
The Coalition for Children, Youth & Families**

414. 475.1246

info@coalitionforcyf.org

www.coalitionforcyf.org