

Creating a Support System for Children in Foster Care

December 4, 2018

Presenters:

Robyn Cenizal, CFLE, Project Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families

Kary James, Executive Director, Child Welfare Information Gateway

Jacquelyn Mallette, Assistant Professor, Human Development and Family Science, East Carolina State University

Oriana Carey, Chief Executive Officer, Coalition for Children, Youth and Families

Operator:

Good day, and welcome to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Webinar. Today's conference is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the conference over to Jackie Rhodes. Please go ahead.

Jackie Rhodes:

Thank you, and welcome everyone. Thank you for joining us today for the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Webinar, Creating a Support System for Children in Foster Care. My name is Jackie Rhodes and I'll be helping with the logistics for the webinar today, along with my colleagues, Andrea Mitran, Kate Dumanian and the Resource Center Director, Robyn Cenizal, who will be moderating the session.

Before we get to the content for today's webinar, we are going to go through a few logistical items. The webinar today will be an hour and a half, ending at 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time. The webinar will be recorded, and the slides, transcript, and recording will be posted to our website in the coming weeks. Audio for the webinar will be broadcast through the computer. Please make sure your speakers and volume are turned up.

If you have any technical issues, problems seeing something or hearing something, you can send us a message in the Q and A box on your screen, or call us at 1-866-916-4672, and we will be sure to assist you. Again, please make sure your computer speakers are on to hear the presentation.

After the presentations today, we will have an online Q and A session. We encourage you to type in the questions you think of at any time while presenters

are speaking, by typing them in the Q and A pod, located on the bottom right corner of your screen, and clicking enter. We will collect submitted questions, and then address those during the Q and A session at the end, as time permits. If your question is for a specific presenter, please reference that when typing your question, if possible.

Throughout the webinar, presenters may reference materials or links relevant to their presentation. You can browse web links by clicking on any of the links in the Web Links pod at the top right-hand corner on your screen, and you can download materials by selecting files in the Downloadable Resources pod on the right-hand portion of your screen.

We are excited about the agenda for today's webinar. The agenda includes introductions of our speakers, a welcome and overview of the Resource Center and introductions to Child Welfare and Healthy Relationships, an overview of the research on creating healthy relationships for foster families. And, lastly, strategies for supporting youth relationships by supporting families.

Following the presentation, as I mentioned, we will have an online Q and A session. When we close, a brief feedback survey will pop up on your screen. We encourage you to complete the survey, to provide us with valuable feedback for improving future webinars. Once you complete the survey, you'll be able to download a Certificate of Completion for attending today's webinar.

Before we begin, I'll briefly introduce our speakers. First, is Robyn Cenizal. Robyn is a Principal with ICF and the Project Director for the Resource Center. Robyn will be sharing more with you about the Resource Center and will moderate today's webinar.

After Robyn, we'll hear from Kary James, the Executive Director of the Child Welfare Information Gateway. She is a seasoned team and services executive with more than 18 years of experience providing technical assistance to state child welfare systems. Most recently, prior to joining her role, Kary was the CEO and principal of Mainstruct Consulting, a consulting firm that delivers coaching, implementation and program development services to public and non-profit organizations specializing in child welfare, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and social services. Prior to this, Kary was the Executive Director of the Social Services Administration for the State of Maryland and also served as a director of Casey Family Programs for eleven years.

After Kary, we'll hear from Jacquelyn Mallette. Jacquelyn is an Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science at East Carolina University. She earned her master's at East Carolina University and her PhD at the University of Georgia and is a certified family life educator. Her research is grounded in family resilience, theoretical framework for understanding the

processes by which family relationships impact the individual and familial resilience. Using a research to practice approach, Jacquelyn has authored journal articles and a book chapter, presented research nationally and locally. Produced and disseminated family life education materials and resources and delivered trainings to support families and children in local communities.

And lastly, we'll hear from Oriana Carey, the Chief Executive Officer for the Coalition for Children, Youth and Families. Her work focuses on ensuring that the coalition creates programs and services so that all children have a champion and that those champions have support. She is currently licensed as a clinical social worker in the State of Wisconsin. Before coming to the coalition, Oriana held a variety of supervisory and managerial positions within child and family serving agencies. She began her tenure at the coalition in 2005 as a project manager where she helped to successfully launch the Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center. She has served as the CEO since 2014.

To learn more about our presenters, I encourage you to download the speaker information document in the Downloadable Resources pod on the right hand corner of your screen. This document includes more detailed biographies, as well as contact information for each speaker. And now, Robyn, I will turn it over to you to get us started with opening remarks.

Robyn Cenizal:

Thanks, Jackie, and thank you all for joining us today. We appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to join us. And I hope that you'll share the information that you learn today with your colleagues and encourage them to take a look at the archived webinar, which will be on our website within the next couple of weeks.

So the Resource Center, for those of you who are not so familiar, and I'll be really brief with this because I know many of you are familiar with the Resource Center, but basically we focus on four core skills. We focus on healthy marriage, education skills such as interpersonal skills, communication and conflict resolutions. These two skills are interpersonal skills that transfer not only from in couple relationships, but also to parent/child relationships, relationships in the community, the workplace and so on.

And we also focus on critical skills, like parenting and financial education. Parenting and financial issues are the top two stressors that impact all families and obviously these can be even more detrimental to high risk families.

We offer a tremendous number of resources to support agencies who are interested in strengthening families by integrating relationship education skills into their service delivery systems. As you peruse our website, you'll see our

media gallery, our webinars that are archived, so are our newsletters. We have a calendar of events which might offer interesting opportunities for you to, you and your colleagues, to participate in professional development.

We have a resource library that has over 3,000 resources that are all research based, and a virtual training center with seven different courses. And like today's webinar, if you complete those courses, you can get a certificate of completion which can be used for CEU.

We do distribute a monthly newsletter. If you're not on our listserv, I hope you will join. We're also on LinkedIn, so look for us and connected with us and we're on Twitter. We are looking for lots of different opportunities to share this information with everyone from professionals to individuals who might benefit from it.

We also, in this work, recognize the importance of having culturally responsive and stakeholder specific resources. So when I say stakeholder specific, we have resources that if you were to go into our library and put in child welfare, it will bring up a whole host of resources that are specific to that stakeholder group.

And culturally responsive resources that speak to efforts to work responsibly with African American families, Latino families, Native American families and our latest one is working with Asian American families. But we also have resources that speak specifically to services provided to Muslim families, Orthodox Jewish families, LGBT communities. And so lots of different resources in our toolkit, as well as fact sheets which are just simple, easy to follow research to practice briefs, tip sheets and guides. So I hope that you will take some time to check out the website and enjoy some of those resources.

This past year we've really focused on a special collection that targets youth and young adults. And we've called this collection "Healthy Dating Leads to Healthy Marriage." Now the goal isn't necessarily to push people towards marriage, but the idea is that whatever relationships we're in and what those relationships look like really do form a foundation for what marriage might look like down the road for those who decide to choose marriage for themselves.

So what we want to make sure is that people are understanding what are the attributes of healthy relationships so that they are dating in a way that leads them down a positive path. And as we look at youth, one of the things that we realized is that youth who are involved in the foster care system often need a little additional support. They often lack the core skills that are necessary to navigate the transition to adulthood and that's often because they haven't seen positive healthy relationship skills modeled.

And so today's webinar is really focusing on that system and the efforts to support foster youth and their families. And before I turn you over to Kary to get

us started with our presentations, just a reminder, as Jackie says, I'll be back later to facilitate questions. So be sure to type any questions that you have as we go through the presentations in the little box and then we will revisit them after the presentations. So with that, I will turn it over to Kary. Thank you.

Kary James:

Thank you, Robyn, and good afternoon, everyone. Again, my name is Kary James. I'm the Executive Director of the Child Welfare Information Gateway. Now, I am incredibly confident that most of you are already familiar with Child Welfare Information Gateway as it has been a long-standing resource in the child welfare community, in one form or another, serving as the national clearinghouse for child welfare for probably more than 20 years.

But just in case it's been a while since you visited us or have accessed our resources, I'd like to give you a little brief information on who we are and what it is that we do. Child Welfare Information Gateway operates as a service of the Children's Bureau and we provide information resources, tools, for future child welfare, recurring and future child welfare and adoption professionals, as well as the general public, to promote safety, permanency and well-being of children, youth and the family.

The website is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We also operate a 1-800 number that allows the general public to access any number of our professionals with finding specific answers to information related to their child welfare concerns. And we also operate the nation's largest child welfare library also serving as a resource to professionals and our partners in the system for research materials, tools, documents, state statutes data. If it exists in child welfare, nine times out of ten Child Welfare Information Gateway is going to have it.

My job today for the webinar is to offer somewhat of a baseline and an overview on this thing that we call child welfare. Child welfare itself is a massive system, and so distilling down all of the components or even the most important components in child welfare to a few slides is challenging at best. But I believe I have done a fairly decent job of attempting to give us some general language and baseline information on what it is that we mean when we talk about child welfare.

The child welfare system is a group of public and private services that are focused on ensuring that all children live in safe, permanent and stable environments, environments that are designed to support their well-being. Child welfare services may interact with entire families or they may be focused on direct interventions for children.

The public child welfare system itself operates at the federal, state and local level. And there are also many private and community-based organizations that are involved in providing children's well-being as well. So the child welfare system, in the all, can vary dramatically from state to state.

Oftentimes when we refer to child welfare, we're referring to any of the elements of the system. This can mean a family who is involved in child welfare who may be receiving services, but their family is intact, meaning children have not been removed and placed in out of home care. Intact services are often referred to family preservation, prevention services. Or, the child or children in the family may have been removed from the home, either on a temporary basis or a permanent basis after a system has attempted to do end support of family and reunification, but reunification has turned out not to be the best plan.

I want to make an important distinction, oftentimes we will hear child protection and child welfare system and they can be used interchangeably. Child protection is a component of the child welfare system. It is one of the elements that happened. Child protection is a term that is often used to refer to the child welfare system, but specifically it describes the government's response to children who have been maltreated.

Child Protective Services or CPS is a term that is most often used to refer to the social services agency that has been designated to receive reports, conduct investigations and assessments and to provide treatment and intervention services to children and families when a child has been identified as being maltreated. And that could have been physical, sexual. That could also mean that a child's needs are not being met effectively and the system is stepping in to provide services.

CPS services are often administered at the state or county level and this agency is often located within the larger public service or social services agency. While the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the state, the federal government also plays a major role in supporting states in delivery of services, primarily through funding programs and through legislative initiatives that help to guide the way in which the child welfare agencies should function, but I do want to make a note that child welfare looks very different from state to state.

Guiding principles and standards for child welfare generally, no matter what state we're in, a child's needs must be considered - their welfare, their social and emotional health. It should be what is in the best interest of the young person. Our goal is also to always preserve the family unit when possible and the involvement of child welfare, either from a child protection standpoint, from a prevention standpoint. Even if a child is being removed, child welfare, foster care

at the more higher end of the spectrum really should be time limited involvement if we're getting it right.

Sometimes, a good portion of the time, young people will return home and reunification is achieved. But, unfortunately, there are times when reunification cannot be achieved and we begin looking at permanency options, which reunification is one of them. But permanency could also mean a young person is looking at adoption, is looking at guardianship and will not be able to return home.

You'll see I've given just some current statistics and these are probably plus or minus a few at the latest AFCARS reading, which haven't been published for this year. But currently we have approximately 437,000 young people that are currently in foster care and this is running the gamut of all ages, from our 0 to 3 population to our young adults and teen population. So over 117,000 are currently waiting adoption and each year there are over 700,000 young people that are confirmed victims of maltreatment. Pretty staggering when we think about the number of families of young people that are impacted by the system on a day to day and annual basis.

I've already mentioned this, I will just make a note that the goal of child welfare broadly is to promote the well-being, permanency and the safety of children and families. While you saw the numbers previously listed, there are a large number of young people that enter care. There is also a large number that do go home or go on to live with relatives and kinship care placement or find permanency and stability with a lifelong adoptive family.

This is just providing you a little bit of an overview. We could probably spend the rest of the webinar talking about the child welfare system in what each one of these elements mean and what happens throughout the lifetime of a family once they become involved with the system.

But as it relates to our conversation today particularly around our foster youth and the impact that foster care has on them and their ability to develop, form and maintain healthy relationships. I really want to focus on the piece that refers to our out of home placement, because it is oftentimes here where our young people really are going to experience the most trauma and begin to have some of the most challenges in the experience of entering into the system.

Even in situations where foster care is the best option, for a young person, being removed from their family of origin and being placed into foster care, being taken from their home, from their family despite the circumstances, is a traumatic event. And I'm sure most of you all on the call in your professional capacity having worked with young people over time are more than aware of this.

But this is really where my colleagues today are going to focus their comments and the information they'll share on what we know from research and our current work on where we, as professionals, as foster parents, even just as community members can strengthen our support to ensuring our young people who are impacted by foster care are given the additional support that they may need to learn and to see what healthy relationships are and how they are modeled.

So for young people in care, we know that many of them - and I have had the tremendous privilege and fortune over my time to have met and have worked with some just amazing young people who display the type of resiliency that I think I can only hope to have. But despite their level of resiliency, what we do know, as I mentioned previously, is that entering into foster care, being removed from your family, moving from foster home to foster home which is unfortunately a circumstance that young people do find themselves experiencing until they either return home or they meet their lifelong family, it is traumatic.

And what we know about research around this topic is that the adverse experiences that young people experience early in life, and this can be from our very young children that enter care, to our older youth that enter care. Regardless, the trauma has a significant impact on their short-term social and emotional functioning.

My colleagues who will be talking a little bit later will go into far greater detail, but all of this translates into young people having difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships with peers, adult figures, really throughout the course of their lives.

All right, I think that was the end of my slides. So I am going to turn it over to my colleague, Jacquelyn.

Jacquelyn Mallette:

Thank you, Kary, and hello everyone. My name is Jacquelyn Mallette and I'm going to be talking today about promoting healthy foster families by recognizing the formal and informal support needs of foster caregivers.

Child welfare experts have emphasized the importance of reinforcing elements of healthy family functioning in order to minimize risks to children. And so while all youth are going to benefit from exposure to healthy couple and co-parenting relationships and stable families, foster children really require greater attention to being placed in high quality home environments making it important to understand how best to support these foster families and improve placement stability.

Due to the unique and many stressors experienced by foster parents, they're at elevated risk for experiencing marital and co-parenting challenges, strain on their family relationships, role ambiguity, unhealthy communication patterns and disagreement on parenting decisions.

While there are many rewards to fostering, foster families also report specific challenges that lead to stress and burnout. So many foster caregivers discontinue fostering within a year with the average length of fostering being about eight, between eight and fourteen months. Research indicates that even if foster caregivers have high overall satisfaction, having a strong dissatisfaction in just one area can contribute to ending their fostering role.

Foster caregivers may find it hard to adapt to combining the biological and foster family and foster families are learning to adapt to these new roles, setting boundaries, developing a new sense of family and blending biological with non-biological members.

Foster parents do more than just provide stability for a child in need. Many are also advocates, mentors to the biological parents and they form attachments to the children in their care. So the grief after a foster child leaves their care has been reported to affect at least half of all long-term foster parents. An ambiguous loss that comes with that doesn't always allow for foster parents' grief to be acknowledged or supported.

Foster parents report feeling unprepared with their training for how to cope with the displacement of a foster child and they also report not being provided with much counseling afterwards, which makes that change even more difficult.

Due to these complex and varied stressors, foster caregivers often experience strain in their couple of co-parenting relationships and other family relationships. Also, while foster children are a great source of joy, negative child behavior is reported as a top stressor amongst foster caregiver. And they may also lack knowledge about how to appropriately care for the individual needs of their foster child or they may struggle with really knowing how to establish a bond with the child.

Many foster parents also report a lack of understanding of the child welfare system or their foster agency and families report challenges with the foster care system as one of their main reasons for terminating fostering.

To help cope with these challenges and responsibilities, foster parents really benefit from social support, training and a team of helpful professionals. Those interested in fostering are required to undergo both screening and training processes on in-depth parenting education including normative and non-normative child development. However, parents also report wanting training that

takes into account the individual circumstances of their lives, location, children and other contextual factors.

Both informal and formal sources of support have been shown to be essential for parents to develop both parenting and relationship skill efficacy, but there's a lack of understanding about the functionality and impact of these support systems for foster parents.

So here in Eastern North Carolina, my goal was to understand a few different things about what foster caregivers are experiencing and how best to be able to support them in their role. I wanted to know the strengths and challenges that foster parents face within their family and romantic lives, what resources are available that serve as protective factors or maybe serve as stressful influences for them in navigating their family and romantic relationships. And then get a sense from them about the helpful aspects of their informal support system, such as family, friends and support groups. And then their formal system, such as social workers and state mandated training, as well as what kind of gaps may exist.

My goal with these answers is to begin to prepare specialized training that could augment their required training and ultimately promote more stable placement. To do this, I conducted three focus groups with licensed foster caregivers from two large counties in Eastern North Carolina.

I recruited them by distributing flyers at local social service agencies and local foster parent support groups. I ended up having a total of twelve participants, ten foster mothers and two foster fathers. Seven of the parents were married. One was in a committed relationship and four were currently uninvolved romantically.

Each focus group lasted about 90 minutes and I asked them questions about stresses for their family, sources of support for their family, parenting challenges and strengths, relationship challenges and strengths. Or, if they were single, I asked about their experiences data while fostering. And lately, lastly, what kind of topics they might be wanting from a training. I videotaped each focus group and then they were transcribed and we coded the data and pulled out some themes, which I will describe next in more detail.

So preparation for moving from foster care into adoption came up as a particular and specific challenge faced by many of the foster parents in my group. Several foster parents reported not having initial intentions of adoption, but desired to move into adoption after they had begun fostering. And a few of my parents indicated that their intent was fostering from the start was to ultimately adopt a child.

Foster parents felt that although they knew that social services promoted reunification with the biological family, they felt that they did so sometimes even in unhealthy circumstances and they felt a lack of rights towards their foster children and so they frequently felt fears that their foster child would be removed. And this fear influenced their willingness to speak out when they had concerns or questions about the placement.

All of these fears meant that they felt they needed to be overly cautious to ensure smooth transitions to adoption. They also felt that they weren't provided with much information or training on the adoption process and how adoption might ultimately impact their family dynamics. So they felt that they would like more information on how a child might move towards adoption and how they as a family could better prepare to make that transition easier on the family and the child.

The child welfare system and social workers are obviously a large part of the foster care system. Foster caregivers in my study included their social workers, the Department of Social Services and guardians ad litem as particularly useful support. Sometimes, though, they felt a lack of flexibility and understanding and sometimes they worried about reaching out to their social worker about even general questions for fear that they would be seen as a bad parent.

They expressed that it would be helpful if everyone involved in care got some of the same training information that they do because it sometimes felt as though they were not on the same page when it came to caring for their child.

In regards to formal training opportunities, foster parents reported that their initial training was helpful, but they reported wanting some additional training in some of the more day to day situations that they face, such as grief counseling, how to make connections with their children, the adoption process and the impacts on the family, training related to different stages and ages of their children.

For those who were married or dating, they wanted something about navigating strain on their romantic relationship. Alternatively, for those who were single, they mentioned that they had received no information about how to start or maintain a relationship while fostering.

They also frequently mentioned the need for a strong informal support system with other people who understand. Family and friends are an important support. However, having friends who understand the foster system or have an understanding of what the foster parent might be going through was regarded as more useful support.

Those who were married mentioned that they often turn to each other for support, while those who were single listed other family members, such as

parents and siblings, as being particularly important sources of support. However, several expressed that they don't want to worry their external family members with the specifics of fostering, so they don't necessarily consider them as a support for their fostering role, but more of a kind of a general support.

Also, those who were involved in some sort of a support group or a foster parent association, either face to face or online, said that having people available to just talk things through was very useful. Topics they reported frequently asking their support group about were things like resources in their local community, parenting ideas for a specific incident and questions regarding things such as local schools and doctors. And they felt that having somebody to talk to about those things made some of these challenges, day to day challenges, less tricky.

Relationship training is not generally provided for foster parents, although the fostering process has been shown to affect their romantic and familial relationship and foster caregivers expressed that the couple relationship is impacted. You see this quote here from a husband and wife. When I asked whether fostering changes the couple relationship, the wife said, "oh yes." And then the husband chimed in, "and if you say it doesn't, you're lying."

Within the partner relationship, parents explained having to navigate parenting roles and also ensure that they keep each other in the loop. Mothers specifically tended to feel that they bear more of the work, but that was pretty family dependent. And all of my participating couples agreed that overall, there is way less time for intimacy.

For the single participants, they agreed that bringing a new romantic partner into the family was very difficult. One dating participant explained the awkwardness that comes from having to explain to any potential romantic partners that they're going to have to have a background check in order to be around her kids. She jokingly said that she doesn't get many second dates.

Foster parents explained also that they're unable to share everything about their placement with their family members, or they don't want to burden them which causes a divide of understanding and creates worry and strain on their family relationship.

One foster father made this statement that I found to be pretty poignant and sort of summarized what many of the caregivers were discussing. He explains that as foster parents, they feel like people expect them to be like robots. They love the children in their care, they form strong close attachments to them, they comply with mandates and submit to multiple and frequent home visits. They spend countless amounts of time and resources on their kid. But then when the children are removed from their care, they don't feel like they're permitted to grieve or to

feel the loss since they do understand that the ultimate goal is reunification with the biological parents.

From these focus groups, we took away several salient factors for foster parents. We know that retention is improved when foster parents feel supported, but it's not always clear how best to support them. We found that these parents benefit from support groups, their foster parent associations, where they can discuss some of these day to day issues without feeling judgement or fear that they'll be seen as a bad parent.

Although foster caregivers may have access to informal and formal support, they consider positive close relationships with social workers and family members as most beneficial during difficult times. Unfortunately, if those relationships are strained, we found that the foster caregivers become disenchanted or distrustful with the process and begin to distance themselves or conceal some of their true support needs or fears.

Foster caregivers respect social workers for the difficult task of removing and placing children and they want to have positive reciprocal working relationships. One stated suggestion was for everyone to have the same training that they do, or at least the knowledge of the covered topics so that they feel like they're on the same page about how to care for the children.

Also, foster caregivers suggested cheat sheets or a one page document that would give quick information about a child such as food allergies, known behavioral triggers, nicknames or helpful resources. Newer foster caregivers agreed that being provide with some list of local usable resources would use some nervousness around feeling unprepared or uncertain about the responsibilities of their new role.

Also, a major theme was that although they appreciated their state mandated training, they felt they could use trainings that include more relevant and useful information that will help them with kind of their day to day functioning such as information about different age groups, how to handle feelings of grief and loss, how to work through all the various functions associated with adoption and how to navigate the strain on their family and romantic relationships.

Because fostering can heighten the stress on family relationships, it's increasingly important for couples and co-parents to have realistic expectations and keep a strong partnership while transitioning to fostering or adding a new foster child. Creating healthy relationships between foster caregivers can promote child adjustment and resilience, so family life education programming, such as parent or relationship education, could have meaning for the parents and other family members and allow for the application of new skills.

For example, relationship education specifically for foster parent couples has shown positive impacts in Georgia and that model could be replicated in other states. In addition, relationship education specifically focuses on skills that could translate to working with others, which could help with some of their worries about communication and feeling heard by their informal and formal support.

So in summary, these increasing numbers of children in foster care combined with a lack of available foster placements really makes recruitment and retention a vital factor for those who train and work with foster parents. Now this research really indicated a strong need for appropriate and applicable foster caregiver training combined with support from both these formal and informal systems.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Oriana.

Oriana Carey:

Hi, good afternoon, everybody. I am going to talk a little bit more today about some of those specific supports and things that we do here in Wisconsin. At the coalition, we are not a licensing or placement entity; we are sort of a smaller version of what Kary talked about with the Gateway, a clearinghouse, but we also do a lot of facilitation of support activities and creating more opportunities for learning through that whole life cycle.

At the coalition, when Jackie introduced me, she talked about our motto being that we believe, we truly do, that every kid needs a champion. You know, everybody needs somebody. As an agency that has also supported many youth outside of the system, people need those champions. But also too, a lot of what Jacquelyn was just talking about is that too often our champions get wore out from the stress of taking care of traumatized children.

And so we look at first the importance of connection and relationship. And so to the other two speakers I had, and as they have brought up, and where we know how trauma is healed and that is why it is so important that we have a healing environment for our kids. They need to have that environment, and so those who are caring for them have to be supported as well.

I often use a metaphor with people when I talk about the fact that if you get onto the airline, Southwest Airlines today, the first thing they're going to talk about in terms of oxygen, those sorts of things. They're not going to say give that oxygen mask to children first. They're going to say give it to you, the caregiver.

And that's very much what's going on here, is that we have to make sure that the people who have such an important role in helping healing, also help in healing with birth families. In our state we have many families that work really hard to support our birth families. And that is also just very challenging for them when

they can see somebody working so hard to have their children back with them, and yet they're struggling and we don't always have a lot that we can do for birth families as well.

So we, I'm going to talk today, kind of like how we do those supports from low touch to sort of deeper touch in the system. And so we start with making sure that people have access. You noticed that Jacquelyn talked about often through her presentation people talking about having access to reliable information. When I talk to families who, or board members, who were back in history in the past having information and access to it was a challenge.

Today, the problem is often with our worldwide web is that you can have access to lots of information and then knowing what is good or not. And so we spend a lot of time here. If you go to, they have our overall coalition web link above, but within that are four different websites that we run on behalf of the State of Wisconsin that get into specifics in foster care adoption, post-adoption.

And in that, our staff spend a lot of time vetting information from good lists to brief how-to's. In fact, we currently have about 130 tip sheets on a variety of topics. And what we like about them is they're quick and they help people get the information they need quick and also know where they can go and get other information to do that.

Next we look at that, as Jacquelyn was speaking about creating that network of support. What we have learned and what we have been told over the years in supporting families is they really need those opportunities, and so do the youth, to normalize their challenge. So from a youth perspective, when we do very simple events, you'll hear kids talk about being in a space where everybody is like them, where they're not having to explain that they have been adopted or they're in foster care. That everybody there just sort of knows what it is and what it's like.

With teens, sometimes showing up to things is a little bit more complex, but we try to create other events to make that a little more palatable. For parents we have, in the last year and a half, hosted something called Coalition Parent Talks. And let me slow down a minute and back up to what I said before. We are not the licensing entity. So we are considered sort of a neutral safe place.

And so often what I do know in the agencies we support across the state and we support all 72 counties is that often when they try to do these groups, their attendance isn't as good. And that's just that sticking point that Jacquelyn talked about a lot of times. I think that at times there's that fear of when I speak up in front of the people who are licensing me and how that's going to work.

But what we have done is taken what we call parent talks, and they're not necessarily support groups, they're more like using a world café model where there are some topics that people can talk about and have dinner and enjoy each other, but they are talking to people that are experiencing things like them.

And one success story I'd like to share out of that is we had somebody attending for weeks that some of the facilitators would have considered to be kind of negative or on a downturn. And when we did a debrief session one night, that was the person that stood up and spoke and said without these parent talks or coming here, I think I would have given up. And I've stayed in here and I feel more competent because I've met folks. And so that was very surprising to all of us and it shows the impact of being able to talk to other people.

The other success that we've seen, specifically here in Milwaukee, there is a Facebook group, but it's run by families. I think it started out more in an association. But this group of families does a very good job and they let just about anybody involved. But their group itself, they kind of moderate, they keep things not negative or complaining about the system.

But what you'll notice in there is that if somebody leaves - back again to what Jacquelyn spoke about - if I've had a particular difficult day or I've left court and I'm feeling bad about myself, what we're noting in there is that people can put that out to the group and they'll get four or five really supportive responses in a very short time. And for many of those families, they indicate that is a lifeline. And certainly our agency cannot take credit for that, but we're part of that and we help people get connected that direction.

The other thing as we have talked about in this presentation already is that opportunity for ongoing learning. People, even if they've learned something in the beginning, they'll talk about how easy it is to forget things, or they'll say things in some of our trauma sensitive or healing parenting sort of classes. You'll hear people say - I came into it with this lens. The kids got tough. We got tougher. This was a good reminder. So the fact that maybe somebody already has some of that information doesn't mean that they don't need it again.

But what we also know in this grouping is that we need classes and we need information that also allows for networking and socialization. So we do a lot of, similar to what we're doing here today on Adobe Connect, but we also do some things in person. And when we do things in person, is much less didactic learning as more as it is time to network and make connections with each other. And we get incredibly positive response from that. Because when we weren't doing it, the feedback we were getting is that people weren't getting that.

We also, I noted an example that we're currently not able to offer, but part of healthy marriage grant back in 2005, we had built a special curriculum called

“Our Home, Our Family” in which we had developed these relational and healing models. So every other week would be based on relational and the other would be in helping children heal and trauma. And it had incredibly positive research results.

The challenge is that that model is pretty expensive to replicate in other states and even when we gave free train the trainers, people had a hard time with it. So we’re continually looking as the online learning and online practice world falls out on ways that we can get that curriculum out to help people be able to use that, because it always that experiential piece.

So you had some learning, but you had ability to really get to know the people in your cohort. You had time in those two weeks in between to go back and practice some things with your children and with your relationship and be able to talk about that.

The next thing we talk about, as things get more deep and you look at models in other states, they talk about peer mentoring and coaching. We have a little bit of some peer mentoring here. We have some assigned staff that have received additional training. They are more casual employees in that they take phone calls as needed as people say they need to speak to someone with specific experience.

But here I noted a very successful model from an agency here in Western Wisconsin and they also serve part of Minnesota names A New Family Services. And they have developed a really, sort of a parent coaching certification model. And their approach is two prong. What they found in their work is that many of our families that we’re talking about also had some of their own trauma, some of their own challenges and they needed support with working through that while helping take care of really challenging children.

And so they apply this model to all the families they work with in their treatment foster care tier realm, but I know that they also offer classes and certification in this area and it has been very successful for them.

And lastly, I will just advocate for the fact of having, while we need the clinicians that are trauma responsive, we also need our clinicians to understand the uniqueness of that foster care adoption relationship, a lot of what Jacquelyn talked about. So there are, in addition to trauma, which in and of itself is very challenging and complex to help somebody and help families navigate, the foster care experience in itself has so many other layers.

There’s grief and loss. We have lots of trans-racial, trans-cultural issues because we know that our children are disproportionately placed in our systems across the country. And then also other family complexities. And what we find

and often what we help navigate when people call here is helping them find those clinicians that other families have said that understand that. Because without that understanding, sometimes we have assessments and diagnoses that don't necessarily fit.

On the other hand, I will say that a concern that we would all share here is that while we see trauma responsive parenting as incredibly important, we also need to remember that some of our kiddos do actually have clinical issues, clinically diagnosed issues and they do deserve the same assessments that anybody else would to help look at where that is coming into play with everything.

Because we tend to go one way or another, in my 25 years of experience in our field, where we say okay, now it's trauma and we forget about yes, it's trauma. And then if I have ADHD on top of it, what is all exacerbating everything?

I also, what I don't have on here, I think the biggest struggle and stress for our caregivers is often navigating our school systems. As a leader who has many employees who are either adoptive or foster parents, I can tell you that I have had to be so flexible in working out things simply because times when people had to leave work with very little notice because of the struggles they were having with education.

And I think we all have to try to help work with our systems and help everybody understand and work to support these families, because that is really hard. And that is really hard on them maintaining an employer. And I do truly believe that sometimes that could be a difference for some of our older youth needing and receiving the permanency they need.

Also, I would always advocate and say that everything I talked about here also is applicable to our birth families. And I think we don't give enough attention to the fact that when children are unified, that these same complexities are going on and they also need support very similar to get through a lot of those processes.

And equally, our relative caregivers, as we all know, are probably one of our most underserved groups. They need all of these things and more. And often, too often, we pair our relative caregivers in our typical regular non-relative foster groups. And the challenge there is that some of the experiences that they're having are very different.

So that's just a little bit from me on what we see on a hands-on basis and doing those hands-on supports here in Wisconsin. I'm going to hand it back over to Jackie Rhodes to continue on.

Jackie Rhodes:

Thank you, so much, Oriana. As a reminder, we're going to start the Q and A session now. You can actually submit a question at the bottom right corner of your screen in the Q and A pod and we will just give everyone a few more minutes to ask some questions. And I will turn it over to Robyn now to get us started with facilitating the Q and A session.

Robyn Cenizal:

Thanks, Jackie. Thank you so much to all of our speakers and thank you, Oriana, for the comments about relative placement. I too feel that they are sometimes one of the most underserved groups in the foster care system. Partly because they are part of the family of origin. And, in some cases, they may have some of the similar stressors, maybe not to the risk level, that the family of origin did, but may have many of the same stressors. And then they also are having the compounded stress of do they allow their relatives to visit the children or not based on what the court has said and all of those complications.

So I really appreciate all of the presentations. And for our attendees today, I am seeing some really interesting questions, so I'm going to get started on some of these while we take in more. So the first question that comes up, and I think I'm going to pitch this one to Kary, so get ready, can you speak a bit about the dynamics between biological and adoptive siblings and how foster parents can promote a healthy dynamic in that environment?

Kary James:

All right, thank you, Robyn and thank you for the question. You know, I think that the easiest thing is, there really shouldn't be a determination between who is a foster youth and who is - if I'm understanding the question right, is this about foster youth being in the home with adoptive families or --

Robyn Cenizal:

Well, if you have foster or adoptive children in the home and you have biological children, how do you manage that dynamic? Because obviously there are those - there's a different relationship.

Kary James:

Perfect, okay. Just want to make sure I had it. Thank you, Robyn. You know, I'm going to use, and I will refrain from the young person's name, but there is a young lady that I worked with many years ago who had been a young person in care, she along with her sister, and had ultimately gone into social work as a profession.

And years ago they used to a video story series. And her video story was on, focused on permanency. And when she talked about her story, she talked about not wanting to be adopted. She had a family that was ready to adopt her, that was actually ready to adopt both her and her sister.

But what she recalled most significantly about her experience, the home was a wonderful place, they seemed to be a loving family, was that the mother every night went to her biological children's room, kissed them all goodnight and said goodnight and never went to her room or her sister's room.

And I think at the core, that is the thing that we can do differently. When young people into homes, into adoptive homes, into foster family homes, I think knowing and engaging with young people as if there isn't a difference. And surely there are going to be times, this is a new place, we're getting to know one another, but treating everyone the same is, I think is probably a good first step.

Robyn Cenizal:

I would agree with that, and I think that that's a perfect example of where the foster parents actually created the dynamic because they highlighted that there was a difference, even though it was unintentional. So I think that's an excellent -

Kary James:

Absolutely.

Robyn Cenizal:

So on this next question, how about you, Jacquelyn, do you have any resources or strategies for foster parents who are trying to navigate the relationship with their foster child's biological parent?

Jacquelyn Mallette:

Thank you, Robyn. Yeah, and this is an interesting question because it tends to be fairly state specific as to whether or not they have much involvement with the biological parents. For the foster caregivers that I've worked with in Georgia, for example, often they serve as mentors for the biological parents and they talk to them about certain parenting things and they keep in touch throughout the course of the time that the child is with them, and then even afterwards as well.

I know that the same goes for other states. For example, Oklahoma has a similar sort of program where I believe that foster caregivers are encouraged to keep in touch with the biological parents. Here in North Carolina I was actually surprised to find out that they are, often they are discouraged from having any contact with the biological parents whatsoever.

And to me, I feel like it's an interesting challenge because they often create sort of a disconnect between the parenting systems. And, as we know, in terms of co-parenting, any two parents who are trying to, who are invested in the raising of a child can work together. And when you can kind of promote those positive co-parenting relationships, that's going to work for the best of the child.

And so when I asked that question of foster caregivers here in North Carolina, I was really surprised to find out how many of them said they had never met a biological parent, they were not encouraged to have a relationship with them.

And when I asked why, they said that it's actually specifically to make sure that those boundaries are kept and so that when the child is reunified, that there is a - there's no kind of boundary ambiguity there.

So I think, I guess I have a couple of different thoughts on that. I can see why it is helpful for the foster parents to be able to serve as kind of a helpful support for the biological parents and especially in terms of the co-parenting that needs to happen when the child is reunified. I think that the foster caregivers can serve as really helpful resources, again, to the biological parents. But similarly, I do understand in North Carolina their feeling that potentially that can cause some role confusion there as well.

Robyn Cenizal:

Good Point. So Oriana, you talked about navigating the school system and how foster parents can work with their foster children's school and the children to create this kind of environment, for the positive environment for the youth. Do you have any tips on that or ideas on where foster parents can actually get information on their rights as a foster parent as it relates to the education of the youth?

Oriana Carey:

Yeah, so I think that - so there's been a couple of pieces. And I would defer some of that to Kary so that I don't totally get that wrong. There is a lot of federal legislation that has opened some of that up over the last couple of years.

But I would say in every state, we have them here, we will have, and we try to work in collaboration with those systems that provide. We have a couple of groups here that will provide all types of families who are touched by special education, information about their rights. And from time to time we host trainings with that.

But what I would also say is I think it is really important and it is so challenging depending on the teacher, but I do think it's really important to develop those

relationships early on. And again, people have different views about that. But I would err on the side that I think that most people are trying to do the right thing. If they know what they're managing, they can do better and talking to them about issues of confidentiality and the like.

I think it just is really difficult and sometimes our workers have to help get all of those things in place ahead of time. Because I know what also can happen is who has the right to speak and talk and be part of it. But helping the day to day teacher know that somebody is coming home, they're coming home to me is really, really important.

But yes, that stigma, I wish I could give the golden answer to that. I think it is really, really tough. What we know just in what we've studied here in Wisconsin, and I believe nationally as well, just from first placement somebody loses six months of education because of what's going on with them and trauma.

For kids who have experienced multiple moves, sometimes they are just trying to catch up and that acting out behavior is so much a sign of embarrassment and things and then we have, foster and adoptive families, trying to work with them. I also, a lot we connect experienced families with other families and what they will say is, you know, make sure you keep your expectations in check. Get what homework you think you can possibly do. And understand and advocate and support for the individual needs of this child, versus worrying about whether somebody is going to evaluate you as a bad parent or not. I mean, these kids are trying to do the best that they can. And so often our families become very strong advocates, and have to, in working with our educational system.

Robyn Cenizal:

Thank you. Kary, did you want to add anything to that?

Kary James:

Not specifically. I think that that covered it. Is there anything that I can go in depth on that might be helpful to know?

Robyn Cenizal:

Well, perhaps if there are some specific resources that you're familiar with in the Information Gateway that might be helpful, that might be something that you could highlight.

Kary James:

So one of the fantastic features, and instead of even beginning to attempt - Child Welfare Information Gateway is roughly about a 5,000 page website which

means there's a lot of information there. But we do have a fantastic search feature that putting in key words of anything that you're potentially looking for will likely take you to a series of resources.

You can also contact our 1-800 number or any of our librarians who are available for live chat, if there are questions and they can point you to resources that might help, sort of get to what it is that you're interested in knowing. So I would just offer that you all take benefit of some of those search functions, either the chat, the phone or the search engine on the website to look at specific resources.

If there is something that you're not finding that comes up on the search feature, reach out to us. Our team is always available and excited to get requests from colleagues around the country. And if we don't have it, we can usually find it.

Robyn Cenizal:

And, I would add that there is also the fabulous resource 2018 Prevention Resource Guide that is your downloadable resources in the box to the right of the slide, which I think is a really great starting point for folks who are just getting kind of intro'd into Gateway and all the resources that are available there.

So as a follow-up question, Kary, and this may be, again, something that people can just go to the Information Gateway and look in your search, but are you familiar with any curriculum for preparing biological kids for foster children coming into the home? A lot of the focus is on preparing foster parents, but do you know of anything that is designed to prepare the biological kids for bringing in foster children?

Kary James:

That is a fantastic question. And I am really sad to say no. But that doesn't mean it's not there. You know, a lot of times what happens also, one of the things that I have been working, assuming my role with Gateway with my staff, is not only connecting the resources that we at Child Welfare Information Gateway may develop on behalf of Children's Bureau, or resources that the federal government puts out.

But connecting with states and local agencies. Because what I know from my career is that there's so much work that local and state agencies do putting together these types of resources that may just not make it onto Gateway or a public website. And so unless you have a relationship or you know, you may not know how to access it.

So I hope to be able to have more types of resources that might show what, for instance, Georgia or North Carolina is doing. But I would say outside of the

search engine or contacting one of our librarians, that would probably be the best way to see what may exist out there or even to punt some ideas about where they might look for resources. I wish I could think of a curriculum off the top of my head, but I can't.

Robyn Cenizal:

Oriana, I understand you might have a tip sheet on the top, if you want to tell us a little bit.

Oriana Carey:

Yeah, I do believe we do. I mean, so here's what happened, as Oriana has been at here so long, I used to do a lot of all of that direct work, and now I don't. But again, any of that, very similar to what Kary has said. Yes, we serve the state of Wisconsin and we answer lots of calls from everywhere. So I do believe we have talked about that quite a bit in the past.

And I'm almost 100 percent, because we have, like I said, 130, so off the top of my head, I mean I could send it certainly after the fact or if you guys have a listserv. Again, if you search our website, you would find also some of that similar pieces. It's a lot about talking to your children about youth coming into your home, preparing your whole family. Having a conversation when you are making the decision to foster and how we think that's very important.

Because most of the time what we have found is the experience has been extremely positive and also that birth children grieve their siblings when they leave as well. But there are a few times when it hasn't been. But by and large, we hear very positive things.

And more often what we get calls about from family is that we don't have enough resources for birth children to deal with those grieving and loss issues that when they get really close to someone in their home as well, they miss them.

Robyn Cenizal:

Well, we can certainly, if you can share it with us, we can drop it in our library so people can access it. But there is also a link here where folks can perhaps do a search on your website. Would that be feasible?

Oriana Carey:

Yes. So it's taking you to a main site, but within that main site you see things on the top that say foster care, adopt, post-adoption. And those are those other sites that have tons of resources. That just has to do with the fact that we're really big in the way the State of Wisconsin wants things divided out.

Robyn Cenizal:

No worries, that works. So Jacquelyn, you talked about the strain that fostering can have on parents' relationships with each other. Can you talk a little bit how that strain is, the spillover, the impact to children? And as a caseworker or practitioner, do you have any advice on how they can navigate that and provide support for those parents who are going through that?

Jacquelyn Mallette:

Thank you, Robyn. So I understood two parts to that question. You started with how the co-parenting or couple relationship would spill over to the children, is that correct?

Robyn Cenizal:

Correct.

Jacquelyn Mallette:

And then secondly, how practitioners can be aware of that and dial into that?

Robyn Cenizal:

Absolutely.

Jacquelyn Mallette:

Yes, okay. So specifically, and you use the word 'spillover,' which is exactly perfect to explain how these strain on the couple and co-parenting relationship really does impact parenting practices. And so that strain of kind of the everyday arguments or the challenges of trying to figure out how you're going to navigate these parenting decisions and those things kind of get compounded when you have the addition of a child that perhaps has significant trauma or behavioral challenges.

And without a lack of real understanding of what would be the best way to handle them, foster parents specifically are really challenged with kind of understanding a new child who has just come into their home. And, of course, parenting is not a one size fits all deal, and so sometimes those sorts of strains can come up and the foster caregivers, in my sample specifically, mentioned not having any idea what to expect.

You know, when they would have a child and the child would come into their home and they would think that they knew something and that wouldn't work at all with this particular child. And so they were talking about kind of the differences

in parenting styles that they had with either the person that they were living with or their spouse.

And in that case, they felt that kind of that lack of intimacy and those lack of feelings of knowing what to do when parenting the children just sort of compounded and built up. And that really did start to take a toll on their ability to be effective parents.

And so that spillover hypothesis is one that basically says exactly that. That when you have these strains on that relationship, that that is going to spill over into your work life, your parenting life and kind of make that even larger of a struggle.

So for practitioners, specifically, I guess I do always like to come back to the idea of family life education. And I know that family life educators, we are specifically trained to recognize some of those challenges and help them work through how they can work together as a co-parenting team, but also just highlighting the communication. And not just communication between the couple, but the communication between the parent and child system and the sibling systems, as well, as you brought up earlier. Those sub-systems of siblings working together.

All of that, when you benefit the communication and those conflict management skills, it's going to benefit the family overall. And so I think practitioners, if they are seeing those sorts of challenges and if they're able to ask kind of questions about have you noticed any changes in your couple relationship, do you feel like you're experiencing some strain, then if there are some resources that can be provided to them so that they know that they're not alone.

And I think that that was something that came up a lot with foster parents not necessarily recognizing that other parents were having the same challenges. And I think if they can realize that they're not alone in this, this is a typical feeling to have and to experience that strain, but that there are resources out there to support them, or trainings that could be beneficial.

I also wanted to mention, earlier I mentioned the guardian ad litem program. And I think that that's really important here in North Carolina. It's an advocate for the family who is a trained community volunteer who is appointed by a district court judge to investigate and kind of determine the needs of the children that are in the court system.

And their responsibility specifically includes monitoring, looking for details about the case, collaborating with all of the people who are involved in the case. Writing up court reports to make recommendations about what's best for the child. And so their main goal is really to empower the child. And because they serve as kind of this link between all of the pieces, foster parents find them to be a really useful support as well.

And I would say that sometimes just having that useful support, or someone who is really looking into and monitoring all of the pieces and understanding what's happening in all the different systems can notice if there is a significant challenge that needs to be addressed before it becomes a problem or spills over into a parenting.

Robyn Cenizal:

Excellent point, thank you. And of course, with family life education, we do know that all parents have struggles sometimes and there's always strain on relationships. Parenting and finances are the top two stressors that impact all families, so we know that it can be compounded in this type of dynamic. And so we've talked about the dynamic of foster parents and we've talked a little bit about relative placement.

But one of the questions that has come in is about siblings fostering siblings. And the question is, can siblings foster their siblings? We know that the answer is yes. And the age requirements for that vary from state to state based on different issues associated with the situation.

But I was wondering if anyone could contribute to this in terms of are there resources that speak to this? Because this is kind of a novel situation. You're not going from an adult in the child's life to being a parent, like an aunt or an uncle, but you're their older brother or older sister and now you are the parent, so to speak, in this foster arrangement. Anybody want to jump in and offer some thoughts on that? Kary, why don't we start with you? Are you on mute?

Kary James:

I am, I'm sorry. Just trying to get myself off in a timely fashion. Okay, can you repeat the question for me, Robyn?

Robyn Cenizal:

So the question came into about sibling fostering siblings. And so we've talked a little bit about relative placement, but it's typically a relative who is an adult, already an adult figure in the child's life, an aunt, an uncle, whatever it is, already coming from that position of authority. But when it's a sibling, there's some other transitions that are going on. You're no longer my older brother; you're now basically my parent. Are you familiar with any resources that speak specifically to that kind of dynamic?

Kary James:

Another good question. Again, not a specific resource, but I'm going to stay with my consistent answer, which is let's check the Gateway for a search feature. You

know, a lot of times local agencies, public agencies, particularly those that are your foster care programs, your training programs, should have resources for this type of situation.

If they don't, again, going to Gateway, contacting one of our librarians or one of our social workers that support our 1-800 line can help do some of the digging if these are particular concerns or challenges that foster families, siblings serving as providers, the [unintelligible].

Robyn Cenizal:

Okay, great. All right, so we touched on this a little earlier. I mentioned that the Resource Center offers a lot of stakeholder specific and culturally responsive resources. And so one question came in about how can we support foster parents who are fostering children from different culture, religion, socio-economic status, et cetera.

And so the first response to that would be that if you were not of that same background, that finding out as much as you can about that culture would be the first step. And so we do have some resources related to that. And I know that around the country most of the time an effort is made to place children in foster homes that are similar.

And I know especially if we are talking about a tribal community, there's a requirement to target families of the same tribe or a tribe to place children with. I know that there are some efforts that are made around that. But definitely, as we've also heard our presenters mention, there's not enough foster parents to go around.

I mean, as we heard earlier, there are almost half a million children in care and we don't have enough foster parents to go around. So I would also, as we think about these questions, also think about opportunities and opportunities to educate and share information about the importance of fostering and getting involved and volunteering as foster parents or guardian ad litem or some of the other volunteer opportunities that are associated with supporting children who are in the system. So would certainly encourage that.

And let's see, I'm going to do one more question and then I think we're about ready to wrap up. Here's another question about resources or curriculum available specifically addressing foster parents caring for pregnant or parenting teens. So not only do you have a teen, but you also have a teen who is either pregnant or has a child already. Oriana, do you want to weigh in on that one?

Oriana Carey:

I am going to say some of what, I would think that in the search feature that the Child Information Gateway has, that there would be some. I think I'm aware that there are some states that are doing that. What we're seeing more and more around here is those are some really specific licensing kind of circumstances.

You know, have we worked with and then we have talked with families who have done that successfully? Yes. I think it is often, I know one family in particular where it worked really well where mom off and on had some challenges and really a very unique situation. That family now has joint custody with mom and so that child has not lost either her birth mom or a very strong support system.

But that takes a really creative court system that's really willing to work together. I think the challenge there is both parties. I mean, we're talking about a teenager or a young adolescent who often there are lots of trust issues that go into placement. And that's what we see in families who have to really work through that process with them.

But I think matched well, matched well with foster and adoptive families who know how to balance out sort of that keeping it structured, but helping mom work on her life skills at the same time is what really helps. But I would say as far as curriculum and resources, I am sure, I don't know off the top of my head of the countless places I've been, I know there is someone in this country that has. And I'm assuming that some of Kary's operators, as well as some of our staff, could help locate that.

Robyn Cenizal:

Awesome. And Jacquelyn, I know that you've had some focus in the past on teens who are parenting. Perhaps you'd like to jump in on this one?

Jacquelyn Mallette:

Yeah, it's interesting that you say that, actually, but that is the goal for my next round of research. So I am, I feel like I am not quite positive what to say yet about what's already been done. I know that this is an area where research has lagged behind. But it is something that I really am interested in getting into. And so that is going to be, after I finish this round of focus groups and trainings, I want to move in that direction. So stay tuned, I guess.

Robyn Cenizal:

All right, we will do that, we will stay tuned. So I want to thank our presenters again for the wonderful information and massive amounts of information that you shared. I want to give you each just a minute for any final thoughts. We'll go ahead and start with Jacquelyn since you're off mute.

Jacquelyn Mallette:

I want to thank everyone that is here listening today. This is such a valuable and often disregarded part of research, sort of understanding the needs of the foster parents. And I feel like often we focus a lot on all of the pieces around it, but not necessarily what the foster parents are needing. And I feel like that is, it is gaining attention and I really appreciate that.

So I want to thank the other presenters, as well as the people who are listening today and I am looking forward to continuing to collaborate and trying to get more research out there.

Robyn Cenizal:

Thanks. Oriana, final thoughts?

Oriana Carey:

I would echo what Jacquelyn said as well. I want to thank everybody for tuning in today. This is extremely important. We often say here recruitment is retention and so we need people to retain families. And also, again, compliments to both of my co-presenters and all of the information that you provided as well.

You can always reach out to our organization at any time and ask questions. We do take a lot of them from across the country. And very similar to what Kary said, if we can't answer it, we'll try to connect you with someone who can.

Robyn Cenizal:

Awesome, thanks. Kary, how about you?

Kary James:

I, again, would also like to echo the comments of my colleagues, my other presenters today. I think, this is a final take-away. While we've talked a lot about the challenges, resources, supports needed for foster families, for adoptive families, I am a parent and the reality is that parenting is hard. Parenting is just hard and there is no manual for that. Every day, I have two children, I have a 16 year old and I have a 13 year old. And there was really no guide book ever provided.

And we do the best that we can with the information that we have. But truly for me, both when my children were young and now that I have two teenagers on my hands, it is about the village, it is about the community and being able to tap all of

the resources that I have available to me to support parenting these young people that I have is important.

And I think that that is truly the same spirit, the same energy and the same way that we need to support our foster families, our adoptive families, our kinship families. [Break in audio]

Robyn Cenizal:

We're losing you, Kary.

Kary James:

Please reach out to us at the Child Welfare Information Gateway if we are able to be a resource to you all in any way. Back to you, Robyn.

Robyn Cenizal:

Thank you. And just a reminder, in the Downloadable Resources you have a PDF document called Speaker Bios which feature more information about all of the presenters here today and their contact info, as well as some other resources that are there that may be of interest to you. And the web links in the top right box, I think you'll find them all to be useful resources.

And on behalf of the Resource Center, we really appreciate you joining us today and hope you'll take advantage of our website and the virtual library. And again, if you go to the library and can't find something, we do have staff that can support you in looking for it, or helping you find it on one of the other sites, if that's what it takes.

So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Jackie for the final logistics. And again, thank you all for joining us today.

Jackie Rhodes:

Thanks, Robyn and thank you all so much for your expertise and willingness to share with us today. As the webinar concludes, there will be a brief survey that pops up on your screen. Please remember to provide your feedback using the survey as it helps us with planning for future webinars.

Once you complete the survey, you'll be able to access your certificate of completion for attending this webinar. And the survey link will also be sent out via email following the webinar in case you don't get it.

If you have any additional questions, you can send them to info@healthymarriageandfamilies.org. And to check out more of our resources

and information, you can go to our website at
www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org. Thank you all for joining us today.