

Creating Organizational Culture that Values the Role of Foster Parents in Permanency

June 30, 2020



Introductions

- Kate Hurt, senior director, Capacity-building and Engagement team
- Alicia Groh, consultant, AdoptUSKids
- Mary Boo, director, Family Support at AdoptUSKids

Introductions

Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) panel:

- Carol Campbell Edwards
- Brandy Hudson
- Manny Arroyo
- Darlene Bell

Housekeeping

- This webinar will be 90 minutes long and will include time for questions via the online questions feature.
- We will record this webinar. We will share the recording with you and post it on professionals.adoptuskids.org.
- Your line will be muted throughout the webinar.
- The webinar will include opportunities for you to share information via the questions function, including if you are having technical difficulties.
- Please evaluate the session after the webinar. You will receive an email from AdoptUSKids.

About AdoptUSKids

Our mission:

- Raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system
- Assist states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families

Goals for this webinar

- Strengthen participants' understanding about how the agency's view of foster parents plays out in organizational culture and practice
- Present a vision for how to view and value foster parents in ways that support child welfare goals, priorities, and values
- Provide strategies for changing and strengthening an agency's organization culture to support desired practice

Child welfare agency culture

What is agency culture?

- Values
- Beliefs
- Expected behaviors
- “The way we do things”

Child welfare agency culture

Why does agency culture matter?

- Communicates to our staff, partners, and stakeholders what we value
- Orients new staff and partners to our way of doing things
- Shapes our work—how we interact with people, what messages we convey
- Guides our decision-making and prioritization

Changing agency culture

- Multiple ways to change agency culture
- Importance of being intentional about making the change
- Leadership role in culture change—top-down approaches
- Grassroots change—bottom-up approaches
- Using combinations of strategies

Changing agency culture: Hearing from you

What works?

Please share in the questions pod what you've seen work to change organizational culture.

Strategies for changing agency culture

- The stories we tell, what we celebrate
- Images and language we use (e.g., referring to foster families as “families” rather than “beds” or “providers”)
- How we make tough decisions and how we explain our reasoning (what we prioritized among competing values and options)

Strategies for changing agency culture

Supporting and reinforcing desired behaviors:

- Hiring, orientation, training, supervision, performance reviews
- Policies, practice models, work tools
- Barrier-busting and responding to feedback from staff
- Making corrections when we see behaviors that don't align with desired new culture

Strategies for changing agency culture

- Identifying and engaging champions
- Equipping supervisors to encourage, support, and reinforce desired behaviors

Changing agency culture about how we view foster parents

- Many shifts in the role and expectations for foster parents
- Need to align agency culture to reinforce valuing and supporting foster parents and helping them in their roles



PRESENTER

**Carol Campbell Edwards, Youth Law Center
Training Coordinator**

QPI

AdoptUSKids
2020



QPI APPROACH

Approach to foster care based on the idea that the most important task for the system is to develop and maintain supportive relationships for the child, especially the parenting relationship.

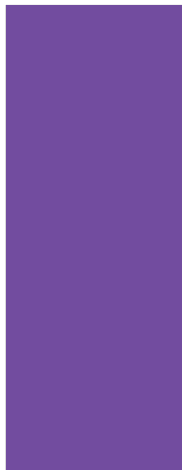
A photograph of a woman in a red cable-knit sweater holding the hand of a child in a black and white striped shirt. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of foliage. The image is framed by black bars at the top and bottom.

WE STAND BY THIS

**Every child
needs excellent
parenting
everyday.**

5 CORE PRINCIPLES OF QPI

- ❑ Excellent parenting is the most important service we can provide to children and youth in care. Children need families, not beds;
- ❑ Child development and trauma research indicates that children need constant, consistent, effective parenting to grow and reach their full potential;
- ❑ Each community must define excellent parenting for itself;
- ❑ Policy and practice must be changed to align with that definition; and
- ❑ Participants in the system are in the best position to recommend and implement that change.



QPI panel discussion

Manny Arroyo, birth parent

- How did involvement in QPI affect how you felt about the child welfare agency?
- How did the QPI approach affect your relationship with your child?

QPI panel discussion

Brandy Hudson, former youth in care

- How does a supportive relationship between foster parents and birth parents impact children in care?
- What do you want child welfare workers to know about the importance of contact between children and their parents while they are in foster care?

QPI panel discussion

Darlene Bell, foster parent

- Did you have preconceived notions about birth parents? How did you feel after being part of the QPI approach?
- How do your relationships with birth parents affect children you are fostering?
- What suggestions or tips do you have for other child welfare agencies that want to shift how they engage foster parents?

What do foster parents need to effectively partner with birth parents?

- Focus on what foster parents need from us, rather than on what we need from them.
- The support resource parents receive enables them to engage in shared parenting and actively support reunification.

Type your answer

What barriers do foster parents meet to partnering with birth parents in your system?

Key questions to consider

- Does our recruitment messaging emphasize reunification as a system-wide value and priority?
- What skills and attitudes do resource parents need to actively partner with birth parents?
- How do we know if we are adequately preparing resource parents to partner with birth parents?

Key questions to consider

- How are we supporting foster parents through the challenges they will likely encounter?
- What feedback loops do we have in place to continue to learn from foster parents about what they need?
- Are we equipping our trainers and workers to meet the needs of resource families?

What *development* do foster parents need to partner with birth parents?

- Empathy and understanding for birth parents' circumstances
- Communication skills
- Conflict management skills
- Coaching skills
- Cultural competence

What *development* do foster parents need to partner with birth parents?

- Understanding of how to talk with children and youth about birth families
- Education on the impact of trauma, including intergenerational trauma
- Knowledge of grief and loss
- Importance of visitation and how to support it through challenges

What *supports* do foster parents need to partner with birth parents?

- Support from caseworkers committed to reunification
- Mediation and assistance with birth family relationship dynamics
- Peer support—from peers who are committed to partnership
- Therapeutic support around grief and loss
- A welcoming team of professionals that includes them in planning
- Timely communication

Type your answer

How is your system making it easier for foster parents to partner with birth parents?

Strategies for workers

- Encourage positive attitudes toward birth families in your interactions with foster parents.
- Provide opportunities for peer support.
- Provide clear guidance and support on birth family contact and visitation.
- Plan transitions well and incorporate foster and birth families in that planning.

Strategies for workers

- Offer enhanced support during periods of transition and loss.
- Listen to foster families and provide opportunities for them to share their needs.
- Include foster parents in your team and in decision-making.
- Give special consideration to kinship caregivers.

Strategies for managers

- Ensure consistent messaging in family recruitment, response, engagement, and orientation.
- Incorporate birth parents and youth into your training.
- Ensure training includes skills that foster parents need to engage in effective partnerships.

Strategies for managers

- Train all staff on how to communicate about birth parents.
- Develop and support peer leaders and listen to their expertise.
- Incorporate feedback and data analysis to improve your services.

Quotes from those we serve

- “Creating space for relationship-building...will become transformational in the life of a parent, also in the life of a child.... A house divided is no good for a child.”—a birth parent
- “An amazing supervisor who encourages partnership is effective because of the language she uses. Her message to both the birth and foster parent is ‘I believe in both of you.’”—a foster parent

Questions and answers

AdoptUSKids resources

- *Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices*
<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/customer-service-concepts-for-recruitment-and-retention/>
- *Five Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service—Phone Interaction with Families*
<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/improving-phone-interactions-with-families/>
- *Agency Assessment for Good Customer Service*
<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/a-tool-for-agencies-to-assess-customer-service/>

How AdoptUSKids can help

- Tailored capacity building services
- Family support peer group for administrators or their designees
- Free resources on the [AdoptUSKids website](https://adoptuskids.org)

Stay informed about upcoming events and new publications:

adoptuskids.org/newsletter-sign-up.

Contact information

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Contact consultation@adoptuskids.org to inquire about tailored capacity-building services.



AdoptUSKids

Together we hold their future

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