

Marion County Children and Families Commission

The Family Preservation Action Team

Eliminate the Gap Strategic Plan for the Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents 2017



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Eliminate the Gap



We would like to acknowledge the members of the Marion County Children and Families Commission's Family Preservation Action Team for their work in creating the Foster Parent Champion Team and spearheading the effort to improve the lives of Marion County's foster families.

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The recommendations put forward in this plan were developed in collaboration with the Marion County Children and Families Commission's Foster Parent Champion Team and Community Services staff.

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Abbreviations

CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocate
CBH	(Marion County) Children’s Behavioral Health
CCS	Catholic Community Services
CFC	(Marion County) Children and Families Commission
DHS	(Oregon) Department of Human Services
FBB	Family Building Blocks
FPAT	Family Preservation Action Team
MPFPA	Marion Polk Foster Parent Association
OHP	Oregon Health Plan

Executive Summary

Children in the foster care system in Marion County are in crisis and urgent interventions are necessary so that they can be placed, in a timely manner, into homes where they can find the love and care that they need and deserve. Foster parents in Marion County are also in crisis and it is vital that networks of sustained support be developed for their families.

The early 2000's Marion County saw a concerted law enforcement effort to crackdown on meth use. This resulted in an upsurge in the number of incarcerated parents and a subsequent dramatic increase in the need for foster family homes. At one time, there were almost 1200 children in Marion County in need of homes.

In 2005, community and faith leaders successfully rallied to recruit the needed foster parents through a series of emergency meetings, community events (live and on video), and promotions

Unfortunately, between 2005 and now, the gap between the number of children needing a foster home and the number of available foster homes has widened significantly again. At the same time, more children who are in care require both professional behavioral health services and an enhanced level of care that is often provided by foster parents. Those providing foster care are not trained to support children who have experienced repeated trauma. This combination of diminishing supports for the caregivers in the foster care system and children entering with complex needs has led to high turnover among Department of Human Services' (DHS) Child Welfare staff and a high number of unhappy foster parents leaving the system. Currently, there are approximately 570 children in the Marion County Foster Care System and 250 qualified foster family homes.¹

To address this significant gap, in the summer of 2016, the Marion County Children and Families Commission's Family Preservation Action Team (FPAT) collaborated to provide funding to hire a Foster Parent Champion to work with FPAT members to create a strategic plan to improve the recruitment and retention of foster parents. After approval of the strategic plan by the Children and Families Commission, a 12-18-month implementation phase will commence.

This strategic plan to improve the recruitment and retention of foster parents relies on research that has demonstrated time and again that the most effective recruiters of new foster parents are current and satisfied foster parents. Satisfied foster parents are those who feel supported, valued, heard and a part of the team. As a Marion County foster parent recently said, "We are not 'beds!'"² expressing her frustration with how unvalued she feels by DHS. In counties across the U.S., communities have developed plans and campaigns to support and acknowledge the important role of foster families. For example, in Gainesville, Florida, foster families are now referred to as "Partner Families"³ to honor their significance in the lives of the children in their care.

¹ November 2016 Oregon Department of Human Services statistics.

² Interview with foster parents conducted on November 10, 2016

³ *Effective Practices in Foster Parent Recruitment, Infrastructure and Retention. December 2014 Casey Family Programs. www.casey.org*

In Marion County, there are promising efforts being developed within government, non-profit child welfare agencies, and the faith community to address the issues in foster care. For example: DHS has begun to hold monthly town hall style meetings with foster parents to hear their concerns; Catholic Community Services has raised funding to pilot an Enhanced Support for Foster Parents project based on the Mockingbird Family⁴ model service delivery approach to serve foster families; and, New Hope Foursquare Church has launched its Fostering Compassion initiative to recruit and support foster families within its denomination.

The focus of this plan is on approaches that have proved to successfully support both child welfare workers and foster parents in the foster care system. Essentially, an effective foster care system is one that creates communities of care and resource sharing among professionals, foster families, and within the neighborhoods in which foster children live - the same interventions that, if implemented for all families and children, would greatly reduce the need for foster care.

⁴ www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Background Summary

In preparing the recommendations contained in this report, during the months of October and November, meetings were held with various stakeholders; including the Oregon Department of Human Services' staff, non-profit agency personnel, foster parents and foster youth. Online research was conducted regarding best practices in foster care. The major themes of these meetings and research are detailed below. In summary, most agreed that the best recruiters of new foster parents are satisfied current foster parents. In cases, like Marion County, where community recruitment events are urgently needed, targeting affinity groups such as faith communities and state employees and messaging positive stories about current families and foster children are proven successful recruitment strategies.

More long term, the focus needs to be on developing a cadre of satisfied foster parents who feel heard, valued and supported. Best practices for supporting foster families include responsive communication from DHS staff, team decision-making models, easy and consistent access to behavioral health resources, available and affordable respite care and tokens of appreciation. Foster parents echoed these findings.

Stakeholder Meetings and Outcomes

Stakeholders	Questions asked	Major themes and perceptions
Oregon Department of Human Services	What is the process? What are the problems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff burn-out • Staff turn-over • Need to streamline certification process • Foster parents feel unsupported by DHS staff • Expand and improve volunteer role • Need for ongoing training and supports for foster parents
Non-profit agencies	What is working? What is not working? What are your ideas for making improvements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to improve relationship between DHS and foster parents • Need for increased behavioral health supports • Need for community to value and support foster parents • Best recruiters of new foster parents are current satisfied foster parents • Need for team decision-making that includes foster parents • Leverage existing expertise and resources

Foster parents	What is working? What is not working? What do you want me to know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are not supportive • Need for ongoing relevant training • Need to improve relationship between DHS and foster parents • Foster parents do not feel a part of the team or valued by DHS • Need for respite care funding • Need for mentoring • Problems with visitations- transportation and behaviors • Need for information and access to resources
Foster Parent Champion team	How have foster parents been recruited? What are your ideas for improving recruitment and retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to include the business community in valuing foster parents • Satisfied foster parents are the best recruiters of new foster parents • Need for new strategy to recruit foster parents not based solely on altruism • Need for useful data on why foster parents continue or terminate • Talk about successes rather than crisis • Pilot Enhanced Support for Foster Parents service delivery model
Community Services staff	What do you think is needed to improve recruitment and retention of foster parents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a marketing plan to target different foster care stakeholders • Need person(s) of influence on FPAT to advocate to the state legislature • Need for resource person/hub to provide consistent assistance to DHS and foster parents

Conferences

Conferences	Major themes
Shoulder to Shoulder Conference October 24, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for more diversity among foster parents• Focus on prevention• Need for additional behavioral supports for foster children and parents
Trauma-Informed Oregon seminar December 13, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for trauma-informed care to be embedded at all levels of agency practice, policy, and for agencies that partner together to include trauma-informed practices in their partnership agreements
Together Toward Tomorrow: The Science and Power of Hope January 12, 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hopefulness can be objectively measured and encouraged• Hopefulness improves outcomes for people receiving social services

Online research

Online research	Major themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unintended Consequences videos (2005) • Oregon DHS Child Welfare website • <i>Family to Family: Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care: Building Community Partnerships Step by Step</i> Casey Family Foundation 2005 • <i>Evidence-Based Practice in Foster Parent Training and Support: Implications for Treatment Foster Care Providers</i> by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare October 2008 • <i>Family to Family in Monterey and Santa Clara counties, CA</i> 2005 • <i>Oregon DHS Foster Parent Orientation Basics</i> • <i>Child Welfare League PRIDE Model of Practice</i> • <i>Theory of Change Draft</i> • <i>CCS Grant Proposal for Enhanced Supports for Foster Parents</i> • <i>The Mockingbird Family Model</i> • <i>Children & Family Services Division California Wraparound Program</i> • <i>California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare website</i> • <i>Neighbor to Family, Inc. website</i> • <i>Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare: the Kempe Center</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported foster parents are the best recruiters of new foster parents, foster parents feel supported when they are a valued and treated as part of the team caring for foster children • Successful recruitment models promote positive images of foster families and market to existing affinity groups such as faith communities and military families • Successful retention models include organized peer support, responsive communication, community appreciation and accessible respite care • Rebranding “foster parents” and calling them “partner families” enhanced the value assigned to these families and improved recruitment • Team decision making models that included all important adults in a child’s life improved outcomes for foster children and helped foster parents to feel heard

Risks and opportunities

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DHS Foundations Class • Stakeholder commitment • New knowledgeable and enthusiastic leadership in the Marion Polk Foster Parents Association • DHS team available for one-on-one check-ins and trainings with foster families • Several highly-engaged faith communities • Willingness of Safe Families to provide respite care and transitional care for children being placed into foster care • Several agencies trained in trauma-informed care • Improved DHS contact rates • Available and consistent mental health services through Marion County Behavioral Health 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate communication between DHS and foster families • Lack of awareness/support in the school districts regarding foster children • Inadequate communication about resources among foster system stakeholders • Inadequate data to steer a strategic plan; e.g., location of foster families, reasons for foster parents' dropping out • Faith community burn-out • Child Welfare staff burn-out • Foster family burn-out
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state is focused and committed to improve the foster care system • Improvements in the economy and salaries 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased media scrutiny of foster care is another barrier to recruitment and retention • State budget cut-backs • Increased community suspicion about government programs and spending

Objectives and Priorities

- Recruit, train and support enough qualified foster families to eliminate the gap between the existing number of homes (250) and the number of children in need of homes (570)
- Create a framework to implement the strategic plan; including the hiring of a Foster Parent Champion
- Retain 90% of existing and future foster families
- Pilot an Enhanced Support of Foster Parents service delivery model for foster care
- Increase the capacity to certify and support foster families
- Create a method to continuously collect data about foster parent attitudes and support needs
- Develop a network of foster families, stakeholder agencies, faith communities and business leaders that are committed to sharing their expertise and resources to support effective foster care

Recommendations

The following are recommendations to address both the immediate need to recruit more foster parents and the ongoing need to improve the retention of foster parents through enhanced supports for families and child welfare staff.

Foundationally, most of the recommendations rely on braiding funding among child welfare agencies rather than on expectations for increases in available state funds.

Data collection

Most information about foster parents' needs and dissatisfaction in Marion County is anecdotal; therefore, it is recommended that DHS, in partnership with the Marion and Polk County Foster Family Association, make it a priority to collect data to answer the following questions:

- Why do foster parents terminate?
- What are the primary unmet needs of foster parents?
- What are the qualities of successful foster parents?
- What are the primary unmet needs of child welfare staff?
- What is the wait time between when it is determined a child needs to be placed in a foster home and the actual placement?
- How many parents apply to become foster parents during the DHS Foundations Class?
- How many parents drop out of the application process? When and why?
- What would foster parents recommend to improve retention?
- Why do foster parents choose to serve as foster parents?

Though immediate steps need to be taken to address the gap between available foster homes and children who need homes, data needs to be collected to develop sustainable strategies that meet the actual deficiencies in the current foster care system.

Foster Parent Champion

As a first and necessary step to implementing the recommendations in this strategic plan, funding must be identified and allocated to hire a Foster Parent Champion. This person would work closely with FPAT to carry out the action plan and to envision next steps to strengthen foster care in Marion County.

Recruitment

ISSUE ONE

As of November 2016, 570 children were in the foster care system and only about 250 foster homes were available.

Current context

DHS reported that more than 80 potential foster parents attended the November/December Foundations Class and more than 90 in the current class. It is difficult to estimate how this increase in potential foster families will impact the existing gap between number of children in need and the number of available homes.

Possible strategies

- To coincide with Foster Care month in May, launch a campaign to recruit enough foster parents to eliminate the gap between foster children in need of homes and available homes. Target affinity groups whose members are already involved with children in foster care, Safe Families and CASA. These include faith communities, and other affinity groups. Focus on positive messages and compelling stories about thriving foster children and engaged families.
- FPAT to organize and sponsor foster care community awareness and recruitment events.
- Continue DHS community recruitment efforts. In the last few months, these have yielded increased numbers of potential parents attending the Foundations trainings.

Recommendations

Focus on developing a foster parent recruitment campaign that is a call to action for children in our community. Target faith communities, and other affinity groups, to recruit foster parents and respite foster parents. Create a campaign team made up of DHS staff, the Marion Polk Foster Parent Association, the Foster Parent Champion, and other FPAT members to both develop the campaign and to carry it out by convening calls to action in churches, and other affinity groups. Message positive stories about successful foster children and families and begin to reframe the role of foster parents in terms of “partner families.”

In addition, it is recommended that a role of the Foster parent Champion include assisting FPAT and DHS to organize and partner with leaders in the community to host awareness and recruitment events.

Recruitment

ISSUE TWO

Certifying new foster homes in Marion County is a lengthy process and is a barrier to increasing the number of available foster homes.

Current context

Currently, the average time to process a successful home inspection is 3-6 months. Lack of adequate staffing at DHS has resulted in a bottleneck in the certification process for new foster parents. If a foster parent recruitment campaign is successful and no new staff is hired, the wait time will only increase as will dissatisfaction with the foster care system.

Recently, with the endorsement of the Family Preservation Action Team, DHS was able to hire two new temporary Certifiers to assist both with the current backlog of certifications and to process the applications from the most recent Foundations Trainings.

Possible strategies

- FPAT members send a letter of support to Clyde Saiki, Director of the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) to permanently hire at least two certifiers for Marion County.
- DHS contract out the certification process to Catholic Community Services (CCS) or other appropriate agencies.

Recommendations

DHS and CCS ought to explore a partnership in which the certification process would be contracted to CCS. CCS has staff trained in this process and such a contract could benefit both agencies financially. Current DHS staff members who work as certifiers would have their position descriptions modified to focus on being advocates and case workers for foster parents on their caseload.

Recruitment

ISSUE THREE

Foster child placement wait time statistics are unavailable due to current litigation. However, it has been reported by media and confirmed anecdotally that there is an unacceptable wait time for homes for many of the children who are placed into care.

Current context

Media have followed stories of Marion County foster children spending their days in Child Welfare offices supervised by DHS staff and their nights in hotels with these same staff. The psychological damage that is inflicted on these children who are receiving the message that they are unwanted is intolerable. The use of expensive and valuable staff time to provide care for these children is not the long-term answer.

Possible strategies

- Emergency certify CASA or Safe Family volunteers to provide short-term care for foster children in their homes until a stable foster family home is identified
- Recruit volunteers to provide onsite care for children at DHS who are waiting for placement

Recommendations

DHS, CASA and Safe Families need to establish MOUs that would allow DHS to emergency certify CASA and Safe Families volunteers. DHS would provide any additional training that would be needed for these families.

Retention

ISSUE ONE

Foster parents are not receiving the level of support they need to address the behavioral needs of the children in their care.

Current context

It has been reported by DHS and other child welfare advocates that children currently in foster care have higher behavioral needs than in the past. This may be due to DHS' success in keeping many children in their biological families' homes rather than placing them into non-kin care. Thus, many of the children who are in care have experienced more trauma and family disruptions.

In meetings with foster parents, many voiced the desire for enhanced supports around the behavioral health needs of the children in their care. Foster care placements are often interrupted because parents are overwhelmed by behaviors they are not trained to handle. At this time, DHS offers onsite one-on-one consultations for foster parents during visitations. The Foundations Training instructor provides modeling and some counseling to parents who are concerned about behaviors being displayed while in care. As well, foster children have Oregon Health Plan (OHP) and are eligible for counseling services through Marion County Children's Behavioral Health and other agencies who take OHP. Though this is a benefit, foster parents also felt that this represented yet another appointment in their busy days.

Possible strategies

- Provide 24/7 on call behavioral health supports through Marion County Children's Behavioral Health
- Provide in person behavioral support trainings to foster parents at locations that are convenient and that include childcare
- Provide online behavioral support training that is more practical and less theoretical
- Promote and make mandatory the onsite one-on-one consultations provided at DHS

Recommendations

Though all the above interventions are valuable, DHS and Marion County Children's Behavioral Health should prioritize the development of an MOU that would allow MCCBH to provide 24/7 on call behavioral health supports to foster parents. Almost all the clinical staff at MCCBH are certified in foster care and in adoption, and in addition, the clinic's leadership is motivated to provide this service. The costs of these services to the foster child would be covered through OHP.

Providing on-call help would greatly reduce stress among foster parents. The expert advice would give parents the tools to address difficult behaviors and therefore placement disruptions for foster children and foster families could begin to build relationships of trust with a behavioral health provider.

Retention

ISSUE TWO

Due to cost and lack of availability, foster parents cannot access respite care as needed and this leads to burnout.

Current context

There is no separate fund to pay for respite care and foster parents must use part of their monthly stipend to pay for that cost. Additionally, the stipend dollars cannot be used to pay for babysitting of biological children and this makes the scheduling of respite complicated for foster parents who also have their own biological children.

Possible strategies

- Increase the monthly stipend to include the cost of monthly respite care
- Communicate or map out the physical location of other nearby foster families so that they can network and provide respite care for each other
- Promote Foster Families Night Out in churches and other agencies such as the Salvation Army Kroc Center and the YMCA

Recommendations

The most immediate and effective strategy would be to make foster parents aware of the other families around them. Foster families report that when they know of other families in their neighborhood or faith community, they naturally network and support each other with, among other resources, respite care. This is a no-cost solution that encourages the creation of supportive and sustainable networks.

As well, it is recommended that the Foster Parent Champion recruit faith communities and other organizations to provide volunteer and regular respite care that includes both foster and biological children.

Retention

ISSUE THREE

In interviews, foster parents reported that do not feel that they are part of the team that is making decisions for the children in their care. Feeling unheard in this way is frustrating and creates a wedge between foster parents and DHS staff.

Current context

Though efforts are made to include foster parents in decision-making, scheduling is difficult and foster parents feel that their input is not valued.

Possible strategies

- Implement the Family Team Decision-Making model⁵ that has been successful in California. The model involves foster parents, caseworkers, birth families and community members in foster care decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for them.
- Support DHS staff with more volunteer involvement

Recommendations

DHS continues organizing its efforts to define volunteer roles that would directly support staff so that they can be freed up to better support foster parents. Some suggestions are to assign volunteer scribes who would assist with case noting or drivers who can transport children for visitations. Moving certifications to CCS or other agencies would also open up more staff to respond to foster parent needs.

Once those supports are in place, the Family Decision-Making model could be implemented. This model values the input of all adults invested in a foster child's life including biological parents and teachers, non-caregiving relatives, pastors, case workers, foster and other adults identified by the child or by a close adult as being a part of the child's social network.

⁵ Family to Family in Monterey County: Everyone's Chance to Care" Agustín Gomez* Bob Harper**

Retention

ISSUE FOUR

Foster parents, who were interviewed, stated that they are frustrated by long response times when they call case workers and a perceived lack of respect for their role in the lives of the children in their care. This comes up repeatedly in discussions about visitations when foster parents are left out of the loop in scheduling, and often are limited in how they can communicate with DHS staff or biological parents about children's behaviors.

Current context

DHS has recently provided cell phones to its child welfare case workers in the hopes of improving response times. DHS is aware that some of their staff needs training to improve communication skills and to reframe relationships with foster parents from hierarchical to collegial. DHS has implemented monthly town hall meetings between staff and foster parents.

Possible strategies

- Provide a communication journal to foster parents and biological parents that would be used to note observations and concerns about the children to share at visitation times.
- Improve the customer relations skills of DHS staff through training and accountability
- Support DHS staff with more volunteer involvement

Recommendations

There is a reportedly high turnover and burnout rate among DHS child welfare staff and this, undoubtedly, contributes to the poor communication between foster parents and DHS staff. As with issue three, DHS needs to continue its efforts to develop a volunteer corps to support its staff. As well, DHS should continue its customer service trainings with a focus on collegiality with foster parents. As one approach to accountability for DHS staff, foster parents should be allowed to change case workers if they are not satisfied with the performance or responsiveness of their assigned worker.

Retention

ISSUE FIVE

Foster parents feel that their role in the community is not valued. Many believe they are considered to be no more than a “bed,” rather than being considered essential to improving the lives of children and neighborhoods. ⁶

Current context

There are few perks or acknowledgments offered to foster parents by the foster care system, by faith communities, or by the community at large. Also, access to donations such as diapers and school supplies is limited or not publicized. In addition, foster parents report that sometimes donations are assigned to specific groups of children in foster care and that others are left out.

Possible strategies

- Involve the Chamber of Commerce to identify local businesses who may be willing to provide special discounts for foster parents
- Identify local businesses to obtain needed donations for foster parents
- Involve local businesses promoting special discounted “nights out” for foster families

Recommendations

The Foster Parent Champion along with members of FPAT should engage the business community to provide perks and donations for Marion County foster parents. These could be promoted and publicized in cooperation with MPFPA.

⁶ Interview with foster parents conducted on November 10, 2016

Retention

ISSUE SIX

In interviews foster parents reported feeling isolated and often inadequate; especially when the first child is placed under their care.

Current situation

Foster parents often do not know about other foster parents in their neighborhoods or faith communities. This is especially troublesome for new foster parents who report feeling afraid with their first placement.⁷

Possible strategies

- Improve online trainings to make them more practical
- Develop a mentoring program through MPFPA and DHS to help foster parents through their first year
- Communicate or map out the physical location of other nearby foster families so that they can network and provide respite care for each other

Recommendations

With its current dynamic leadership, MPFPA is in a position to develop, with DHS, a mentoring program for new foster parents that would pair new foster parents with seasoned parents who are on break or who have stopped fostering. Mentors would need to be carefully selected and matched. One model to explore is Florida's Quality Parenting Initiative⁸

⁷ Interview with foster parents conducted on November 10, 2016

⁸ Effective Practices in Foster Parent Recruitment, Infrastructure, and Retention. December 2014, Casey Family Programs

Retention

ISSUE SEVEN

Foster parents and DHS staff report lacking knowledge about available resources for foster parents.

Current Situation

Due to high turnover at DHS, case workers are often unaware of resources in the community to help foster families and there is no centralized place to learn about what is available.

Possible Strategies

- Create a working group to develop a resource book
- Create a working group to create or identify a service that would be tasked to maintain an online social service resource site that could be accessed through the MPFPA and DHS websites for foster parents and DHS workers

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Foster Parent Champion convene a working group made up of DHS staff, foster parents, and other child welfare agency staff and community partners to develop an online social service resource site for both DHS and MPFPA. This could be accomplished through an independent contract, a separate service, or could be maintained a trained volunteer who would administer the pages and keep them up to date.

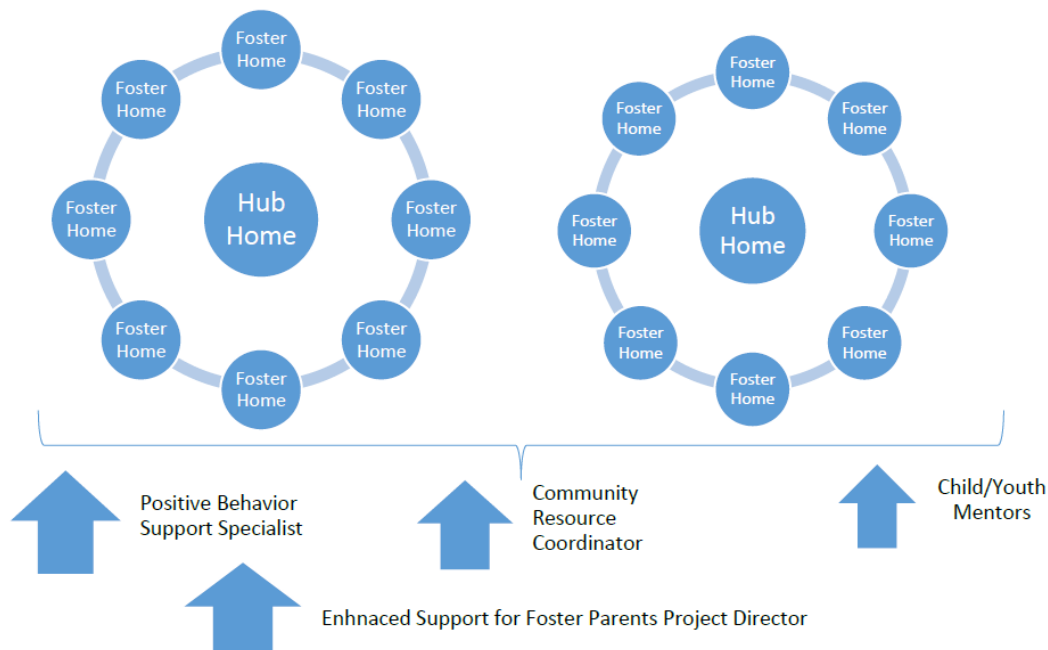
Catholic Community Services Enhanced Support Model for Marion County Foster Parents

CCS will pilot the Enhanced Support model for Marion County Foster Parents. This is a modified Mockingbird⁹ service delivery model. This model creates a central “hub home” that has experienced foster parents who do not have foster children in their care and are available to mentor and provide respite care. Eight foster families in close proximity to the hub home will be served by the experienced foster parents. In addition, CCS will staff a Child Behavioral Support Specialist, a Community Resource Coordinator, and Youth Mentors to support the families in this pilot.

This model addresses many of the foster parents’ concerns relating to peer support, assistance with behavior management issues, and respite care. One of the stated goals of the project is to “reduce foster parent turnover” and to “increase foster parent satisfaction.” This aligns with the primary objective of the Foster Parent Champion to improve foster parent retention.

It is recommended that FPAT support CCS’s implementation of the Enhanced Support Model.¹⁰

Enhanced Support Model for Marion County Foster Parents¹¹



⁹ - <http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org>

¹⁰ www.ccsww.org

¹¹ *Catholic Community Services Grant Proposal for Enhanced Supports for Foster Parents*

Beyond eliminating the gap: Envisioning next steps

While the recommendations included in this plan hope to eliminate the gap between the numbers of foster children needing homes and the numbers of available foster parents, to realize our vision that “every child who enters the foster care system will be provided with the care of a qualified, trained and supported foster family,” next steps need to be considered.

Embrace Oregon may open offices in Salem and conversations are beginning with its leadership about what services it plans to provide. An Embrace Salem office located in Salem may change the landscape of existing services available to Marion County foster families.

Hire a Foster Parent Champion who works collaboratively with all the child welfare agencies, FPAT, MPFPA, and the faith community, businesses, and other affinity groups, to implement the strategic plan. This could lead to new framework for supporting foster care. This may be achieved by the creation of a separate agency to administer aspects of recruitment and retention.

Action Plan

Quarter 1		
Action to take	Related Objective/Issue	Resources
Develop a scope of work, budget and contract for Foster Parent Champion. Determine where the Foster Parent Champion would be housed and managed (which agency).	Foster Parent Champion	FPAT
Explore the creation of a separate agency to recruit train and certify foster parents	Recruitment and Retention	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion
Identify funding sources to obtain financial support for the Foster Parent Champion position. This may include funding to create a new organization to oversee the work of the Foster Parent Champion	Foster Parent Champion	FPAT
MOU – commitment to work together: CFC, DHS Child Welfare, CCS, Safe Families, Family Building Blocks, and Marion County Children’s Behavioral Health, and others.	Retention/Issue One	DHS, CCS, CHB
Recruit and hire/contract Foster Parent Champion	Foster Parent Champion	FPAT
Partner with agencies and leaders in the community to host awareness and recruitment events.	Recruitment/Issue One	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion, community leaders, and DHS
Finalize communication and marketing campaign to recruit new foster families	Recruitment/Issue One	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion
Implementation of Catholic Community Services Enhanced Support for Foster Parents Model	Retention	CCS staff, FPAT
Map out the location of foster families	Retention/Issue Two	DHS
Contract between DHS and CCS and/or other agencies to provide certification services	Recruitment/ Issue Two	DHS, CCS, other agencies
Develop foster parent survey	Data Collection	DHS, MPFPA and Foster Parent Champion
Convene a working group to develop an online resource tool for foster families and child welfare staff in all agencies	Retention/Issue Seven	MPFPA, Foster Parent Champion, DHS
Engage the Chamber of Commerce to identify local businesses who may be willing to provide special discounts for foster parents	Retention/Issue Five	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion, Chamber of Commerce

Action Plan

Quarter 2		
Action to take	Related Objective/Issue	Resources
Roll out communication and marketing campaign to recruit new foster families for April Child Abuse Prevention month or May Foster Parent Appreciation month	Recruitment/Issue One	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion
Hold awareness and recruitment events	Recruitment/Issue One	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion, Community Leadership, and DHS
Finalize volunteer job descriptions to support DHS Child Welfare staff	Retention/Issue Four	MPFPA, Foster Parent Champion, DHS
Recruit and train volunteers to support DHS Child Welfare staff	Retention/Issue Four	MPFPA, DHS
Recruit faith communities and other agencies to provide respite care	Retention/Issue Two	Foster Parent Champion
Ongoing mapping of location of foster families	Retention/Issue Two	DHS, Foster Parent Champion
Conduct foster parent survey	Data Collection	DHS, MPFPA and Foster Parent Champion
Distribute foster family maps to MPFPA to provide opportunity for networking	Retention/Issue Two	DHS, Foster parent Champion, MPFPA
Complete development of business community appreciation promotions for foster families.	Retention/Issue Five	FPAT, Chamber of Commerce, Foster Parent Champion
Begin development of pilot mentoring program for new foster families	Retention/Issue Six	DHS, MPFPA, Foster Parent Champion

Action Plan

Quarter 3		
Action to take	Related Objective/Issue	Resources
Implement pilot mentoring program for new foster families	Retention/Issue Six	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion
Launch online resource tool for foster families, DHS staff, and other stakeholders	Retention/Issue Seven	MPFPA, Foster Parent Champion, DHS
Analyze foster parent survey	Data Collection	DHS, FPAT, Foster Parent Champion and MPFPA

Action Plan

Quarter 4		
Action to take	Related Objective/Issue	Resources
Based on foster parent survey data and evaluation of Enhanced Support for Foster Parents pilot, review and modify strategic plan	Retention/Issue Six	FPAT, Foster Parent Champion, DHS and MPFPA

Stakeholders' Contact information, meeting dates and notes

1. Marion County Community Services Department, Tamra Goettsch, Director and Mary Grim, Program Coordinator

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MGrim@co.marion.or.us

October 10

- History of the Foster care crisis that began with the crackdown on meth in 2005.
- Children now in foster care system need more intensive supports.
- Barriers to increasing number of foster families include: lack of reimbursement for childcare and respite care and lack of support from DHS due to budget driven understaffing.
- Some ideas for improving recruitment and retention: professionalizing foster parents to assign community value to their role, a separate organization to handle certification and training of potential foster parents, a resource network to assist foster parents.

2. Forever Home Youth Council and Jim Seymour and Ariana Adams

arianaadams@goisn.org

October 10

- School is problematic for foster children because of moving around and stigma.
- Parents need to be screened to identify age preferences prior to placement.
- Parents need more opportunities for self-care.
- Parents need to be better informed about a child's history.
- More mental health and other wellbeing supports are needed for foster children.

3. New Hope Foursquare Church, Pastor Greg Vesely, Associate Pastor

greg@inewhope.org

October 12

- Problematic relationship between foster parents and DHS; poor communication and a sense of minimal advocacy for the parents.
- Lack of separate funding for respite care.
- Need for improved behavioral and mental health services for foster children.
- "Fostering Compassion;" a Foursquare denomination initiative to raise awareness in the faith community about the need for foster homes. This would provide DHS training in churches to potential foster parents in an effort to create a culture in faith communities that acknowledges that it takes a "whole church" to raise a child and to provide support groups for foster parents.

4. Family Preservation Action Team, Walt Beglau, Chair

wbeglau@co.marion.or.us

October 26

- Current assets for the foster care system are: CASA, CCS, Liberty House, Family Building Blocks and Options Counseling.
- Foster parents were the most effective recruiters, now they are “poisoning the well” because of their own negative experiences.
- Marion County needs to become a healthy community for foster parents and foster children.
- Need for compelling stories about children who are thriving because of their foster parent experience.
- Altruism motivated community previously, but now many potential foster parents need to work outside the home to financially survive and children generally have more needs. Need for a new kind of motivator. Economic? Community recognition? Additional supports? OHP provided for foster parents as well as children.
- Loss of natural community supports; fewer extended families and two-parent homes
- Business model rather than Strategic Plan to recruit and retain foster parents? Marketing: overcoming fear and recruitment models. Improve customer service.
- Research types of data that will be useful for recruitment and retention plan and sustainability.

5. Oregon Department of Human Services/Child Welfare, Ormond Fredericks, District 3 Program Manager and Gwen Slippy, Recruitment/Retention Specialist

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GWENDOLYNN.L.SLIPPY@dhsosha.state.or.us

October 26

- Foundations Training provided in 8 sessions for potential foster parents.
- Most parents turn in an application by the 4th class. Parents are usually certified within 2-3 months.
- Most parents find the certification process to be unnecessarily intrusive.
- Foster parents feel unsupported by DHS. Certifier serves as the advocate for the foster parents. The certifier needs to be pro-active in addressing the needs of the foster parents.
- Need for better customer service at DHS.
- Some DHS staff work can be handled by volunteers. Embrace Oregon supports the Office Moms and Dads program, and the Welcome Boxes program.
- Marion County school districts are not at the table.
- Within the Salem-Keizer Public Schools, foster children are not automatically enrolled in the Students in Transition Educational Program (S.T.E.P.) S.T.E.P. allows homeless children to remain in their existing neighborhood school. Foster children may now access the program; but, foster children must be identified by the school to participate.
- Need funding for daycare for foster parents.

6. The Marion Polk Foster Parent Association, Mandy Augsburg, President

mpfpapresident@gmail.com

October 27

- School teachers are not trauma-informed. Foster children are considered only if they have an IEP. Need for school staff training regarding the nuances of children who are in foster care.
- Need for mandatory DHS refresher training for foster parents who are currently serving; PSU classes are too theoretical.
- Many current foster parents are threatening to quit because a perceived lack of respect from DHS staff and because of poor communication. Foster parents want a “voice” and to have their opinion valued by the team. Perceived lack of advocacy from certifiers. Ask foster parents: “Are you working well with your certifier?” Schedule foster children appointments with foster parent schedules in mind. Parents feel uncared for.
- Need payment or stipend for respite care, daycare, health insurance for foster parents and for diapers.
- Some parents feel black-listed by DHS if they are strong advocates for the children in their care.
- Family visitation issues.
- Need for a quicker process from fostering to adoption.
- Healing is needed between DHS and foster parents. Ask foster parents: “What would it take for you to continue and to feel valued?”

7. Meeting at Salem Alliance Church for potential foster parents, CASAs and Safe Families

<http://www.salemalliance.org>

October 17

- Presentations from DHS, CASA and Safe Families. Appeal to faith community’s calling to serve the widows and orphans.
- Questions and answer time with current foster parents, CASAs and Safe Families. Positive discussion.

8. Salem Leadership Foundation, Sam Skillern, Executive Director

sam@salem1f.org

October 31

- Need to bring a representative from the SK School District to the table.
- Contact Chrissy Chapman.

9. Catholic Community Services, Josh Graves, Deputy Executive Director and Kyle Deets, Chief Operations Officer

jgraves@ccswv.org

kdeets@ccswv.org

November 3

- In recruitment plan, need to focus on successes rather than on solving a problem.
- In retention, need to transform the community so that fostering is valuable and esteemed.
- Help potential foster parents understand that they don't have to be perfect to be a great foster parent.
- Most successful foster parents are those with a strong network of natural supports. In recruitment, market to parents who have strong networks.
- DHS' relationship with foster parents is problematic. Example: a young, childless case worker is telling an experienced foster parent what to do. Move towards a collegial relationship between DHS and foster parents rather than a hierarchical one
- Faith communities are burned out. Look at other affinity groupings.
- Offer foster parent recruitment materials in other languages.
- Increase customer service training for DHS certifiers and caseworkers. Foster parents feel that certifiers and caseworkers talk down to them, versus seeing them as partners.

10. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Brittany Wade

brittany@daretocare.org

November 7

- Staff were hired by Texas Department of FPS to specifically focus on outreach to faith communities and to military bases.
- Child Welfare boards write grants to offset costs to parents who want to become foster parents.
- Marketing campaign includes using billboards to recruit parents.
- Emphasis given on the creation of foster parent support groups.

11. Parents with the Marion Polk Foster Parent Association

mpfpapresident@gmail.com

November 10

- Need for improved response time from DHS-smartphones for staff.
- Need for respite care.
- Need for input on visitations.
- Need more information about children placed in their homes.
- Need for peer support.
- Need for a reliable place to learn about resources.
- Need to be able to change certifiers if the foster parent does not feel supported.
- Need to feel a part of the team/partners.
- Feels like DHS sees foster parents “as the enemy” and sometimes foster parents feel undermined by DHS.
- Foster parents want: respect, gratitude, action not just words, to be seen as partners, resources, connection to other foster parents, mentors in their first year of providing care.

12. CCS Safe Families, Teri Alexander, Associate Director, Fostering Hope Initiative

talexander@ccswv.org

November 11

- Potential role for Safe Families in caring for children who have yet to be placed in a foster family or in providing respite care.

13. Family Building Blocks, Adrienne Esquivel, Programs Supervisor

aesquivel@familybuildingblocks.org

November 14

- FBB provides coaching to parents whose children have been removed at sites that are most convenient for parents.
- Therapeutic visitations that support both foster parents and bio parents.
- Educate foster parents about visitation transitions.
- Bio and foster parents keep behavior journal to pass to each other at visitations.
- FBB provides Circle of Security parenting classes and relief nurseries open to all families.
- Experience with DHS as a foster parent: long wait for response, lack of voice in decision-making, different case workers with different agendas, long process to adopt, need for trauma-informed care training at DHS, need for fun activities.

14. CASA, Shaney Starr, Executive Director

execdirector@casamarionor.org

November 3

- E-certification of relatives or other adult supports for short term placements.
- Need for trauma-informed care training for volunteers working with foster children.
- Need for data about why foster parents stay and why they leave.

15. Family Preservation Action Team, Walt Beglau, Chair

wbeglau@co.marion.or.us

November 14

- DHS staffing is down creating bottleneck for certifications.
- CCS to assist DHS with certifications.
- Safe Families to provide emergency care to children entering the system?
- DHS Child Welfare agencies staff burnout.
- Volunteer scribes to assist DHS staff?

16. Oregon Department of Human Services/Child Welfare, Erma Brundidge, Trainer

Erma.S.BRUNDIDGE@dhsosha.state.or.us

November 16

- Foundations Training is well attended and parents typically complete the training.
- Before placement, make it a requirement that foster parents meet with Erma.
- During visitations, foster parents meet with Erma for one-on-one training and modeling.
- Certifiers and case workers need to attend Foundations Training.
- Erma acts as a foster family advocate at DHS.
- Need for a resource person at DHS.
- Foster parents need “tokens of appreciation.”

17. Salem-Keizer School District, Melissa Wisner, Federal Programs Coordinator

WISNER_MELISSA@salkeiz.k12.or.us

November 17

- Foster children can stay in neighborhood schools and receive transportation if foster family is not in the neighborhood.
- School district would like to know who the foster children are so they are more able to provide needed supports. Now only foster children with IEPs receive any special supports.
- The Salem-Keizer School District would like to serve on FPAT.

18. Marion County Community Services, Mary Grim, Program Coordinator

MGrim@co.marion.or.us

November 21

- Business plan model.
- Include a marketing and communications plan.

19. Oregon Department of Human Services, Sam Osborne, District 3 Manager

Sam.OSBORN@dhsosha.state.or.us

November 23

- DHS will be instituting monthly Town Halls with foster parents.
- Need for survey and a way to capture data that can be used to create a profile of what keeps a foster parent satisfied and feeling supported.
- DHS case workers are getting smartphones.
- Explore a role for Safe Families.
- Work with Catholic Community Services to increase the number of certifiers.

20. Marion County Children's Behavioral Health, Phil Blea, Clinical Director

PBlea@co.marion.or.us

November 29

- 80% of children seen by behavioral health staff members are DHS involved.
- Most staff members are foster and adoption trained and certified.
- Develop a partnership between DHS and MCCBH to provide behavioral health supports 24/7 to foster parents and to provide ongoing trainings for families.
- Create different champion roles within DHS; e.g., Trauma-informed Care, foster parent, etc.

21. Marion County Community Services, Mary Grim, Program Coordinator

MGrim@co.marion.or.us

December 5

- Include MOUS in the plan.
- Person of influence on FPAT.
- Chamber of Commerce involvement.
- Timeline.
- Include Mockingbird Model.

22. CCS Youth Transitioning Out meeting, Larry McMurray, Chair

mcmur@q.com

December 5

- Youth Thrive Café model to bring foster families together.
- Mockingbird model for foster care.

Conference notes

Shoulder to Shoulder Conference

October 24

- Focus on strengthening relationship supports for foster parents; including with DHS staff.
- Encourage mutual care vs. self-care models for supporting foster parents.
- Need for intentionality when addressing racial and ethnic bias in the foster care system.
- Foster children need to have their repeated experiences with ambiguous loss acknowledged during their transitions to new placements.
- California's foster care system is a best practices model.
- H.R. 5456 – Family First Prevention Services Act of 2016, Title I-Investing in Prevention and Family Services. Strengthen families by providing evidence-based prevention services to keep children out of foster care and reduce inappropriate group home placements.
- FosterClub.org advocates for foster children.
- Peer mentoring and other peer interventions can be billed to Medicaid.
- A good community includes ALL.

Trauma Informed Oregon Workshop

December 13

- Culture of organization needs to adopt trauma-informed care model.
- Appoint a trauma-informed champion in an organization.

Together Toward Tomorrow, The Science of Hope Breakfast

January 12, 2017

- Hope can be measured and encouraged.
- People receiving social services who are hopeful do better.

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