

A Qualitative Study: Exploring the Connection Between
Therapeutic Foster Parent Training and Placement Disruption

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Abstract

Each year close to 500,000 children spend time in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). According to Leathers et al. (2019), 18.9% of children who enter care experience two different placements in their first 18 months after entering foster care, while 64% of children who stay in care for 24 months or longer experience three or more placements. Many placement disruptions occur because therapeutic foster parents feel they lack the training needed to support the children in their care. This study aimed to answer the following research question: What trainings result in positive fostering outcomes for therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington? Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) sets the framework for the implementation of this study. A total of eight foster parents participated in the study through in-depth interviews. Results showed that in addition to Caregiver Core Training, therapeutic foster parents should receive training on dealing with the police, human trafficking survivor training, de-escalation training, and trauma informed training. Having adequate supports, including training, can lead to a stable placement for the children in foster care rather than a placement disruption.

Keywords: therapeutic foster parents, placement disruption, foster care, training, supports

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Dedication

To my siblings Jr, Sandra, Jorge, Oscar

To my parents Martin and Martha

To my grandparents Rodolfo and Trinidad

In memory of my mentor Dr. Elena Pereyra (Dr. P). Although she was my inspiration to pursue my doctoral degree, she was unable to see my graduation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a job where the employee is expected to be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The employee must be available at a moment's notice, whether at three in the morning, six in the evening, or at midnight. Responsibilities for this job consist of scheduling appointments, arranging meetings, and ensuring that all paperwork and documentation is done accurately and on time. Also, this employee manages one or more people and is responsible for implementing complicated plans that require coordination with others in the office and with others outside the organization. The employee must attend weekly and monthly meetings to update the progress of the projects and assignments they are currently working on. In total, the employee only receives twenty-four hours of training with an orientation and is expected to perform their job without any violation of any number of rules and regulations. Each year, the employee is expected to complete thirty additional hours of training on their own time to be able to keep their job. The employee is not paid hourly or salary but receives a monthly reimbursement. This job comes with no health insurance, no life insurance, no retirement plan, and no dental insurance.

This is precisely the position of a foster parent. As a current therapeutic foster parent, I know that the work is challenging and emotionally and physically draining. Being a foster parent is not easy. It takes a lot of energy, mental strength, patience, and determination; most importantly, one must be warm and loving no matter who the child¹ is. My partner and I are responsible for our foster teen's health and well-being, attending weekly and monthly meetings with the case

¹ For the rest of the dissertation, child is used as an all-encompassing term that includes infants, children, and youth in foster care.

manager, social worker, attorney, and guardian ad litem. In addition, with the COVID-19² pandemic, we were entirely responsible for the schooling of our foster teenager. Even though foster parents receive a monthly stipend, the stipend is small and only meant to cover the expenses for that month for the child.

Foster Care in the United States

Each year close to 500,000 children spend time in foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). The child welfare system is a group of public and private services focused on ensuring that all children live in safe, permanent, and stable environments that support their well-being (Hamm, 2004). In 2017, about 45% of an estimated 442,995 children lived in non-relative foster family homes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Foster care is a temporary arrangement in which adults provide for the care of a child whose birth parent or guardian is unable to meet the physiological and/or safety needs (Hamm, 2004; Redding et al., 2000). The different types of foster care placements include non-relative homes, relative homes, therapeutic foster homes, group homes, residential facilities, emergency shelters, receiving care facilities, and pre-adoptive homes (Behrman, 2004).

The current child welfare system and foster care in the United States have evolved over the years. Much of the changes over the years have been influenced by changing social attitudes towards children and more awareness of child neglect and abuse. According to Pine and Drachman (2005), the history of foster care began in the 1850s when approximately 30,000 orphaned, abandoned, and homeless children lived in the streets of New York City. In 1853, Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society in New York and initiated a family-

² COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease that spreads from person to person caused by a virus resulting in an ongoing pandemic.

focused system of foster care placements (Harris, 2014). A program was started to place homeless children throughout the U.S., and the children were transported to their new homes on trains, which became known as the orphan trains (Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013). Children who lived in the streets of New York City were transported by train to live with Midwest families. Families in the Midwest took care of them, and in return, the children helped on the family farm. The experience of being removed from their families and sent to live with a family they did not know caused severe emotional problems for the children (Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013). Some of the children experienced abuse in their new homes and needed social and emotional support later in life, while others led productive lives (Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013). The orphan train movement and mass relocation of children was the beginning of what we now know as the foster care system in the United States.

Children in foster care come from many diverse families and backgrounds between the ages of birth and 18. According to Morgan-Hewitt et al. (2013), a child enters the foster care system after a report is filed with Child Protective Services (CPS). CPS will investigate and determine if it is in the child's best interest to stay in the home or be removed from the home. The average age of children entering foster care is eight years old and the average stay in foster care is two years (Roman, 2016). However, for African American/Black children, the average stay in foster care is nine months longer than two years (Government Accountability Office, 2007). During this time, biological parents or guardians work to complete the services that will allow the child to return home. Reunification is the goal of foster care. More than half of the children in foster care return to their birth parents or guardians, but if reunification is not possible, the child becomes eligible for adoption (Roman, 2016).

When a child comes into foster care, federal law, The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, mandates that a search be done to see if the child has relatives who can provide a safe and secure home for the child (Murray & Gesiriech, 2004). If a child does not have relatives or if the relatives are unable to provide a safe and secure home for the child, the child is placed in non-relative foster care (Murray & Gesiriech, 2004). It is estimated that at least 30% of all children in foster care need social and emotional support (Craven & Lee, 2006). As the number of children in need of social and emotional support entering the foster care system increases, a need for more foster parents who can effectively provide therapeutic home environments for these children is needed. Therapeutic foster care (TFC)³ models are specifically designed to serve children in foster care who often require significant therapeutic intervention.

The number of children in need of social and emotional support who enter the foster care system has increased since the establishment of the therapeutic foster care programs in the 1970s (Haugaard & Hazan, 2002). Therapeutic foster parents are responsible for the safety and well-being of children who often have a high level of need and may be resistant to change as opposed to traditional foster parents who care for children with a lower level of needs.

Therapeutic Foster Care

Since the 1970s, therapeutic foster care (TFC) is used as an alternative form of care for children in need of social and emotional support or who have medical needs (Walter et al., 2003). TFC, also known as "treatment foster care," "family-based treatment," or "specialized foster care" is out-of-home care provided to children by foster parents with specialized training (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Specialized training looks different for each

³ For the rest of the dissertation, descriptions of therapeutic foster care and traditional foster care are used interchangeably.

therapeutic foster parent. Each foster parent chooses what type of training they want to sign up for based on their needs or the child's needs in their care. Foster parents in TFC settings act both as foster parents and front-line professionals (Farmer & Lippold, 2016). Sheras (2011) describes the difference between traditional foster care and therapeutic foster care:

TFC is distinguished from traditional foster care not only in that it specifically targets and serves children who need social and emotional support, but also because (a) it focuses on rehabilitation of the clients rather than maintenance of their behaviors; (b) it implements specialized, developmentally-appropriate treatment plans for children in foster care; and (c) it stresses active participation of the foster parents with the treatment team (p.3).

TFC programs vary widely in terms of theoretical models and methods of implementation. In general, TFC programs in the United States typically share seven things in common:

(1) Care is provided within a family setting, (2) the program targets children with social and emotional needs otherwise placed in more restrictive settings, (3) the program is committed to individualize and community-based treatment, (4) foster care providers are specially trained and members of the treatment team, (5) providers usually care for no more than one or two TFC children and receive ongoing support and training, (6) caseworkers' caseloads are limited to eight children, and (7) TFC families are reimbursed at higher rates than general foster care (Walter et al., 2003, p.i).

Initially intended as a short-term transitional placement, TFC programs serve as a step-down placement for children leaving more restrictive settings such as juvenile justice centers or psychiatric hospitals, or as a step-up for those not able to be served effectively in traditional foster care (Reddy & Pfeiffer, 1997; Walter et al., 2003). There are no national standards of care

for TFC programs. However, agencies like Foster-Family Based Treatment Association (FFTA) have developed their own set of guidelines and policies currently used in several states across the country (Walter et al., 2003).

One of the biggest problems in TFC programs is the recruitment and retention of foster parents. Therapeutic foster parents' retention rate is low, and often time foster parents stop fostering soon after a foster child is placed in their home. Two reasons why foster parents decide to stop fostering are due to not being prepared to foster and the stresses that come with caring for children in foster care (Rhodes et al., 2001). When therapeutic placements of children in need of social and emotional support fail, the children are shifted from one home to another without the opportunity to experience permanence or emotional attachment, resulting in a poor adjustment to foster care (Redding et al., 2000; Rosenfeld et al., 1997). This issue of recruitment and retention in the foster care system is not uncommon. In another study by Farmer et al. (2002), 78% of the foster care agencies that participated in the study reported having difficulties recruiting and retaining foster parents. This is attributed to the criteria that foster care agencies set for potential foster parents like meet an age requirement, pass a background check, complete pre-service training, complete an in-home study, and be financially and emotionally stable.

Statement of Problem

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) programs have positively affected different aspects of children's experiences in care like negative behavior, social skills, and self-esteem (Farmer et al., 2004; Reddy & Pfeiffer, 1997). One area where little to no impact has been made in therapeutic foster homes has been on placement disruption (Walter et al., 2003). Children in foster care enter new home environments with no guarantees that they will stay for an extended period. According to Leathers et al. (2019), 18.9% of children who enter care experience two different

placements in their first 18 months after entering foster care, while 64% of children who stay in care for 24 months or longer experience three or more placements. Most disruptions occur within the first six months at the rate of anywhere between 38% to 70% (Walter et al., 2003). Teenager girls have the highest placement disruption at 55%, followed by older boys at 12.7% (Walter et al., 2003). Most placement disruptions occur due to the social and emotional support the child needs and the lack of attachment between foster parents and the foster child.

Although issues that pose too high of a risk to others in the home like property destruction and physical aggression of the child may play a factor in placement disruptions, research shows that the primary reason placement disruptions occur is because foster parents feel they cannot meet the needs of the child in their care (Leathers et al., 2019). According to Leathers et al. (2019), 83.3% of placement moves of children in care occur at the request of the foster parents, suggesting that foster parents' parenting experiences are a critical indicator of placement disruption. A significant retention factor in therapeutic foster parenting is training. Notably, many placement disruptions occur because therapeutic foster parents feel they lack the training needed to support the child in their care (Grant et al., 2015).

While all foster parenting has its challenges, therapeutic foster parents experience an even higher level of stress, pressure, and anxiety that may interfere with their parenting capacity and increase placement disruption (Farmer Lipscombe & Moyers, 2005). All foster parents, including therapeutic foster parents, receive the same pre-service training before becoming licensed and are required to continue receiving training each year (Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, n.d.). Once licensed, each foster parent selects the training they want to receive to meet the required training hours each year. No specific training or opportunities is required for therapeutic foster parents; therefore, training experiences vary from

foster parent to foster parent. The experiences of therapeutic foster parents have gone largely unexplored. Most research focusing on the connection between foster parent training and placement disruption of foster parents has been done with “regular” foster parents (Tullberg et al., 2019). Very little information exists on the connection between therapeutic foster parent training and placement disruption of children in care.

Study Rationale and Significance of the Study

Foster parents play a critical role in the foster care system. Without foster parents, many children would not have a home to go to. With the percentage of children in foster care increasing by 11.6 percent between 2012 and 2017, the demand for traditional and therapeutic foster parents has also increased (Meinhofer & Angleró-Díaz, 2019). Therapeutic foster parent retention is low, while placement disruption for children in foster care is high. Most research focusing on the foster parent training and placement disruption of foster parents has been done with traditional foster parents (Tullberg et al., 2019). Research also shows that the majority of placement disruptions occur at the request of foster parents. This is a concern given the association between foster parent training and placement disruption. Establishing personalized support through training that is helpful for therapeutic foster parents and matches the needs of the foster child in their home can have a positive effect (Cooley & Petren, 2011). As a result, the number of placement disruptions that children in care experience might decrease while retaining therapeutic foster parents. More research needs to be done to understand the connection between therapeutic foster parent training and placement disruption.

Study Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to understand the connection between the training that therapeutic foster parents receive and placement disruption. In particular, this study focuses on

therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington. The goal is to provide recommendations to foster care agencies looking to retain skilled therapeutic foster parents and increase the stability of children's experience in therapeutic foster care placements. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) sets the framework for the implementation of this study.

This research study addressed the following question:

- 1) What trainings result in positive fostering outcomes for therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington?

Definition of Terms

The following are conceptual definitions of terms utilized throughout this dissertation proposal:

Biological Parent: The birth mother or father of a child who retains legal parental rights until they get terminated through the court system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Behavioral Rehabilitation Services: A group of services designed to improve the lives of children and adolescents by providing behavioral intervention, counseling, and skills-training services (Oregon Department of Human Services, n.d.).

Child Welfare System: A group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families to care for their children successfully (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Extended Foster Care: A program that provides an opportunity for young adults who were a dependent of Washington State at age 18, to voluntarily agree to continue receiving foster care services, including placement services, while working on their goals towards independence (Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, n.d.-b).

Foster Care: All out-of-home placements for children who cannot reside with their biological parent(s) (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Foster Child: A child under state custody who has been removed from their biological parents because they are unsafe, abused, neglected, or their parents are unable to care for them (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Foster Parent: A licensed caregiver for a child who is a team member working to provide appropriate services and support to the child and the family of origin (Roman, 2016).

Kinship Care: Care of children provided by relatives or in some jurisdictions, close family friends (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Placements: The number of foster home placements the child has experienced since coming into care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Placement Disruption: A child's unplanned termination of care in the foster home or foster care setting can negatively affect the foster child (Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013).

Placement Stability: The foster child's emotional and behavioral stability in the foster care placement (Redding et al., 2000).

Traditional Foster Care: Out-of-home care by foster parents to care for children with no significant need for social and emotional support or who have no medical needs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC): Out-of-home care by foster parents with specialized training to care for a wide variety of children, usually those with a significant need for social and emotional support or who have medical needs (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Positionality

In this section, I will begin by describing the prime identities and intersections I bring as a researcher. I will then share the skills and resources I provide to leverage power and promote equity. I acknowledge my bias I bring as a researcher and foster parent. Next, I will describe my experience as a therapeutic foster parent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, I will conclude with my reciprocity statement for this study.

Prime Identities

My name, Emmanuel, comes from the bible, which means, "God is with us" ("Immanuel," 2020). I come from a family of bakers, my grandfather, uncle, and father are all bakers. I grew up living by the border between the United States and Mexico in El Paso, Texas. My parents emigrated from Mexico to have a better life and provide a better life for their children. Eating Mexican sweet bread, homemade tortillas, frijoles de la olla, and rice were part of my staple food growing up.

My memory of what family constitutes respect, patience, understanding, love, unity, and communication. However, it also consisted of depression, cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Growing up poor and not having much helped me appreciate what little we did have as a family. Seeing both my mother and father happy with each other under the same roof helped me see what a healthy and loving partnership looks like.

My identities of religion and sexual orientation intersect with where I am from. Religion played a significant part in my upbringing. However, the church took away many hours of spending time with my parents. My parents prioritized getting involved in the church over spending time as a family. As an openly gay man, my sexual orientation is not accepted under Catholicism. Hearing often that marriage is between a man and a woman and that same-sex relationships are wrong pushed me away from continuing to follow the only church I knew. It

was hard coming out knowing that my parents were devoted Catholics and may not accept who I was. As I reflect on my past, my family's support allowed me to be who I am. My current view about religion and sexual orientation is that no one should have to choose between one or the other, but instead, one should be able to embrace both identities. Now, as a non-practicing Catholic, I have found other ways to practice my spirituality.

My race/ethnicity of being a Latino (Mexican/American) is an identity that I had never had to think about before. Growing up in a majority Latinx community, I have never had to think about the impact of this socially constructed identity. It was not until I left for college in the Midwest when I began to encounter racism and began to understand that not everyone is treated the same. Since then, my understanding of race in America has changed. Being a gay Latino in the United States has affected me on different levels. I feel unsafe walking outside or entering places I do not know. I often think about how I would respond if I am confronted by racist and homophobic people today. Would I be able to stand up for myself, or for safety reasons, would I let it go and pretend it never happened? Would I also be able to stand up for someone else, particularly a child?

My intersectionality in identity has shaped my parenting style and the reasons why I am a foster parent. The family unit that I envision for myself is healthy, patient, communicative, understanding, and loving. This is what my partner and I try to model for all the children and youth who come and stay with us. Children need care and love. They enter foster care because their families are going through a crisis. Children are removed from their parents because they are unsafe, experience abuse and neglect, or are unable to adequately care for them (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). Many of the children and youth we cared for have never had a stable placement and have bounced from home to home.

In foster care, there are not many foster parents of color. An estimation of over half of the children entering foster care are non-white (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019). It was not until my partner and I became full-time foster parents that we began to see the impact race has on children of color. Both full-time placements that we have had have requested to have foster parents who were non-white. It was essential for both youths to have non-white foster parents because of white America's experiences as a youth of color.

Skills and Resources

The skills and resources I provide to leverage circuits of power and disrupt interlocking systems of oppression are best described using community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) describes community cultural capital as knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts that Communities of Color have and used to resist forms of oppression. The community's cultural capital consists of six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital is keeping hope and dreams alive. As foster parents, we often must remind ourselves why we decided to be foster parents, especially when things get complicated. Linguistically, I am bilingual and speak both Spanish and English. Familial capital comes from developing relationships with the team of folks most closely working with the youth in our care. This team often consists of the social worker, case manager, biological parents, and attorney. Although Yosso (2005) speaks about family to include extended family, I would say that family does not have to be blood related. Social capital, described as the network of people and resources a person has, is one of the most important capitals for foster parents. As a foster parent, I bring knowledge and experiences to other foster parents who are just starting in their journey of fostering. As one of the few foster parents of color, I serve as a resource for foster parents who have children of color placed in their homes. Navigational capital is having the skill to move

through social institutions not created for Communities of Color by Communities of Color. Over the years, I have learned how to maneuver through social institutions not created for people like me, such as higher education institutions and the foster care system. Finally, resistant, which refers to the knowledge and skills gained from challenging the status quo. One way I show resistance is by questioning why things are done the way they are. Often, the primary response I get is because we have always done it that way.

Acknowledging Bias

Admitting that one has biases is hard as all human beings have biases. Having biases does not make me a bad person. With biases, my goal is to become aware of my own biases, acknowledge them, and act from this awareness. I agreed to show up for this research because I assumed there was a need for literature about therapeutic foster parents' experiences. My experience as a therapeutic foster parent has been different from traditional foster parents. After talking to other therapeutic foster parents, I concluded that this research is necessary. Practical training for therapeutic foster parents needs further research. An assumption I have about therapeutic foster parents is that all therapeutic foster parents have the same parenting experiences and encounter the same barriers. Another primary assumption I am trying to move away from is having a deficit mindset of both foster parents and children in foster care. Assuming that both foster parents and children in care lack training, skills, and have negative behaviors. Finally, I have an assumption that foster parents are very busy and do not have time to spend helping me with my research.

COVID-19 Pandemic

As in-person support for foster parents moved to online support due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my partner and I have found ourselves in limbo. I had to adjust our work schedules to

meet the youth's needs in our care. I had to give up my full-time employment and settle for a part-time job. Training for foster parents delayed implementation until training modules transitioned to online. Our stress levels, pressures, and burnout have increased exponentially. We have had to take on additional roles as teachers, supervisors of virtual meetings, and manage a digression of social and emotional learning for our youth. Social justice is providing foster parents with the adequate support needed at the individual level during this pandemic.

Reciprocity Statement

This study provided a space for current therapeutic foster parents to inform future foster parents who are thinking about becoming foster parents about their foster parent experience. Additionally, this research will help inform foster care agencies looking to retain skilled therapeutic foster parents and increase the stability of children's experience in therapeutic foster care programs. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted foster parents. However, the foster care agencies and the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) have responded quickly to meet the needs of families. Nevertheless, returning to how things were before COVID-19 will be a long process. I hope that foster parents sharing training opportunities and resources that have helped them along their fostering journey can build a repertoire of shared training and resources for therapeutic foster parents. In the next section, I will describe the theory used in this study to examine the interrelations between a therapeutic foster parent and a child's development.

Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory guides this research study. Urie Bronfenbrenner, an American psychologist, developed the Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that individuals are a product of their environments in specific

their social environment. The social environment encompasses people, their cultures, institutions, and ideas. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), there are five interrelated systems; the influence of one system on a child's development depends on its relationship with the others. The ecological system focuses on person-environment exchanges, recognizes that many individuals and systems contribute to the challenges faced by children and families in the child welfare system, and emphasize the important relationship that occurs over time among these individuals and systems (Germain and Gitterman, 1996; Leon et al., 2008). Bronfenbrenner organized the five systems based on their impact on the developing child. The five environmental systems that help support and guide human growth consist of the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Appendix A).

Microsystem

The first ecological system is the microsystem. The microsystem is the smallest and most immediate environment in which the child lives and describes the individual's interpersonal relations, roles, and activities (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). Within the microsystem, a foster child is influenced by significantly more elements than children, not in care (Farineau, 2016). Understanding foster family support from the ecological perspective, Piel et al. (2016) states that the microsystem may include partners or spouses, children, close friends, extended families, child welfare workers, and for some families, people connected to them through faith organizations. Individuals in the microsystem can both influence and be influenced. For example, a child in foster care is not only influenced by their biological family but also by their foster family. One of the most critical relationships to consider for children in the foster care system is the relationship with foster parents. Concerning displacement, research shows that children placed in the care of foster parents who are perceived as stable and emotionally

involved are less likely to have a failed placement (Redding et al., 2000). Several different factors contribute to the success of a positive placement. Placing children in foster care with poorly trained foster parents has been linked to higher placement disruption (Richardson et al., 2018).

Mesosystem

The second ecological system is the mesosystem. The mesosystem is the linkages and direct interactions between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). The mesosystem is especially important for therapeutic foster parents. It is here where the relationships foster parents make with others and the personalized training therapeutic foster parents receive can affect the outcome of the child in their care and their retention as foster parents. These interactions can be healthy or unhealthy and either promote improved functioning or inhibit it. This is especially relevant to children in foster care who have various microsystems that can either work collaboratively to create placement stability or create conflict that can result in placement disruption (Farineau, 2016). Richardson et al. (2018) believe that even though the interaction between the microsystems as a whole is important, the interactions between individuals and organizations play a crucial role in stability. For example, the case manager and social worker of the child must interact with both the birth parents and the foster parents to schedule meetings and visitations. Another example is the goals developed for a child in care; these goals can greatly vary based on the perspective of the biological parents, foster parents, case manager, and social worker. How these different microsystems of the child interact can significantly influence their outcomes in the child welfare system.

Exosystem

The third ecological system is the exosystem. The exosystem refers to the relationships between two or more settings, one of which may not contain the developing child but can indirectly impact them (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). The exosystem highlights the importance of therapeutic foster parents' experiences with the social-support network outside the immediate family (e.g., extended family, friends, and neighbors), which can affect their relationship with their children (Hong et al., 2011). The exosystem for a foster child is very similar to that of a child not in foster care. However, the foster child's exosystem is often complicated by policies that impact placement, reunification, multiple neighborhoods, and other factors within the foster care system (Richardson et al., 2018). These settings can have a significant impact on the child's life and well-being, even though the child may not be directly involved with those systems. For example, the foster parents' work affects how much free time they have and their well-being, consequently impacting the child's development.

Macrosystem

The fourth ecological system is the macrosystem. It is the largest system that contains all the distant people and places that significantly affect the child. The macrosystem takes into account the overarching culture or subculture that provides the defined beliefs, norms, values, and customs of the system (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). What happens in the macrosystem affects the practices that occur within the microsystem. The macrosystem of the foster family consists of the political, economic, and social climate of the community, the child welfare agency, and the state and federal level climates (Piel et al., 2016). For example, placement in foster care often has a negative stigma in our society that sometimes influences the foster child's opinion of themselves.

Chronosystem

The fifth ecological system is the chronosystem. The chronosystem encompasses change over time and constancy in the children's environment, including the socio-historical events (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). For children in foster care, time spent in care and their past experiences impact their development. Their past experiences, including maltreatment, birth parent history, and previous placement disruptions, impact future placement stability (Carnochan et al., 2013).

Synthesis

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1979, 1994) provides a look at the social system that influences the child's development. Children in foster care are influenced by multiple relationships within the ecological system, both directly and indirectly. One of the most significant relationships for children in care is that of a child-foster parent relationship. Foster parents can significantly influence their child's development. Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as a theoretical framework, this study will seek to understand the training that results in positive fostering outcomes for therapeutic foster parents that decrease placement disruption. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, previous research studies and literature reviews are explored to examine the dynamics of therapeutic foster parent training and its association with placement disruption.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Children in foster care typically experience several placements within their first two years of care. One major reason therapeutic foster parents initiate a placement change is because they feel inadequate in their role as foster parents due to the lack of training. Being a foster parent can be a complicated, complex, and challenging thing to do. This study aimed to answer the following research question: What trainings result in positive fostering outcomes for therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington? Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the following literature review will first discuss the experiences of therapeutic foster parents. Second, I will discuss placement stability and placement disruption on the child's development in care. Finally, I discuss what research says about foster parent training and placement disruption. The review concludes with a synthesis and critique of existing literature.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

Foster parents provide a range of services to children in care that are critical to their long-term development and well-being. Farmer and Lippold (2016) looked at the role therapeutic foster parents play in the child's life. Foster parents of 247 children in care participated in the study, with 88% of therapeutic foster parents reporting high levels of satisfaction with the supervision and support from their TFC agency. Therapeutic foster parents must play both the foster parent and the treatment professional. All children need social and emotional support as they grow. Farmer and Lippold (2016) study concluded that the role of the foster parent is to provide discipline, structure, a nurturing environment, and maintain a close, accepting, and supportive foster parent-child relationship to encourage both short-term and long-term success.

Additionally, most therapeutic foster parents from the study saw their role more as a parent figure than as a treatment professional.

With no set guidelines on how to parent, foster parents must learn as they go. Some foster parents bring their own experience from parenting their children, while others have had no previous parenting experience. Foster parents are often confronted with different requests regarding caring for children in foster care, which they may not expect or be ready for without the proper training, support, or intervention. Due to the demands of balancing their personal lives while still being foster parents, foster parents may experience adverse outcomes. Previous research has shown that both traditional and therapeutic foster parents have identified that foster care agencies provide inadequate assistance, support, and information (Cooley et al., 2017; Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013; Tullberg et al., 2019). Other foster parents report that they feel undervalued or not part of the team by child welfare workers and foster care agencies (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Daniel, 2011).

Furthermore, therapeutic foster parents have also had a negative experience with transitions. These transitions not only impact the children's development, but they can also impact the foster parents. Transitions can occur in many ways. Some transitions occur when agency staff leaves the agency or change positions within the same agency. This type of transition can ultimately leave the foster parent feeling alone; meanwhile, the child is left to restart the process of getting to know and building a trusting relationship all over again with someone new (Tullberg et al., 2019). Another major form of transition is when a foster child is removed from a home and placed in another home. This transition leaves the foster parents heartbroken and the child who was removed with many emotions.

More often than not, therapeutic foster parents do not receive complete information about the child being placed in their care. Foster parents often take placements without complete information about the behavioral, social, emotional, or medical health needs of the child coming into their home (Tullberg et al., 2019). This is difficult for foster parents because it does not allow them to prepare themselves or their home for their new placement often. These types of placements can often lead to another placement disruption.

Placement Stability and Placement Disruption

Children enter the foster care system for many reasons. Child abuse, parent incarceration, illness, or death of a parent are reasons why a child enters foster care (Harmon, 2016). The primary reason is child neglect because many parents have substance abuse problems (Harmon, 2016). For these reasons, placement stability is important for children in foster care for their appropriate emotional and psychological development. When children are placed in a new home, they are never guaranteed a length of time in the home. As previously mentioned, children in foster care typically experience multiple placements. More often than not, foster parents are the ones to initiate the process for a placement move. One reason parents initiate a placement removal is because of the difficulties with parenting children across different age groups. A study by Leathers et al. (2019) found that some parents can adapt better than others to their parenting to meet the child's social and emotional needs. Transitions in general, whether agency staff, social workers, or placement, can be a factor in placement disruptions. Therapeutic foster parents in a study by Tullberg et al. (2019), said that transitions are difficult for them and agreed that more structured, consistent communication and support are needed during transitions.

Sometimes foster parents may decide to not only terminate the placement but decide to terminate their foster license. This usually occurs with very new foster parents after their first

placement (Roman, 2016). New foster parents may not be aware of how much support they will need as a foster parent or what resources are available until their first placement. Although the literature suggests that most placement disruption occurs in the first six months, one study done by Tunno et al. (2015) found that the disruption placement rate was below average. Possible explanations for this were the improved placement stability for children in care, the efforts to look at the child's individual needs, and match that to the correct type of placement to enhance placement stability. Finally, the children's division of the state of Missouri has placed stricter guidelines on the placement of a child with a relative vs. a non-relative as part of assessing their behavioral and emotional needs.

Training of Foster Parents

A foster parent is a caregiver for the child. Foster parents are also members of a team working to provide appropriate services and support to the child and the biological parents or guardians (Roman, 2016). The foster parent's role is to provide discipline and structure to encourage both short-term and long-term success. Foster parents should provide the child with relational support such as a nurturing environment and maintaining a close, welcoming, and supportive parent-child relationship as well as help them navigate developmental tasks (Farmer & Lippold, 2016).

Training for therapeutic foster parents can cover an array of topics such as documenting, grief and loss, and behavior management. The content and focus of these training vary across each state, and research varies regarding the effectiveness of this training. Training can help foster parents manage the social and emotional needs of the foster child, avoid stress and burnout, and help provide coping skills during difficult times to maintain placement stability. It can also help foster parents with relationship building and understanding laws and child welfare

policies. Training provides foster parents with knowledge, skills, support, and connections to other foster parents (Grant et al., 2015). Additionally, training can help provide a better match between foster parents and children in foster care. Most importantly, foster parent training can reduce placement disruption, help prevent foster parent burnout, and help improve relationships between foster parents and children in care (Morgan-Hewitt et al., 2013). This is important because therapeutic foster parent retention needs to increase to keep up with the increasing number of children in need of social and emotional support entering the foster care system.

Although the importance of training has been documented, there is little knowledge about what constitutes the best training for therapeutic foster parents. In a study by Cooley et al. (2017), therapeutic foster parents believed that training is necessary to understand their role as foster parents; the training they received was insufficient and did not prepare them for the challenges they faced as a therapeutic foster parent. Findings from another study by Tullberg et al. (2019) revealed that therapeutic foster parents would like to receive more support from the agencies and their peers. While some studies show that foster parent training positively impacts their fostering experiences, other studies like Tunno et al. (2015) have concluded that foster parent training does not make a difference in placement disruptions.

To take on the role of a foster parent, foster parents must first meet a set of criteria. Foster care agencies are required to prepare parents for fostering adequately. Generally, to become a licensed foster parent, eligible adults must have a home safety check, an interview, pass a criminal background check for all individuals who are 17-years and older living in the household, and complete pre-service licensure training (Missouri Alliance, 2012). To retain the foster parent license, foster parents must complete ongoing training. For example, in Washington State, foster parents must complete 24 hours of pre-service training before becoming a licensed

foster parent and must complete 90 hours of ongoing training during the first 3-year licensing period (Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families, n.d.-a).

Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training refers to the required classes that individuals must complete to become foster parents. These courses are required to take to have a better understanding of what the child in foster care has been through and how to welcome them into the family. Pre-service training courses consist of orientation, Caregiver Core Training, first aid/CPR, and bloodborne pathogens. They are taken right before, or at the same time, future foster parents complete their application. Pre-service training helps future foster parents decide if they want to be foster parents or not. In general, Caregiver Core Training can take up to 24 hours to complete and can take anywhere from two to ten sessions to complete. Pre-service training is also an excellent opportunity to meet and build relationships with other families who are becoming foster parents.

Synthesis

The ecological system theory helps analyze how therapeutic foster parents influence the child's development at each level of the ecological systems theory. The literature review explores different aspects of therapeutic foster care, including the experience of being a therapeutic foster parent, the effect of placement stability and displacement for foster parents and children in care, and what therapeutic foster parents are saying about foster parent training. This literature supports the idea that placement stability is connected to foster parent training; however, it fails to distinguish between traditional and therapeutic foster parents. Another gap in the literature is a qualitative analysis research approach of therapeutic foster parents. Most research that exists has been done using surveys to gather data from a bigger sample size. Early studies in the area (Rhodes et al., 2001; Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008) generally concluded that retention and

recruitment of foster parents are connected to foster parent training. As Tullberg et al. (2019) pointed out, however, these studies all failed to distinguish between traditional foster parents and therapeutic foster parents, and thus their conclusion is suspect. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, an articulation of the selected methodology for this dissertation is provided.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the connection between the training that therapeutic foster parents receive and placement disruption. Identifying training that would benefit therapeutic foster parents to have a more positive fostering experience is critical in retaining and recruiting therapeutic foster parents. The aim is to provide recommendations to foster care agencies looking to retain skilled foster parents and increase the quality and stability of children's experience in TFC programs. In the following section, I will discuss the research design and approach, including the research question and justifications for my choices. Next, I will discuss the following: the participants and sampling procedure, the protection of human subjects, data collection, and data analysis.

Qualitative Methods

To adequately tell the stories of therapeutic foster parents from their perspective, a qualitative research methodology was needed for this study. Stories of traditional foster parents make up the master narratives for the experiences of all foster parents. To understand therapeutic foster parents' experiences, it is important for me to do in-depth individual interviews. Qualitative interviews allow the researcher to conduct individual interviews with a small number of six to eight participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, qualitative interviews allow semi-structured, open-ended questions that guide the interview and elicit views and opinions from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To gain a better understanding of therapeutic foster parents' experiences in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington, I have selected a qualitative analysis research approach.

Justification of Methods

I chose a qualitative analysis research approach because I was interested in doing in-depth interviews. Qualitative research allowed me to work with a small sample size while still getting rich qualitative in-depth data. To make sure that each participant's voice was heard, I decided to do individual interviews instead of group interviews. The small sample size and geographic location of the sample were limitations of the study; consequently, the results are not generalizable to foster parents in other counties in Washington State nor foster parents in other states in the United States.

Study Design and Research Methods

This qualitative study is a study of in-depth interviews of therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington. The central question guiding this study is: What trainings result in positive fostering outcomes for therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington? The central question that aligns with the qualitative analysis research approach seeks to understand human relations. It relates directly to the lived experience of therapeutic foster parents and is an open-ended question. I submitted this research proposal to the Institutional Research Board (IRB) for approval before beginning the study. A total of eight in-depth interviews were conducted with therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic occurring in 2020, modifications to the study design were needed to meet the guidelines for COVID-19.

Participants in this study were voluntarily recruited using online Facebook groups created for Skagit and Whatcom County foster parents and by snowball sampling. The Facebook groups were an easy way to reach many therapeutic foster parents throughout Skagit and Whatcom County licensed by agencies in the county. An announcement was created about the study and posted for group members to volunteer to participate. Permission to post the announcement in

the group was obtained from the administrator of the Foster Parent Exchange Skagit and Whatcom County Facebook groups.

Agencies that licensed therapeutic foster homes in Skagit and Whatcom County were contacted by email to help recruit therapeutic foster parents. Agencies were asked to contact their licensed therapeutic foster parents that met the inclusion criteria directly by email. Interested participants were asked to fill out an online form to ascertain demographic information and responses to inclusion criteria questions that determined their eligibility for participation in the study (see Appendix B). If the participants met the inclusion criteria for the study, they were contacted by me, via email, with information about the 90-minute in-depth interview. A copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) and semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix D) were also sent by email ahead of their scheduled interview. Participants were asked to email back a signed copy of the informed consent form before their scheduled interview and were encouraged to get in contact if they had any questions before signing the informed consent form. Participants in the study were asked for their preferred date and time for their interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were held via Zoom. Participants received a reminder a week before their scheduled interview and another reminder the day before their scheduled interview.

Before the 90-minute semi-structured interviews, a series of about 20 open-ended questions were prepared and piloted with friends to evaluate their feasibility. Not all interview questions were asked, nor were they asked in any particular order; instead, they were used to guide the conversation. The dissertation committee approved the interview protocol. I moderated the interviews, took notes, and wrote observations. The role of the researcher was clearly described for participants prior to starting each interview. The 90-minute in-depth interviews were video-

recorded. At the end of the study, participants received a \$50 gift card for taking the time to voluntarily participate in the research study.

The notes taken during the interviews were transcribed and the video recordings were transcribed and coded. Participants were presented with the qualitative findings before they were finalized to see whether they felt that they were accurate and deleted any information they did not want to include in the findings. Participants were given a copy of the dissertation.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of therapeutic foster parents who resided in Whatcom County, Washington, who had at least six months of fostering experience. The small sample size was chosen because it allowed for in-depth interviews to occur within the time constraint. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) must currently be or previously been a licensed foster parent in Washington State, (b) must currently or previously been part of a TFC program through a private agency that serves Skagit or Whatcom County, Washington, and (c) must have at least six months of experience fostering through a TFC program (see Appendix E).

Sampling Procedures

The sampling design for this population was a snowballing procedure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participants were voluntarily recruited using the online Foster Parent Exchange Skagit and Whatcom County Facebook groups created for Skagit and Whatcom County foster parents by Foster Hearts and by recommendation from existing participants. Also, agencies that license therapeutic foster homes in Skagit and Whatcom County were contacted to help recruit foster parents.

Protection of Human Subjects

To decrease ethical issues, I got IRB approval to be able to conduct this study. The purpose of the study, risks, benefits, and rights of human subjects was disclosed to the participants, and participants were not coerced to participate in this research study. Any foster parent who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study was given the opportunity to refuse to answer any questions during the interview or stop participation before completing the study without fear of any negative consequences. Since I was dealing with very sensitive information about foster parents' experiences, I built trust with the participants and informed them that all information provided during the interview process is confidential and will only be accessible to members of the dissertation committee. I video-recorded the in-depth interviews. Participants were asked to give their written consent for video-recorded interviews. All information was kept secured and destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Names and other personal identifying information were not used in the dissertation nor other reports about the study. Participant data files were assigned a unique number to protect confidentiality.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, data was analyzed using the five systems from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Participants received an informed consent form and a copy of the in-depth interview questions prior to conducting the interview via Zoom. Before conducting the interview, I answered any questions about the study and consent process, and had each participant sign a consent form. Participants were given a copy of their signed consent form. No identifying information was used in any research reports and or manuscripts written and submitted for publication.

During the interview, I asked the participants questions about their experience as foster parents. I facilitated the interviews, took notes, and video-recorded the interviews. The notes

were typed, and the video recordings were uploaded and transcribed by Zoom. The dissertation committee did peer debriefing and member checking to enhance the accuracy of the study.

University of Washington student email was utilized to share documents between the dissertation committee and I. Copies of all files were kept in an external hard drive. Participants were presented with the qualitative findings to check for accuracy. I used Microsoft Excel and Word to keep track of data and manually coded for understanding and emerging themes. All online data was kept stored in a computer that was password protected. All forms were kept in a locked file cabinet.

Synthesis

Using a qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to use a qualitative analysis research approach. This is important because qualitative analysis allows for a holistic picture of the foster parent training experience through interviews. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. This matters because the voices of therapeutic foster parents have mainly gone unexplored and often silenced by traditional foster parents' voices. I hope this study benefits therapeutic foster parents. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, the analysis of the data and the results of this study will be discussed.

Chapter 4: Therapeutic Foster Parents

The data collected for this study was derived from eight interviews with therapeutic foster parents who presented unique and personal experiences. The data collected during the interviews varied in their extent and depth of relevant information. However, each interview contributed significantly to the research study as a whole. It is also important to recognize that the data collected is that of only therapeutic foster parents' experiences. This chapter provides each participant's profile, which includes demographic information, recruitment process, interview process, and field notes of our interviewing session. Following the profiles, I provide raw data from the interviews, so the readers have an opportunity to “hear” the participants' voices and their experiences as therapeutic foster parents. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the chapter.

Sunshine

Sunshine is a female foster parent in her low 30s from Whatcom County pursuing a master's degree. She first learned about foster care when she was a child. She had friends who were in foster care and who were adopted. Sunshine has no biological children and has been a full-time foster parent for a year and six months with Falcon Peak, a child placing agency. Sunshine has foster one child and hasn't had a placement disruption. She is a life skills teacher at a local elementary school. Sunshine shares that she had a pretty good childhood. Her parents divorced when she was two, but she has a very close relationship with her mother and father. Her mother was her primary parent, and growing up, she moved homes and schools a few times. She always had a solid group of friends and a lot of support. Some of the most influential people to this day in her life were teachers.

Sunshine and I previously knew of each other through the foster parent community. She contacted me on Facebook to let me know she saw my recruitment post and was interested in participating in my research study. She was full of energy and excited to do the interview. Her tone of voice was enthusiastic and bubbly. Her excitement in her voice made showed how passionate she is about helping children in foster care. Sunshine's sweet demeanor allows her to be very likable by others, an important quality to have as a foster parent. Her sweet demeanor allowed me to relax and sets the mood for the interview. Sunshine's interview via Zoom lasted 45 minutes and took place from her bedroom to allow for privacy.

Becoming a Foster Parent

I teach life skills and had a student in my class who had some disabilities and it became apparent that she was possibly going to need a place to live and I came home and I started talking with my partner about it. We chose over the summer to begin exploring getting licensed. The universe works in really mysterious ways because two weeks after my partner and I had that conversation, an old principal I used to work under called me about one of my kids needing a place to live. He's gone to like nine foster homes in the last three months, and they were going to send him to a group home. To keep the family connected and finish the school year, she asked if I can keep him for a month. I talked to my partner and we said yes. That is how our journey began. My [foster] son moved in a year and a half ago; his sisters moved in six months after him, and we are currently working toward adoption.

Parenting Style

My parenting style is that of a warm demander, I would say. It's also my teaching style. I would say that I am very warm and very approachable. I'm very loving, open-minded, and value having boundaries and routines with children in my home. I don't believe that punitive

punishment works even though sometimes it is a lot of people's go-to because, at the moment, that feels right. We don't do a lot of that in our home; however, we do have a lot of natural consequences and choices equal consequences, whether they're good or bad. A consequence usually is directly related to whatever the action was. As a foster parent, I am really close with my kid's paternal grandmother. In my parenting style, I've made their biological family very important and a huge part of our lives with my kids. It is enriching and good for them to have positive family members in their life.

Licensing Experience

There are a lot [of agencies] and I didn't know what to do. At this point, I wasn't licensed and I had a child placed with me. I needed to get the ball rolling and I reached out to a friend of mine who's a teacher that I work with who used to be a guardian ad litem, and she suggested getting licensed with Falcon Peak. I didn't know if I should go through a private agency or go through the state. Initially, I started filling things out through the state, and they never got back to me. I thought to myself, and this is why we don't have any foster homes. So I ended up going through Falcon Peak. One of the [reasons] is people spoke very highly of Falcon Peak. The other [reason] was that although we are a very spiritual family and have a church that we go to, I didn't want to mix the two. I didn't want my parenting journey and my foster care journey to be motivated by my religion. I just wanted to keep them separate. I liked that Falcon Peak was not tied to a church or a religion and specialized in placing older children and children with behavioral needs.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

I like to think that I did not choose therapeutic foster care, but instead, it chose me. My child just so happened to qualify for BRS services and had needs. When the licensor was doing

my licensing, she just kept saying repeatedly I think he would be perfect for our therapeutic blah, blah, blah. I was like, no, I do this all day as a life skills teacher, and I'm about to be a parent now, on top of that. I'm going to go ahead and say no to [therapeutic foster parenting] until I kind of know what I'm doing and then it was like, oh, just kidding. So that's kind of how that came about. My experience with that, I would say, is I had this hesitation. It felt really scary, and I'm envisioning just like horror, and that's not what it is. In my experience of being a therapeutic foster parent, I've learned a lot about trauma and the brain and how it affects us short-term and long-term. I also learned about how it directly impacts behaviors. You can look at behavior in a very different way from traditionally looking at behavior like how I do as a life skills teacher. That has changed my teaching, looking at how trauma impacts our brain. We are neurodiverse and not neurotypical and it has nothing to do with autism or something like that.

I would say that with the foster parent trainer, I felt like I had people that I could call to give me skills and advice if I ever felt like I didn't have any more tools in my tool belt. I had a community that I could rely on. Initially, it can be hard because we're so flooded already and to have somebody say we'll do this and you're like, oh my gosh, it's going to be so much more work. After that initial [feeling] of I can't do that wear off, putting your ego aside, and finding a little bit more energy in your body, you can do it and I love that. I love our community. I haven't been as active in our community as I probably should be. When I first started this journey, I needed to have more friends because another experience that I did have as a [foster] parent was feeling very lonely. It felt lonely because nobody else in my circle of friends really had this same type of parenting that's going on in my house and I just felt like people didn't always understand. If I talked to other people to try to get advice, I would end up like you don't understand, that's not

going to work. I felt very alone and maybe even like our family was a little misunderstood at times.

Motivation

The most motivating thing for me is love. I love my kids so much and teaching them about unconditional love means modeling it. I just care a lot about kids in general and specifically kids who have found themselves in a foster care situation. I guess it's just in my nature. I'm not going to say that there haven't been days that I haven't cried in my bed and thought to myself, I don't even want to get up to go pee or that I don't want to talk to anybody. I felt like, what the hell am I doing? How have I gotten myself into this? I'm so tired and need help. I need a break, but that fades. I think that's just being a parent, and if I had biological children, there would be days where I probably didn't want to be a parent and it doesn't mean I would quit. So just because I have children who are not my biological children doesn't mean that I get to quit.

We live in a pretty small house. So we have three bedrooms currently, but we're going to remodel our house. Luckily my partner's a carpenter and he's going to add a second story to the house. We are getting there, but we have bills to pay off first to get the construction loan to one day expand our family if that ever felt right for us. We would need more space. But we already need more space where we are, like, we are in 1000 square feet and we are on top of each other. There are five of us with like a menagerie of animals. I would never say no [to continue fostering once the current placement adoption is finalized]. That would not be in our future. It would be really hard for me to set boundaries and say, no, this is not the right time for us if the need came along. It would also really depend on the impact on my family. How is this going to impact my children and make sure that as a family it is something that we all are on board with. I would

never say no, but I wouldn't just say yes for the sake of saying yes because I have more people than myself and my partner to think of now.

Caregiver Core Training

I did [Caregiver Core Training] online. I would say the original videos [from the Caregiver Core Training] were not very helpful. I'm not great at learning online. First of all, I kind of just go through the motions. But I felt like it was so general and such a blanket and children are so diverse. I don't necessarily feel like it covered the whole spectrum because how could it right. I think it would be really helpful to have therapeutic foster parents participate in the training and come in and share, whether it be something that you know they've experienced or have exceptional knowledge in. I think that is a little bit more real than just this blanket of videos. There were some things that I felt were helpful. I think that everybody should do the training even though it is boring. It has a lot of useful information in it. It has many do's and don'ts that we need to know and advise on how to communicate with all parties. I think that's valuable for everybody. If you choose to become a therapeutic foster parent, you should have additional training on top of [Caregiver Core Training].

Trauma Informed

The biggest thing that anybody could ever learn and have it drilled over and over is learning about trauma informed practices with parenting and opening the mind outside of what the behavior feels like to you. Because there are so many things that my kid does and I receive it as maybe manipulation, or I receive it as whatever. Just because it feels that way to me doesn't mean that that is what is happening. Having a little bit more information about what is driving behaviors, learning about trauma, learning about emotional states, and advice on how to help your child regulate, whether through co-regulation or a child who needs space and time [is

important]. How do you give them that space and time in a positive way that doesn't feel like a consequence or punishment? All this stuff I learned about with the foster parent trainer. I loved the training with the foster parent trainer at Warm Beach so much. I would love to do that every year just as a refresher or build upon having the community. Going in the flesh was also really helpful versus zooming in and it's hard because we're also tired, were strapped [for time], and we don't need one more thing. But in the end, I walked away from that [training] feeling rejuvenated and empowered.

Training Opportunities

I'm going to be completely honest, I am so terrible at checking my email. I know the licenser from the agency sends me many training [opportunities]. I check my work email all the time, but my personal email has like 40,000 unread spam emails in it. I never look at it. So I don't think that my opinion or experience will be indicative of what's happening there. But I will say that they are sending me tons of training opportunities. I know what I want and I'm going to find it. If I hear something that could be cool outside of anything Falcon Peak sent, I will go ahead and do that. However, with that being said, all the training that I have done has been suggested by Falcon Peak.

Foster Parent Mentor

[Foster] parents are just inundated and we are short on time and short on energy because we got a lot going on. I think that what can sometimes be an issue is when we add something to help, but it just ends up being one more thing we need to do. Sometimes you don't get out of it what you put into it. I think that almost like AA [who] have a sponsor, we need a parent sponsor. As therapeutic foster parents, I think it would be so cool if [we] could have that parent mentor that you can go [for support]. Even as a foster parent, we all need somebody in our community

that we can turn to that is not your case manager, who is not your social worker, not your mother in law. It would help if you had somebody who can go where you can have a real and honest conversation and say I'm having a tough time and I need some help whether I need a sounding board of somebody else who gets it or want you to hear me or solve problems with me. We could all use that because we have so many people who work here for us and our kids, but we don't have somebody we can comfortably talk to unless you have your therapist and not everybody does. I think we do need a mentorship program.

Building Community

I think that having opportunities to gather and I know with COVID here is hard, but having opportunities together in a way that feels good for us as [foster] parents and our children to start having more community amongst ourselves. The one tough thing is when Falcon Peak would do something, they would have people go all the way out in Snohomish County, and I live in Whatcom County. Up here in Whatcom County, you're not going to drive to Snohomish County for pizza and a movie and to talk to somebody. I am certainly not and vice versa. People from Snohomish County are not going to want to come to [Whatcom County]. I think we need to all remember that teenagers don't care about pizza in a strange location with other people they don't know. My 10-year-old would do anything for pizza if I were like, there is pizza and technology. But my 14-year-old and my 12-year-old don't care about pizza or movies in that way. If our friends are coming, we are having our movie night and as a community, we come up with it, it would feel better. I think we need to have hubs for all of us coming together. Whoever is in this area, let's be a support system to one another. Let's hang out and let our kids get together and do things that they like. We can have a hub home and once a month, we do a thing because it feels so much better than once a month doing a thing super far away and you're not

feeling like you're building community. I think we got to do our own thing to have to make it. It doesn't exist until someone makes it happen. It is hard right now with COVID, the holidays, and the crappy weather outside, so nobody wants to sit outside. It is hard currently with our current situation, but it's not going to be like that forever.

I think a cool idea would be to put together a regional booklet that shows the [agency's foster parents] in Whatcom County. Here are your people [in your area] with names and phone numbers and extra information if we're allowed to add any additional information. We can then reach out to them, connect with them, have a group chat or a Zoom meeting, and make a plan. For me, a community is nonjudgmental, provides support, and just togetherness eating together that's huge in my family. I'm Hispanic; we eat. That's what we do when we are in community and having people you can call on when you're stressed or recognize that somebody else is having a hard time and having the ability to reach out to them and see what they need. You may not even know what you need, but I'm going to do this to support one another. You also have to feel safe and comfortable to open up about your family, yourself, or your personal struggles. For example, I knew that [Sofia] was struggling with the placement. The only reason why I knew that was because, at a work meeting, I saw that she was not doing well. Then the other day, the same thing happened to me. I called her and told her I was not doing so hot right now. She came and brought me what she calls happy, happy, and it was a bag of gifts. She and I spent a lot of time on the phone together. Not everybody wants to be on Facebook. Sometimes it's nice to old school communicate and I would like to find the people around me who are my people and just have that community that group of friends. We all have things in common and we're going to support each other and our children all together.

Foster Parent Support Group

I think meeting [foster parent support group] once a month would be awesome. Honestly, I am so people out right now. I am not experiencing what many people I know are experiencing where they're like, oh my gosh, you know, I miss people in my life. I'm like, I never not with people. I also don't quite understand what a [foster parent support group] will offer. I wonder if it's going just to be heavy and hard or if I am going to walk away from the meeting with a heaviness or with a lightness that I have some allies. I just don't know what that is going to look like.

Carmen

Carmen is a female in her mid 30s from Whatcom County. Carmen first learned about foster care in her teenage years when her aunt and grandmother became foster parents. She had a very happy and loving childhood. Carmen has been a full-time foster for nine months with Falcon Peak. Carmen is married and has three biological girls, ages 14, 12, and 4. She considers her family to be multiracial as she identifies as Hispanic and her husband as Black. Together, Carmen and her husband manage a youth sports program. Carmen and her husband have fostered three children; two of the children have been in therapeutic foster care and their current placement is in traditional foster care. Carmen's first placement was able to return home to his biological mother six months after being placed with her family. Her second placement lasted one month before they asked for the child to be removed from their home. Carmen's current placement is going on for six months.

Carmen was personally recruited to participate in my study by my partner. We both met Carmen and her husband when our youth staying with us joined the football team that Carmen's husband managed. That same youth was placed under Carmen and her husband's care when we asked him to be removed from our home. Carmen and her husband got licensed with Falcon

Peak. Carmen and my partner have stayed connected through social media. My partner told Carmen about my dissertation and she agreed to participate. Carmen missed our scheduled interview the first time because of other commitments and forgot she had her interview. Carmen rescheduled her interview and profoundly apologized for missing her interview. During her interview, Carmen often referenced following gender norms to raise her biological and foster children. Carmen's parenting style can be best described as structured and strict. Carmen and her husband have been told that their home is a military household. They are not what you would consider your typical parents. When it comes to disciplining their biological children, they write sentences, do pushups, and run around the block. Carmen does not believe in coddling children because their role as foster parents is to prepare them for the future to be on their own when they become adults. This mindset was evident throughout her interview. Carmen's interview via Zoom lasted 70 minutes and took place from a quiet room in her home to allow for privacy.

Becoming a Foster Parent

What made us decide to become foster parents was we kind of got thrown in there. I mean, it was in the back of our mind, but we always wanted to wait until our children were a lot older like it was going to be like a wait till our children were out of the house kind of thing. And then we got thrown in there and fell in love with it. We run a youth organization and they asked if we wanted to be like a suitable other for one of the athletes and we were like, yeah, let's try it out. The fit was so good because we partially already knew him. And I think our family reminded him of his family partly because the kiddo was African American. We found out after we did decide to get licensed that there were not very many people of color who do foster care. I think it is huge for many of these kids as I believe it is all about the fit of the home. Culture is so different for everybody and like my husband, he's Black and I'm Hispanic. We are both loud and

we got a busy life. I think that helped that kiddo feel more at home. He felt like we were an aunt and uncle to him. I think that made it feel like more of a safe place for him. So he ended up not having behaviors in our home. And we still have contact with the child quite a bit. I just got on the phone the other night and at the end of the conversation, he said I love you guys and I miss you guys and it was just so heartwarming to hear that. For someone who was only in our home for six months, it's just amazing. So yeah, that's kind of where that started and they licensed us and here we are. So we officially got licensed in March of 2020. That is our story in a nutshell.

Why we got into therapeutic foster care was just the people that we originally did the suitable foster child with that we wouldn't have licensed with anybody else. I love everybody at Falcon Peak and if it was therapeutic or traditional, either way, we were happy with all of them there. I was happy to stay with them and I don't think I would have done traditional care because overall, we want to help the children who are struggling the most. I wouldn't want to be in a position because many of the kids in the therapeutic foster world are children of color, for some reason, and I just feel because we are a multiracial family, I think it helps make them feel comfortable.

Parenting Style

In our parenting style, we are told we are very structured and strict. It is like a military household. It is just like straight to the point of no messing around because we parent children for their future, not for now. So whatever is going on right now may suck, but you're only growing; you're not getting younger. So we're parenting them for their future, like installing all those values and everything they would need to be growing as a successful young woman or young man in this world. That is why we have high standards and expectations for them.

Previous Parenting Experience

I have previous [parenting] experience before becoming a foster parent; I mean a therapeutic one. Some of the behaviors [foster children] seem to have are behaviors that I've experienced with my children who never had any trauma in their life. As I said, a lot of the kids in foster care can compare so easily to my oldest daughter, and I think it's a personality thing, not necessarily a trauma thing because my child has never gone through trauma. The only trauma was that recent foster child we had that was kind of like domestic violence for them because they've never been around anybody harming family, which would have been the only thing. It's just simple things like constantly having to remind children that are kind of having burst out where they get upset about things, but that's just overall teaching children. Some kids can grasp that and some kids can't. So I think like my oldest daughter, she had a hard time grasping how to grab her feelings and control them herself. She let her feelings control her, whereas my middle child took that and was awesome with it. She could control her feelings very well. So I don't know if I would say I had experience because my oldest daughter can compare her so much to a lot of the foster kiddos, which is so weird. I think it's a personality thing and not because of the trauma they experienced.

I felt like we parent every child that comes into our care, just like we would parent our children. We have the same expectations and same standards. How we go about it might be a little different. I'm finding different tools to help them learn different things. You forgot to do your dishes today, and you owe me like 50 pushups. It depends on the child, though, like my oldest one, she could probably do 100 pushups. My middle one would be a little different. Whereas our foster [kiddo] that's not going to be the same. [Our biological children] would run around the block and then our foster kiddo gets to write sentences that part is different. Doing the teaching aspect is a little different because of the trauma. At certain ages, they do have trauma,

like early in life, they have neglect. They are missing a lot of brain development that they were supposed to have. I would teach my children differently because they can't grasp the same as my foster children can, so I guess those little things are different. For the most part, it's the same overall outcome; just getting there may be a little different.

I think if I were that person, I would probably follow all the training they provide. I would probably follow that 100%, but I have children of all different personalities. I have three children and legit have three completely opposite personalities. I thought opposite meant like you had to have something to have opposites, but there are three of them, and they're all opposite. So the personality thing is huge. I think that there's no way that you can train somebody that this child is behaving this way because this is what happened to them in their life. I feel that children are so much more resilient than we give them credit for. They are so much more adaptable than we give them credit for. If you give them a positive, loving home, the behaviors will be different, but at the same time, they have to be in an environment that they're comfortable with. Knowing the child and knowing their personality and their struggles and strengths and weaknesses is key to placing a child in a home. That child who was having the behaviors in our home needed one-on-one attention, no other children in the home, and a male figure. He craved one-on-one male attention and didn't want to see the attention given to anybody else. If he was with a single foster father or with a couple that didn't have any other children, I think that would have been amazing for him. So as far as only knowing what I know because of my children, that is like the personality thing is huge for learning how to deal with the children. If I had never had my children, I would have been completely lost. The training is helpful, but I don't think the training doesn't work for every child.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

We go through Falcon Peak, so they do therapeutic foster care. A benefit is watching the children grow into positive people in society. We've had a teenager or preteen for six months and then we had a nine-year-old for maybe a month. Now we've had this kiddo since July, so about six months as well. We don't have a BRS case right now. The child is very new in the foster care world. So we're only the third placement for that child. So he's borderline possibly be BRS, but there's not enough story on this kid to figure out for sure what he is. We are still with Falcon Peak. We still do therapeutic foster care. So overall, the experience has been kind of up and down with the different [foster] children. Because I don't consider our first one really like BRS, I feel like it's hard for some of them because, as I said, the fit is really important. It's really important to find a good fit for these children and I think a lot of their behaviors come from not having something similar as home or what they consider home and what their home was even if it was bad. It's so hard to explain, but our experience overall has been scary. It's scary stepping into [foster parenting] not knowing the background of the children, the full background. You only know what you're told and there's always so much more that you're just unsure of. Trying to figure out why the behaviors are happening and trying to work around them sometimes can be pretty straightforward, but sometimes it can be challenging. Overall, the [foster care] system is so broken and has so many holes in it that it's hard to pinpoint where to even start to make it better. These children's experience could have been different had there been different evaluations done for these children prior to them going into anybody's care which I know is unrealistic. Overall our experience has been pretty good. I mean, we had one pretty scary situation with the kiddo that we only had for a month. I don't think anything could have changed other than we were not the right fit. Like dynamically, family dynamics wasn't the right fit for that child.

After that second kiddo left, I felt like we can't get a child like the first one I don't want to do this anymore. The behaviors from the first one weren't cupcakes and rainbows either. I mean, obviously, as the teenage boy, he struggled with why he can't be home with his mom and why a sibling was able to move in before him and why he had a wait. So it was a lot of things that brought on a lot of emotions, but we set some clear boundaries with him. A few times, it was the rush out the door, but my husband is a football coach, so there were so many outlets for him to get his anger out, so we have like these football bags so that he could punch them. I don't want it to seem like the first one was just cupcakes and rainbows because it was not, but it was easier to work with him. Because of the age or maybe other factors, I think it easier to work around those behaviors and get a better understanding.

If the child in our care now goes back to bio dad, I either think we would take a long break or we would potentially wait until our children were out of the house. The family dynamic significantly changes when you bring a child into your home initially, but it adapts and then it changes and gets better over time. Would I want to do that again? I don't think I do with a new child. I don't think I would want to do it again with my daughter; my youngest is four right now. I just think that I would want to focus more on her and not try to give all my energy to a foster child because it takes at least six months to start seeing some significant changes. But I don't know. That would be a tough one because I want to [continue fostering], but I don't. So it's like if they call and tell me, "Are you sure you want this child to sleep in an office?" my mama's heart will be like that boy can't be in the office, he needs to be in a warm, cozy bed and feel loved. I would probably change my mind, but it is very draining on the family and changes the whole dynamic in the first few months of trying to get into those behaviors and letting them know that's

just not acceptable here. Just allowing them to understand what's acceptable and what is not is draining [during] those first few months.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

Therapeutic foster parenting different than traditional for us; it is not. As I said, we hold them to the same standards as our bio kids and the discipline would probably be the only difference for us. We're never the family that feels that a disability disables you. We will never let a disability label you. We don't let anything label you, so if something is going on with any of the children, we don't use that as an excuse; you're still able to overcome it. It's just going to take something different for you to get there. So I don't think it's too much different. Anyways, I know we're not the typical people were not typical, especially in Whatcom County. We're not typical. We're one of a kind. I guess we run our own story, we write our own story, and we live it.

Child Placements

The first teen we had was a return home to biological mom. He was with us for only six months and we had him doing dishes on Thursday and he took out the trash because he was the boy in the house. We instill these traditional roles in his life that he could carry and that is something he's continued. When I was on the phone with him the other night, he was just getting ready to take out the trash and I've called before and it was his dish night and it's still on Thursday, which he calls that his mom's day off and it's something he's carried on with him. It's so heartwarming to know that those little things we instilled in him are still going on in his life. Those are things that he's still looking forward to going to college. My husband had many conversations with him about going to college and where he is at his age. He was, I think, in sixth or seventh grade at the time and was talking to him about why it's important to be looking

forward to college. It is a benefit for us to see these kids grow and know that we were a part of it is huge. Where we could have been that crossroad from going down the wrong road or going down the right road and we were that crossroad possibly and that's huge for us. That's a huge benefit and the child we have now in July was not reading at seven and a half years old. Now he's reading at grade level in less than six months. It's just crazy that the little bit of time and effort you put into these children, the benefit outweighs it. The challenges would be the behaviors and backgrounds I talked about before the behaviors they could bring in the home. Just changing your family's whole dynamic because when my children are misbehaving and I send them to their room, then as a mom, my heart hurts to know that they're in the room grounded when we're all having fun. So it's the same thing with a foster kiddo. A lot of them are struggling and trying to make these positive changes because they do have so many behaviors. When they're constantly getting sent to the room or writing sentences and it's so painful to write sentences, it still hurts your mama's heart. It is a challenge because it changes the dynamic and you want them to learn and move forward and sometimes it's like after the 10th time of writing the same sentence repeatedly, you're like, why can't you get it like I want us to move past this. It does change the family dynamic, especially like the kiddo that we had that was challenging with behaviors hitting his head against the wall, kicking his head with his foot, and then when we try to intervene to get him to move out of the room, he would punch and kick us. For our three-year-old to see that was very traumatic for her. So that would probably be the challenge of having a foster child in our home.

The second one we gave notice. We had the second placement for about a month. Oh my goodness, why are BRS children a 30-day before they are removed and traditional can get removed the same day? That's insane to me. We were so confused. We are every day calling the

case manager; this just happened, so this child needs to be out today. Every day it was something new. This child took a whole bottle of baby powder and squeezed it unleashed into our entire bathroom. The bathroom was white from ceiling to corner to every crevice in my bathroom. I'm telling you, it was a nightmare. That one was a 30-day removal and it took the full 30 days to remove the child from our home. They tried every possible way to give us support. I really feel it just wasn't the right fit. I feel that the other children in the home and my husband had a really demanding job that he had to work a lot didn't help. I also think possibly, the COVID situation made it worse because there was no outlet. [The second placement] was right when the pandemic happened. I think that also could have been a factor were like even though my husband was so busy with work, if we had our youth sports program going, he would have been involved in it. I think maybe it would have been enough between my husband and the other coaches to give him that attention he needed, but I can't say for sure. I know the behaviors were really common at the previous home, so I feel that a home with other children was not a good fit for him.

Motivation

What motivates me to continue is that we are blessed with three girls and it is clear that we were not blessed with boys, possibly for a reason. There are so many boys out there who need a father figure and even a mother figure, but more so the male role model in their life to help them become a better person. They're going to listen to men more than a woman, at least for my experience. Men tend to be a little rough and women are a little too soft. I think boys need that sternness. By just having another boy in the house is huge for my husband. I know he wants a son of his own, but that's not going to happen. We're not trying to have any more of our own children at our age. Knowing that there are so many children of color that need that extra guidance, I think that's what keeps us moving forward is knowing that we could potentially help

a child not to become a negative statistic. We could possibly help them become a positive statistic. I think that's what keeps us motivated is just the change that we've seen thus far and the kiddos that have come into our care, including the second one that had a lot of behaviors. Every kid who comes into our home once they turn eight years old has to do their laundry. They get a laundry day, one day of dishes and they have chores. They do these things to see the growth in becoming independent. If you're hungry, make your own food. Just giving them their own independence makes us happy because eventually, they will be out on their own. If they're a child who's bouncing from foster care home to foster care home, they don't have a family when they turn 18, so they have nobody. Teaching them all these independent things, we know that if they move on from our home that they will be one step closer to being okay if they end up being alone and not having a family. We want to make sure that we're there for every child who comes into our home, but unfortunately, we're not a good fit for everybody and that's just what it is. What keeps us moving forward is just what we can potentially do to help them become the best they can be.

Caregiver Core Training

I did the [caregiver core training] online, but I could be confused because I did a lot of online training. I do remember doing the video because it was when I had our first kiddo in our home and I recall him coming [into the room while working on the training] a few times and was kind of joking with me about the stuff that I was listening to. I don't think that anything specific helped us because we just parent them as we parent our children and have the same expectations and standards as we would for them. So I don't think there's anything different that I can think of other than possibly just seeing their different techniques of doing things. I don't even think it was from the original training. I think I learned it through something else. When a child is having a

really bad behavior and you need to calm them down, have them blow bubbles. One thing that stuck with me is having them blow bubbles usually helps them become centered again. I've never used that technique. We always say if you're having a hard time handling something, go chill in your room and think about it for a little bit. We always say to our biological children that you need to remove yourself if you are having a difficult time. We always tell them to remove themselves from the situation. Take a breather and think about it. So I don't think there's anything specific from the training that helped us because we were already parents. We don't look at any child's ability. We don't label them as anything; they are just another child in our eyes. I don't think there was anything specific that was helpful that prepared us for challenges.

Coddling Children

I have to say, some of the stuff in the training, I do remember laughing at some of the responses that they expected people to have for different circumstances they had. Like, if this and this happened, what would your response be? Are you kidding? When are the kids going to respond to that like that? As I said, my foster child at the time was a 12-13-year-old boy and I would joke around with him when I was doing the training and we would just kind of laugh about it because we knew it wouldn't be something that would be responded to too well. I think that's where the personality thing comes through because a lot of the training is very gentle and soft. I think with children there are too many choices given to them and they are just children they can't have that much responsibility. I feel there's too much responsibility given to them and too much for me; it's not a choice. It's you are going to clean your room or you can stay in. It is a [problem] how they want you to respond to a lot of these foster children because they feel so sorry for them that they feel that you just have to coddle them. That's the word I'm looking for. They feel they need to coddle them the whole time. I don't think that helps these children out,

especially for their future, especially for young boys and actually for girls. Women need to be strong in this world and to coddle a child takes their strength, their health, and their self-esteem away. It takes a lot away from them. We just got rid of our counselor for our child because she talked to him like he was three years old and just coddling him. We gave him all this self-confidence and every time he would talk to her, he was back to being very needy. He became very dependent, so we got rid of her. He sees a different counselor who is more on our level that doesn't talk to him like a baby who dives in and talks to him about his feelings and lets him know what emotions are acceptable for certain things. A lot of the training is very coddling and that's why I didn't care too much about the training. I have girls and I don't coddle them. Like if you fall, you have to get up and brush that stuff off if you're not bleeding. If you don't have a bone sticking out, just brush it off and you will be fine. There is no coddling and if a child doesn't want to clean their room because they want to show behavior, then I'm not going to go in there like, "Honey, just clean your room and I'll give you a cookie." I'm going to say, "Boy, if you don't clean that room, you are going to be in here all day." When you want to come out, you'll have that room clean. So that's the difference. That's what I'm saying. We are a very structured stern kind of parenting style. Even a kid with trauma is going to respond to that just fine. Sometimes our social worker hears us out and she sees the beginning product and the end product and she is like, "Okay, you guys were right." These kids are more resilient than we think. So I feel that if anything were to change in training, I would stop trying to push the coddling of these children and focus on putting in different personalities of children and different techniques that work for those personalities.

I enjoy a lot of the training, but I obviously critique them a lot because many of them, like I said, go into that coddling stage that I don't care for. I do feel³³ that the [trainings] are

overall helpful in understanding the back story of a child. Learning if a child in their first year doesn't get enough nurturing from others and are just left in her crib and not held complicates their mental development. That helps to understand the child more and potentially help them through their cognitive development. Would it change the way I do things? I don't think so. It's good to know the understanding of that, and it's easier to empathize, but it's still not going to change the way I parent them. So you have to raise these children to be the best they can be before they turn 18 and before they end up in that situation where they have behaviors and nobody in the world knows that they were coddled the whole time because they were a foster child.

Boundaries With Extended Family

I would touch more on the biological family aspect. I guess boundaries with extended family. Not just the biological mother or father, who the child is visiting or not visiting, but I'm thinking extended family that may not be able to bring the child into their care. There should be more of an option for these children to see other biological family members, not as a visitation but if the foster families are comfortable with having playdates with their aunts and uncles or other family members. I know we've done that before. It depends on the [biological] parents and the family situation. I guess for me going into it, I was confused with what is allowed what is not allowed as far as the bio family aspect of it. So probably elaborating more on that and getting more feedback from foster families and bio families would probably be good.

Personalities Training

Adding additional training for therapeutic foster parents and changing it with different techniques for different personalities because I think it's the key to what we do with one child is never the same as what we do with the other child. I have one child that I have to prepare her and

I have to give her a week [notice] in advance. If she's going to have a procedure done, she wants to know exactly what they're going to do. I let her make the decisions. Do you want to be put under anesthesia? Do you want numbing medicine? I have to give her those choices. My other child does not know she's getting a shot until we walk in there and they bring the shot out. I can't even mention the word shot, or this girl will have anxiety for days, and it'll be a way traumatic experience in the end. So they are so different. My youngest, I still haven't figured her fully out yet because she wants to know, but I feel the anxiety creeps up on her. So I think she's going to be more of the one where it has to be a surprise. So yeah, I think personality is huge. I think that should be added in there versus the trauma they go through because I think kids are resilient. They get over it so quickly. When you do the training, they make it seem like they are stuck in their trauma which I don't think is the case. I think that it is just fitting them in the right home and the right surroundings. If they added the personality aspect to the overall training for traditional and therapeutic, it would be amazing. Then hone in more on the personality traits with the trauma for the children who are in therapeutic is what I would say.

I think breaking it up based on personality for the children not based on trauma. It's not so much [trauma] because I look at children when some traumatic thing happens in their life. If you look at a whole family and something traumatic happens in our life, it's not the children that suffer, it is the grown-ups. For example, my dad passed away Spring of 2019. To be honest, my children took it way better. It was the first significant death for them to experience and it was mine too, but they took it way better than I did. I mean, I know that was their grandpa. He was the best grandpa. He was such a good grandpa to them and the way they coped with it helped me. They were in the room when he took his last breath. We were there for the five days he was in a comatose state and they were there for his last breath. The fact that they saw what they saw and

how they processed everything for me was tremendous. I think children honestly can teach us so much more about coping mechanisms because they do it so naturally. I feel that adults are putting on too much pressure on them to cope with things instead of just letting them cope with it how they naturally do. Losing a loved one from death and getting pulled away from your own home because of a CPS [investigation] I feel is very similar. You are still losing a loved one and most of them don't even know what is going on or when they're going to see them again and they're entirely left in the dark.

IEP Evaluation

There should also be a complete IEP evaluation, whether it be the social worker who does it in their intake or the first foster family that should do it in their first 30 days you have a child just like dental and all that other stuff. We just got a child who was seven years old, almost seven and a half, and could not read. He was in second grade and couldn't read one word. He had an IEP for only social and behavior. He had no academic IEP when he came to us. I had to fight and of course, it was during the pandemic. So we're doing online school, not even the regular school. I had to argue with them to let them know because they are not used to having foster children take online classes because they are usually not allowed to do homeschool. I had to fight with them to redo his evaluation and he now has one, two, three, four, five, six, no seven, with his speech therapy. He has seven IEPs. But a lot of the behaviors weren't coming from his living situation. The behaviors were coming from him struggling academically. So I think in the first 30 days, if you do a full IEP on these children, you're going to find out that it's not coming from trauma in their home. The behaviors are coming from the lack of what they know and that's why so many kids in foster care are on IEPs because they are getting neglected. They're not getting the proper support at home for academics, so many of them struggle academically, but they go

and throw them in social and behavior IEPs because they're acting out. They also try to throw them into the category of ADHD or ADD when that's usually not the case. That's where the trauma comes in. Because if you've ever seen an ADHD questionnaire, all those questions can be answered easily yes by the child experiencing trauma. Like a child that just got taken from their home, they can easily have all those questions answered yes. So that's another thing I think needs to get implemented is within the first year of a child being in foster care, I don't think they should be able to get diagnosed with ADD or ADHD because I think the questionnaire is way too vague.

Agency Support

I love Falcon Peak. I love the support they have given us. I love how they do try to bend over backward to help us in any situation. [For example,] like when that child needed to be removed from our home, they provided a case aide to come every day to take the child out of our home for three hours a day to give us a break. So for them to do that and to have it that often was very [helpful]. You could tell they were trying to do what they could. I definitely feel completely supported. I feel that I can contact them at any moment for anything and they are going to be there to support us.

I don't think the agency can do anything different. I think the agency does everything they can possibly do. I honestly believe that they do everything they can do. I do think the training needs to be updated more or looked at from a different angle. No, I don't believe the agency themselves can do anything different. I love the agency. I think that they take in what we talk about like they understand our different parenting style. They understand that we don't agree with the training and understand that we are not going to follow that. If it doesn't work, then it doesn't work. If our method doesn't work, we will revert to doing what we saw in training and see if it helps. We haven't had a situation where it was not effective.

Respite Support

I did say you know what respite would probably be great because they always got that two-week honeymoon stage every time they're in a new home. So we'd always get the best of the best. The only thing about providing respite is that you don't have that continued follow-up to see the benefits of watching them change and be the best person they could be. Then you have a child for a couple of weeks and you fall in love with them and want them to stay in your home, so that would be a difficult one.

Foster Parent Support Group

I do not attend the support group meetings only because I know I'm going to hear everybody talking about how they coddle their kids and it makes me feel insane and I can't handle it. Like when I see, on like a mom support group and somebody posted the other day about how their teenage son wears shorts all the time and how she doesn't know how to get him to stop wearing shorts. I'm like, take all his shorts out of his drawer and only allow him to have pants plus you're the parent. Please don't give them a choice to wear shorts. I don't get how that is a problem. I just can't handle it and I would probably be rude on there. I'm a nice person and I don't like when things make me rude.

Sofia

Sofia is a female in her upper 40s from Whatcom County with a master's degree in special education. She has been a full-time foster parent for seven months with Falcon Peak. Sofia has no biological children. She works as a special education teacher at a local elementary school. She previously worked for organizations that worked with and supported children in foster care. Sofia is a single foster parent who has fostered three children. Her first placement was a suitable other placement that lasted a week before she asked for the child to be removed

from her home. During her first placement, Sofia began the process of getting licensed with Falcon Peak. Sofia's second placement lasted three and half months. Initially, this placement was supposed to be a one-month-long placement, but due to COVID, it was extended longer. At the end of the three and half months, the child transition to her pre-adoptive home. Sofia's third placement lasted about one month before she asked for the child to be removed from her home. Currently, Sofia has no full-time placement as she is waiting to see how COVID impacts her job as a teacher. The impact will determine if she can handle teaching from home and having a full-time placement.

Sofia contacted me on Facebook to let me know that she saw my post and was interested in participating in my research study. Sofia and I previously knew each other because of the foster care community. Sofia was very responsive throughout the recruitment process, including replying to emails and filling out the interest form on time. My interview with Sofia felt natural and honest. She was very forthcoming about her experience as a single therapeutic foster parent. She wanted to share her experience because of her unique situation of being a single foster parent. Sofia prefaces her interview by saying that her experience as a special education teacher will "flavor all her answers" to her interview questions. Sofia's interview via Zoom lasted 90 minutes and took place from a quiet space in her home.

Becoming a Foster Parent

I decided to be a foster parent when I was like 11. I watched a movie with my family called *The Day After*, and it was in the 80s, during the Cold War and the nuclear holocaust hanging over our heads. It was about the nuclear holocaust and it freaked me out. I didn't sleep for a couple of weeks and then I told my dad that I am not bringing a kid into this world that could do that. I never changed my mind. Then I worked in foster care for a few years back in the

early 2000s as an educational liaison between the foster care system and the education system. So that's where I knew even more that I would [foster] one day. It took me longer than I thought to get here because it's harder to do it on one income and with one person because there are some things that are just, I don't know if they're harder they're just different, but they're hard for me.

My brother in Houston, Texas, has adopted two now, possibly a third sibling of kids out of foster care. He didn't do foster to adopt; it was just adoption. He knows the foster parent trainer and she had a kid on her caseload here [in Washington] that needed a place. She called him one day and said, "I need someone like you. Do you know anybody who's like you?" He said, "I have this sister." [the foster parent trainer] called me and I started the whole process for this child; he was four. I don't count him in my total time as a foster parent because I wasn't licensed at the time he was a tribal placement. I didn't have to be licensed to have him. I had just started the process and it was all very quick. It was a month and a half from hearing from the foster parent trainer] to him moving in and lasting a week. But that's how I got into [fostering] and then it just rocked my world. I have to see if I can do this because it is my life's dream. I can't give up.

Parenting Style

I've never been a parent. The experience I have is not parenting, though I had a former student that I taught in middle school move in with me. She's now 22 or 23 and moved in with me as a young adult. I think she was 17 and just barely escaped being in the [foster care] system. I sort of parent her, but I don't have actual [parenting experience]. I would say up until five or 10 years ago, I didn't really have the biological mothering. I taught punk kids and I was kind of like the hard-line. When I moved up to Washington five years ago, back to be with my family up here, I started teaching elementary life skills. All of a sudden, this mother thing came out that

had never been there. I don't think I would have been able to do it without finding that side of teaching. You know, it's how I teach now. In a way, it's always how I taught, but not like I was with little kids. So there were times when I didn't know what parents do. Is this normal? I don't know. Then it's hard when it's a BRS placement because no, it's not. You call a friend and they're like, no, that never happened and you can't really tell them stuff.

My parenting style is like my teaching style and I lead heart first. I just go full-on love and then really try to understand where they are and place my needs aside. But then I also see in the parents that I have power struggles when they have a need and things are not going the way they want it. But I also have to place the teaching aside a lot because maybe this isn't a teachable moment and I don't have to meet an IEP goal and there were times when my social worker would say, you're going to tell her not to do that, but she's still going to do it. In school, when you make a decision like this, it is not allowed. This whole thing that I'm going to say something's not okay, but then it's going to happen anyway I had to learn about that. I guess my parenting style is love first and very trauma informed. I guess be kind but firm. I feel like kids want to know where the boundaries are, but the boundaries don't have to be quite so small with kids with trauma.

Choosing An Agency

When she was placing this child with me because she was connected to the tribe that was placing him, the foster parent trainer suggested Falcon Peak because she knows the program director and said, "This guy is great you need to go with Falcon Peak. I know there are other choices. I just highly recommend it." When the kiddo came to my house and it was really hard and I needed help, she called him and said, "I think he's going to be a BRS placement" and the program director showed up at my house just helped me. He just showed up. It was Christmas and he didn't have the staffing. She said the kiddo needed four to five hours a day of case aid

time and he didn't have it. So he did the best he could. I just thought [to myself] I'm in because this guy shows up. So that's how I [chose Falcon Peak]. I'm so glad I did because I would have gone one of the other two directions. From what I've heard, I'm just so pleased that I did and partly because they had BRS and the foster parent trainer was confident that he would qualify, which he did. I did think of going with Eagle Care, a child placing agency and that would have been who I would have called. They did call and they didn't call me back the first day and the program director showed up at my house and it was a done deal. Just because I had worked there, I would have called because I knew their name, and I knew they did BRS or thought they did.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

After I became licensed or close after I had my first placement, I specifically planned on being a traditional respite care provider. But I think they called me for a placement that was supposed to be a five to six-week placement pre-adoption out of state because of my experience. That was March 1st and then March 13th everything closed [due to COVID] and so it ended up being a three and a half months [placement]. She was really on the light side of BRS, I think and part of it was because she knew I was wait station. At the very end, she started having more significant behaviors and that was, I think, fear-based from the big move. My [parenting] style just worked well with her and she was happy and comfortable. She left mid-June and by mid-July, I had my next placement and she rocked my world. I did not ask for her to be removed. Falcon Peak put the 30 days' notice for her to be moved out of my home. She really stretched my ability [to parent] and it helped me kind of really refine what I think I can do by myself and what I can do when I do it at school all day and then come home. She left beginning of November and then I went back to [teaching] school in person two days later, and partly, I needed a break. The one benefit of being a foster parent is you could take a break. I'm not sure I can teach in person

with the kids I teach and have someone at home who is not going to school. I just didn't feel like it was possible, so I'm taking a little time to figure out what it all looks like. I didn't know [therapeutic foster care] existed, to be honest, until the young man came [to stay in my home]. I didn't know there were levels. The minute I heard there were levels, I knew I have the education to do this I know I do. It just worked out that the benefit of the first BRS placement I had was not high level. I just didn't know [therapeutic foster care] existed.

I had some guilt coming in from my first failure. I absolutely adore the foster parent trainer and the learning I got from her is probably at the top of the good learning I've had. But there was one piece where she and I disagreed, and I kept saying it was the first non-official placement. I kept saying, I think one person can't do it and she kept saying, "no, no, no, that's nothing." I kept saying like, "Oh, no, it feels like something because there are not enough hours for one person to do this." I think it's not an excuse or anything, it is just a reality that one body can't always do all the things and then also work. Maybe I could if I wasn't working. So I do think that is a factor. This last placement that Falcon Peak decided to remove, I was just a shell. I was working and just surviving. It was not sustainable. I told them I would do what's right for her and if what's right for her is for me to do this, I will do it. But if it's like 50/50 and there's something else and it won't harm her, I'm dying here. Then it just got bad enough that they did [remove her]. But their support was huge and so I am pulled to keep working with them. I also really enjoy them as a team. I just feel like they don't judge and they just help and support. In my experience, they're just there and that's that. I feel like they're doing it right, which makes me feel like I want to keep helping them. They also thank me a lot and that's nice too.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

My guess from what I can understand the difference between therapeutic and traditional foster care is less support. After my first official placement, there was a call for a child's respite in Falcon Peak from the traditional side. The person from Falcon Peak calling didn't know that I had been in contact with that parent and knew of the child. The person said, "Oh, there's no behaviors." I had been in contact with that parent as a support for the behaviors and I felt a little distressful like you're telling me that child with this level of disability that I happened to know about who had reached out for help and you're telling me that there's no behavior. That felt dishonest and it turns out that behaviors had decreased but based on the disability, I don't think it's possible for there to be zero behaviors. I felt like at least with Falcon Peak with BRS, they are straight up. I just felt like at least with the therapeutic side I'm going to know what I'm taking in and knowing was more important to me than an easy [placement]. Kids have trauma and there are often disabilities and there is also support. I don't think the support can be as high in traditional and as a single parent, I'm not sure I could have done these last two [placements] without that level of support that the therapeutic side gave me, which has me torn because I did find that it's tough to do it at work and at home. But I don't know if, as a single person, I can do it without the level of support that the therapeutic side gives, maybe because I don't have a vast network [of support]. I can't just drop them off with my parents. So I've been torn because I feel like I need it to be a little easier at home, but I also know that I need support to do it.

Child Placements

The first "unofficial" placement lasted a week and it was supposed to be like a forever thing. I lasted one week and said, "I can't do this." Okay, it sort of accidentally happened. I called and said, "I need more, I need help," and his aunt said, "We'll take them back," which was not the response I was expecting. When she said it, my body just went okay because it was not

possible. That was the first time I had run into something where I couldn't put my head down and try harder and make it happen. He was only four. And I remember the program director saying, "I have never had a kid this young eligible for BRS" and then he met him and he's like, "Oh, yeah, okay." He needed such a high level of support that I didn't comprehend it. I've taught very challenging kids and I didn't comprehend the level he needed. [The support] wasn't in place and it was the week before Christmas and no one was around. It was 24 hours a day because [the child] barely slept. He had high, high, high energy and I finally called up a colleague while I was standing for my fifth hour in a row at the trampoline place and just shed tears just standing there. I called her and just said, "I need a professional eye. Can I [foster] and work?" She came and she's like, "I don't know if you can [do] like that level. If you were home all day maybe." the foster parent trainer said 'I didn't lie to you.' I'm like, "No, nobody lied. I just did not comprehend it." It was incomprehensible to me that level. I've seen a lot, but I hadn't had the younger kids before, and there's a difference there. So, I don't think more training would have helped, but I think the supports being in place would. One of the hard things about having a kid that you're reaching out for help is all the advice is more things to do. When you're stretched [thin] and you are like, right now, I can't do anything. That's why the program director showing up made all the difference. Because every phone call was to do this, try this, get this, he's not sleeping, so get melatonin and I'm like, no, we're not talking melatonin. On reflection, there is a part of me that it's good that it wasn't because what might have happened and I would have lasted longer and then disrupted. I don't think I could have worked and had him. Although now that I know the level of support Falcon Peak can provide, maybe, yeah, so.

The second placement was three months, March, April, May, three and a half months. She's the one who was being adopted and so it was always a plan that she was going to go. It

went really well. The whole team that had her had known her before. She really sort of blossomed. I think there were a lot of factors. She was able to relax because she didn't need me because she knew she was being adopted. It was a pretty good stopping point for a while. She was comfortable, safe, happy and we got along, but she knew she didn't have to connect deeply because she was going to leave. When she came, it was supposed to be short term and she was going to be adopted, so we kind of did it like 12 and 13 [year-old] roommates. We co-existed very well and when she came, I said, "You know what, this is short term. You got a lot going on and I am just going to ask you kind of take care of your own stuff, but we're not going to do any chores. You to take a little vacation from life and enjoy yourself." Then it lasted three months and she would never do a dish because of what I said that first day. And then she got nervous about moving at the very end, and some stuff started to come up. But we really got along well and when the stuff started to come up, I sat down and just said, "You know, there's a couple of ways to say goodbye, and saying goodbyes are hard. There's the easy way being mad or the hard way where you let the feelings happen and you sort of celebrate." She heard me and switched it and we had a great goodbye. She loved me and because we got along really well, we are still in a little bit of contact and she's doing really well. But she had WISE support and all the supports were in place. She had been so challenging before that they were all there already. Then the pandemic hit and it was just her and I. We did okay. Her adoptive parents and I were in touch a lot during the transition. She has screen issues, so she only can email during school, but she does and shares pictures. Up until her sister had a baby, she had one of my dogs who had to be put down and she really, I don't know, took it on in a positive way because I kind of lost it. Her little avatar was my dog's face for a long time. So she had some connection. And she left with a positive, which was nice to know that she could do that.

When the third placement came around, it was a little easier. I had wanted to take a little bit of time [between placements]. I think it was three and a half weeks or four weeks total and the reason I wanted to wait because I didn't know what school is going to look like. And so when they called, they were like this might be a hard one. She's eligible for BRS, but she hadn't ever been in foster care before. She just had a ton of instability and has been in shelter care. They said she wants to try having a home and I was like, "Oh, gosh, bless her heart, 17 and a half. We can try it." My teacher's lower cognitive skills were like, I get this, I understand where she's coming from and what was I going to say about her and then the one thing I kept saying is I don't know yet if I'm going back to school in person. I don't know what school is going to look like if she can't be home alone. Then I'm going to need help finding support for her to do school if she can't do it by herself and by the looks of her cognitive level, that's going to be the case. People without an educational background or interest just say it will be fine, and it wasn't. I don't think I was prepared for how hard teaching would be remote with the demands. She came and she was hard almost immediately and it just ramped up. Yeah, so I think I might have asked for her to be removed if I didn't have heavy guilt about the first [placement]. I feel embarrassed with the foster parent trainer, to be completely honest if I didn't feel so guilty about that decision I had made. I feel like I owed the foster parent trainer one. I'm just being reflective and honest with myself like I think I probably would have said, this is not sustainable. Still, I didn't let myself do that because part of going into foster care and the things I saw that didn't work when I worked in it was foster parents feeling like, oh, if it doesn't go well, then I get to just say no, and I was like, no. When you say you'll do it, you do it and that line between holding that line and then the reality of, oh my gosh, I can't. If I hadn't had the level of support I had from Falcon Peak, I wouldn't have been able to do it.

I found out she was going to go to a shelter anyway when she left me at 18. She was going not to choose to stay with me and probably go to a shelter. I just said, “You know if that's where she's going anyway, if it's not like she just hangs on with me a little longer, then she can A or B and I'm a holding pen, then I need something because if I'm not benefiting her, but it's harming me, then we need to work something out.” But I probably would have put my foot down harder if I didn't have that guilt that made me stay because I didn't feel any longer than it was beneficial to her or that it would have a negative impact on her to leave based on what I learned about her. She ended up leaving three weeks before her 18th birthday when it just became evident that there was nothing that was going to happen on that day. Because it really was that you signed the thing that's the day and you agree to stay in extended foster care or not. She got to decide that it actually had the highest possibility of being effective for her to get her out of the area because of the connection she had in the area that was part of her nonfunctional life plan. It turns out exactly what they said was going to happen, happened. She went into a shelter and then the day of her 18th birthday, she signed into extended foster care and ran away the next day. She's been gone and that was her plan all along and I couldn't have stopped it. So I think I was like on that edge of I need to disrupt this [placement] this is harming me, but I had this stubborn guilt that wouldn't let me.

I would say that the thing that surprises me was her physical aggression. The reason it surprises me is that it's my job. I get it at work all the time and it very rarely personally hurts me. I mean, anytime you get hit, there's a personal feeling, but I was always able to understand it professionally. But getting hit in your home feels so different. At least it did for me. I wasn't my best self, you know. I always stayed very calm and very proactive and trauma informed and we get trained in education for response to aggression. That probably was the hardest thing for me

and it surprised me because I don't [react] when those things happen at work. I don't have fear, it's a character flaw, but a professional bonus that I get calm and I don't personally fear injury and I didn't with her, but I felt offended and that surprised me. I guess I need to be safe in my home to do the work that I do. One day she shoved my dog, and I just had it. I got mad inside. I always maintained my calm with her. Wow, did that affect me. I am not saying that I didn't think it would. I know that hurting an animal would affect me, but I didn't know how much it would be because I'm always student-focused. I can put my needs aside 100% and then all of a sudden, they hurt my dog and it was really hard. It took all my effort to maintain focus on her needs when I felt injured or when she's stealing my things and hurting my dog. It was tough for me to do heart first, which is how I do things and be focused on her needs when I was just feeling so attacked. I think that's the thing that her level of need was so high that there are times when the house just felt crazy and it was so hard. Because my work feels crazy sometimes and to have to at the end of the day find a safe spot of not craziness to refresh, to be able to do work the next day and I couldn't find it. It surprised me how much that all affected me because I do it all the time, but having it at home really impacted me.

Training Experience

I am a very irreverent student. I don't have a lot of patience for training that I don't need as I get very fed up very quickly and know that about myself. I can put myself in check and engage and find learning, but there are times when I'm just tired and it's not my job to find learning and I get irreverent about it as an adult. I've done a lot of school and if you're not going to give me information, I'm going to go find it. I do go find it, but sometimes I'm like, come on. Knowing that when I hear training, I go, oh, not more of that as I don't feel like It gives me information because it is designed for so many people and we all come at it in different ways.

But I think the other piece that I wonder about is would I have heard it before because I had this image of what it was going to be like, what I have heard, what I needed to hear and until I experience it, I don't know. There are so many times you go, oh yeah, they tried to tell me that. I got a ton of stuff from the foster parent trainer before I was a foster parent because of the child that she placed [in my home]. I got her bread and butter of her business and a full day of training. Her husband was working with the child and he came up and spent nights that first week with him. I got a level of support from her that made all the difference. Now that she's a part of the therapeutic system, hopefully, people are getting the stuff I got prior to the placement I lean on all the time from her. I had done a lot of trauma informed or trauma responsive work in my school and my past. But there was something about the way she approached it that I thought I understood it before and she just clarified my understanding of it in such a way that it elevated what I sort of already knew. I was like, I know this, I do this, and I teach other people this, but then she just elevated my learning in a way that I needed. I would say her learning or that level of trauma responsive care made all the difference to me and I was lucky enough to have that. I was lucky enough to have her at my kitchen table for six hours one day and teach me. When she joined the team, [Falcon Peak], and I could call her, made all the difference. I'll tell you when you have a question and you call her she is 100% at the very bottom of her soul advocating for kids and that's good. There were times when I was like, I don't need a kid advocate right now I just need to survive. She could hear that, but her very soul is helping kids. She has a knowledge and an understanding that has really helped me. So that is something that that level of trauma responsive care I think is necessary and I think it's necessary not only prior but at the outset. I think there needs to be that ongoing we told you this before now it's in front of you, and here's how you do it.

Special Education Experience

The other thing that's been huge is the one thing I did for that last placement that I had is an understanding of special ed law and special ed ins and outs that I don't think everyone has. I was also a Special ed director for a while. So I was able to really understand her IEP very well and see what I needed to do and I called someone I know, the director of The Arc and they said, here's what I need and here's what she needs. I was able to leverage supports to get her eligible for DDA services. I had been told that was not possible, but I understood the system that I said I disagreed. It didn't happen before her 18th birthday because the social worker didn't believe me, but it did happen like a week later, and so she did get [DDA services]. So getting her what she needed was only because of the experience and connections that I had as a special ed teacher or someone who knows special ed law. So I think that kind of support, which is what I used to do as a liaison for the foster family agency is speak education for the social workers, but also speak social work for the educators and cross that gap. Take care of things like making sure the records get transferred, making sure that the right people are on the IEP team, all of that kind of stuff.

For all of its highly litigious special education, California was ahead of the game in foster care as far as some things in place, especially San Diego County, where I supported the educational needs of foster youth. Being able to be a part of that and really had a checklist of here is the educational needs of foster youth before you make a placement have to make sure these things are in place. There was a database for records. There were some things in place that Washington's not there that helped me know that those would get missed. I don't see how that would translate into training, but if I didn't have that, I feel like I would have really missed something on all of the kids I had because finding school placement or knowing what I could do with the school when the second [placement] had really serious issues with her internet usage on

her school computer—knowing what I could do because I had school experience. Knowing who I could call and it was my district, so I just picked up the phone. You need to do this because I'm not just a random here. So I think that made a huge difference. So how to replicate that for parents that don't have that is the part I'm not sure of because I just had it. Most of the training that I luckily already have is getting supports in place for kids with high needs. I happen to have a lot of that from my job. But if I didn't, there are things that I think would have been a lot harder in my placements. That's what I spent a lot of my time doing was finding the supports.

Caregiver Core Training

I think that the information about keeping a paper trail was helpful. I wasn't good at it, but I know it was supposed to [help]. There were little things in one of the videos a foster parent says, “When you're setting up for licensing, set it up not because you want to get approved, but because this is how you're going to live now so the locks and where the meds are and all of that, create a system that is sustainable to live.” That was helpful but not necessarily for therapeutic. One thing I remember from the training and this is not that important, but they spent more time on how to draft an email to a social worker than on youth of special needs, LGBTQ youth, or tribal youth. The only thing I could figure with that was because that's what the social worker wants and there's nothing that helped me because I never followed any of it. And so I was kind of like you need to shift the balance here because that's about you. I don't care how you want your emails. I want to talk about how I can support children.

Right Response Training

One thing I forgot to mention that was huge for me with therapeutic care is I'm trained in something called Right Response, which is proactive. Yeah, if I didn't have that, I would have gotten hurt and she would have gotten hurt and I would have probably had to report on myself

because I didn't know how to keep myself safe and her safe when she was being physically aggressive. I have to [renew Right Response] for work. They do it at work all the time and I not only have the training, but have done it all the time at work, so it is automatic for me to be like hand spread and safe with her body and how to do that when she's grabbing you. Being on the phone with a social worker during it and was asking, "Can you just go lock yourself in your room? No, she's not letting me. I'm physically trying to keep us both safe right now." If I didn't have training and experience in that, it would have been bad. I do have a fear I could lose my job. If there's a report or if I don't do it right and that was big to me because what if I can't be a foster [parent], that was huge. I have to go back every year to renew it. I had to go back in the middle of all of this and it was really good for me to go back and renew and reflect and get back to that proactive support.

Educational Liaison

I think like the job I had where I was an educational liaison. I was involved in foster parent training from the get-go. Then I was also involved in intake. From the day we got the intake, I gathered the educational information and connected with the school and prepared the parent educationally for what was coming to help and not be a disruption. And then, I was able to support those educational needs in addition to providing training in schools. I think that would be beneficial because it's hard to tell and maybe not quite as much with the pandemic, but I just think that's such a huge part. And also just the rights of children in care with the disproportionality and special education. The triple threat includes the disproportionality of students of color in special education, the dispersion of children of color in foster care and special education, and the disproportionality of young men of color being labeled with

behavioral and disabilities. All of that triple threat needs more support to support kids and not falling victim.

IEP Evaluation

There's so much misinformation about special education that gets spread out like you have to have an IEP to get the service and you don't. I used to talk to parents like if you feel like your child needs protection, an IEP can protect them at school from their misbehavior. But if you feel like a magic service will happen, it's not if they don't need something educationally, then it might not be an IEP. It might be, hey, school, you have to do this, but I think you also know they'll say, oh, no, you have to have this label on your IEP to get the service. Not true. You don't have to have anything on your IEP to get the service. You just have to need the service and having someone who can go in there and just say, nope, that's not. It's not people trying to be nasty is just misinformation. I think that the kids with the most needs get the short end of the stick. I was actually talking to my brother the other day because he's had to deal with the CPS system. And he's like, I don't trust the system. And they said, you know, having worked in both and actually as a liaison for both, they will tell you they are both broken education and child welfare. Both are broken, both are equally broken, both broken in a lot the same way. But we depend on education daily, so we have to rely on child welfare. We can't just say, oh, I don't trust that system, but I do think they're both not broken but struggling. I don't think they're evil and I think they both want to support kids. It's just sometimes you have to clear the way as we want the same thing and here's how we're going to do it. So I do think that that support would be important. I think some level of training early on about how these things exist and there's someone you can ask because these things exist. I don't think parents know about that. I only know about DDA because I teach kids who have it, otherwise I wouldn't have known.

Dealing With Police

I don't have a lot of experience dealing with the police, so some experience or training would be beneficial. Because most of the time I got this one officer who's probably like the area [officer] and he was a young, but not cocky and did a good job. But then one time, I got a guy that I was like, ooh, this is not [right]. He said, "I have to take someone in." I said, "Oh, then she didn't hurt me." He was kind of a jerk, but [I was] learning their system and their rules and what you can call for and can't call for when you call 911 and then having to report on yourself. With my last placement, because she had so much instability in her life, I uncovered a lot of stuff that had been there before. I had to report on myself because it happened technically in my house, but it was something I uncovered from the past of internet usage and online relationships that were not safe. I had to report on myself for something that I uncovered. I had the experience to trust the system like I'm putting it all out there. Also, one of my former student's dad is one of the detectives. I just called him and asked what do I do because I had no idea. Then I started working with The Arc of Whatcom County. I happen to know the director [of the Arc of Whatcom County] socially, so I was able to call her and have a 15-minute conversation with her. I felt like my soul had a message about all that what's going on. She is just an incredible advocate. Maybe that's what the foster meetings could have, like, today we're going to meet Beverly Porter. She had done training for the life skills teachers. She's a huge advocate for kids about their rights as humans, their sexual rights, their rights to their experiences, their rights to their body, their rights to explore their body and all that kind of stuff that some people might be squeamish about and she's able to lay it out there in a way that just makes sense. I think that that's probably an area that I don't struggle with. I'm guessing that some parents might struggle with some of the

sexualized behaviors and how to support a child in building a positive body and sexual identity and feeling supported through that.

Foster Parent Trainer

I think my work with the foster parent trainer did [help prevent a placement disruption] and it was trauma responsive care. Also, she has a child and speaks very freely of her daughter with fetal alcohol syndrome behaviors and things that I was experiencing. That I think is what kept me from disrupting is the learning I had from her previously and her ongoing support. What kept me from disrupting was someone who understood what I was seeing because asking a friend while maintaining privacy limits your ability to get help from friends. They say, “Well, you should not put up with that tell her to leave.” You're like, “No, that's not the answer.” Actually, I had suggested Sunshine to talk to you. She and I have the same job and she called me recently about something that wasn't working. I don't have anyone else to call because I asked my friends and they're like kick them out and that's just our reality.

Foster Parent Support Group

I do think that I tried to go to the foster parent zoom meeting. And I get why parents need to do this. I totally do. But it was just time to emote. I could see one family that heard my actual question and wanted to work together, but there's just too much need to emote, which does not energize me. I am energized by problem-solving. And so it didn't work for me. But I don't judge it. It works, I'm sure, for a lot of people, but it did not work for me. I don't need to commiserate; I need to solve. I think that's a good thing that they have [a foster parent support group], but it didn't meet my need.

Foster Parent to Foster Parent Support

One day when Sunshine called me, I knew what I would have wanted. So I listened and asked questions and clarifying questions and heard and then asked her, “Would you like ideas?” she said, “Yes.” I knew what I wanted was what I can do right now to feel better and my long-term plan. I kind of walked her through some of that and then two days later, I delivered alcohol because that's what I would have wanted and I do think that is huge. I knew how she was feeling. I knew that what I would want is some whiskey in a container that was easily locked up, which people don't always think about and also that I would want. What can I do right now to feel like I'm doing something, and then what's my plan? What can we do for each other? But how do you build a support group saying no, this isn't for that. This is not for you to trump me and say yours is harder because I know it is for you and I get that, but that's not why I'm here. I also think there's the type of people in the world that have no trouble hijacking a conversation and especially on Zoom, they can just go and I can't. I don't say that in judgment because sometimes I wish I had some of that, but I'm a little bit more introverted in a group. I'm going to sit back and let people talk. So a meeting like that, I just sit there and let people talk. And that's great for them. But when I'm in crisis, I don't have that to give. I know that the foster parent trainer holds a weekly meeting with the case aids, where they talk about things and work things out. She doesn't let stuff happen, like let someone take over conversations.

Respite Support

I will say that the biggest trigger was I finally had respite on the schedule because from the day she came for like two months, I had nothing. The first month was my choice. I said, “I don't feel like it. She's very anxious. She's very nervous and having her leave to someone else's house would be bad for her.” Finally, folks convinced me. It might be a little hard for her, but you need a break. Then it got canceled at the last minute and I guess I had put so much hope into

a chance to sleep feeling safe and not have everything locked for a minute. Then [respite] went away. That was the weekend that went bad. I think part of it is I had lost some of my mojo because I so needed it and then it went away suddenly.

Maybe actually kind of as an analogy I love teaching, but I would poke my eyes out with sticks before I was a substitute. I think it turns out that respite would feel the same to me because I am so heart first and relationship-driven that respite isn't probably the way to do that. And those first few days are so hard that I want to do. But after my first unofficial placement, I still hadn't done the where you go to a meeting or talk to a foster parent for the training requirements and I talked to a Falcon Peak foster parent that's also a principal in my district. She said, "Take whatever you have in your imagination about how fostering is going to be like or what you're going to do and go down like four levels and start there." I just keep remembering that that that's how I envisioned respite as this beautiful thing and I need to knock it down. And that realization that respite [happens] a lot on weekends and my weekends get me ready to face the week. I will say right there in October I thought I couldn't do this. I'm going to have to rethink my entire life plan, but then almost like a week after she was gone, I was back to thinking, oh no, I can do. If I didn't have the experience and education that I particularly have, I would have probably disrupted sooner on that last one and I probably wouldn't do it. Because of the training and education I have, not from the foster [care] system, I have a knowledge base that helps me do things because I don't think I could have done it without what I already know and it wasn't the information I was taught by licensing or whatever.

Case Aide Support

I think I've been fortunate and well supported by the case aides that I've worked with and having that support at all has been pretty important in the placements. It would have been the

pivotal factor in that first placement having that [case aide support]. I had my schedule, like, oh, I can get two hours of work done from when she gets picked up to when she [gets dropped off] and then she'd refuse to go and then all of a sudden it wouldn't happen. If I can just get this [thing done] I can make it and then it wouldn't happen. I think that was the shift for me where I just thought I am [done]. This was a similar shift to the very first placement when I realized I am so at the mercy of other people who are just employees showing up and if they don't, I am screwed. So I think that was probably when I just emotionally [was done].

On-Call Support

Until the very end, I had very positive feelings about the on-call because I was not pleased one time, but I made it pretty clear at the time. I just said, "I hear what you're saying, but what I need you to do is listen to me." It's just, I had no tolerance for being left off. That was just once, but I found it very supportive and never judgmental, always willing to show up. Not like do you need me to come, but I hear you, you're calling, and I'm in the car. That was huge for me and real support for me. There were times when the youth called it and I could tell they knew someone just needs to be the ear for a couple of hours and they did. That's been big for me. Having [on-call] and then having it, but when you use it feeling no negative feelings that you called. That's what we're here for. It was significant to me because even a tinge of I don't have time for you and I'll back off and that's my character flaw, like, okay, I'll do it myself. Never did I get that feeling. The program director specifically always seems to get it and would say, "Oh, I see what you need right now, why don't you go take a drive." Once, we were dealing with a runaway situation and he said, "Why don't you go home, I'm here." Just knowing that's what's needed right now. I've always liked him and I'm glad he's running the show because he seems to get it and has kids' skills. They were willing to come in and do it, which I think is important to

say I'll show up and I'll help deal with it instead of telling you how. So I guess that lens of knowing that they're willing to jump in, I think, is something Falcon Peak does well. I believe this is the reason I would continue because I believe in them. I'll probably wouldn't continue foster parenting if they hadn't been who they are.

Suzy

Suzy is a female in her mid 60s from Whatcom County with a master's degree in social work. Suzy has been a respite care provider for a year and four months with Eagle Care and has provided ongoing respite to five children. Suzy is a survivor of extreme child abuse. As a child, she did not remember her abuse until she was 37 years old, so she has recovered memories. She has been happily married to her husband, Red, since 2010. Suzy got divorced in 2003 after a 23-year marriage that involved some domestic violence. She feels like the good thing about that marriage was her two sons. The relationship she has with her two sons seemed to be very important to her as she references her sons on multiple occasions.

I first met Suzy and her husband when we took part in the Mandt Training together through Eagle Care. Suzy, her husband, Red, and I have taken a couple of foster parent training classes together before COVID and during COVID. I found Suzy on Facebook and sent her a private message to ask her if she would like to participate in my study. She agreed to participate but was concerned that she might not qualify because she and her husband only provide respite care and are not full-time foster parents. It surprised me to hear how comfortable Suzy felt with me sharing openly and candid about the trauma and abuse she suffered as a child and the domestic violence in her first marriage during our interview. Suzy spoke very fondly about her husband, Red, and praised him for being a fantastic foster parent and role model to the children they provide respite care. This made me think of the loving, caring, and supportive relationship

that my parents have with each other. She is committed to providing the best respite service to full-time foster parents that she can. Both Suzy and her husband go above and beyond what respite foster parents are expected to provide in the form of support to other foster parents. Through the interview, I saw her passion and purpose in helping children in foster care despite facing multiple obstacles in her personal life and as a foster parent. Red had the vacuum going during the first part of our interview, so sometimes it was difficult to hear. Red kept walking behind Suzy during her interview, but she didn't seem distracted by that. Suzy's interview via Zoom lasted 70 minutes and she did her interview in an open space in what looked like a hallway in her home.

Parenting Style

I was a social worker with a master's degree before I became a parent. I think I talked to children more than some people do. I don't think I was extremely strict; I would talk through things with my children. I think he learned most negotiation skills from me and he's actually admitted it. My parenting was affected because I was in a verbally abusive marriage and I didn't have the power I should have had. In the end, I ended the marriage because I could see that it wasn't good for my sons to show me so little respect and to be kind of encouraged to be disrespectful to me by their father. As for my parenting style, I tried to explain things to my sons.

Previous Parenting Experience

The fact that I've been a social worker, the fact that I'd had kids, I don't know that was a factor. I have always loved children and I don't think being a parent made a difference with me wanting to be a foster parent. I was homeroom mom every year. I was sad when my sons went to sixth grade because they were in middle school and there weren't homeroom moms. I just made a big deal with each party. I would help with parties at most classrooms, like during St. Patrick's

Day, I would make green cupcakes and put green food coloring in the sprite. It turns out to be a green drink and they even oddly let me bring my little dog. I dressed in costume and the dog dressed in costume. Those are the kinds of things I did and I like still being able to do those kinds of things.

I was a social worker for 23 years and I placed over 100 children in adoptive homes. I also did play therapy. I got a certification to do child-centered play therapy, which is like client-centered counseling like Rogers Carl Rogers. Where you believe that people are good and need to talk about things, they can sometimes work out their own problems. In that kind of play therapy, you listen to children through their play. I really liked doing that. All the social work I did was child-oriented. I did some psychotherapy with adults, but most of it was connected with children. I did parenting time evaluations and disputed divorce custody cases. I was never a foster care worker, but I worked at a children's home where I felt like some workers didn't look at things long-term. You have to look at the long term for adoption. At the children's home, I got to have a separate staff meeting for placement staff, including foster care and adoption. When they change supervisors, I led the meeting and put me as a supervisor over the foster care and adoption [team].

Being a parent, I think it has helped with foster parenting, although my husband's never been a parent. I think he does well too. I think it definitely is helpful. One child who will come to our home tomorrow is bright and reminds me of my son because bright children are hard to raise. One reason it is hard is that he is brilliant. Most foster children are behind academically but this child [is doing well] academically and likes to learn. [Sometimes] is hard to set limits with him. I think it's been helpful being a parent. I can think of examples with my other son of how parenting him has been really helpful, like what to cook.

Becoming a Foster Parent

I heard about it when we moved here. I babysat for a little girl when we lived in Tiger. It wasn't to make money, but I just thought it'd be fun to be kind of like a grandma to someone. I didn't have any kids and didn't have any grandkids. I was abused and trafficked as a child by my parents. It was extreme abuse, and my ex-husband didn't believe me. He didn't believe me because I was married when I remembered my abuse. He convinced my son's that my abuse didn't happen. They just don't believe me that I was abused as a child. So my sons have decided that I can't babysit for my grandchildren. I can take care of them while my sons are sleeping or taking a nap, or I've stayed overnight at one son's house and I take care of the kids before my son and his wife wake up. It's things that many people will consider babysitting. When I came to live here, where I have three children and grandchildren, I didn't know how much I'd be allowed to see them because the whole thing was just confusing about babysitting. So I posted something on Nextdoor saying grandma for hire and explaining what I was looking for. I got someone who is a foster parent to contact me through Nextdoor and told me why I don't consider respite foster care and explain what respite foster care is and I thought, I'm not babysitting for money anyway. So I talked to my husband and he said he would be willing to go through the classes. I didn't know he would say yes to it or not. That is how we became foster parents. It was through this foster parent telling me what respite foster care is.

Licensing Experience

We applied at a different private agency and they would not approve us and they said the reason was because of my childhood. The worker there watched my film and said that she has nothing bad to say about the worker, but the supervisor said she couldn't approve it. That was upsetting to me because I just believe that people who work with children are abused. We can

have good lives and be turned down as a foster parent was very upsetting on so many levels. I have placed a hundred kids and adoptive homes. It was insulting for me as a professional, but also it was really hard. So I wrote to Eagle Care and told them a different private agency had turned me down due to adult children's references. It's just a no-brainer if you're trying to determine if someone will be safe and a good parent, you should talk to their adult children. My son apparently gave a bad reference and we were really surprised when we were approved. We were approved only for respite. My understanding is that it had something to do with my son's reference or maybe both of my sons. I don't know what's in the reference.

We had not planned on doing therapeutic foster care because the other private agency doesn't do therapeutic foster care. Initially, we were going to go with a different private agency, but when they turned us down, I was actually in Germany looking at which foster agencies we could go with and found out Eagle Care. They do therapeutic foster care, but not all of their kids are at that level. Some of the kids we had were BRS known as Behavioral Rehabilitation Services and some are regular [foster care] while others are somewhere in between. We get paid a little differently [depending on the level of care the child needs]. It's not important to us how much we get paid. We don't always know what level the child is at until we get the payment. It's like, oh, I guess that child was BRS or that child is something in between. It was not intentional for us to go into therapeutic foster care.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

We've seen some challenging behaviors. One of our kids, who was BRS, was nicknamed the energizer bunny. He was six years old and he was a tough kid. It took me and my husband our full attention most of the time he was in our home. I took him to church. He had some problems there, but it was nice to have that break and take him to church, although I stayed in the

Sunday school classroom with him the whole time. My husband got to go jogging and running that morning while we were gone. It literally took one of us the entire time to take care of him. We took turns taking care of him. He was better if you went to a park. He was better in some situations, but we had to quit pretty much taking him to the Children's Museum because he caused so many problems there, or if we were there, we were right next to him. He was a challenging child and a really sweet child. We don't know where he is since his foster home ended placements and they didn't have another one right away, so he's not with Eagle Care anymore. Our first child was a BRS child and he wasn't hard for us that week. He was here, but he was older and he aged out [of foster care]. I don't know how he's going to do in life. It's a sad thing. We have had difficult experiences with some of the kids. We always want the kids back even after the child was no longer with Eagle Care. We asked that we be considered for respite, but we haven't gotten a call about him. We will always let any of the children back.

It is so interesting that about 50% of foster parents only foster one year. We did have a situation where we thought we wanted to offer the child a permanent home and we were set up to do that. I didn't realize we were only allowed to do respite, which was part of what our study said. They were going to let us have this child full time and the child was tribal. So, for some reason, that makes a difference. The child was going to be in foster care with us for a year and then we were going to seek guardianship through the tribe. As I said, I had no clue that we couldn't do that because they were letting us do that. That child did not want to come, which surprised everyone because everyone thought she would want to. She said good things about our home and everything.

Having this girl was a hard situation. We had to do an incident report because she said we took her to the park and that a boy there [inappropriately touched her]. She also called the police

on my husband because my husband was trying to get her away from a boys' house one night. The police were very understanding, but that was also a part of the incident report. We called in to report it and Child Protective Services chose not to investigate, but licensing did investigate. Eagle Care came out and they did their interview. The whole situation was hard. It was not founded, but we're still waiting for the state of Washington to tell us because there's a three-month backlog and so we won't find out until probably March what happened with that because the incident was in early November. I don't know when Eagle Care turned it in. Eagle Care did say they thought we didn't say no enough to this child. That is a difference of opinion. We were saying no I think I definitely say no more readily than my husband does. One area of feedback I had for Eagle Care is that they did not write to us and said we found it invalid and we are sending something to the state of Washington saying you should keep your license. They didn't do that and I would have liked to have had that. As soon as they decided they should inform us and then as soon as they find out from the state of Washington. However, that does mean we get information both times. That occurred when we had been foster parents for a year and three months.

I can see how people would quit. At that point, what I decided was that I had to adopt a teenage girl. This girl was 11 and she'd like became a teenager overnight. An older girl might be better for adoption, which can be better because she wouldn't be in the foster system. I still plan to do respite care. We were not going to quit. That is when I found out that our study didn't approve us for anything other than respite. I didn't know it until then. We can't adopt based on these references my sons gave. Eagle Care didn't think we handled some of the things well with this child, but in this instant, I continue to believe what we did was good. If I had to do it over again, I think I still would. That night after she calmed down, she said, "Why do you want me if I

am bad?" I was able to tell her why I wanted her, how much we loved her, how my husband had never been a parent before and he wanted to be a parent, how talented she is, and how great of a sense of humor she has. I got to compliment her in some heartfelt ways and she ended up deciding she didn't want to move with us because we are older. Part of it was our age and part of it may have been that I got too close in that scared her. But I'm still glad I got to say that to her because I think she'll never forget there was a family that wanted her. She is still in the foster home she was in and that is where she wanted to be. She got what she wanted and that's good. They have said it will not be long-term, but maybe it will be longer than they thought. I don't know how long she will be there, but she got to stay longer and she did like it there. That is something where we used some skills we have obtained from training. With Eagle Care, we get Mandt Training. Those skills came in handy that night because I thought about what I have control over to help settle her down. I just did a lot of walking that night with her and the walking did help. While we were walking, she went back to the house three times. It was about 11:30 pm. It was late at night, but she was cold and I gave her my coat or asked if she wanted it and she said yes. I think she kind of liked me. All that walking did settle her down. We felt that we could have used some of the physical restraint skills from Mandt Training in keeping her safe but what we did was a better way than physical restraint. We were limited in what we could do and I thought the training was beneficial.

We thought about changing agencies. I wanted to switch to a different agency because I had known I felt let down when I looked at kids to adopt on a website and then found out we wouldn't be able to do that through Eagle Care. So I looked at another agency and as it turns out, we can't even transfer to another agency for some reason. The state of Washington did not let us transfer. Now that we can't transfer, we will stay with Falcon Peak because I think they offer a

lot of good things. We will only do respite as that is all we can do. There are advantages to not having a child full time. So I have kind of thought maybe this is for the best and at our ages, we can be more like grandparents to the kids. When we thought about changing to another agency, I asked the other agency could we still have this one kid who we consider our regular who has been coming to see us for over a year and they told us definitely. I never was going not to have that child any more; I was always going to keep the continuity for that child. I never thought of quitting because I was always going to do that.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

I think we do the same thing with the kids. We just get paid differently. I think the hardest kids have been the ones who were classified as [BRS]. Well, no, that's not really true. We can't always tell that the child is that much harder. One of our children his classification changed. We don't always know and one of our kids, who my husband thinks it's the hardest, was traditional, but his classification may have changed. We can't always tell which kids will be the hardest based on their classification, to be honest. We treat the child according to the child's needs and it has nothing to do with the classification.

Motivation

I feel so committed to the kids. One example of that is one of our kids is now living with his biological mom and he still comes once a month and visits us. I get along well with the biological mom. That is where we had Thanksgiving. We went over to her home to a tiny trailer and had Thanksgiving there with them. Then we brought him home and he spent the weekend with us. We plan to have him always in our life. So we make a commitment to these kids and the commitment stays. He's going to be moving out of state when his case closes in February. We are going to fly him in to see us every summer. That is the kind of commitment we have. He

really likes my husband. I don't know that there's any other man who's ever been in this life, who's been good, kind and non-criminal. Now only one of our regulars is still in care. But then I also feel committed to the foster parents I've worked with and it's nice to give them breaks. So one of the full-time foster moms now has another child and I understand that child will be coming for respite. Maybe one reason we don't have so much respite now is because of the pandemic. Foster mom is very careful about the pandemic. I don't know at what point she would want him to come for respite.

Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence

Eagle Care makes us aware of other training. We have gotten excellent training through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence and that's been helpful. One training that was especially helpful that we took before we had foster kids was the one on handling allegations. That was helpful, especially when this came up when I had to call to self-report. Just knowing more about it was helpful to me. We have had other training through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, which has just been really good. Since that incident with the child, we have taken more classes with the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence, so that's been helpful. I also took training with the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence on how to do virtual visits and that was good because with the one kid, we bake a cake. His mom got to watch us bake a cake. He did not want to have a very long visit, but in the end, he wanted to finish baking the cake, so the visit lasted very long. He also ate the cake and the visit. We also had to have the training and I think it was through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence on how to deal with a sexually aggressive youth and how to deal with the physically aggressive youth. Those were good training even though that film needs to be updated. I still learned from both of those trainings.

So my husband and I have taken classes together. I have taken classes to see if some of what I knew as a social worker is still being done. Books were a big thing when I was doing social work many, many years ago. I started doing social worker in 1976. My husband and I took that training together to know how to help the child know their history and give a little report to the bio mom of all the times a child's been with us, so she has more information. We just recently took training on setting limits. We have way more training hours than we have to have. I think training is important and so does my husband. The eating disorder training was helpful. We are concerned about obesity and so my husband and I need to make decisions together on that with the kids in our care. So I was hoping to have some guidance on handling obesity within children. We might get a child who has other eating disorders and then we'll know more about how to handle that, how to prevent anorexia in young girls and boys and address eating in a way that won't aggravate the situation.

Caregiver Core Training

We did the Caregiver Core Training in-person with a different private agency. With the Caregiver Core Training and my social work experience, I thought they did excellent in showing a video on communicating with [biological] parents, which has helped me. I'm supporting the child with visitations and because of the pandemic, I have supervised kids on zoom visits with their [biological] parents. I feel like we got more information or more reminders of how important it was to the bio parents. On the negative side, I don't think they spent more than 10 minutes on dealing with a sexually abused child which really bothered me. I thought there were a lot of good things about our training. They did the training early in the evening and said if they covered everything they didn't need to take the entire scheduled time for the training, that bothered me considering how little they spent on handling children who were abused. They

didn't spend much time on handling children who were physically abused but spent even less time on sexual abuse.

Human Trafficking Survivor Training

It is just an appalling number of the number kids who age out of foster care. I want to say it's like 60% of human trafficking survivors were in foster care. I think that is something that should be covered. That was good training for us, but we didn't have anything like that with the other private agency. The basic philosophy is we're going to take the easier kids, but I don't think that works. You may think you have an easy kid, but you could have a kid who is a human trafficking survivor and they just came into care because of neglect or for some other reason and then they disclose more once they are in care with you. You cannot train foster parents to take easy kids because easy kids may be easy kids because they are behaving well. Once they get comfortable, they start to talk and what are you going to do? Kick him out of your foster home because they disclosed they were trafficked. I think that training needs to be included in the Caregiver Core Training. I think it's been helpful to have the training in a group setting.

Agency Support

As far as the agency we are with, Eagle Care, I think they've done good providing support to us. We have worked with five foster parents. We've had five kids. One of the foster parents I have not communicated easily and the other four are really good friends. The agency has been very supportive of complimenting us. A couple of [foster parents] gave us Christmas presents in appreciation for what we've done. I'm very vocal and appreciative that we are still in contact with this one child who is back in his home. We do extra things for the foster parents like we do the pick up and drop off. We feel like full-time foster parents shouldn't do that as this is their break. So that would be the other thing that Eagle Care has done or that someone within

Eagle Care has done. The agency likes to give us a little Christmas gift. They had a Christmas party last year, which they couldn't do [this year due to the pandemic]. They do an appreciation dinner which we've only gone to one of those because of the pandemic, but that that was really nice. They weren't able to make the foster parent appreciation dinner, but they bought pizzas you could bake. So each of us got a pizza and a salad. We could order what kind of pizza we wanted and they brought it all to our house in May. They've really tried to do things like that. So those things they do in appreciation, I think, go a long way.

Case Aide Support

Case aides are really important thing with Eagle Care. That is huge because the foster parents don't have to take the child to the doctor or whatever. When I say we have always picked up our kids, there was a child who would come to our home directly after a visit with bio parents and those visits were hard. I chose to have the case aide bring the kid home instead of us picking up the child from the visit. I thought the child would have more time to settle down after the visit. It would be an easier transition to settle down, but also that makes it so much easier for the foster parents not to have to transport these kids and instead have the case aides transport them. One of the kids we had that we wanted to provide a permanent home to really liked her case aide. She had time with her case aide one afternoon or two afternoons a week. I keep doing it because I didn't want her to make another transition and have another person out of her life. She actually came here a couple of times because of the pandemic and the case aide took care of her here. That way, she could cook and stuff. I would literally go on walks and stuff while the case aide was here. So not only are case aids helpful as far as the usefulness of supporting the child, but it is also another relationship for the child and that's something that Eagle Care does well. They seem to have case aides available and work hard to have them available.

Respite Support

I think respite can be longer than this, but respite in Washington allows foster parents to get two nights off a month. I like to have the same child repeatedly so that child comes and spends one weekend a month with us. Some respite parents are not willing to do this, but then if that parent goes on a week-long vacation, we keep the child during that week they are on vacation. For instance, one of the kids' foster parents went on a cruise. They had already gone on a child-friendly vacation with him and a cruise just for them as a couple. The child stayed with us during that week. Another example of a more extended respite is we had a child while the foster mom had surgery, and we kept that child 10 days. We have been called about kids who don't have a possible [home], and I have decided not to take a child who's like in between homes. I just think it would be hard for me emotionally to know that the child might be going back to a hotel. We have taken kids who had been in a hotel because they couldn't find any foster homes and so social workers stay overnight at the hotel with the child, which is horrible. It is disgusting that we are taking kids from their home and putting them in a hotel in our society. I just can't be a part of that. I don't want to be a part of that. So I only want to take kids in a foster home and their parents need a break in Eagle Care.

Foster Parent Support Group

We haven't had the online foster parent support group with Eagle Care. I think they usually do have them and we have been to one of those before the pandemic. Eagle Care hasn't been doing the support group during the pandemic. Another support is a Facebook group that is helpful to kind of build community among the foster parents. I think that has been really good. I post pictures of us with the kids like my husband helped this one child build this huge lemonade stand. The child got to design it. I got so many compliments on that, but also I posted so that

other foster parents would come by to buy lemonade from this kid and they did. Then another kid wants to be a YouTube star and so he does these videos. They are not the most exciting videos, but he wants people to comment on him and the foster parents have commented on these somewhat boring videos. The foster child himself got recognition and it was completely confidential because it's a private Facebook group, and normally, I couldn't post that and I couldn't let people know that he is a foster child.

Red

Red is a male in his low 70s from Whatcom County. Red has been a respite care provider for a year and four months with Eagle Care and has provided ongoing respite to five children. Red has no biological children and is happily married to Suzy. Red was recruited by his wife to participate in the research study. Most of the communication about the research was done between Suzy and me, even though Red was included in the email exchanges. He only responded when it was time to schedule the interview. Red's age did not stop him from saying no to becoming a foster parent. Instead, he described his role as a respite provider more as a "fun" grandfather figure than a parent figure. Red reminded me a lot of my grandfather, not because of his age but because he was very soft-spoken, calm, and had a hard time hearing me during the interview. There were a few times when I had to repeat myself twice. One thing that stood out from the interview was that Red admitted he is not the perfect foster parent. He knows that he will inevitably make mistakes. However, for Red, it is important for him and his wife to learn from their mistakes to improve and change the outcome next time something similar happens. His answers were often short and to the point. I conducted his interview right after Suzy's interview. At times I felt like the interview was rushed. Red's interview via Zoom lasted 33 minutes and he did his interview from a private room in his home.

Becoming a Foster Parent

I'm just a guy who never had kids. I never thought I'd have kids and then Suzy, of course, got interested in having foster kids temporarily. I agreed to take the training. I am just fine having kids, you know, I just never had my own. I mean, I've had nieces and nephews that I played with and watched grow up over the years, and that was wonderful. It just didn't work out in my life to have kids. And now, it was Suzy's idea, and I kind of went along with it. Certainly not something I opposed. It's something I thought we could do together and help some kids out. I think I was ready [to become a foster parent]. I didn't feel unprepared. I've observed other people raising kids and seeing them do things right and things wrong and just thought, well, I can do that. Suzy is so good with kids. I could lean on her if something went wrong. Yeah, it never would have occurred to me [to be a foster parent]. Since it was respite, it was easier for me to go along than if she had said we're going to become long-term foster parents on day one. I might not have been so amenable, but since it was respite, I thought, well, that's not a whole lot different than just babysitting. I could do that. Many of these kids aren't your average everyday child either, but I knew that going in. I thought it's something we can do together. We're always looking for something meaningful to do together. We do a lot of entertainment things together, you know, go to movies or whatever, but as far as doing something meaningful together, that's the only thing we've ever done. We're helping other people as a team.

Previous Parenting Experience

I think I would do better if I had the experience, in retrospect. As I said, I've observed other people raising kids, and I thought, well, I can do that too. But I also have observed that it is a hard thing to do especially with these kids. All of them have at least been rejected some time in their life I think I would have done better if I had more experience, but I

have what I have, and I think I'm doing okay. I think I might have done some things better with more experience. I don't think I've had self-doubt. I admire Suzy's ability to deal with kids. She can pretty much do anything, such as just talking to a child in the right way. I don't have that skill as well as she does, but I just find that as a learning opportunity. I don't find that I feel inadequate because of it. I just feel that I've got a lot to learn.

Co-Parenting Experience

We have a lot of discussions between us before and after the kids come. If something has gone wrong, we have a post mortem as to what we did wrong. We haven't had any new kids during COVID. We've only had kids we had before COVID. So we know all the kids that come here. We have a discussion beforehand about how we're going to handle them associated with problems we had the last time they came. Usually, Suzy handles the food because she does most of the cooking. I'm usually the one that goes out and plays with them because I'm more athletic than Suzy. I can run around and play around with the kids a little better. As far as other things, like how much TV they can watch, that's as much of a concern to Suzy and me as it is between the kids and us. We try to decide that before they come. What becomes an issue is trying to tell the kids to stop watching and sometimes they ignore you and do other things. We sometimes get into a conflict over that and the kids get into disputes over that. We each end up dealing with it at one time or another. So there's no clear responsibility on most things, but there is on a few things. We try to act as a team. We try not to argue with each other when the kids are there.

Being a Male Role Model

Being a male role model figure for some of these kids, that's more Suzy's opinion. I only know one kid that I seem to be a male role model and he's no longer in foster care. He now lives with his biological mother, although we still see him once a month. Yeah, it seems that he adores

me, and I seem to be a male role model. I don't think that's true of any other kids we have, even though I don't think any other kids we have had have a male figure in their life. But I'm not sure I've become it either. One kid's father was in jail and just got out of jail, but he doesn't seem to have that much contact with his father. The father of another child may be in jail also. The child is so afraid of his father; he would never be in touch with him if he had a choice. A little girl we had never mentioned her father and has no contact with him. Another kid we had was 18 at the time that we had him. He never mentioned his father. So, potentially I could be a male role model. I just don't think we see him enough for that to happen, except for this one kid who just immediately took after me, and I seem to be a male role model. It's a more significant thing to Suzy than it is to me. I don't see it quite the way she does. Suzy considers all kinds of things that I don't. I don't feel like I'm particularly trying to be a male role model. I'm just trying to be the nice grandfather, basically.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

In general, things go well. We haven't had any kids get seriously hurt or anything. We act basically like grandparents. We try to do as many fun things as we can with the kids. We try to keep them as active as possible. We are not responsible for raising them; that's their regular foster parent's job. So we're, you know, especially me, we act more like playmates than as parents. Sometimes, we have to act as parents, but most of the time, we're just playing with the kids and just having fun. Sometimes, we have to rein them in and be a little bit of a disciplinarian, but not too often. We've had some kids that have just been tough to just keep from destroying things. We had one little six-year-old who, if he was around another kid, you're guaranteed to have a fight. I mean, it was going to come up if he was around another kid. There was no way to avoid that we could find, except to keep him away from other kids. He was just

wild, you know. He ran around the house throwing things and yelling and screaming. We wondered if we were going to keep having him. It turned out that he was sent off to another foster home, and we weren't respite parents for him anymore. And I don't know how long we would have stayed with him if that hadn't happened. And then Suzy probably told you about one kid. We had a rough night with her. She wanted to visit these couple of boys and wasn't paying attention to us. We were wondering about our own ability to take care of these kids. We wondered if there was anything we could do that would be proper that would help. What occurred to me is, what can we do differently or better so that we don't have the situation again. The most immediate thing was, how do we get out of this situation right now? I was thinking, for the future, what do we do differently? I never thought of quitting or giving up on a particular child or any child. It's just, if something goes wrong, the first thing that comes to my mind is, all right, what am I missing?, what did I do wrong? What can I do better next time?

It's been rewarding. I think we have provided a second home for some of the kids. We try to provide a grandparent role that some of the children didn't have. It has been frustrating sometimes because I think we haven't really done well with some kids. You know, it's OK to me, as long as we don't harm the kid. I feel like I have become a better parent over time and without hurting anybody. It's been a rewarding experience overall. The challenges are pretty obvious. The kids in the therapeutic program tend to be more sensitive, you know, less likely to behave appropriately. They're more likely to blow up at any time. I guess you feel pretty good if things go well. I think that's the reward. But like I said, we don't differentiate between kids, and we just can't choose what kids they send us, and we treat them on an individual basis. We don't say this is a tough kid, so we're going to treat them differently. We find out he's a tough kid first, and if he is, we treat him accordingly.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

They send us whatever kids they send us. We've never asked one way or the other. We have had not such difficult kids, and we have ended up with some kids that are, you know, BRS kids. Just basically a random chance. Yeah, we haven't tried to be therapeutic. We pretty much treat kids all the same. It doesn't matter to us. If you know they've got particular problems or don't know about their problems, and we deal with them as we can. Some of the kids are much more difficult than others to take care of. We may know ahead of time that they're in the therapeutic program, but it doesn't make any difference to me. We deal with them as they are. And yeah, the ones that are in therapeutic foster care tend to be more difficult. That's true. But we've had some pretty difficult kids that aren't, you know, they're in traditional foster care, but they've been rather difficult. We had one kid who was in therapeutic foster care, who is an older kid. He was 18, I think when we took care of him, and he was an easy kid to take care of. From what we understood, his more wild days were behind him at that point.

Motivation

I just like the kids. I think we can do a good job with them and help them. And it's kind of fun being a grandparent. When things go wrong is a challenge, but I am not opposed to challenges as long as I think we could do better in the future. So, it's just satisfying because we're taking care of kids that need to be taken care of, and I don't think we're harming them. I'm happy we don't. Sometimes I question how much we're helping them, but I don't believe we are harming them.

Training Experience

The training has helped with the challenges that have come up so far. As I said, I'm starting at zero for just about everything. What I learned in training was more than I knew

before. The Caregiver Core Training wasn't as helpful as things like the Mandt Training. The Mandt Training was the most helpful training I've taken. We've taken some other courses like first aid and CPR. I mean, I find those very helpful. They are just the basic things you have to take to raise a kid or take care of anybody. The Caregiver Core Training prepared me somewhat, but not completely for the behavioral challenges I would face as a foster parent. I mean, I view it as an introduction. If that's the only training I had, I will find it inadequate, but I think it started me out in the right direction, knowing some of the challenges and some of the background of these kids and what motivates them and what doesn't, and how to treat them and how not to. I don't think there's any one training that will ever prepare you to be a parent. I also think you could take training for years and still not be prepared for everything. A lot of work you just have got to do on your own. You can fall back on some of the principles you learn. You still have to be pretty creative in many situations you run into.

[Suzy and I] have been taking much more training than is required. We try to take courses that seem relevant. Sometimes, it seems like we're taking a course to find out what we did wrong last time. We're trying to learn and grow all the time because until we're perfect, which will never be, we will try to get all the training we can. Like I said, the Mandt Training is the most valuable training that I've taken. We took a course on how to avoid being reported or legally protect ourselves from unfounded accusations. That was helpful in a very practical sense. So we document everything we do. I don't know if that helped us raise the kids any better, but it helps us feel better about potentially facing accusations from the kids. We just took a course dealing with anger, and we got some useful ideas. We took another one, I can't remember what it was called, but it was a video course where they talked about things like instead of arguing with the kid, just say I love you too much to argue with you to avoid getting in conflicting situations.

So, I mean, I've gotten lots of ideas from lots of different courses, and, you know, each course has added a few little things to our repertoire, but, you know, I don't know what else you could do but continue to learn to continue to get better. Since I'm starting from such a low base of experience, I think almost anything is helpful for me.

Agency Support

Eagle Care mostly just schedules kids. We don't. They don't do much for us unless we ask for help if we have trouble with a particular kid. They're always there to answer questions and talk to us about it. So they're kind of a resource. They arrange the Mandt Training, which I find the most helpful training. So certainly, they are a resource, and they let us know about other training opportunities. Their primary role is just to be there in case we need them. They are not actively involved in taking care of any particular kid. They're just there as a resource. Of course, when we had that one night with that one girl, they were there to investigate, which I think was a fair thing for them to do. But I guess that's a resource they provide when something goes wrong. They're going to investigate. I don't think so. I mean, they pretty much let us do our thing unless there is a problem. I don't see what they could do beyond that now, except to be there on-call as a problem may arise, you know. Sometimes, a couple of times, when Suzy and I were kind of arguing about how to treat a particular kid, we call them, and they gave their opinion. It's the same thing as they called and put in their two cents, which sometimes we take and sometimes we don't. At least we know what they're thinking. I don't know what else they could do. I'm not looking for more support from them now. I'm just happy with them being there in case we need them. Suzy's got some issues. I don't necessarily agree with her. We both do things differently. I think that Eagle Care has been great.

Foster Parent Support Group

I assume the [foster parent support group] meetings will resume when COVID is over. Those were just education opportunities. You always have some sort of educational thing, but it is nice to meet some of the other foster parents. They occasionally have ideas, and you find out they are facing the same problems. That's kind of reassuring, I guess. So, yeah, the meetings are helpful in that respect. But for the most part, they're just a training opportunity.

Noah

Noah is a male in his upper 40s from Whatcom County who works in law enforcement. He has been a full-time foster parent and respite care provider for five years and six months. He was first licensed with the state and a few months later transitioned to Eagle Care. Noah is married to Olivia and has no biological children. He has fostered over seven children in his home. The placements ranged from just a few days to three and a half years. Three of those placements have been long-term placements. The first placement lasted two months before the child was asked to be removed from the home due to her behaviors. The second placement lasted nine months before the child was asked to be removed. The third placement lasted three and half years before the child was asked to be removed. Both the second and third placements were youth in extended foster care. Currently, Noah has no placement as Eagle Care cannot provide long hours of case aide support to support him and his wife while they are at work. Noah and his wife are taking a break until the schools return to being full-time in the classroom or until Eagle Care provides them with the case aide support they need during the day.

I first met Noah when I was shadowing a case manager for work. When I interviewed Noah, he had just gotten home from work. Even though Noah can look like a big tough guy, he is a very easy-going and loving guy. Through my interview, I was able to see that Noah has a big passion for helping youth. Although many children need a home, Noah has a particular affinity

for teenagers because they have a more challenging time finding a home. Noah finds that even though it can very tough having a teenager at home, it can also be very rewarding. Noah's interview via Zoom lasted 52 minutes and he did his interview from his home office.

Becoming a Foster Parent

Several years ago, we had kind of dabbled in the idea of foster care and we were actually at a friend's wedding and one of her guests worked in foster care. We got to chat with her a little bit about what foster care was all about. In talking with her, we discovered that foster care was in great need of foster parents that would foster teenagers. We decided this might be something we can do because we had already decided we weren't going to have any bio kids. We started digging into it a little bit to figure out what we wanted to do, how we wanted to go about doing it, and then ultimately initiated all the classes and stuff with the state. We got our first foster kid and that that was an experience.

We saw the need for foster parents [for teenagers]. My wife works in mental health. She is a mental health counselor and I have been in law enforcement for a while now. I've known people that have been in the foster system. One of my really good friends, their mom, died when they were very young. Luckily there was enough family and friends' support and they didn't go into foster care. I saw the need along with my wife. We can probably make a little bit of a dent here, specifically for teenagers because 80% of the time, people go for kids. We honestly don't want the littles; we prefer the teenagers. They are a little more challenging, but the rewards are there as well.

Parenting Style

My parenting style is pretty simple. I'm fairly laid back. We don't punish per se, it's not like we say go to your room or any of that type of stuff, but instead, we try to lead with love and

logic. If a kid has a blowout or has a bad day or whatever, we try to address what they're experiencing and what's causing and try to help them get back to the baseline. We got the Mandt Training that we utilize for that stuff through Eagle Care and it works most of the time. We luckily haven't had to get into anything like the restraints. I remember one of our tough foster kids that we had. She had a massive blow up and her social worker was here at the time. She didn't want to do something, if I remember correctly, and just had a meltdown. She went back to her room and started banging on things so hard in the room that the whole house was shaking. The social worker and I just sat in the kitchen, like, if she punches a hole in the wall, I'll fix it later and if she breaks her hand, that will be a natural consequence. We don't get extremely excited about that stuff. She ultimately ran, but she only ran as far as the park next door.

Licensing Experience

The state was not easy to go through the process of getting licensed. Not that there is anything bad in our history, but communication sucked. I remember the licenser that we had at the state level was concerned about my law enforcement career and that there are firearms in the home. There has to be as part of my job and his exact words to me were, "You may have the right to bear firearms, but you don't have the right to be a foster parent." I could not believe that he would consider denying our license for the simple fact that I worked in law enforcement and carried a firearm. I told him he better talk to his manager because under the Law Enforcement Officer Safety Act (LEOSA), I can carry firearms pretty much anywhere. After a few weeks, all of a sudden, we got the phone call saying, "Oh, you're licensed approved and we have a placement for you." The same voicemail was like, here is your license and we would like you to come down to the office because we have a placement. It was an interesting process and as time went on, it developed into the BRS stuff and going through Eagle Care.

We struggled a little bit with getting licensed with the state. We didn't know that there were other options available. It was just you contact Fostering Together and they just said you got to do this class and blah, blah, blah. They provided a lot of that initial training and stuff and then boom, we were licensed. We were not aware that you could have these private agencies like Falcon Peak and Eagle Care until we got introduced to the CPA services from Eagle Care. That is when we inquired with Eagle Care about what does it take to actually get licensed through them because we really liked the support that they had to offer. We kind of peaked at the other agencies out there at the time and because we were already working with Eagle Care, we opted to stay with them.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

When a teen comes into our home, we have specific household rules that we introduced to them before they even go into the house. We let them know this is what you can expect when you're going to be with us and it's going to start fairly restrictive because you need to earn those privileges and the trust that goes along with it. Eventually, you'll get some time on the internet and you'll maybe get a cell phone and you'll have your media nights that you can watch within reason on the TV.

Eagle Care has been good to us. We have seen some families come and go from the agency for various reasons. They treated us well and they've given us the tools and support that we need to be as successful as we can. The biggest thing for us is having the availability for the case aide as needed. They do pretty good with that. We've had a couple of issues where we would call for case aide and they fail to show up or they show up late. I've got to go to work and there's no case aide here yet. You can't always be perfect on that stuff. We're happy where we're at. We haven't had anything super negative with Eagle Care. We are fairly independent of them. I

think that's one thing I like about us that with my experience just in life and career and my wife's experience in life and career and the additional training that we've received through Eagle Care, we do pretty good just only having case aide as needed and most of the other stuff we resolve on our own.

We take eight hours in training. Allowing them to deal with the state-level stuff when you have to deal with the social worker. It's almost impossible to get hold of social workers. Even our last kid, this happened quite a bit because you'd send out emails needing some critical information and weeks would go by. We finally said to the agency, "Okay, you guys deal with it and you try to get this information because they're not responding to us." We need kids in our home and we need this information and it's just not that urgent for them. That's probably the number one thing that the state could really work on improving: getting people who communicate and follow through. I understand that they are busy and they got an overloading of cases. Either they need to reduce the caseload for these people or train them to better handle higher case levels. I deal with a crapload of stuff daily. My wife deals with a crapload of stuff. You figure out the priorities and even if you can't get to something right away, you at least communicate back to acknowledge your question. Which lets us know you are working on it.

We realized pretty quickly that a lot of these kids would come from a place of trauma. It's not just your neighbor kid that doesn't have a place to live. It was about the third placement in the first couple of really short terms. The third one was that troubled girl that we had and we didn't have the tools to be able to handle it with both of us working full time. Luckily, her social worker was aware of the services provided through an organization like Eagle Care and hooked us up with Eagle Care for CPA services. We started working with that, but the state wasn't willing to pay for a CPA kid and it was like pulling teeth to get time for the supervision.

Ultimately, we agreed to be licensed directly through Eagle Care because as an Eagle Care family, we found that there were a whole lot more resources available to us through the agency and then the agency dealt with the state stuff. They also provided us a lot more relevant training for the BRS type stuff. With the state, it was like you pass like training and you have to do follow up education, but they didn't tell you things like this is the type of kids you're going to be dealing with and here are the types of training that we would recommend that you have or the current agency does. We talk about this often, the first really difficult child that we had. We look back at it now and if we had the experience, then, that we have earned over the last four and a half, five years, we would have done things a lot differently and maybe been successful or maybe not. Even the agency was like, yes, she wasn't quite ready for being placed in a standard home yet.

Adoption

We've talked about the adoption stuff and we are not going to be an adoptive home. The reason that we don't want to do that is, in reality, it's not fair to the other youth that have been in our home to say we're going to adopt this one, but we're not going to adopt you. We think we can offer a better service to the youth that are in the [foster care] system, especially being with teenagers. We can do a better job helping those kids out as foster parents without having additional kids in the home as well.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

We've only really had a couple of placements that I would consider traditional and they were short-term respite. I see that all the kids that are in the foster [care] system have experienced some form of trauma which you get that [information] all in the training. You take [the child or teen] away from their home where they don't have a home because of something

traumatic that happened. I see the traditional foster family from like when I was growing up and knowing what I guess would be considered traditional foster families. You've got a kid or three or whatever that live in a home and have minimal amounts of what you would see as problems. I don't think there are any normal kids who are stereotypical well-balanced type kids living in a home other than their own because of whatever reasons.

On the therapeutic side of it, you get these kids that have experienced some pretty extreme trauma. In some cases, physical abuse, sexual abuse, high drug use in the homes, things like that. They've got many things that they also need some help professional health counseling WISE or whatever to help them cope with and figure out why it happened because it's not their fault in most cases. So as a therapeutic foster home, we can help support that as well. We can help them to understand the reason this is the way it is. It's not because you did something bad, but because of what happened and what the situation was. We can benefit by providing that additional support by providing the understanding and the care for them. Now let's have support to help us deal with it and hopefully provide a little bit of therapy for that child to realize what normal would be and should be. I can't say for sure that my parenting style is what would be the stereotypical normal. I have to go off of how I was raised and compare that with what I've seen in how other people were raised. Then the training from a professional saying this is the types of things that are best for the raising of the child. We screw up and don't know any parent who doesn't screw up, but we can at least allow the kid to be a kid. Like our last kid was high functioning autistic and when he first came to us, he absolutely would not accept that he had autism. We had the medical tests and stuff done to confirm and verify and everything. Eventually, he got to the point where he would tell people. [He would tell people], "Hey, I can't help it as my autism." It was like, wow, so he understood it with the help and the encouragement

from us. It's like who you are. It's not a disability it is just something you have to learn how to work with on your level and that I think was accomplished through us, providing that supportive therapeutic way to help.

Child Placements

The first placement that we got was a little difficult, but not bad. I haven't had to have the police come here and take a kid from our home. However, the girl we had in our home that we were working with and had several issues with because we were fairly inexperienced with it had Oppositional Defiant [Disorder]. She would refuse to go places. She was doing lots of things that we really didn't know the best way to deal with them. Ultimately, it boiled down to my wife had taken her and a friend of hers also in the [foster care] system to the fair. She ran and ran in the sense of rub it in your face. My wife was there with her mom and my nephews. They had these set meet times in certain places and my wife let the girl do what she wanted to do with her friend, as long as she checked in. She came and checked in later in the evening and my wife told her they were going to head out and go home in about 30 minutes. She's said that she was not leaving and you can't make me leave and took off. We had to contact the police to let them know that she had run and had to contact the social worker to let them know that she had run. I had to get off work early to help out and figure out what was going on. We ultimately found her still at a fair. She was in line for a ride somewhere with her friend. She had lied to the police about her name. The only reason that I found her was because I showed up there searching with them. She was standing in line with her friend and we went up to take her to the police station at the fairgrounds. I had to tell her that we were sorry, but that was the last straw and I let her social worker know. We called the intake line and said she needs to be placed somewhere else because she's not coming back home with us. We can't do this anymore. Two or three days later, we had a

family team meeting and at that family team meeting, we gave her some simple stipulation on being able to come back to our home and the one stipulation that she absolutely would not agree to was to stop cussing because she swore like a sailor. She said no, it's my effing right, it's my effing identity blah, blah, blah. It was a simple request if she wanted to live in our home. She is going to stop cussing and she refused. At that point, she was out of our placement. She was going to a group home and was there for a while and really struggled at the group home. After about six, seven months, she kind of finally started getting through the counseling and in kind of addressing the trauma and did fairly well. We haven't heard from her in forever and probably never will again. The last time we heard from her, she asked us if we still had the password to one of her Facebook accounts or something like that. Because that was one of our requirements that we got the passwords from the kid. We're going to have access to their stuff to monitor. We had long since got rid of all that information.

We've had two others that we had ended placement with but on good terms. The most recent one initially had moved out and then asked to come back. We allowed them to come back six months later, or actually about five months later. When he was back here, the stipulation was these are the things you will work on because you're now in the extended foster care system. You need to work on your independent living skills and work on getting yourself out into your own if you're not going to work on that, then the place here is not going to work. He just refused to look for housing and stuff like that, so we gave him a 30-day notice based on another incident that happened where I was gone for the weekend and he was completely disrespectful to my wife and argumentative and threatening. It was like, dude, you are done 30 days [more] that way, his social worker knows and everyone else knows.

Same with the other kid that we gave the same stipulation. He was also in extended foster care and we told him we're working on these goals to get you out on your own. You need to do this, this, and this. Well, that kid would go into town during the day and screw around, hang out with his friends, smoke pot, drink, and do whatever. After about four weeks of him accomplishing nothing, we told him you are not in agreement with the signed contract we had with you, so it looks like two weeks and you'll be done. He went to a rehab center after [he left]. I guess the one that I would call removed would be the girl and that was just because we ended the placement right then and there quite abruptly and kind of wish we hadn't, but ultimately it worked out properly.

Motivation

We're crazy, I guess. The biggest thing is we see the need for the kids to have supports. For us, it's been quite a bit of trying to deal with the state stuff and all of that as well. We're not quitters. We're not people that are going to give up on a kid that easily. We only do one kid at a time. That was one of the things that we've had the agency asked us multiple times if we would accept another youth in our home at the same time and it's like, no. We strictly do the one of the time. We've told our agency multiple times why we do one at a time because it is a unique thing we can offer to the kids. We can focus on the one kid to make sure that one kid has our full attention. I think part of it too is having enough support for getting a little bit of a break like during our last kid, we took off and went on an Alaskan cruise and while we were gone on that Alaska cruise, we were able to relax and decompress a little bit. We don't usually take off and do vacation-type things, although this last kid we did take to Nashville. That was something that was kind of a unique thing for him. We thought about after one of the kids just not doing [fostering] anymore, but we realize this is actually relaxing about having the stress of the kid.

Now we've been [fostering] long enough we think we're fairly decent at it. We're not excellent, but we're decent enough and we don't see a reason that we should be giving up now and there's definitely a need for it in the [foster care] system.

Caregiver Core Training

I took [caregiver core training], but my wife did not because only one of us had to do it. I remember the most prominent thing from the core training was the stuff you can do and can't do. If your bio kid doesn't want to go somewhere, you can throw them in the car and take them with you, but your foster kid, you can't do that. The stuff that they taught us in the [caregiver] core training that I remember about was about all these different forms that you're going to wind up having to fill out for if you have an incident or your monthly [report]. I also specifically remember them talking about how you have to be resilient because these kids you're going to grow attached to these kids and then they're going to be gone. They might be with you for a week, a month, or years but you know they're going to be with you for a while and they're either going to age out or they're going to leave your home. I remember them talking about that you have to have that emotional strength to do it. But as far as giving any sort of tools to prepare us to be foster parents, there wasn't anything there.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Out of Eagle Care, we are pleased with what we get. Right now, we are between placements and it's been kind of good because we don't know if they can support us with the current school system. You know, everyone is working from home. I can't stay home all day and teach a kid. Neither can my wife and they haven't been able to commit to case aide time. Hopefully, things will calm down with this COVID stuff and at least get the kids back in school

because that honestly plays a role in our ability to succeed. We can have the kid in a program at the school where they are being supervised at the school while we are at work.

Needed Training and Supports

It would have been nice to see more of the types of training that I have received, like the Mandt Training and the trauma informed care and all of that type of stuff to be incorporated in the [caregiver core] training that you get at the state level. If you come into Eagle Care, you get all that training before you even get a youth. They will make sure you have Mandt Training, trauma informed care [training], and understand the types of kids you're going to get. The first kid we've got we showed up at the DCYF office that night to pick the kid up and we get this poor kid that has been removed from their home, but he's got nothing. He didn't even have clothes except for what he was wearing and we wind up having to go to Fred Meyers that night and buy clothes for him. That's nothing that they teach you in any of your training. That kid they had initially thought would be a long term but turn out to be five days. They could significantly improve the training system if they could put it more into here is what you can expect and here are the tools to deal with this type of stuff instead of just going, oh, you're a willing family that will take kids in that are in the foster system. Good luck. That's kind of what it felt like when we first got into the [foster care] system. I was here is your first kid, good luck.

Through the state, it would be nice to see the state do some additional things. It looks like the last couple of years, and the state is kind of turning more towards relying on private agencies to do the foster, which is great because you get an agency that can be more focused on the needs of the kids. I would like to see the state provide more support for that. One of the difficulties we've dealt with recently was our last foster kid wanted to learn how to drive and set up a contract and everything with him as to what he needed to do to get enrolled in driver's ed and

learn how to drive. But one of the things was we couldn't let him become a licensed driver until he was 18 years old because there was no way in heck I was putting him on my insurance policy. If there were something with the insurance agency saying once that kid out of my home, it wouldn't affect my rates. If he's on my insurance policy and he goes and gets a speeding ticket or goes and gets in a car wreck and then a month later he's out of my home now my rates stay jacked up for the next three to four years, so we weren't willing to do that. If the state could help these kids with like getting car insurance sponsored by the state still make them pay for the dang insurance but something where if they are 16/17 years old and can drive. We found that was a huge tool for independence for our last foster kid because he could get himself to and from a job. He could go fishing whenever he wanted to go fishing. If he had been mentally at that level to get his license, he wasn't at that time because he had too many anger issues and stuff. We could have said at 16 and a half you got your driver's license now you've got a vehicle to drive. I think that would have been huge for him. That's one of the biggest things that I see as an obstacle for the kids these days is they are not our kids specifically they are a ward of the state, we're caring for them, but the tools to help them have as normal of a life as possible in the foster care system are inadequate. Often places like Falcon Peak and Treehouse have programs that help the kids get their license and pay for driver's ed, but if they don't have any way to get insurance legally, what good does it do.

Additional training for therapeutic [foster parents] is absolutely necessary because if you're going to be a therapeutic foster home, you're generally dealing with those kids that have a high level of trauma or generally some more severe issues than others. We've got one of the kids that I'm aware of that was adopted. I would consider her, and I can't say, average, but you know, closer to an average kid who doesn't appear to have the social interaction issues and doesn't have

the massive blow-ups. I mean, she's a teenager, she's going to have some blow-ups, but from the stuff that you see that is going on with her and her life, she's not that much of a challenge compared to somebody that's bounced through 14 different homes. Because they're dealing with trauma and each of those homes they've been in, it's like a shape up or ship out type thing instead of addressing the reason for these blow-ups and the reason for these difficulties and understanding why they are having the problems. Knowing what resources are available for counseling services and things like that so that they can be successful. Sadly not all the kids are going to be successful. Some of them have been in the system for so long that they've experienced issues in such a way that it is going to be years of dealing with it or is going to turn into something where they wind up going into the criminal justice system because they don't want to conform. You know their upbringing was that way and that's all they know or it's what they get hooked up within a gang or something like that and unfortunately, you can't save them all. You do the best to provide the love and support you can for those involved. I think the base-level foster training should have more training to understand trauma and how to help these kids through the trauma. I mean, they introduce the fact that these kids have experienced trauma. From the [caregiver] core training, all these youth have experienced trauma, but you've got no tools that are given to you in training on how to help the youth deal with that trauma, which we've got with our Eagle Care stuff. And then, by all means, if you're going to be a therapeutic foster home, you absolutely should have that type of training well in advance. I also think that it would be good for many the homes, instead of, okay, here's your training boom here's your first kid. It might be something like, okay, here's your training now, let's do a trial weekend with a kid with some difficulties and have the support available—kind of like on-the-job training stuff. Now you've got this kid that does have some behavioral issues, and we're going to let you care

for this kid for a weekend or a week or something like that. We are here to help you with the situations you're going to have to deal with because we have this experience. I think that would be very beneficial for a training perspective because then you get twofold, the family is learning what they need to do to deal with this kid that has experienced trauma and the agency that's supporting them can also learn what their levels that the family is capable of supporting are. Not all families would react the same way as Olivia and I react one way to whatever happens, but another family may be different and how they feel they should parent. That also gives the agency the ability to know that they're going to most likely parent this way. This particular kid that likes to run is not going to be a good kid for their home. They're going to get punished because they ran instead of being welcomed back into their home after they decided they shouldn't be running.

Preventing Placement Disruption

That is one thing my wife and I have talked about several times. With the proper tools and proper support, if we had been with Eagle Care [she would have stayed longer]. At that point, we had just started with the CPA stuff with Eagle Care. She was the first kid we had that we had new types of services available, but being a CPA kid, they were minimal. We would look at it if we were at this point five years down the road into foster care with the different types of kids we have experienced we are pretty sure that she would have lasted longer in our home. She might not have stayed long term, but we could have dealt with this situation in a different way if we provided other supports and work through the issues that caused it to begin with and maybe she would have still been successful in our home, maybe not. We definitely did not have the tools that we needed when we started to be successful with her.

The second one had a fair amount of trauma. We're pretty sure it was also a fetal alcohol syndrome but never diagnosed as a kid, so therefore it doesn't apply. He had addiction issues and

stuff like that we [help him] work through a lot of those types of things. We gave him this is what you need to do under our contract and if you can't do these types of things, then your placement will end with us. And that's exactly what it turned into and he knew it. He knew that he wasn't following through with what was in the contract. He wouldn't meet up with his social caseworker and stuff like that. It was just one of those he was riding the coattails for as long as he could until we finally said no can do. The decision was based on the youth's decision of not following what we all agreed on.

The same with the last teen. We told him in a positive way you're ready to be out on your own now because you are demonstrating to us with your actions. He had initially moved out on his own with his mom. Then he moved back with us because the situation of living with his mom was not ideal. I think they were in a house with like nine other people. Then when he moved back in with us, we gave him a whole bunch of support. Here are the tools to help you try to find housing and be on the housing list. He struggled to keep employment because he would get grumpy about something and quit. This is kind of interesting because when he was living with his mom for the five months that he was there, he kept one steady job the whole time. He has some skin in the game and then when he comes here, he bounces through different jobs because he's got free room and board at this point. Now that he has been with his mom for the last couple of months, he's got a steady job. It's what he needed to have that responsibility so that he can put his mindset on it. I have to keep this job because otherwise, I don't have a place to live.

School Support

I've had a fair amount of times that I've had to leave work because of some blow-up at school. Dealing with the school is interesting, all in itself, they have learned fairly quickly that we know a lot more than they wish we did because we have forced their hand to say no, by law,

you guys have to do this and then they do it. That was Eagle Care helping us get that connection through Treehouse. Getting a Treehouse advocate in there and sit in on the meeting and know all of that stuff with the school is helpful.

Olivia

Olivia is a female in her upper 30s from Whatcom County and works as a licensed mental health counselor with adults. She has been a full-time foster parent and respite care provider for five years and six months. She was first licensed with the state and a few months later transitioned to Eagle Care. Olivia is married to Noah and has no biological children. Olivia first learned about foster care in her early 20s when she had a summer job selling books door to door, and some of her favorite families that she ran across were foster and adoptive families. That planted the seed and she decided that at some point in her life if it were possible, she would like to become a foster parent. She has fostered over seven children in her home. Three of those placements have been long-term placements. The first placement lasted two months before the child was asked to be removed from the home due to her behaviors. The second placement lasted nine months before the child was asked to be removed. The third placement lasted three and half years before the child was asked to be removed. Both the second and third placements were youth in extended foster care. Olivia and her husband currently have no placement due to the pandemic.

Olivia was recruited by Suzy, another participant in my study. She and I communicated by text and by email. I met Olivia and her husband, Noah, previously at their home when I shadowed a case manager. After a long day at work, Olivia had just gotten home and was eating her dinner during the interview. During the interview, Olivia's dog kept chewing on a bone very loudly and he kept hiding underneath the desk. It was a distraction for Olivia, but after a while,

she just ignored it. Olivia was very forthcoming with information and provided examples with her answers to the questions, which helped me understand her perspective. She grew up as a pastor's kid in a pretty religious legalistic type environment. Olivia's parents split when she was a teenager. Her biological father was not a nice person, but she had a loving mom. She believes some of her passion for teens who had a rough time comes from that because the teen years were hard. One interesting observation I made was that she not only stated what resources and support could be improved to help her become a better foster parent, but she also advocated for the needs of her husband during the interview. It became clear that for Olivia, she and her husband were a team, and their relationship as husband and wife comes first before any placement in their home. Olivia's interview via Zoom lasted 56 minutes and she did his interview from her home office.

Becoming a Foster Parent

Noah and I never really were fully interested in having biological kids of our own. Even before we got married [we thought] maybe someday we'll do like a foster thing or something and kind of tabled it until we were at a friend's wedding and sat at a table with a couple basically spent a whole wedding reception talking about the need for foster homes for teenagers. Noah and I, after that started the process to become licensed, which took about a year, I think initially. I'm sure Noah told you all about that. So here we are five and a half years later.

I think some of [the idea of becoming foster parents] came with the turf of working with teens and I think just having watched other foster families for a while. I think most foster families take littles and then oftentimes when the teen years come around, you have hormones raging, and it's just a classic time where socially, romantically, and attachment trauma is getting triggered all over the place. I'll bet there are more BRS teens than younger kids because of some

of that stuff. Some of it was also just because of our own household needs. We both work full time and so sometimes there's a three or four-hour chunk of time where neither of us is home. We don't have much family support, so we wouldn't be able to do it without the support that case aids provide. We have one neighbor who will do us a favor now and then, like, a ride or hang out with a kid for a little bit, but not any consistent thing. So, really, it was like if we're going to be able to do it, we have to have case aide support. Not that we have to have a lot of it, but we quite honestly couldn't do it without case aide help.

Parenting Style

As far as my parenting style, I pull from love and logic a fair bit especially working with teens because you're like preparing them for life like adulting. I like Dan Siegel and Tina Fey Bryson's and their parenting approach. I've read a lot of their stuff and done some workbooks. So yeah, I'd say a combination of kind of those two things. There's also another book called Beyond Consequences by Heather Forbes and Bryan Post. I think it's just a different take. I didn't agree with everything there, but I kind of pick and choose from different modalities. I would say I don't know if this is helpful because we didn't have any biological children. I work with adults at work. I can tell you know what my parenting style is and all those things, but like not a chance in hell, I could have answered that question with any sort of thoroughness when we first got licensed. That's all stuff that I've learned in the last five and a half years or sought out in the last five and a half years. I do remember they asked you that question in your licensing process. But you really don't know and parenting these kiddos is so different than a biological parenting experience.

Co-Parenting Experience

It does kind of just depend on who happens to be the point person for whatever's going on. Like if you're the first one in there, dealing with whatever's happening, you're the one probably writing up all the emails and making all the phone calls. Noah is pretty proactive. Sometimes he's really proactive and he'll just jump in and be the communication point person and I'm the one who writes case notes every night. I do a lot of the activities of daily living stuff like teaching homecare stuff. We equally provide rides or go to appointments, but it depends on Noah's work schedule and if he's working weekends or not. So it just depends who's on the point [person]. As far as what we each bring, well, as our last placement said, "I have to live with the fucking therapist and a fucking cop." That sums it up pretty nicely. I tend to be the feeling, whole-person health, trauma informed part, and Noah's really good at setting boundaries and bringing humor and lightness. It would be best if you had both kinds. If there were just me, I think I would get walked all over to some degrees and if it weren't for me, there might be a lack of empathy.

I think marital tension contributed to thinking about quitting. Sometimes things are challenging to the point where it makes your relationship challenging. My relationship with Noah was here before I was a foster parent, so I'm committed to that. There's been a few times when I have to remind myself a lot, your therapist, Olivia, this is what you've studied, this is what you do, which comes naturally to you. There have been some non-empathic cringeworthy things that I've witnessed sometimes that have made me worried. But then I think like your therapist Noah is human and I'm thinking about everything through that lens. They love Noah to pieces and they have respected him and want to be Noah and want to do everything and be everything he is. I think he's doing a pretty damn good job. It's when I get to overthinking that I think contributes to that.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

I would say that it's been the most rewarding and most challenging thing I've ever done in my life, so equal parts 50/50. I think it has challenged me and taught me about myself and has been incredibly rewarding. Being a foster parent specifically for me has been challenging because I work in community mental health and it's a pretty exhausting job. I'm very passionate about it, but we work with chronically mentally ill folks. A lot of them have been in the foster care system. One challenge is balancing when work is hard and things with a kiddo are hard at the same time. My brain will start getting a little warbled. I had one time when I had two of my work clients in the psychiatric unit and my foster kid there simultaneously, and I was trying to maintain HIPAA. I can't see these people and that was a particularly a tough moment. So if work is going well, then my ability to cope better with the parenting challenges improves.

I think it's been equal parts challenging and equal parts [rewarding]. It's been rewarding for our marriage and it's been a challenge. Sometimes, Noah and I have very different takes on things and addressing those things out can be pretty tricky sometimes. We have figured that out, but it can be tense. Sometimes I think, too, there's just a lot of loneliness in [fostering], which I didn't anticipate. People are scared of foster kids, which is ridiculous, but I've not ever had any family offer to help out much. It's not like typical grandkids or nieces or nephews. You don't get the same kind of support or offers for support at all. And so it's been kind of lonely sometimes. I think the other challenging thing is just parenting in a fishbowl. You have many people watching what you're doing all the time, like case aids, case managers, agency directors, social workers, therapists, doctors, lawyers, and adoption recruiters. It's just kind of like parenting in a fishbowl sometimes. Everybody has a different opinion of what you know they think you should

do and sometimes nobody has opinions for you at all so both of those things can be various kinds of challenges.

I have on the relational piece that kind of balance between work and home life. It sometimes really raises your adrenaline and cortisol levels and I still need more practice on how to make sure I'm doing good with my own emotion regulation. It can be anxiety-provoking when you have a big teen who's flipping out about something. It's a benefit, though, if I continue to figure out how to do all that stuff. I have clients who freak out at work because of the populations we work with, but it's different when it's a kid in your own home. It's different. So the internal responses you feel are different and challenging and in a different way.

We've had some [placements] who just were short-term placements like respite or like it was going to be long term and then found something else for them. Our three long-term placements all have been ones that we've terminated which sounds terrible. I think the first one didn't have to happen. We were well supported, but maybe not in a way that might have helped maintain the placement. The other two endings weren't harsh or extremely abrupt they were aging out and we had to tell them, "Listen, if you want to keep living here, and we hope that you do, these are some things that need to happen, like not use substances, be making efforts towards work or school." They were in the extended foster care program, so there weren't big huge blowouts or anything on the day they were leaving, but some things might have come up. It's weird to say, "Yeah, actually, we kicked them all out." Other times it's been like, "Hey, this is what we agreed upon and it's not happening, so it's time to move on to the next thing." All but the first one didn't leave under poor terms; it was under natural development.

I consider them always a part of our family if they want to be and hope they stay in touch. It is why we don't adopt. We don't want to pick some and not others. Some may be here for a

long time and some for a short time. I tend to be the one who maintains contact. You always remember your mom's phone number. I've talked with Noah about us maybe having a camping reunion once a year or something for a weekend because that'd be kind of cool because we have at least two, now, who kind of moved on and are men in their 20s. It would be sort of fun for future placements. I have a vision of like two years down the road, there being all these people getting together. When we take our previous placement out for like his birthday or meet up with him for Christmas, our current placement is with us and the previous placement tells the current one, "You think their rules are unreasonable now, but I'm telling you what they're actually pretty darn good." They see later why we did or said all that stuff.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

You know, it's funny because we had a CPA kid to start and I would say in some respects, we had more challenges with that kiddo than we did with our first BRS placement. It's a funny thing in a way the labels are, but I think the difference is you expect trauma responses more readily, more frequently and ideally to see them as such and not as intentionally abusive or deviant behavior. You see it as a symptom of trauma. In some ways, I think that there's not a big difference [between traditional and therapeutic]. They're probably going to run into some like BRS behaviors at some point, even for the traditional track.

Child Placements

So that first [placement] we had good support from Falcon Peak. I think what happens is (a) agencies are respectful of the fact that every household and every parent has a different parenting style, and (b) they don't want their foster parents to quit; therefore, they are hesitant to give more direct feedback. They give us a safety plan to follow, but they're hesitant to say more direct things that could help. When you're a brand new BRS foster parent, you don't know

necessarily how to set your household up for success, what boundaries and expectations are good to have from the beginning. That can be presented in a belittling or disrespectful way, such as asking if we'd like some feedback on what some other BRS foster parents have done that they found helpful. We did have one case manager who gave lots of advice and was belittling, which was pretty annoying. When Noah and I look at it now, we're like, oh my gosh, if we could have applied household expectations on the front end like you don't get unlimited internet right off the bat or you can't just watch TV all day long or you have some household expectations thing would have been better. Privileges get earned as you go along. Even just those couple of things, I'm curious what would have happened. She was running the household and the dog was sleeping in her room. Everything was on her terms. We couldn't go grocery shopping if we did have to go grocery shopping and she refused to leave the house. I think a lot of that stuff came from not having expectations and boundaries and things like that set up on the front end. I wish we had had a little more coaching.

The second [placement] was into drugs. He was initially going to leave on his own terms, which was a short-term thing that did not work out. It was like a two or three-day thing. He came back and we made with him a three-month contract. We told him we want you here and here is what you need to do to stay, stay away from substances, stay in mental health and chemical dependency services, be making some efforts to look into school, work and independent living stuff. I'd sit down with him at night to plan what he wanted to work on tomorrow and figure out all the details and map it out and then he would not do anything. So when there were several weeks of that, maybe even like a month or more of that, we were like, "You know, dude, this stuff isn't happening that we agreed upon." I think we gave a two-week notice at that point and he went from us to chemical dependency treatment. Then from there, he got an apartment

through Northwest Youth Services. He bounced around and had a real rough time for a few years, but has now been clean for two years, so that's great. The rewarding parts are when you bite your nails wondering how things will go and then like, oh my goodness, this person is still alive, doing well, and is housed.

The third one was our longest three and a half years and it was great. It was cool because we got a couple of weekend trials on the front end to make sure it would be a good fit and it was a good fit. We just kind of rolled with all the different life events that came his way. It was cool to see him graduate because we weren't sure that it would happen a few times. It was really cool to see him get his driver's license as we weren't sure if he would be cognitively able to do that. It was cool to see him get his first job. I think by the time he moved out a couple of months ago, we counted them all up. I think there were like 18 jobs. I've never seen someone be so good at getting jobs and struggled to keep them. I think one of the coolest things, one of the things I'm really passionate about I think because of what I do for work is building positive connections with bio family. We're committed to just being foster parents and my philosophically politically racial justice self feel that my role, if possible and if safe to do so, is to help build positive connections with the bio family. We got the opportunity to do that with our last placement, which was probably one of the coolest things. They live together now, mom and kiddo. We had them up for his graduation and went down there once and did camping and really tried to build a relationship and they'll be in our lives forever. They consider us family to a degree and that's cool because I think that's helpful and important to have those connections when possible.

Motivation

We thought about giving up. Typically it's me wanting to keep going and I'm not sure that Noah wants to, but then we always seem to be back at it again and excited about it. So I think

some of what keeps you motivated as a foster parent is the why. Why I do this is because it is equal parts challenging. It is rewarding and meaningful to watch and be a part of somebody's healing and growth process. It makes me a better person, I think. I think breaks between placements have been really important. We have taken at least a two-month break between longer placements and think between our last two really long ones it was a four-month break which gives us a chance to kind of reset and rejuvenate. I can't imagine going straight from one [placement] to another. I don't think I could do that. Yeah, I think some of his curiosity. Some of it is we're both pretty stubborn, you know, where we like the rewarding process and the challenge. That's probably why we haven't quit. Without the case aides, we couldn't do it without their support. It just wouldn't be possible. We try to work our schedules, so there's the least amount possible of [case aide] needed but two and a half to three hours, three days a week. I don't know how we would do it.

Mandt Training

The training that I did go through that we all had to go through is the Mandt Training which is 20 hours on the front end and then eight every year. The Mandt Training is a great approach, but I think it needs to be catered towards situations and scenarios. Sometimes you can't see how things work until you can imagine what they would look like right inside of a scenario. I think that is a big piece that is missing from training. What do you do in this scenario? What would be your trigger? How would you be tempted to respond? Is that therapeutic? Why is that not therapeutic? How might that affect the kid? How might that affect you in the relationship and the placement? I have never received any of that training. And I think that would be really valuable and really important.

Needed Training and Supports

There's a book by Dan Siegel called *Parenting From the Inside Out*, which is great and has all these conversational questions at the end of every chapter that looks at your parenting. It looks at how you grew up and what you learn from that parenting experience and your attachment style and how that's impacting what you're doing with a kid. There have been some okay training. Again, I'm really particular because I'm a therapist, but I think that's a critical piece that's missing. The foster parents should be having a therapist in their coaching and guiding and helping and supporting having something for the dads or whoever the other partner is, you know, who is not the front runner, so to speak, not that I'm the front runner. I think the therapeutic piece for natural reasons should have some situational scenario practice where you map out the developmental, the therapeutic, and the trauma impacts in lots of different situations and come at it or are encouraged to come at it from that therapeutic trauma lens.

I've always thought it would be really cool if there were a therapist to support the foster parents. I think that Noah has way different needs than I do. He's going through different stuff that I'm going through. We both need different types of nudging and sometimes you know you're not going to be very good at doing that with each other because that feels like telling the other person what to do. It would be helpful if there was someone, a therapist figure with some experience, not the young case aides or case managers, who are asking important questions like what's working and what's not working for you? What are you getting triggered by? How can we help you work through that trigger? How are you structuring your home? where are you feeling vulnerable? Where is it hard to stay trauma informed? Those aren't really questions that anybody ever asks. They are things you're kind of just left to figure out on your own, which is ok, but it means that I think some of those initial placements don't go so hot because you don't have all of that is support.

I've also thought it would be helpful to have a workbook of scenarios, you know, like these are things that have happened. Here is how foster parent A responded and here's how foster parent B respond. Different people might respond to things in different ways. Actual scenarios that had happened within the agency or within those families to show some ideas [how they handled the situation] because oftentimes, like case aides are young and they are not parents or have a clue. Often the case managers are young and don't have kids. The kind of experience parenting supports you get are sometimes social workers, but you don't interact with them too much. Sometimes, the agency directors, but they're like massively busy and that's just awkward for them to like fly in and start offering parenting advice, so there's a gap there in that regard. I think that is why that placement did not end up working out. Nowadays, we would not have kicked her out, and instead, we would have given her many more chances. The reasons why we kicked her out then, we would not have kicked her out now. But we were so drained at that time because we had not done all those things on the front end that would have made it so that she was not running the house.

I think it's really important to ask foster parents where their lines might be. Every foster, adoptive family has their line where a placement is not going to work out. It's important to us to know where that line is. For example, if we had a kid who was abusing our dogs, that's a line that neither of us would be able to tolerate. We just couldn't do it. We know that's the one. But they can punch holes in the wall and break shit and cuss us out and run away and you know we're whatever. I'm sure every household super different. I heard of a foster family recently where a fairly new placement stole their car some alcohol and they are pressing legal charges. I'm like, "Oh shit, that kid now is gonna have legal shit to deal with." I think it's important for the agency

to know where the line is for the kids' well-being and for the foster parents to think it through and have scenarios.

I think if the first one we had more support and guidance not in a directive way but in a hey check out all these scenarios. Where are your triggers? What do you think about how your parenting styles going? Having support with people asking helpful guiding questions would have been really helpful. It would have been beneficial to have specific directions about the importance of having boundaries and guidelines on the front end. I think that would have made a huge difference because you really need to have a list of household expectations, especially with BRS kids. After all, they tend to have been in a lot of placements. They know what it takes to get kicked out of a placement. They know that if this one doesn't work out, there's one just behind it. There's learned helplessness that specifically BRS kiddos learn through that whole process of going through a lot of placements. That it's just not a normal typical parenting experience. You wouldn't sit down with your bio kid when they are born and [explain] the household expectations. But it is important because it lets them feel safe, so they know what box they're operating in. They know what to expect from you, so they're not blindsided by it later when you're suddenly bringing up. We kind of have a boundary about how the expectations are running the show like it's not the behavior that's running the show. I wish you would have had the zone in front of it because that would have made a big difference.

Regarding the last two [placements], it was more the fact that they were already over 18 and they were ready to move along. However, in both of those situations that we had, in particular, if we had had more support, they might have lasted a little longer. Perhaps because they're both guys and Noah's a guy, he has some expectations about what a guy should be in the world and at what point they should be that way is hard for him. The older the youth gets and

Noah sees them treating me disrespectfully, the more his tolerance for that decreases. Because he's a guy, I wish there were more supports for him. I don't want to be gender-specific here, but my hunch is that foster moms might take a fair bit of the front-loading on situations and I think that foster dads need some specific support because I think their experiences as foster parents are really different than mine is. I don't know what that would look like exactly, but I always had the secret wish that the Executive Director of Eagle Care would call up the foster dads to see how things are going and then gently provide feedback. The feedback I give Noah is received differently because I'm a therapist who works in that field and the setup just isn't great for me, offering suggestions. He loves me and I love him, but it's just not a great setup for us. Noah doesn't have any other foster dad friends. I have a couple of foster friend moms and I think that kind of thing makes a difference. In Noah's case, I think that would need to be facilitated because he's not just going to go out there and [talk about it], ain't going to happen. I wonder if maybe some of that stuff had been happening if our last two [placements] might have [lasted] a little bit longer but probably not much longer, quite honestly.

As far as my parenting style, all of those things I mentioned initially are all things I sought out of my own. They did offer a love and logic training within this last year. I took that [training], which was pretty good. I think they do tend to offer different training. I think what lacks, though, is that I'm having conversations about the areas that might be your weak points that you need to have more training in and I don't think that can come from a licensor because I think a person would get defensive. It would be tricky coming from a case aide or case manager who has no kids, or it's never done it and that's where I think having a therapist who has either been a parent or has worked in these types of scenarios could be really beneficial. From a social worker, it would be the same as a licensor and make you feel defensive. I think the piece that's

missing is, What do you guys need to work on? What are your triggers? What do you need to work on? What do you guys want to get better at as a household? And then funneling that into what trainings might be helpful.

One other thing that I think is really lacking that concerns me is I've seen some optional training on working with bio families, but it's not an expectation [to take the training]. It's like the case aides can take them to their visit in my personal opinion, that is crappy. Then the thing that I've never received, there was an LGBTQ training that they had everybody do that was like an hour, and it was pretty good. I think they need more of that and we need training on race and culture. There has been none of that, which is distressing to me because it's more common for kiddos of color to be in care. I've been at five and a half years and I've had zero required cultural competency training. That's pretty screwed up and that's a big deficit, I think. I worry about the impact on the kids. Here they are in this predominantly white family who's had no cultural competency training. It should be brought up in conversation all the time and it should be included everywhere. Even BRS training would look different, culturally, I think. If Mandt Training was created by white people and studied on white people, can we expect it to work with the kiddos who are Asian or Black?

Agency Support

Eagle Care is very much respectful of whatever it is that we need to do for our household. They've never said no to a case aide request. They've been supportive about problem-solving like maybe it's a kiddo with school issues or parental stuff. They've trusted us, which is huge for me. They have a great sense of humor. I think that they do the very best they can with what they have. We're very appreciative and we wouldn't be foster parents if it weren't for them and the services they provide. There was one time, I think, we thought about switching when the

program director left Eagle Care. That was kind of like, what's up here, Eagle Care what's going on. They really had supported us pretty thoroughly and we didn't want to disrupt things that were happening with our current placement, so I'm glad we stuck around. I think they have a good reputation in the community. They have had a say in bigger areas like legislatively and things like that and were the only ones working with teens. I think really now they've kind of branched out but so very thankful for them.

Respite Support

We have not done much respite because if you're going to have a kid who is a part of your family, they should go on vacations with you. We went on a cruise and that was the only respite we used in the last five years. Otherwise, it's mainly [us going] with the kids. We might do more of that moving forward, but I can see where it would be really important for some folks. We have a cool respite family, Suzy, who told me about your study and that's been really helpful. Having a family that you really know and trust as a respite [provider]. It makes us feel okay about doing that, so that's been helpful.

Foster Parent Support Group

They haven't since COVID hit, but they have those foster parents' support groups or whatever. Sometimes we find a lot of them and sometimes we've had very few of them. Sometimes they seem like good for training opportunities, but as far as support where you're just kind of hashing things out, not so much. I mean, I think they're a little bit nervous when everybody's sitting around bitching about their situations. Maybe it's better in like a two-on-one scenario or like a three-on-one scenario than like a whole crew of people. I think that's a missing link that could help make sure that different parents are supported in the different ways they need.

Jean

Jean is a female in her low 60s from Whatcom County. Jean was first introduced to foster care 20 years ago by a casual friend whose daughter had a little girl that was going to be going into foster care. She asked her if she would be interested in becoming a licensed foster parent to take her in. Jean was not able to do it at that time. She has raised four biological kids on her own. Jean has been a full-time foster parent and respite care provider for twelve years and eleven months. Jean had previously been licensed with an agency that no longer licenses foster parents. She transitioned from that agency to Eagle Care. Jean has been with Eagle Care for three years. Out of the 30+ total of foster children Jean has had in her care, she has done ten long-term placements. Her longest placement has been a year and three months. Two of the placements Jean had asked to be removed. The first placement was removed due to physical violence. The second placement was asked to be removed because the youth's needs are more significant than what Jean can provide him. The second placement has been in Jean's home for six weeks.

Jean was recruited by Suzy, another participant in my study. She was very responsive throughout the recruitment process, including replying to emails and filling out the interest form on time. Her answers were often short and to the point. At times the interview felt forced. I got this feeling of uncomfortableness and felt like Jean was just trying to get the interview done as quickly as possible. Jean's interview via Zoom lasted 21 minutes and she did her interview from her home.

Becoming a Foster Parent

When my youngest was finishing high school and about to me about, I realized I was not done parenting yet. So that's when I thought I would look into foster care, and I had thought

about it years prior to that, but with my own, I just knew that I would not be able to devote time to it. When she was graduated and moved out, I talked to an agency and I got licensed.

Previous Parenting Experience

I've learned a lot from being a parent. What didn't work as a parent, I'm able to try something different with these kids and that's been really helpful, kind of like a second chance. All my kids turned out fine and they're doing really well. Knowing what didn't work well with them, I can try something different with these kids, especially teenagers because my kids were hard teenagers. I primarily work with teens. It seems like that's who I'm placed with. Just knowing what worked with them and what didn't work with them, I just do a little bit differently or if it worked with them, I do the same thing with these guys. I did not just want to do teenagers, but that's just how it has ended up and it's been good. I now really appreciate teens, I mean, I've grown to appreciate them.

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

Actually, I was first licensed with another agency. They licensed me and I was with them until they no longer licensed homes about three years ago when I switched to Eagle Care. I appreciated their WISe program because several of the youth that I had were involved with that. That's a total wrap-around kind of thing. There was a lot of support from them for the kids and for myself as well. I thought they did that well and they continue to do that. It's been challenging, but it's been very rewarding because I have abuse in my background. I wanted to be able to use my experiences and I went through years of therapy and so I thought that I'd be able to use that to help kids that have been through the same kind of experiences. For the most part, I have been successful with the kids that I've worked with. There have been a few that I haven't been [successful with], but overall it's been a very rewarding experience knowing that I'm helping

kids. Sometimes the behaviors are just more than I'm able to do. I think it's much more rewarding when you see a child that comes into your house scared to death even go into a bedroom and then within a couple of months, they are in their own bed and has adjusted. Just watching the growth from this little scared kid that comes and then in a year they're ready to go back home or wherever they're going to go, but just watching them grow that's very rewarding.

Some training has been helpful, especially the more in-depth training you can take after the core classes. I don't know exactly what it's called, but training was really helpful for the aggressive youth. The one for the sexually acting out youth was really good as well. I'm a single parent and I'm on my own with [fostering]. It's challenging to be the only one in the home that can de-escalate, especially when a child is getting out of control. That's been my biggest challenge is just being alone with them and not having a backup, other than, of course, Eagle Care offers a lot of case aide and stuff like that. But it's just some of the behaviors that are just sometimes a little too much. When I first was licensed, I was a BRS respite home, so I was only doing respite.

The transition between agencies was pretty smooth. I mean, the only thing is that I went from one agency to another agency because they were still [licensing]. Then within like a year, they stopped [licensing] as well. That's when I had ended at Eagle Care. It would be so helpful if they could use the same paperwork that you've already filled out once because it's like you go through that whole process again. I know a new home study each time because each agency would want to see that. But it's got to be simpler than having to fill out all this paperwork every single time because I guess nothing gets passed on. As an agency, Eagle Care is excellent and much better than my previous agency was. Although I did appreciate my previous agency, I really like Eagle Care a lot.

Therapeutic vs. Traditional

I'd never had a traditional child, I don't think. My previous agency only worked with therapeutic foster kids and so, that's who I licensed through not realizing that was how it was. I didn't realize that's what I was getting into at first until I got into the process of going through the training and everything. I kind of just fell into [being a therapeutic foster parent]. As a therapeutic [foster parent], I've had several kids who are coming out of a hospital. They need more in-depth attention and I always only do one on one. Rather than having several kids in my home, I limit them to one at a time because they do need that extra help and extra attention and normally they have a lot of additional appointments. There's just a lot of extra time that's involved with these kiddos.

Child Placements

Twice I've asked for a youth to be removed from my home. I'm there right now. I have a youth that I've asked to have removed, so he's going to a group home next week. [The first youth] destroyed my house and I had to call the police. She had me trapped in the bathroom and was kicking me. She assaulted me. I have always promised my [biological] kids because they've always been worried about me doing this by myself that if a child ever were to get violent with me, I would automatically ask them to be moved. I kept my word to my kids and had her removed. [The second youth] just needs more than I'm able to give him. He needs more in-depth care and there needs to be at least two people with him, I think just as a backup. And it's only me. He's been bounced around for a while and then this was his last stop before a group home. So he's been here for about six weeks.

[With additional support] I don't think [I could have kept the youth longer] because I have the extra support through Eagle Care and he's also enrolled in the WISE program. I had

wraparound services, so there's lots of support there. It's just that I'm not able to help him with what he needs help with. I can't think of anything that could have changed. I did the whole three strikes kind of thing because I didn't give up on them the first time or the second time. The third time I had warned him that if it happened again, then I would have no choice. So he kind of left it in his hands. He could decide to change his behaviors and stay or if he wants to move, then just continue, and he continued.

Motivation

I know that there are kids out there who need a home. We hear about kids who are spending nights in hotels and it eats me up. I took a break for a year and I thought about quitting. Then I heard about all these kids in hotels and couldn't stand the thought of a traumatized child being further traumatized by not even having a home to go to and that is why I'm still doing this. I thought I retire as a foster parent. After a placement left that was really hard to let them go, I took a year off. I became a CASA and I was doing CASA work for that year. Then I started hearing about all these kids and hotels and so I just knew I had to go back into it. That's when I started taking longer-term placements.

Mandt Training

The Caregiver Core Training was informative as far as becoming a foster parent in general because I learned a lot. The extra classes were more helpful as far as being a therapeutic parent, especially with Eagle Care. They offer training that I had not had any place else. I forget its name now, but it's like it has had the most impact on me and how I parent and how I deal with the traumatic kind of stuff. So their training is especially helpful. [Is it Mandt training?] Yeah, the Mandt training, I really like that. I think our [Caregiver Core] Training should include the Mandt Training just because it's excellent. I mean, there are so many different parts of it that just

really would help out, whether it's therapeutic or just in general. I wish I had known that when I was raising my own kids just because you know it's got a lot of good information in it. Just the whole how to not ever let them get to the escalation point and how to resolve it before it ever gets to that crisis mode. That would be really helpful.

On-Call Support

I really appreciate their on-call because every time I've called it, they've always gotten right back to me and they've stayed engaged until the crisis was over. Then they check up on me the next day.

Case Aide Support

I also appreciate the case aide time. So right now, we do not have case aide time. I mean, COVID-19 has kind of mess it up a little bit, but I have always been able to get case aide time when I needed it. So I really appreciate that.

Synthesis

The data collected and presented are the profiles and authentic interviews of eight therapeutic foster parents. The data presented three primary themes: parenting, fostering experience and supports. When it comes to parenting, participants bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences. The fostering experience of each participant determined the outcome of each of their placements. Participants voiced their opinion on supports that have helped them in their journey as therapeutic foster parents and supports they felt were needed. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, the findings and interpretation of this study's data will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Findings and Interpretations

Therapeutic foster parents are a critical support in the lives of children in foster care. They provide a home for children leaving a more restricted setting such as juvenile justice centers or psychiatric hospitals, or they provide a home for children not able to be served effectively in traditional foster care (Reddy & Pfeiffer, 1997; Walter et al., 2003). Findings revealed that therapeutic foster parents are better prepared to support the children in foster care when they have adequate training and supports to care for the children in their home. Having adequate training and support in place leads to a stable placement for the child rather than a placement disruption. What follows is my findings and interpretation based on the narratives presented in Chapter 4. Based on an in-depth thematic analysis, three primary themes emerged from participant interviews: parenting, fostering experience, and supports.

Parenting

Foster parents are the most influential people in the microsystem of the children in foster care. Children in care learn and rely on foster parents to protect and care for them in ways that promote their overall well-being and development. Findings revealed that parenting children in foster care occurred in many different ways. Most participants were introduced to foster parenting by someone else. Participants' either felt they were thrown into foster parenting by being asked to take in a child they previously met and needed a placement or learned about the need for foster parents by talking with someone who knew about the foster care system. For example, Sunshine was introduced to foster parenting because a previous student needed a placement. Carmen was introduced to foster parenting because a child in their sports program needed a placement. Olivia and Noah were introduced to foster parenting by talking to a stranger at a wedding. Regardless of how the participants were introduced into foster parenting, one thing

was evident; participants brought a wide range of parenting perspectives that helped each of them through their therapeutic foster parenting experience.

One parenting experience that was very helpful for the participants was identifying their respective parenting style. Parenting style is defined as the emotional climate in which parents raise their children (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Having a parenting style helped participants understand the unique methods and approaches they want to use to parent the children in their home. Olivia and Noah both used love and logic as their parenting style to parent the youth in their home and help prepare them for their adult life. Sunshine's parenting style was that of a warm demander. She is a therapeutic foster parent who is approachable, loving, open-minded, and values having boundaries and routines with the children in her home. Carmen's parenting style was structured and strict. She described her style as militant. With many children aging out of the foster care system without a family to help support them and guide them, Carmen made it her mission to prepare the children in her care for when they become adults. The participants' parenting characteristics included being warm, responsive, having clear rules and expectations, being supportive, and valuing independence.

Another parenting experience that participants said was helpful was having biological children before becoming a therapeutic foster parent. While only three of the participants had biological children, their parenting experiences with raising their biological children played a critical part in how they parent as therapeutic foster parents. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994) believed that the parent-child relationship's microsystem is crucial to the child's overall development. Individuals in the microsystem can both influence and be influenced. All three participants expressed how previous parenting experience made their transition into therapeutic foster parenting easier. Participants were able to manage behaviors and provide social and

emotional support to children in foster care based on their biological children's experience. The participants explored their previous parenting techniques that worked with their biological children and changed their parenting techniques that were not successful and explored something different.

The last parenting experience that helped participants was co-parenting. The mutual responsibility of parenting a child in therapeutic foster care was a strategy to provide stable placement. Solid and consistent communication and good teamwork were crucial in making co-parenting households work successfully. In single therapeutic foster parent households keeping a stable placement was more challenging. For Jean, it was challenging to be the only person at home that could de-escalate a situation with no one to help, especially when the child becomes physical. Sofia mentioned that without the support given to therapeutic foster parents, she would not be able to be a foster parent in a single-parent household. Sofia initially expressed interest in being a traditional foster parent, but with her busy and demanding work schedule, she knew the support she would receive would be greater for a therapeutic foster parent than a traditional one.

Fostering Experience

Therapeutic foster parents entered into foster care with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Participants described their fostering experience as both challenging and rewarding. According to Richardson et al. (2018), although the interactions between the microsystems of the foster parents and the children in foster care are important, the positive interactions between individuals and organizations are important for stability. The participants who were first licensed with the state had a challenging experience. Olivia and Noah expressed a lack of timely communication in the licensing process and a lack of supports from the state, which led them to transfer their license to a private agency. Participants like Sofia and Jean, who started the

licensing process with a private agency, reported having a positive experience from the very beginning of their fostering experience. However, Sunshine and Carmen expressed that bringing a new child into the home changed the family's dynamic initially, but it slowly adapted and got better over time. Emotions and feelings of fear, hesitation, uncertainty, guilt, relief, happiness, joy, anticipation, and helpfulness were common across participants. A positive trend shared across all participants was feeling pleased with the support the agencies and their staff provided to them as therapeutic foster parents. However, even though participants felt they had support in place and had agency staff they could turn to if they had questions or had a problem, some participants still felt lonely. The participants never anticipated the feeling of loneliness to be very present in their foster parenting journey due to not having family or friends who understood their unique situations.

Placement disruptions were not uncommon among the participants. Five of the eight participants had experienced a placement disruption. Sunshine has had the same placement since she first received her foster license, and Suzy and Red were respite care providers who supported full-time therapeutic foster parents. The participants' fostering experience ranged between seven months and 12 years and 11 months. The length of the placements among the participants ranged between a week and three and a half years long. Findings suggest that placement disruptions occurred for different reasons. The participants' primary reasons for initiating placement disruptions were because participants did not have adequate supports, including training to provide social and emotional support for children in therapeutic foster care and the placements were not a good fit for the foster home. One part of the exosystem that emerged was the impact that the work setting had on the participants' ability to provide adequate support to meet the child's social and emotional development. Other placement disruptions occurred because the

youth in extended foster care chose not to follow the contracts as agreed upon when they first moved into the foster home. Olivia and Noah shared that two of the youth staying in their home who were in extended foster care refused to work on their goals like seeking mental health services, gaining independent living skills, and finding and keeping a job. After several weeks of not doing what was agreed upon, Olivia and Noah terminated their placement. Both youths left the foster home on good terms, and Olivia and Noah continue to have contact with the youth. For children in foster care, time spent in care and their past experiences impact their development. The chronosystem encompasses change over time and constancy in the children's environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994).

Participants shared that the rewarding part of being a therapeutic foster parent was knowing they are providing the children with a stable, loving home environment and positively impacting the development of the children. The rewards surpassed the challenges that the participants experienced as therapeutic foster parents. Participants were intrinsically motivated to continue doing the work of a therapeutic foster parent as many participants felt a commitment to provide a better life for the children in foster care. Olivia explained that she is a therapeutic foster parent “because it is equal parts rewarding and equal parts challenging. It is rewarding and meaningful to watch and be a part of somebody's healing and growth process. It makes me a better person, I think.” Additionally, some participants mentioned that giving up foster parenting was not an option for them. Noah said, “We're not excellent, but we're decent enough and we don't see a reason that we should be giving up now and there's definitely a need for it in the [foster care] system.”

Supports

Supports for participants were provided in different ways. These supports included training support, case aide support, respite support, on-call support, foster parent support group, and agency support. Each participant determined the type of supports and the extent of those supports needed to have a successful and stable placement. Findings revealed that providing participants with adequate supports allowed therapeutic foster parents to be better prepared to support the children in their home. Feeling unprepared and not having adequate supports in place for the children and themselves as therapeutic foster parents made it difficult for participants to keep the placement stable. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the ability of participants to receive supports.

A major form of support for participants was training. Training provided participants with the opportunity of gaining new skills and knowledge. The mesosystem is important for therapeutic foster parents because the personalized training they receive can affect the child's outcome in their care. Training for participants occurred in many ways and many formats beyond the traditional online or in-person classroom training. Participants received training through their employment experience, by reading books, from having a foster parent trainer, and couples who participated in my study gained knowledge and experience from each other. The Caregiver Core Training (CCT) received mixed reviews from the participants. Even though participants felt the CCT was informative and a good introduction to becoming a foster parent, the training did not provide therapeutic foster parents with the training needed to support children in therapeutic foster care. As a result, participants mentioned that additional training should be required beyond the CCT for therapeutic foster parents to receive their fostering license. A training that participants found to be helpful for therapeutic foster parents was the Mandt training and the Right Response training. Findings suggested that taking de-escalation training helped

participants better prepare to provide children with social and emotional support. The training also helped participants learn proper therapeutic physical intervention techniques in case the need presented itself. Other training that participants found helpful as therapeutic foster parents were trauma informed, having an understanding of special education law and Individualized Education Program (IEP), handling allegations, sexually aggressive youth (SAY) and physically aggressive youth training (PAY), eating disorders, and honoring their history.

Just as important as having training as a form of support for therapeutic foster parents, participants also mentioned that other forms of supports were just as important. This is particularly important in the mesosystem because the different microsystems that impact a child's development can either work together to create placement stability or create conflict that can result in placement disruption (Farineau, 2016). One of those important forms of supports is having case aid support which for some participants it allowed them to be full-time therapeutic foster parents and work full-time. With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Sofia, Olivia, and Noah are taking a break from foster parenting. The uncertainty of working from home and having to supervise a child with no case aide support left them with no choice but to put a pause on their fostering experience. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted another support that was important for participants, and that was respite care. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down how much respite care Suzy and Red provide to full-time foster parents. Both Suzy and Red agreed only to provide respite for children who had previously been to their home for respite to reduce the exposure to COVID-19.

For two participants, Sofia and Jean, having the on-call support has been an invaluable support. For Sofia, "having [the on-call support] and then not only having it but when you use it feeling no negative feelings that you called [because] that's what we're here for was absolutely

big to me.” Jean appreciated it “because every time I've called it, they've always gotten right back to me and they've stayed engaged until the crisis was over. Then they check up on me the next day.” Although many of the participants knew about the foster parent support groups, only Suzy and Red actively attended the meetings before the COVID-19 pandemic. The other participants found the foster parent support groups not helpful and a place where foster parents complain about their experience. Sunshine, Carmen, Sofia, and Olivia hoped that the foster parent support groups were better facilitated and hoped the groups helped find solutions to the questions and problems that foster parents encounter. Participants felt that the support they received as therapeutic foster parents from the agencies was enough and only had positive things to share. Carmen, Suzy, Red, Noah and Olivia shared that the agencies’ staff are always available to answer questions and they are a resource when they need support. Participants felt heard, seen, and valued by the staff and the agency.

Additionally, participants also shared supports they wished they had that would be helpful as therapeutic foster parents. This is important to know because the family setting, or foster home, in which the foster child resides, is the primary arena in which development occurs (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1994). Support that three participants, Sunshine, Sofia, and Olivia, mentioned would be beneficial in the journey of foster parenting is having a person, whether a mentor, foster parent trainer, or therapist, be available to listen and provide advice when needed to foster parents. All three participants requested that the person be an outside person not involved with the agencies to keep information confidential and neutral. Participants asked for additional training to work with biological and extended families of children in foster care, IEP training, personalities training, and cultural competency training. Participants also stated in addition to Caregiver Core Training, therapeutic foster parents should receive training on dealing

with the police, human trafficking survivor training, de-escalation training, and trauma informed training. Other supports that participants wished they had were opportunities to build community within their county with other licensed foster parents within the agency and receive a scenario workbook that contains different ways that foster parents can approach a scenario. Also, having a car insurance and liability program paid for by the state to help youth able to drive get vehicle insurance and pay for a car. Youth receive support getting a license, but once they get the driver's license, the youth cannot drive unless the foster parents are willing to add them to their vehicle insurance.

Synthesis

These three themes and reflections do not cover the extent of what can be learned from these narratives. This is a glimpse into the experiences of eight therapeutic foster parents who, through the ecological system, impact the development of children in care. The overall findings suggest three things. First, participants had a wide range of parenting experiences that influenced their therapeutic foster parenting. Second, the participants' fostering experiences were both challenging and rewarding. Third, participants were better prepared to support the children in foster care when they had adequate training and supports that allows them to care for the children in their home. In the next chapter, Chapter 6, a discussion and conclusion of this study will be provided.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Reflexivity

The difficulty in pushing through the study's journey with the COVID-19 pandemic made the journey feel impossible. Parenting at the same time as I was writing this dissertation made things so much harder. Not only was I co-parenting a teenager, but I was co-parenting a teenager during the pandemic. This meant being hypervigilant and protective of our foster teen to keep him safe. In addition, many of the supports that were once available became unavailable. Extracurricular activities were canceled and schools were closed and became virtual. There were times where multitasking became difficult and focusing on one thing at a time became the norm. Often being a foster parent took more priority than working on writing the dissertation.

As a therapeutic foster parent, I often found myself wanting to interject with my comments and personal experiences as the participants told their stories. I found myself internally experiencing intense feelings of pain, joy, love, and hope, just as if the stories told were part of my own story. Two major observations that resonated with me personally were that only three of the eight participants spoke about the disproportionality of children of color in foster care. Second, only two of them mentioned the need for more foster parents of color to help support children of color in foster care. Although my study did not focus on the disproportionality of children of color in the foster care system, as a foster parent of color, I was hoping more participants would have talked about this issue within the foster care system. This chapter highlights some limitations to this study and will conclude by sharing recommendations and implications for future practice and research.

Limitations

Although the findings in this study add to the field, the study is not without limitations. One limitation of the study was that even though participants were recruited from Skagit and Whatcom County, only Whatcom County therapeutic foster parents participated in this study. Participants' stories cannot be generalized to all therapeutic foster parents in Washington State or across the country. Nevertheless, their stories can be used to inform how similar therapeutic foster parent experiences can be better supported.

Another limitation of the study was the inclusion criteria. Although the inclusion criteria helped narrow the study's scope, it excluded many foster parents who did not meet the criteria from participating in the study. Some of the foster parents excluded from my study were traditional foster parents, foster parents who had less than six months of fostering experience and foster parents outside of Whatcom and Skagit County. The number of therapeutic foster care agencies that served Skagit and Whatcom County was limited to a few agencies. Two of the therapeutic foster care agencies did not have licensed homes in either Skagit or Whatcom County at the time of the recruitment process for the study. It is also important to recognize that the data collected is that of only therapeutic foster parents' experiences not including case managers, social workers, foster care agencies, DCYF; therefore, this resulted in a specific, rather than comprehensive, view of the data.

There were also limitations due to the interviewing process. The pandemic did not allow interviews to be conducted in person and required interviews to be held online via Zoom, possibly excluding therapeutic foster parents who preferred to do the interview in person. Due to time constraints, the participants self-reported their own therapeutic foster parent experiences without additional data sources like focus groups, observations, or journaling were used to confirm or refute their self-analyses.

Regarding the interview results, the participants may have been reluctant to speak candidly about their experiences due to factors such as concern for compromising their foster license or keeping their confidentiality. An additional limitation was that this study occurred over a few months and included only one data collection and analysis point. A long-term study with therapeutic foster parents will yield more information about barriers encountered as a therapeutic foster parent and how they were addressed.

Implications and Recommendations

These eight participants are examples of vulnerability, strength, resiliency, and commitment to supporting the children in foster care. Their experiences navigating the role of therapeutic foster parents have implications for therapeutic foster parents, foster care agencies, and future research.

Therapeutic Foster Parents

There is one implication for therapeutic foster parents. Foster parents are critical members of the child's microsystem that impact their development. Parenting styles give therapeutic foster parents a method and approach they want to use to parent the children in their home. Researchers have identified four types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved (Bi et al., 2018). Each style takes a different approach in raising children and can be identified by a number of different characteristics. The authoritarian parenting style is focused on obedience and punishment over discipline (Bi et al., 2018). The authoritative parenting style is focused on creating positive relationships and enforcing the rules (Bi et al., 2018). The permissive parenting style doesn't enforce the rules because "kids will be kids" (Bi et al., 2018). The uninvolved parenting style provides little guidance, nurturing, or attention (Bi et al., 2018). A recommendation for therapeutic foster parents is to find a parenting

style that supports their needs. Therapeutic foster parents should set boundaries, clear expectations, be nurturing and value independence. Participants recommended children earn privileges rather than just be given from the beginning when they are placed in their home.

Foster Care Agencies and Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)

There are several implications for foster care agencies and DCYF. Communication is key when it comes to recruiting and retaining foster parents. For foster parents, there is nothing worse than being left alone to figure out things on their own. Foster care agencies and DCYF need to remember always to keep open and consistent communication with foster parents. This can be done by establishing a protocol of returning phone calls and emails within 24-hours or by establishing a point of contact for foster parents to communicate with. Therapeutic foster parents who were first licensed directly with the DCYF decided to switch their license to a private foster care agency because of the lack of communication from the state. Changing the way agencies communicate with prospective foster parents, new foster parents, and veteran foster parents can make a difference for foster parents as they feel part of a team, leading to an increase in the retention of foster parents.

The feeling of loneliness will continue to be part of the journey for therapeutic foster parents because of the lack of understanding and empathy from the general public of what it means to be a therapeutic foster parent. With only a small number of licensed therapeutic foster homes, it is hard for therapeutic foster parents to find a community they can turn to for support. Private agencies should facilitate opportunities for therapeutic foster parents to get together and find community among each other if they want to increase the overall satisfaction of therapeutic foster parents and retain therapeutic foster parents. One way of creating community is through a

mentorship program funded by the private agency and coordinated by agency staff in which therapeutic foster parents have access to a mentor, trainer, or therapist that provides them with someone to turn to for advice and support when they have questions or need guidance on how to handle a situation. Participants prefer to have the mentor, trainer, or therapist be someone who is not part of the foster care agency to feel comfortable talking to while also keeping confidentiality. Private agencies can also help create community by creating local hub homes. These local hub homes would help create opportunities for therapeutic foster parents to build community and serve as a resource and support for therapeutic foster parents. Additionally, private agencies can make a therapeutic foster parent directory book containing the names and contact information of the other therapeutic foster parents within the agency to connect with each other for support.

The following recommendation addresses the need for specialized training for therapeutic foster parents. Research shows that most placement disruptions occur within the first six months and that foster parents initiate the placement change because they feel inadequate in their role as foster parents due to the lack of training (Walter et al., 2003). The lack of training that is geared towards supporting therapeutic foster parents was evident in this study. Participants agreed that although the Caregiver Core Training (CCT) is a good introduction to foster parenting, the training does not provide therapeutic foster parents with training such as de-escalation and trauma informed needed to support children in therapeutic foster care. Foster care agencies and DCYF should consider making changes to the curricula and training that therapeutic foster parents receive in order to better meet their needs and decrease placement disruption and retain therapeutic foster parents. Adding the voices, experiences of therapeutic foster parents, and scenario-based questions into the CCT and other training could be helpful for therapeutic foster

parents to be better prepared to care for children in therapeutic foster care and prevent placement disruptions. In addition, participants in this study found the following training helpful as therapeutic foster parents: trauma informed training, having an understanding of special education law and Individualized Education Program (IEP), handling allegations training, sexually aggressive youth (SAY) and physically aggressive youth training (PAY), eating disorders training, and honoring their history training.

Providing children in foster care with social and emotional support is one of the most important aspects of being a therapeutic foster parent. Participants mentioned that the most helpful training they have taken has been taking a de-escalation training. De-escalation training like the Mandt training or Right Response training helped participants better prepare to provide children with social and emotional support. The training also helped participants learn proper therapeutic physical intervention techniques. Foster care agencies should provide new and veteran therapeutic foster parents with adequate training to prevent and de-escalate an escalation before it gets into a crisis mode by partnering with other agencies that are licensed to provide such training. Funding for de-escalation training should be provided by DCYF or a private agency. Private agencies that have policies against physical interventions should still consider providing the non-physical interventions of the training to therapeutic foster parents to have tools to prevent an escalation from happening and de-escalate an escalation.

Foster parents learn better when their training is done in the learning style that works best for them. Many of the participants' most impactful training occurred in informal settings outside the classroom when they were outside in a retreat or when training was mixed between application of the skills and classroom learning setting. Participants shared that they gained knowledge and skills through their employment experience by reading books, having a foster parent trainer, and

couples who participated in my study gained knowledge and experience from each other; however, many of these learning formats are not accepted for training hours. Foster care agencies and DCYF should update their training to incorporate different learning styles for foster parents and expand what can count as training hours.

Although social workers, case managers, and foster care agency staff provide invaluable advice to foster parents, they cannot offer the sense of belonging and understanding that comes from being with people who share similar daily experiences. Foster parent support groups are effective because they decrease feelings of isolation, help members feel understood, and provide realistic suggestions to address the challenges foster parents encounter in caring for children (Lewis et al., 2003). However, participants reported that they do not attend the foster parent support group meetings because they tend not to be helpful. Participants explained that the foster parent support group meetings are used by foster parents as a place to complain about their experience and are poorly facilitated. Foster care agencies should restructure the foster parent support group meetings to meet the needs of the foster parents by first researching best practices for support groups and conducting a need based analysis. Participants recommended making the foster parents' support group meetings be more solution-based meetings and be better facilitated by the agencies.

Future Research

There are several implications for research. Therapeutic foster parents hold a wealth of knowledge as they care and provide social and emotional support to children in therapeutic foster care. Unfortunately, there are not many research studies that center on the experiences of therapeutic foster parents. Most research focusing on foster parents' foster parent training and placement disruption has been done with traditional foster parents (Tullberg et al., 2019).

Therefore, the experiences of therapeutic foster parents have gone largely unnoticed. Future research should include therapeutic foster parents and their collective voices, wealth of knowledge, and experiences. When invited to participate in research, agencies should monetarily compensate therapeutic foster parents for their time and emotional labor.

Although my study did not focus on racial disproportionality and disparity, children of color are greatly represented in the foster care system. Unfortunately, the recruitment and retention of foster parents of color are nowhere near the rate of their white counterparts. Children of color in foster care fare better when they have foster parents of color they can identify with. Foster care agencies and DCYF should research and evaluate their systems to determine where and how disproportionality and disparity occur for both the children of color in care and foster parents of color.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the experiences of therapeutic foster parents. Some therapeutic foster parents have decided not to continue, while other therapeutic foster parents have survived and thrived during this difficult time. More research must be done to understand the implications and effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has created for therapeutic foster parents.

Conclusion

As the percentage of children in foster care increases, the retention of therapeutic foster parents is low and placement disruption for children in foster care is high. The purpose of this study was to understand the connection between the training that therapeutic foster parents receive and placement disruption. Many placement disruptions occur because therapeutic foster parents feel they lack the training needed to support the children in their care. This study aimed to answer the following research question: What trainings result in positive fostering outcomes

for therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington? This study indicates that having adequate supports, including training, can lead to a stable placement for the children in foster care rather than a placement disruption. Participants stated that in addition to Caregiver Core Training, therapeutic foster parents should receive training on dealing with the police training, human trafficking survivor training, de-escalation training, and trauma informed training. However, results also indicate that placement disruptions occurred because the placement was not a good fit. Therapeutic foster parents reported that outside events such as employment and COVID-19 impacted the ability to keep a stable placement.

Before I started this research study, I had experienced a placement disruption and heard stories about the experiences of other foster parents with placement disruptions. As I reflect on this work and interviews for this study, I realized the impact that therapeutic foster parents have on the development of the children in foster care. This research study has allowed me to create a community of support with other therapeutic foster parents. I hope that by helping to tell the story of the eight therapeutic foster parents, agencies in power will consider using this study to help support and retain therapeutic foster parents. As a therapeutic foster parent licensed through a private agency, it was an honor to have been given the opportunity to listen and learn about therapeutic foster parents' experiences in my region. I will continue to support and mentor new and veteran therapeutic foster parents as they move through their foster care journey.

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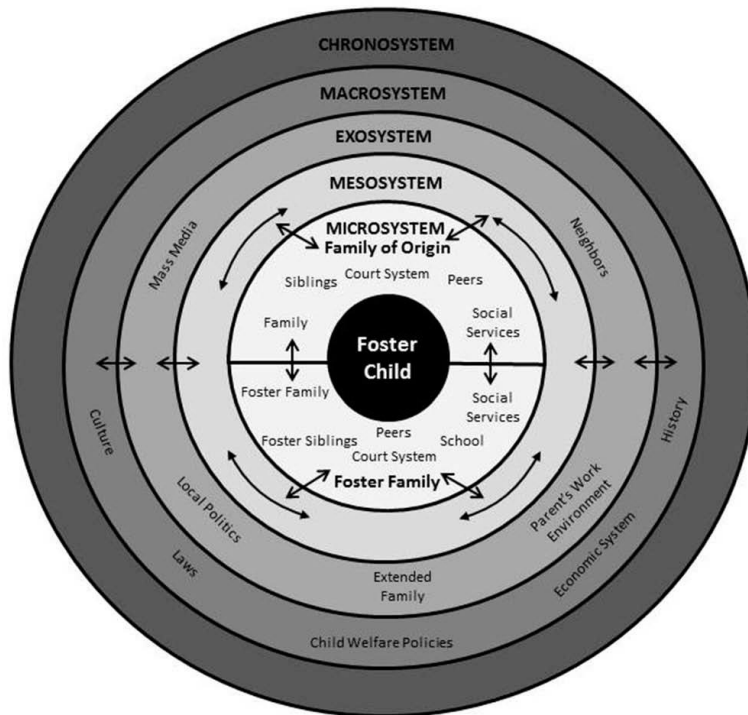
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Appendix A

Figure 1

Ecological Systems Model for Children in Foster Care



Note: Although the ecological system model is used for children, it can also be applied to youth.

From Richardson, E., Grogan, C., Richardson, S., & Small, S. (2018). Displacement, caregiving, and the ecological system of youth in foster care: A theoretical perspective. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 21(4-5), 348-364.

Appendix B

Therapeutic Foster Parent Research Study Interest Form

I am inviting you to participate in my research study, as a part of my Dissertation in Practice through the University of Washington Tacoma. The purpose of this study is to understand the connection between the training that therapeutic foster parents receive and placement disruption. In particular, this study focuses on therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington. The goal is to provide recommendations for foster care agencies looking to retain skilled therapeutic foster parents and increase the stability of children's experience in therapeutic foster care placements.

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. Participants must meet the following inclusion criteria:

- (a) Must currently be or previously been a licensed foster parent in Washington State,
- (b) Must currently or previously been part of a Therapeutic Foster Care program through a private agency that serves Skagit or Whatcom County, Washington, and
- (c) Must have at least six months of experience fostering through a Therapeutic Foster Care program.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1) Participate in an individual Zoom recorded interview, anticipated to last 90 minutes long, in which the researcher will invite you to talk about your training experience as a therapeutic foster parent, recollect past experiences, or discuss other related issues of concern to you.
- 2) After the interview, you will be asked to keep a journal about your foster parent experience for a month and journal for at least three days of the week.
- 3) You will receive a \$50 gift card for taking the time to voluntarily participate in the research study.

For additional questions, please contact Emmanuel Camarillo at ec2643@uw.edu.

* Required

Personal Information

1. First Name *

2. Last Name *

3. Preferred Name *

4. Preferred Pronouns *

5. Gender *

6. Age *

7. Phone Number *

8. Email *

9. Preferred Method of Contact (check all that apply) *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Email
☐ Phone (Call)
☐ Phone (Text)
☐ Other

10. What is your current mailing address? *

Inclusion Criteria

The questions in this section is to collect information to see if you meet the requirements for the study.

11. Are you currently or previously been a licensed foster parent in Washington State? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

12. Which private agency are you licensed with or were licensed with? *

13. Are you currently or have you been a therapeutic foster parent before? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Yes (Currently)
☐ Yes (Before)
☐ No

14. Which county do you live in or lived in while you were licensed as a therapeutic foster parent? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Skagit
☐ Whatcom
☐ Other

Other: ☐ _____

15. How long were you or have you been a licensed therapeutic foster parent? *

Please list your length of time in number of months and years (i.e. 2 years and 5 months)

16. Please describe your experience being a therapeutic foster parent. *

Other

17. Do you have access to doing interviews virtually? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Other: _____

18. Please provide any additional questions you have for the researcher (Emmanuel Camarillo):

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Google Forms

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

CONSENT FORM

A Qualitative Study: Exploring the Connection Between Therapeutic Foster Parent Training and Placement Disruption

Researcher: Emmanuel Camarillo, University of Washington Tacoma, Ed.D. student,
ec2643@uw.edu, [REDACTED]

I am asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Being in the study is voluntary. Please read this carefully. You may ask any questions about the study. Then you can decide whether or not you want to be in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the connection between the training that therapeutic foster parents receive and placement disruption. In particular, this study focuses on therapeutic foster parents who reside in Skagit and Whatcom County, Washington. The goal is to provide recommendations for foster care agencies looking to retain skilled therapeutic foster parents and increase the stability of children's experience in therapeutic foster care placements.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in an individual Zoom video recorded interview, anticipated to last 90 minutes long, in which the researcher will invite you to talk about your training experience as a therapeutic foster parent, recollect past experiences, or discuss other related issues of concern to you. The recorded interview will be transcribed.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Participation in this study might cause added distress or triggers concerning previous and current experiences with foster parenting. The researcher will provide opportunities for additional follow-up as needed.

The researcher will report information revealed during the interview about the abuse and/or neglect of a child or an adult and any information about suspected abuse and/or neglect of a child or adult including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This study will not bring you specific benefits outside of an opportunity to share your experience and opinions. Your participation, however, will be of considerable benefit for training purposes, for it will give recommendations to foster care agencies looking to retain skilled therapeutic foster parents and increase the stability of children's experience in therapeutic foster care placements.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will only be accessible to members of the dissertation committee. Confidentiality will be maintained by using a pseudonym instead of your name when transcribing the interview. All online data will be kept stored in a computer that is password protected. All forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet. You will be given transcripts to all interviews and will have the opportunity to correct the information.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Participants from this study will have the opportunity to review the results of their interview to check that all findings are accurate before the final findings are reported.

You will be given a \$50 gift card for voluntarily participating in the research study. You will receive the gift card within a week after your interview with the researcher. You will be given the option of choosing from among several gift card options.

RESEARCH-RELATED INJURY

If you have questions later about this study, or if you feel that you have been harmed by participating in this study, you can contact the researcher listed at the top of this form. If you have your questions about your rights as a research participant, you can call the UW Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Participant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact the researcher listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

Copies to: Researcher

Participant

Appendix D

Opening Questions

- When did you first learn about foster care?
- What was your childhood like?
- How is your parenting (style)?
- What made you decide you were ready to be a foster parent?

Therapeutic Foster Parent Experience

- Tell me about your experience as a therapeutic foster parent.
- Did you have any previous parenting experience before becoming a therapeutic foster parent? How has your previous parenting experience helped you as a therapeutic foster parent?
- Why did you get into therapeutic foster parenting?
- How is therapeutic foster parenting different than traditional parenting?
- What are the benefits and challenges of being a therapeutic foster parent?

Placement Stability and Placement Disruption

- Have you ever asked to have a foster child removed from your home?
 - 1) Has it happened more than once?
 - 2) If yes, why? What do you think happened?
 - 3) What could have helped you keep that child in the home (if anything)?
- Nationally, over 50% of foster parents quit in the first year. What keeps you motivated to be a foster parent?
- Foster parenting is difficult. Have you ever seriously thought about resigning? If so, what stopped you? If not, what helps you to continue this work?

Training of Foster Parents

- Think back to the pre-service training. What information (content) was most helpful in preparing you for the challenges of having a foster child?
- Do you think that the pre-service training adequately prepared you for the behavioral challenges you have faced from the foster children placed in your home? Why or why not?
- What information (content) would you have liked to have included that was not or expanded that was? Basically, what do you wish you had known about fostering?
- Do you think that the pre-service and ongoing training had any impact preventing you from having a child moved?
- How effective was the pre-service training and ongoing training in giving you the skills to handle the pressures of being a therapeutic foster parent? Can you name some of the skills that helped you?

Closing Question

- Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to share?
Thank you for your participation!

Appendix E

Name	Age	Gender	County	Agency/ Agencies	# of months/years fostering	Full Time/ Respite	Total # of Foster Children	# Biological Children	Have a Current Placement?
Sunshine	low 30s	Female	Whatcom	Falcon Peak	1 year 6 months	Full Time	1	0	Yes
Carmen	mid 30s	Female	Whatcom	Falcon Peak	9 months	Full Time	3	3 (Children)	Yes
Sofia	upper 40s	Female	Whatcom	Falcon Peak	7 months	Full Time	3	0	No
Suzy	mid 60s	Female	Whatcom	Eagle Care	1 year 4 months	Respite	5	2 (Adults)	No
Red	low 70s	Male	Whatcom	Eagle Care	1 year 4 months	Respite	5	0	No
Noah	upper 40s	Male	Whatcom	State/ Eagle Care	5 years 6 months	Full Time/ Respite	7+	0	No
Olivia	upper 30s	Female	Whatcom	State/ Eagle Care	5 years 6 months	Full Time/ Respite	7+	0	No
Jean	low 60s	Female	Whatcom	Other Agency/ Eagle Care	12 years 11 months	Full Time/ Respite	30+	4 (Adults)	Yes