

CALIFORNIA STATE FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATION
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TO: James P. Mayer, Executive Director
LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

Attention: Toby Ewing, Project Manager

FROM: Cora Pearson, President
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SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

THE GOALS OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM:

The primary goal of the foster care system is to reunify the child with the biological family if possible, and if not ensure that each child, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex or circumstances of birth, experiences the security of a safe, loving and permanent family.

IS CALIFORNIA MEETING THOSE GOALS?

Not one hundred percent. Perhaps on a scale of 1 to 10 and 10 being highest, California is a 5. Over the years many legislative and administrative procedures have been developed and implemented. However, the trickle down application to the children and care providers has been slow, watered-down and ineffective.

Describe the barriers facing children and families involved in foster care that prevent them from realizing their personal goals and success.

1. Communication

There is poor communication or no communication between the placing agency and the care provider/foster parent.

- Foster parents are unclear about what social workers expect of them.
- Social workers are unclear on State Policy and Procedures and how to provide the foster parent with clear and concise instructions about the foster care program.
- Foster parents most often are not included in the case planning for the child, but will be held responsible for its implementation. Improvement is needed in the area of including the foster parent in the assessment process.
- The foster parents input regarding the care of the child is treated as trivial or unimportant.
- The youth may or may not be involved in the development of his/her own plan.
- Wholesome dialog about the child's plan and activities seldom, if ever, exist between the foster parent, the youth and the social worker. Never enough time, or its confidential information.

Respect

1. Lack of respect for foster parent.

- The foster parents are often referred to as "glorified" baby sitters or referred to as "just" a foster parent.
- Unannounced home visits without justification.
- Social workers/licensing staff will enter a foster parents home and precede to opening cabinets, refrigerators, and sometime bedroom doors without

the courtesy of permission from the foster parent. Pure disrespect for the foster parent, her home and her family.

- It has been said by social workers that foster parents are stupid.
- A foster parent was asked during a home visit if she has ever had an allegation. The foster parent responded no, and the licensing analyst stated, well you have one now.

Support

2. Support is not consistently provided to the foster parent especially when they are caring for developmentally disabled children, special health care needs children and/or children that are substance-exposed.

- Foster parents are not informed of the child's eligibility as dual clients of the system, (developmental disabled and foster care). This eligibility entitles the child to the ARMS rate developed by the California Department of Developmental Services, based upon his/her individual needs.
- Foster parents may or may not be informed about AAP when adopting children.
- Foster parents are asked to sign documents stating that they will not adopt any more children if they have adopted two. (You need to keep space for foster children).
- Foster parents are chastised if they accept placements and don't have permission from their licensing worker in some counties. Infants have been moved because the licensing worker didn't want a critical ill child in her/his caseload.
- Some foster parents that are caring for substance-exposed infants/children are not provided respite. If counties are operating the Options for Recovery Program, (OFR) respite is provided. If counties are not participating the OFR Program, respite is not

provided. Parents need a break from the 24- 7-365 activities of a substance-exposed child. If the parent ask for respite too often, the worker oftentimes decide that the parent is not capable of caring for the child and a decision is made to move the child from this placement.

- Encourage the State Department of Social Services to develop and implement a program that will provide a positive spin on the foster care program.
- Plan recognition events to honor and thank the foster parent, which may include an annual banquet and or/ public appreciation of the foster parent through other public relations efforts.
- Encourage the CDSS to assist CWD's in the development and implementation of foster parent support groups.
- Encourage the CDSS to assist CWD's in providing foster caregivers with ample notice when moving children's to help and support the foster parents family during post placement in dealing with grief issues or separation and loss.
- Encourage the CDSS to celebrate the Month of May as Foster Care Awareness Month.
- Encourage CWD's to develop and implement in-service training that will equip social workers with the skills and knowledge needed to work as team members with foster parents in all stages of the child's plan.

3. What proposals might the State pursue to improve the quality of foster care services?

- Reduce the size of the social workers caseload or develop a social worker aide classification to assist with the workload, i.e. phone calls, follow-up on appointments and maintain open communications with the foster parents.

- Provide joint training for foster parents and social workers to develop the team approach. Allow them to switch roles and walk in each other's shoes.
- Develop ongoing foster care policy procedures training for social workers.
- Encourage CWD's to work collectively with supporting agencies regarding the coordination of services for the children.
- Provide a universal medical card for the children. (Foster parents take children on vacations and must pay out of their pocket if the child needs medical attention in another state. It is very difficult for the foster parent to receive reimbursement once they return to California).
- Encourage CWD's to place children close to or in their own community to help with the reunification process.

4. How might policy-makers and the public measure the effectiveness of the foster care system?

- Not really sure at this time.

5. Comments on whether foster youth and families have adequate opportunities to influence the quality of the foster care system.

- California has not developed a statewide system for the average foster youth and foster family to influence the quality of the foster care system. However, youth and families that are fortunate to be involved with high profile agencies may be in a position to voice their opinion and perhaps influence certain portions of the foster care system.
- The average child or foster family in the system is never exposed to the opportunity to influence the quality of the foster care system because of geographic, economics, social status and the lack of knowledge about this complex system.

6. How can their influence be expanded?

- By outreach.
- By open and honest communication with informed social workers.

- Collaboration by all participating agencies involved with the child/youth.
- Develop and implement mentoring programs for youth and families.
- Develop educational seminars/roundtables for youth and families to learn about the foster care system.