



Fostering Futures: A Successful Community Volunteer Team Model for Supporting Foster Families

Item Type	event;event
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DOI	https://doi.org/10.7275/R57S7M0R
Download date	2025-03-22 13:17:09
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43013



Fostering Futures NY

Rudd-REFCA May 13, 2016

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Goals for presentation

Basics of FFNY and what/how we do

Underlying logic of the foster family support model

Our journey to date

What's the longer term potential impact

- On foster families
- On foster children
- On volunteers
- On systems

Mission

The mission of FFNY is to provide practical support and assistance to foster parents in their task of providing safe, stable, and nurturing homes for the abused and neglected children in their care.

How is FFNY different from other support models ?

- Support comes from the community
- Outside of the formal child welfare system
- Support is provided by teams of Volunteers who work with a professional coordinator
- Support is driven by the requests of the foster family

FFNY Beginnings

- FFNY is based on a successful model of foster parent support from Colorado
- Reported data from Colorado showed:
 - Greater foster parent satisfaction and higher rates of retention
 - Increased stability in placement (fewer moves)
 - Increased # of adoptions
- OCFS supported replication of model in New York State
- Start up funded through NYS OCFS and a federal grant
- Identify necessary changes, implement, demonstrate, replicate

Why is stability important?

Children in foster care tend to have trauma histories.

Children who have experienced trauma will often internalize these experiences leading to :

- Low self esteem
- Difficulties with emotional self regulation
- Inability to connect/trust/engage with others

Systems generated instability adds to the trauma history

Outcomes for youth who age out of foster care without network of support

Some young people leave foster care, demonstrate extraordinary resiliency and successfully navigate the path from youth to adulthood. Often they are assisted by family and/or other caring adults who provide consistent support.

- 1 in 5 will become homeless after age 18
- Only 58% will graduate high school by age 19
- At age 24, only half of youth are employed
- 71% of young women will be pregnant by age 21
- 1 in 4 will be involved in the justice system within two years of leaving the foster care system

THE COST OF BAD OUTCOMES Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, May 2013

Discharges from Foster Care

For FFY 2014, of the 238,230 discharges across the country, here is the breakdown:

Reunification with Parent(s) or Primary Caretaker(s)	51%	121,241
Living with Other Relative(s)	7%	15,774
Adoption	21%	49,693
Emancipation	9%	22,392
Guardianship	9%	21,055
Transfer to Another Agency	2%	4,173
Runaway	< 1%	1,138

What do we know about Resilience?

- Have a strong, supportive relationship with a competent and caring adult.
- Feel a connection with a positive role model or mentor.
- Feel that their talents and abilities are being recognized and nurtured.
- Feel some sense of control over their own lives.
- Feel invested in and part of a larger community, be it their neighborhood, faith-based group, scout troop, or extended family. Some school-aged children or adolescents who have experienced trauma find that serving a cause can be healing

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

“Every Kid Is ONE Caring Adult Away from Being a Success Story.” Josh Shipp

“No matter the source of hardship, the single most common factor for children who end up doing well is having the support of at least one stable and committed relationship with a parent, caregiver, or other adult. These relationships are the active ingredient in building resilience: they provide the personalized responsiveness, scaffolding, and protection that can buffer children from developmental disruption. Relationships also help children develop key capacities—such as the ability to plan, monitor, and regulate behavior, and adapt to changing circumstances—that better enable them to respond to adversity when they face it. This combination of supportive relationships, adaptive skill-building, and positive experiences constitutes the foundation of resilience.”

In Brief: The Science of Resilience, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, March 2015

Transition from Trauma to Resilience?

- Healing must start immediately
- Cannot wait for a permanency discharge
- A safe, stable, consistent and predictable environment with loving adults is the beginning.
- But only the beginning.

Foster Parents as Primary Healing agents



- Yes, being a foster parent is about providing a safe place for a child to live.
- It is also about protecting and fostering a child's current and future capacity to develop and maintain healthy constructive relationships.
- Foster parents provide the pathway to resilience.

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Parenting is challenging!

- It truly is the hardest, most frustrating/satisfying job you will ever have.
- Now add a foster child or children and the additional challenges and expectations that come along (multiple appointments – medical, school, caseworker, birth family etc.) All of which are of critical importance.
- Now consider that many foster families find that fostering is socially isolating. A consequence of accepting a new foster child or a sibling group often means that they don't get invited to the next social event.
- Foster parents actually need more support than other families and they often have much less.

In New York

- There are 18,500 children in foster care in the New York.
- 82% of these children are in foster homes.
- 79% are discharged to family or relative or adopted
- Almost 14% leave foster care without a family



What is FFNY and how does it work?

- We recruit, train, screen, complete background checks on volunteers from the community who want to make a difference
- Volunteers make a one year commitment to participate in the monthly meeting and make at least one other contact per month
- Volunteer teams are matched with foster families
- 1 team to 1 family
- Foster Families are referred by local departments of social services and child placing agencies

Who do we Serve?

Our Families

- Referred by partner agency.
- 1 Year experience as a Certified foster home.
- Strong functioning.
- Providing care for
 - Adolescents
 - Large sibling groups
 - Medically fragile children
 - Children with Emotional/Behavioral issues

What our FFNY teams do?

- **Learn about the family**
- **Listen to their needs**
- **Participate** – provide practical and natural supports.
 - Meals
 - Transportation
 - Enrichment Opportunities



Model of Practice

- Classic empowerment model
- Volunteers must leave their personal judgments at the door
- Listen and respond to whatever the foster parent is willing to ask for
- Coordinator role is critical to preventing model drift

Creating a team of volunteers

- Recruit from communities of faith and community organizations.
- An average of six volunteers per team.
- Training, background clearance, and ongoing support by FFNY.
- Minimum of one contact a month with family plus one team monthly meeting.
- Monthly Team meeting is facilitated by either the foster parents or the FFNY coordinator.

Outcomes

Colorado

- Improved retention of foster parents
- Significant reduction in # moves for children
- Significant increase in # of adoptions

New York - Early

- Data collection
- What foster parents are reporting
- What volunteers are reporting
- What are partners are saying
- 0 requests for children to be moved
- 0 unplanned moves
- 100% retention of volunteers
- Post permanency support

Budget & Financing

- Need a coordinator – 1 FTE can serve 12 families and teams
- Need dedicated development staff
- Need administrative supports and coordination
- Background checks, insurance, office costs

- Colorado was entirely privately funded
- New York is a mix of federal state and private \$
- Open question is what % of budget can be privately funded (remaining outside of the CW)

Challenges

Program

- Board Support
- Building partnerships
- Length of time to develop teams
- Team development – critical role coordinator

Fiscal

- Start up \$
- Community awareness
- Building and sustaining relationships with local philanthropies
- Financing fundraising and other development work

Potential - Long Term

When you ask caregivers what they need – they know the answer.

For FFNY Re-envisioning foster care starts with a different question to a different respondent

- Families?
- Children?
- Volunteers?
- Community?
- System?

How you can help us achieve our goals

- Join our mailing list for Fostering Futures NY emails.
- Recruit volunteer teams by providing us with contact information/introductions for community groups you are engaged with.
- Promote awareness by sharing info with friends/colleagues.
- Donate to our program www.welfareresearch.org/ffny.html
- Like us on Facebook and share with friends.
 - www.facebook.com/fosteringfuturesNY



Fostering Futures NY

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