

## CHAMPS Research Highlights

Below are key themes from a literature review of the most relevant research related to the effects of foster parenting on the success of children in foster care.

### EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER FAMILIES

Child welfare agencies need the right tools to build and maintain an adequate pool of foster families to ensure that children have the support and stability they need while in foster care. The research offers some effective strategies for recruiting and retaining foster families:

- Use word-of-mouth strategies and existing foster parents to help with recruitment
- Use data to better identify the need and appropriately target the right families for children, to track foster parent attrition, understand foster parent's motivations and needs, and to track timely permanence
- Listen and gather feedback from foster parents, and work more collaboratively with them as members of the child's team
- More adequately prepare foster parents for their roles with information and real expectations
- Help foster parents identify the right supports for their foster children

### BETTER FOSTER PARENT TRAINING & SUPPORTS

Foster parents often experience multiple demands and need access to supports and resources in order to adequately fulfill their caregiving roles. Research indicates that foster parents may end placements as a result of fatigue and burnout, stress, feelings of being misunderstood, or lack of support or information from their agency. Foster parent training can create positive changes in parenting knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills which can lead to improvements in child behaviors. Training is also linked to foster parent satisfaction, increased licensure, retention and placement stability. Research has also shown that kin caregivers are less likely to use formal supports and services than non-kin foster parents. Studies note differences in access to caregiver supports, types of supports offered and type of support sought after by kin and non-kin foster parents.

### COMPARING FOSTER FAMILY CARE TO GROUP CARE

Research confirms that children fare better in family-based settings instead of group and residential care settings. The cost of group care is significantly more expensive, yet it does not yield many benefits for children. Research has also found that foster parents show more commitment to children than group care providers.

### UNDERSTANDING FOSTER PARENT AND YOUTH EXPERIENCES

Understanding the characteristics and experiences of foster parents and the children in their care can help child welfare agencies better recruit for additional families, more appropriately match children in need of foster homes, and provide more realistic expectations for new foster parents. Research has reported a wide range of experiences of foster parents. Foster parents have indicated concerns

about the complexity of the child welfare system and may find it difficult to navigate, communicate, and work effectively with child welfare agencies. In many cases, a small group of foster parents disproportionately foster more children than their counterparts. Research has also identified the characteristics of supportive foster homes for children which include creating a sense of belonging, structure, guidance, and consistency. This research underscores the important role positive relationships can play in foster youth's feelings of well-being. There is evidence that kinship foster families have fewer resources and receive less training, services, and support than non-kin foster families. Grandparent caregivers may experience an elevated level of parenting stress compared to other kin caregivers.

### **NAVIGATING COMPLEX HEALTH NEEDS**

Research suggests that foster parents may need additional supports to identify and navigate the complex physical and mental health needs of the children in their care. The inability for foster parents to address children's physical and mental health needs may lead to placement instability and increased agency costs. Other studies have found that caregivers have the ability to advocate for their children, but there are often barriers to working effectively with other professionals to secure specialty services or navigating Medicaid to secure health services.

### **SUPPORTING QUALITY FOSTER PARENTING IMPROVES CHILD OUTCOMES**

The quality of the foster parent-child relationship plays an important role in the success of children in foster care. Research has found that support of foster parents aimed at reducing the use of negative discipline practices and promoting the use of supportive parenting may have a positive effect on the development of foster children. In addition, targeted selection, training, and support improve the experience of foster caregivers, and their continued preparedness to foster to positively impact child outcomes.

### **SUPPORTING FOSTER PARENT IMPROVES PLACEMENT STABILITY**

Research indicates that children who are older, have more behavioral problems, have a history of residential treatment, or have multiple prior placements are most likely to experience an unplanned move. Research also shows that placement instability and other family chaos is associated with disrupted development of the brain's prefrontal cortex, which is involved in executive functioning. The amount of emotional and social support a foster parent receives has a significant impact on increasing foster placement stability. Other important approaches include strong tracking and case planning, early intervention, increasing the availability and use of placement choice, and increasing multi-agency support.

### **PROMISING FOSTER PARENT INTERVENTIONS/MODELS**

Several foster parent interventions and models have emerged as promising approaches to improve the fostering experience, provide more support and training to foster parents, and to increase foster parent recruitment and retention to lead to better child outcomes. Research has been conducted on interventions such as Parenting Plus, Individual Social Skills Training and the KEEP Program (Keeping Foster and Kin Parents Supported and Trained). Research has indicated positive impacts from some of these programs. The implementation of these interventions can provide insight into the barriers and opportunities to help reshape current foster care parenting models.

*Summary Produced April 2018*