



Foster Home Licensing Spotlight

Our Program Spotlight series continues by highlighting how our **Foster Home Licensing Program** is continuing to provide services in this **Q & A** with the program's Directors, **Mary Kay Collins**.

Q: How has the current shelter in place mandate affected how we deliver our foster home licensing services? Do caseworkers still see clients face-to-face?

A: The licensing program was greatly impacted by the shelter in place mandate and like every other CYFS team found themselves very quickly trying to figure out the best way to keep children safe and families

supported. Remembering the much of the work the licensing team does depends on face to face interaction, staff had to consider their current skill set and then reframe these to engage our families in new ways. Whether licensing a home, working to place or replace children or manage licensing investigations, staff had to rethink the best way to assess and ensure the best outcome possible for our children and families. Face to face visits could be done when necessary however for the most part the licensing team utilized the virtual technology to do zoom home visits, home monitoring visits and even parent trainings.

Q: Tell us some of your biggest wins for your program during this crisis. What are you most proud of?

A: One of the biggest wins of the licensing program is the way the entire team has come together to support each other and the entire child welfare team including foster parents. Licensing has always been a team focused on our foster parents and helping them care for children in care. Now, that support is even more important. Licensing staff has more frequent contact via zoom and skype with each other and with our foster parents. This frequency coupled with the intensity of the COVID realities strengthened the bonds between staff and between staff and foster parents.

Another win we have in the licensing program is the ability to continue to do the work we do in this new pandemic environment. From mid-March through the first of May the licensing team was able to license 22 homes, 19 of these relatives and 3 traditional homes. Considering all it takes under "normal" times to license a home and then considering this was done during the stressful environment of a pandemic, that is a HUGE win!

Q: What have been your biggest obstacles?

One challenge we have faced was trying to be proactive and anticipate the needs of our foster parents in caring for children during this time. Because children were now home from school, upsetting the general routine, we needed to be more mindful of how the family was managing. Did they have what they needed? Most families have had to readjust how to manage both taking care of children and for some work from home. We want to be able to support them through these challenges.

Q: If someone reading this wanted to help our licensing programs right now during the pandemic, what would you say is your greatest need?

A: The licensing team along with the recruiters and child welfare team has implemented a Birthday Bash drive by type celebration helping foster parents celebrate children's birthdays. We are also doing this with graduations. It would be nice to be able to offer more family friendly activities or supplies to help celebrate these events as well as to keep the kids busy while they are quarantined at home. Family games, gift cards for ice cream or pizza, outdoor games, as well as cleaning supplies, gift cards for gas or groceries all would be appreciated.