

CYFS

Foster Caregiver Adoptive Parent Connection

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Hello everyone – feels like it’s been so long since we’ve seen each other – and it has been a long time! What a relief it will be when we can meet in-person for some of our events and special occasions, and connect in-person, something we used to take for granted. For this reason, I am so excited about the virtual trainings being offered across the agency from CYFS through Mindy McBride, one of our recruiters.



In this edition, we would like to use the stories of our licensed foster caregivers. Throughout this newsletter you will see sections titled “Our Stories.” These are stories from you, “real” people, with “real” experiences, promoting healing and sharing unconditional love. If you have some thoughts you would like to share with the rest of us, please submit them, either as an electronic attachment to your licensing worker or write them on paper, to share in the next newsletter to be released in October. We’d love to share your powerful experiences, because we can all learn something new every day. We hope that these articles are encouraging and insightful. Best wishes rounding up the troops and going back to school – always an adventure!

Carol Bennett-Barker
Licensing Resource Worker



2021 Foster Care Training and Support Groups

by Mindy McBride

THE COURT PROCESS

or **AUGUST 17 5:30-7:30 PM**
AUGUST 19 6:30-8:30 PM

We are offering the Foster Care Training and Support Group on two nights each month to help serve you better! I look forward to seeing you in group!

Join other foster caregivers as we explore topics, share experiences and get support from each other!

On the date of the Training and Support Group, simply click on the link below or call in to participate!

Please RSVP to Mindy McBride at mlmcbride@cyfsolutions.org or to your licensing worker.

Coming up!

In addition to the above trainings, Mindy McBride has also scheduled the following, to be offered as listed:

SEPTEMBER 21 AND 23
5:30-7:30 PM

**BEING PART OF THE
CASEWORK TEAM**

OCTOBER 19 AND 21
5:30-7:30 PM

**GEARING UP FOR THE
HOLIDAYS**

**WHAT TO DO WHEN
BEHAVIORS ESCALATE**

We hope you can join us for good information and support!

our Stories

Challenging yet Rewarding...



I hate it here. I want to move; call my caseworker now. You hate me. You are mean; leave me alone. I am sure if you have fostered any length of time, you have heard these words. I have fostered for 25 years and have served specialized children more than half of that time. I am here to share that it has been brutal at times, challenging is an understatement, frustrating, and calling it quits has been uttered from my lips more often than I'd like to admit.



The hard truth is it feels like just surviving at times. Some days are better than others and I treasure those days. I am a person of faith with an optimistic view. I take the time to value that “1 small step for man and 1 giant step for normalcy”. LOL. All kidding aside, parenting a specialized child in foster care is like no other experience I have had. Yet, it is like no other experience I have had! I love the small steps for man (child). The moment your child looks

at you and really seems to be understanding the concept. The moment you see your child role playing with another child. The moment that peace seems to be radiating from your home. The moment that you see the fruit of your labor.

I have had many children in my home all with tremendous needs. In my earlier years, “trauma” was not really a thing. They were a product of their environment. I have had numerous hours of training and I latch on like a newborn baby to new classes/training when available. Zoom has been a “miracle” in my life for in-service training. Research keeps changing and it is so important to keep up and stay informed. These children need us. They need you! They need understanding, unconditional love, structure and resiliency to name a few. I know how hard it can be. I have been there! It can be easy to call it quits. It can be easy to say, this is not what I signed up for. It can be easy to remove yourself and move them on. Yet, I know that it is not easy. I do know that you can go one more day. I know that with all your might, you can change the life/course for one child; one day at a time.

The next time that you find yourself doubting; doubting why did I do this? Why me? Ask yourself, why not me? I am trained! I am equipped! I am here! I can be that one to understand. I can be that one to give unconditional love. I can be the one to give structure and resiliency. I can be the ONE! Fostering can be challenging, yet it can be extremely rewarding!

*Submitted by Patty Hoffman
Licensed Foster Parent*

Co-Parenting with Bio Parents

When we signed up to foster, we did not image developing friendships with the bio parents let alone co-parenting with them, but we did with several! We were lucky our first families were awesome. Together we helped “our” children transition to a two-family setting, similar to divorce parents. We worked as a team. We accepted them and the bio parents. We were one whole family working towards the same goal, return home. It is not always easy and there are many bumps along the way. Remember it is not about you or the bio parents, but about the children. It is hard work and frustrating at times, but the smile on the children’s faces makes it worth it! Plus, the children adjust easier and do not feel guilty loving both families.

Our first family came to our family Easter, stopped to read bedtime stories, and tuck them in a night a week. Bio-mom would call to see if she could stop by just to talk to me for a little while. The girls loved seeing “their moms” talking and laughing. They have been home for six years and the girls still call me mom and stop by just to say hi. Our second family was a little more difficult to co-parent, as the mom lived in another state, but we made it work for “our” son. We rented a hotel room, so they could spend more time together on visits. We welcomed the bio family to spend the weekend at our house. Mom

and the little brother even stayed with us for a week. It was a little challenging at first, we had to set the stage for our boy to be successful with two moms in the house. The first night we sat down, and I explained the rules of our house and told her I would let her be the mom of the house and would only step in if she wanted me too. It was a wonderful week, and it showed our boy, we were one family. When overnights started, we drove twenty hours for a week visit once a month for a year. We still talk and he has been home for four years!

It is not always easy and not all our bio parents are willing to have a relationship with us. When this happens, we always stop and remind ourselves it is not about us, but the children. We bite our tongue and remind the children we love them and sometimes parents do not always get along, but we all love them no matter what. Remember to stay as positive as possible and when you cannot, vent to the case manager or your spouse out of ear shot of the children. If they hear you talking bad about their parent(s), they believe you cannot love them because they are part of their bio parents.

In closing, I am happy to help you build that relationship with the bio parents if you want to reach out to me.

*Submitted by Lisa Allen
Licensed Foster Parent*

The Best Effort is a Team Effort

Navigating the Baby/Toddler Years with Several Children the Same Age

Does having several baby/toddler children the same age scare you? As parents of 10 children, 7 are adults, our family and friends thought we were absolutely crazy when we announced we were going to start working with a baby boy. We brought a 10 month old baby boy home and fell in love and so did our family and friends. We then were asked if we would take his baby sibling after birth and my husband and I agreed. And then we found out that we were expecting a baby a couple of months later. So you can imagine what our friends and family had to say about that! My husband and I did not bat an eye! We prayed about this and we knew that this was the right decision.

In 2018, we had our 16 year old daughter, a 2 year old with some health issues and 2 new born babies. After giving birth to our son, he was in neonatal for 31 days. This was challenging for my husband and I but we made it work. We would both take turns in the hospital with our new baby and the other would be at home with our other 2 babies and our 16 year old daughter. We made this work for 31 days and that set the tone for us. We knew at that point we were definitely a strong team.

As both of us have very demanding jobs, we had to come up with a plan so that we could work together as a team raising these beautiful baby boys. Yes, it seemed overwhelming at times but we had an excellent plan to work together and it worked perfectly for us.

From taking turns with feeding, getting up in the night,

baths, taking off work for doctor visits, dropping off and picking up at daycare, to changing diapers, cleaning up puke, doing dishes, and laundry we were making it work. It felt awesome and it brought us closer as husband and wife and gave us so much more confidence as parents. These boys were and still are our life and they deserve to have the best of both of us.

How do we do this? My husband takes the boys to daycare each morning, and I pick them up after work. We split a lot of tasks up. If I give the boys a bath, he lotions and dresses them. If I cook a meal, he helps clean up the mess. We take turns mowing the lawn, picking up groceries, and we also take turns getting a break if needed. Self-care is so important so we both try very hard to give the other a break if needed. In times of frustration, we work very hard as a team so that we can move past that point successfully.

There are always going to be some rough times. We have had our fair share of not so fun times. For example, on Labor Day weekend of 2019 I slipped and fell on something wet on my kitchen floor and shattered my left tibia. This required surgery to repair with lots of hardware which put me in a wheelchair for a little over 8 months. This was not ideal for us at all. All I kept thinking about is that we do not have time for this, we both need to be walking and working together. My husband was an awesome team player. He really stepped up to the plate and did some pretty mighty things to keep our household running smoothly. I still was able

to do several things to help and contribute to our team from a wheelchair. He made this possible for me. And then 1 month later, my grandma passed away. She was my mom, she raised me. This was a tough blow for me and a very trying time for my household. But, we made it through. My partner was my rock. He was a great team player and this test showed us both what mighty things he could do and what mighty things we could do together. Together we made it through because we worked together as a team.

Currently we are trying to wrap up the potty training stage and that is a frustration in itself at times. However, through it all we try to always laugh and have fun. That is so important too! If your children see you laughing and having fun, they will definitely learn from you and your home will be a happy one. One thing we have noticed and are proud of is that our adult children are great team players. They often come back home and help us out or watch the boys so we can have a date night. This is very rewarding to see as parents especially if you are feeling discouraged. Try to always focus on the positives in life instead of things you feel like you have failed at.

Some things that we have learned is that we need to lean on each other through it all but without taking each other for granted. We must communicate constantly about everything. This was hard for me. There were times when I failed to communicate right away when I made an appointment or scheduled something and then got busy with work and it totally slipped my mind. Then when it was time for the appointment, well we were scrambling and things were difficult. It took a lot of



trials and learning but I've learned to make it a good habit to communicate right away, (most of the time).

This all may seem overwhelming to you and may seem like a lot of work but it does get easier. Just remember to work together, communicate very frequently, and self-care. You definitely need to keep an eye on each other and notice when your other person needs a hand, needs a break, or just needs a hug. You can do this. Together you can be a great team. Together you can do mighty things. Together you can raise and influence mighty children.

*Submitted by Melissa Peterson
Licensed Foster Caregiver*





2021 Advance Child Tax Credit Payments

Payments start July 15

Filed already?

You don't need to take any action now if you've filed a 2020 tax return.

Haven't filed yet?

File your tax return as soon as possible. For people not required to file a tax return and who didn't file in 2019 or 2020, quickly register using the **IRS Non-filer Sign-up Tool**. You may qualify for the Child Tax Credit and Economic Impact Payments.

- Eligible families can receive advance payments of **up to \$300 per month** for each child under age 6 and **up to \$250 per month** for each child age 6 and above.
- Payments begin July 15 and will be sent monthly through December 15 without any further action required.
- You can benefit from the credit even if you don't have earned income or don't owe any income taxes.
- The tax credit includes advance payments for 2021 only.

The American Rescue Plan Act Advance Child Tax Credit provisions include:

- The maximum Child Tax Credit increased to \$3,600 for children under the age of 6 and to \$3,000 per child for children between ages 6 and 17.
- The credit includes children who turn age 17 in 2021.
- Taxpayers may receive part of their credit in 2021 before filing their 2021 tax return.

Eligible taxpayers who don't want to receive advance payment of the 2021 Child Tax Credit will have the opportunity to unenroll from receiving the payments.

[IRS.gov/childtaxcredit2021](https://www.irs.gov/childtaxcredit2021)



Moving Mountains

As a new foster parent, you cannot wait to get your very first placement. Our first call was for a 4-year old boy named Rocky with special needs. We got to meet him first to see if he would be a good fit for our family. We felt an immediate connection and decided to say yes. We fostered him for about 5 years before we adopted him. He was already adoptable so we didn't have to go through any court hearings for termination. Throughout the 5 years of foster care, we encountered many challenges. These challenges included sleep disturbances, behaviors, aggression, child care, school placement, and outings as a family. I will not lie, we had reservations as to whether we should adopt but we loved him so much and couldn't imagine him not being a part of our family.

Fostering and/or adopting a child with special needs can often be overwhelming. Having the appropriate resources can help make the process easier for everyone involved. Resources include specialists, therapies, equipment, and even social support from the agency and other parents that are going through similar experiences. Education, trainings, and sharing ideas of successes and failures was and still is helpful to us to help us navigate day to day. We have to sometimes be creative on new ideas on how to handle issues or behaviors. Respite is a great resource and was very important to us as sometimes we needed a break to recharge and refocus. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

One important aspect of foster care and adoption is preserving those family connections. Rocky has a biological brother and a sister who were already adopted. They live an hour away from us, but we still do our best to try and get them together as often as we can. If we cannot get together, we video chat. He loves his siblings and sometimes it is just what he needs to recharge his little soul.

Once adoption is complete, there will still be challenges and issues that you have to navigate through. For us, we wanted to make sure that we were doing everything possible to help Rocky and our family. We took Rocky to Mayo's just to have a second opinion and have a fresh set of specialists evaluate him to make sure that we were not missing anything. We also have to advocate for him often. We had to advocate for him to have a one on one at school. Due to financial reasons and lack of resources it was difficult to obtain. With that being said, we felt that it was very important for him to have one for his safety and the safety of the other children in the classroom. We live in a rural area that is limited on resources but that didn't stop us. Do we do everything perfectly? No. Am I glad that we chose to say yes despite all the challenges? Absolutely! We made a commitment to be his parents and that meant working through the triumphs and challenges. It has not always been easy but we wouldn't change it for the world.

*Submitted by Amanda Allen
Licensed Foster Caregiver*



An Important Reminder

Youth in care often come from hard places. It's not uncommon for these youth to experience struggles with mental health. Accepting children with poor mental health into your home can be a scary thought but it can also be a rewarding experience. Our family has welcomed children with these issues into our home and I'd like to share some of what we've experienced and how we've managed.

As foster parents we have a general idea of what we feel we're capable of managing when it comes to the needs and behaviors of the kids we accept. Sometimes the reality is that issues may not have been known at the time of placement or they can surface at a later time. Mental health issues and extreme behaviors may be something on your "list" that you feel unwilling or unqualified to manage but you may end up parenting this type of child anyway. We already know that a child with a history of trauma is going to need a lot of support and patience. Add a diagnosis or two or three on top of that, and it can seem overwhelming. The first kiddo we had placed with us had one diagnosis that was shared with us before placement. We were nervous but decided we would move forward. It didn't take long before even bigger diagnoses followed. Then we had the feeling of- what have we gotten ourselves into? Long days and exhausting nights had us questioning if we can do this. What we quickly learned is that it does indeed take a village to raise a child and building your community of like-minded people is incredibly important. Your agency, caseworkers and support staff are also going to be by your side doing whatever it takes to help your placement be successful.

The main thing that we've had to try to remember when it comes to parenting our children, is that their behaviors are a reflection of an unmet need. The behaviors that they're exhibiting are their way of pleading for whatever it is they're lacking. They may not have a clue what that is and that's ok because our job is to meet them where they are and help them figure it out. At times, that process can take trial and error and an extra level of understanding. In our home, we start with the basics; are they hungry, thirsty, tired, overstimulated or bored? If the answer is no, we move on to bigger questions like; are we near a trauma anniversary, is a holiday or birthday coming? A child doesn't have the skills to understand why they're acting the way they are so it's up to us to teach them how to manage those big emotions and feelings. It's extremely difficult to remain calm in the heat of the moment and keep in mind that the lashing out, anger, defiance or whatever the unwanted behavior might be, has nothing to do with you. How you respond matters. A dysregulated adult is never going to be able to help a child regulate. What I've found to be true is that a calm parent, consistency, structure and a firm foundation have made a world of difference in the way my children act.

These kids don't "want" to act out. The behavior is their voice. What they want is to be heard, to be safe, and feel loved. They all deserve that and those behaviors shouldn't stop us from giving it to them.

*Submitted by Stacey Steele
Licensed Foster Parent*



Get Connected with CYFS

Take a Leap of Faith

by Amanda Troyer
Galesburg Licensing Worker

Most social workers in the child welfare field desire to make a difference. They enter the field wanting to be a light in the darkness for children and their families. Their mindset is strong and they are full of ideas, creativity, understanding, empathy, and an unconditional positive regard. Their confidence is at an all-time high. Social workers desire to help guide people to change to be the best version of themselves and to reunite children with their parents and siblings when it is possible. When it isn't possible, social workers hope to find a permanent family which the child can remain with to have lasting support throughout their life.

What social workers don't realize, or at least what I didn't realize, is how emotionally devastating the job can be. With a lot of staff turnover, multiple crises, double caseloads, and kids being shuffled from home to home, it's a lot to process for a social worker. I once called over fifty agencies for a teenage boy with no luck. Every agency said no. Every foster parent said no. As a social worker, going to a teen and explaining no one is willing to take you in is one of the most devastating things a social worker has to do. They pretend to not care but if you know them well enough you can see the pain they feel. These kids may seem defiant, rebellious, or hard. They may present as not caring. But no matter what kind of façade they put up, at times they allow themselves to be vulnerable with agency staff. This is the side of the kid you wish foster parents had a chance to meet. Once you see the heart of a child, it's too hard to cast them aside as nothing. Instead, most times foster parents only have what is on paper and it often times sounds too intimidating or risky to try. Saying no ends up being easier than working through the issues.

I brought my son home two days after he turned 18. Try having a teen who is developmentally not 18 but still thinks he is an adult and can do what he wants. I know how scary it is to take in a teen. They have a lot of baggage from years of abuse and they are set in their opinions. My son had a whole childhood leading up to 18 of dysfunctional, unhealthy, learned behaviors. He was aggressive and had an anger problem. Honestly, he still does but he's in the healthiest place he's ever been. It will be a lifelong process for him to work through his anger. It's not gone after two years of being with me. He had 18 years leading up to being with me and a lot of disappointment and abuse. My kid was previously on probation for assault although had been discharged successfully. I knew all his behaviors very well and on paper he would have seemed too out of control to bring home.

I brought him home from a group home. One step down from residential treatment. I had a lot of fears, mostly of failing him. I feared his anger getting the best of him and honestly how it would impact my two younger children (then 9 and 5). I worried about how I would keep them safe and if I could be making a mistake. What if I had no clue what I was doing? Guess what? I had no clue what I was doing. But I rolled with the punches and took it a day at a time. Had I have been too consumed with fear I would not have said yes. And where would he be today? No one else is saying yes. These kids are not evil. They are just a bigger version of the little kids you currently may have in your home. They need love, acceptance, and someone to take a chance. Next time you get a call, maybe you can consider taking in a teen. No one has all the answers. There's no handbook on children of any age. They deserve what you can give too.

Updated PARENTING SKILLS TRAINING FROM PEOPLE PLACES

by Carol Bennett-Barker
Licensing Resource Worker



Next groups BEGIN THE WEEK OF August 9th

If you are interested in joining one of the next groups to participate in Updated Parenting Skills Training, virtually, please talk with your licensing worker to register for the class. Information reviewed includes the foster caregiver and parent role in the Teaching/Learning Journey, power of Relationships, impact of Trauma, importance of a Strengths-based focus, ABC (behavior modification) Analysis, ABC Planning, Teaching Discipline, and importance of Culture, Repair, and then a review of the tools presented throughout the training. Everyone – foster caregivers, birth parents, and intact families are welcome to complete the training multiple times as a thorough review of its content, a way to acquire multiple hours of training as a foster caregiver, and a way to connect with others across the 37 counties served by The Center for Youth and Family Solutions.

We meet 7 times to cover 9 sessions, in 2 to 3-hour blocks of time. You will receive a new Zoom link for each meeting. There is no cost for the training and the Participant's Manual is provided free of charge. Plus — it's all about positive parenting, the most powerful parenting available in helping out children and adolescents heal and grow. Groups will be offered on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, and each day will schedule two separate groups, the first at 10 am to 1 pm, and the second at **5:30 pm to 8:30 pm**. All you need is an email address, dependable Wi-Fi, and a smart phone or tablet or laptop in order to participate in this virtual training on a weekly basis. If you have any questions about the training, please contact me by email at cbennett-barker@cyfsolutions.org. Hope to see any of you, soon.



Branch Offices

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|---------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Bloomington-Center | 309.829.6307 | Lincoln | 217.732.3771 |
| Bloomington-Morris | 309.820.7616 | Macomb | 309.833.1791 |
| Champaign | 217.352.5179 | Peoria | 309.323.6600 |
| Danville | 217.443.1772 | Rock Island | 309.786.0770 |
| Galesburg | 309.342.1136 | Springfield | 217.528.3694 |
| LaSalle | 815.223.4007 | | |