Oregon Community Programs

Treatment Foster Parents

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Organization and Program Overview

Oregon Community Programs (OCP) is a private nonprofit agency that provides research-based treatment and prevention services to children and families. Since 2001, OCP has provided a range of OHP-funded, evidence-based practices to the families of Lane County and the State of Oregon, with particular expertise in serving foster children and families. Each year we serve approximately 400 youth and families in our programs, primarily in Lane County.

OCP hosted many of the initial randomized controlled trials for Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO). TFCO is the only treatment foster care intervention that meets the highest level of empirical validation[1]. OCP contracts with Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) and the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) to deliver treatment foster care services to up to 40 youth in homes that are trained and supported to deliver TFCO to fidelity.

TFCO, formerly known as Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) was developed in 1983 by Dr. Patricia Chamberlain, PhD, Senior Research Scientist at the Oregon Social Learning Center. TFCO has been found to be an effective evidence-based treatment

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1 https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/factsheet/treatment-foster-care-oregon

model[2] and has received numerous awards and recognitions, including being designated as a national Blueprints Model Program, a Center for Substance Abuse Prevention Exemplary Program for Strengthening America's Families, and a U.S. Department of Education Exemplary Program for Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools. For further information on TFCO, *www.tfcoregon.com*

Intended Impact

As a result of their participation in OCP's TFCO program, we hope that:

◆ **Treatment foster parents feel fulfilled, capable, and confident in their roles.** Foster parents are committed to their involvement with high-needs youth and continue to do the work because they feel that they are an integral part of a team that creates positive change in young people and their overall community. Foster parents feel a sense of belonging and support from our other foster parents and the program. Foster parents are ambassadors for OCP and help recruit prospective foster parents through sharing positive stories.

◆ **Treatment foster parents view their interventions and efforts with youth as planting seeds for long-term change and positive futures.** Foster parents can answer the question, "What's my reason for being a treatment foster parent?" The investment that foster parents apply to youth now impacts family values, communication practices, positive relationship strategies, work ethic, parenting practices, and many other considerations that play a part in the success of multiple generations ahead. Foster parents are a resource for multiple youth over time, not just one, and through their efforts youth exit systems of care to permanency.

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2 Chamberlain, P., & Reid, J. (1998). Comparison of two community alternatives to incarceration for chronic juvenile offenders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 6, 624-633.

Chamberlain, P. (2003). The Oregon Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care model: Features, outcomes, and progress in dissemination. In S. Schoenwald & S. Henggeler (Series Eds.), Moving evidence-based treatments from the laboratory into clinical practice. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 10, 303-312.

Evaluation Methodology

The aim of our evaluation was to see what kind and quality of impact Oregon Community Programs is having on the treatment foster parents within in our Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) program. To understand this, we explored two broad evaluation questions:

1. What kind and quality of impact are we having on our treatment foster parents?
2. What aspects of our program are causing this impact?

Over the course of the project, we (a) developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, (b) designed and implemented a mixed methods outcome evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, (c) identified themes and findings, and (d) considered the implications to those findings for program improvement and innovation.

This project began by identifying and clarifying the intended impact of Oregon Community Programs. Once the ideas of impact had been developed, we used the Heart Triangle™ model to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact on the mental, behavioral, and emotional changes in our treatment foster parents. We used these indicators to design a qualitative interview protocol and a quantitative questionnaire to evaluate progress toward achieving our intended impact.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural, qualitative changes resulting from our program. We delimited our population to all current treatment foster parents and a handful of former foster parents. Our population size for this evaluation was 25. We used a purposeful stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample from the population we serve. Our sample size was 17, drawn from the following strata of our population:

◆ Fostering status (current vs former foster parents)
◆ Number of placements (two or less vs more than two)

◆ Number of caregivers (single vs two-parent homes)

◆ Other children in the home (families with vs families without biological children at home)

Our interview team consisted of Executive Director Ana Day, Program Director Kym Broten, Clinical Project Manager, Nicolle Kuhn, Program Manager Jaimie Broadhead, and Billing/Outcomes Specialist Alice Wheeler. We convened one-on-one interviews lasting from between 45 minutes and one hour in length and collected interview data using handwritten notes and/or the Otter voice-to-text transcription app. Treatment foster parents were compensated for providing their perspectives with a $100 VISA gift card.

We then analyzed the data inductively using a modified version of thematic analysis. Each interviewer analyzed the data from their interviews individually to identify initial themes. Together, we developed common themes from all of the interviews collectively. We identified the overarching and inter-interview themes that emerged from the full scope of our data analysis to illuminate the collective insights and discoveries. We grouped the feedback into categories and examined the dynamics among the themes and relationships between the themes that were revealed in the data. We then determined the most significant and meaningful discoveries and brought them forward as findings.

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the quantitative portion of the evaluation, we designed a questionnaire to collect data on our quantitative indicators of impact. We administered this instrument to 17 treatment foster parents and had a response of 14, a response rate of 82%. The data were analyzed primarily using measures of central tendency. We identified key insights, patterns, and gaps within the data and incorporated these discoveries into the related findings. The most significant insights from the quantitative data are described in the following narrative.

Limitations

Many of our treatment foster parents are co-parenting couples, but typically only one member of the pair was interviewed. The sample size for foster parents was relatively small. Although we were able to invite input from all current treatment foster parents, staff time constraints allowed only limited sampling of former foster parents.

Findings

Finding 1: Professional foster parents are grown, not found.

Key Insight: Foster parents do not begin as professionals but become professionals over time as they develop their skills and grow from their experiences.

A common focus when recruiting treatment foster parents is the need to find "diamonds," caregivers who come preloaded with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to parent complex youth. Such a focus leads programs to emphasize recruitment marketing for an overly narrow target population. Our data suggest that with the type of supports and training offered by TFCO, a much larger cohort of caregivers can achieve paraprofessional status, expanding an otherwise limited community resource. In other words, TFCO doesn't just look for diamonds; some of our diamonds are "in the rough" at recruitment and start to shine with time, experience, and on-the-job training.

Our data demonstrate that foster parents improve their skills as they experience and navigate challenges with the support of the program. Experienced foster parents consistently noted that learning to use the TFCO program, although not always intuitive at first, resulted in improved connection with youth, feeling effective in helping youth accomplish their goals, and in increased confidence that they could provide treatment to youth with complex behavioral health presentations. In this way, they become increasingly skilled and valuable as treatment resources with each successful placement in a process of continuous quality improvement that benefits the community.

A 15-year veteran foster parent offered her perspective on gaining experience and capability over time, saying,

[When I got stuck] I think being able to process even after the fact with someone at OCP was really helpful. The same [situations] come up again, so I would feel better prepared. More and more confident that what I had done was the right approach or if I needed to make an adjustment. Being able to talk that over in a supported setting was really helpful…to see if there were any alternatives for how to respond.

In our survey sample, the majority of respondents reported significant growth in the following key skills development areas:

- ◆ Identify an alternative prosocial behavior to problem behaviors you've noticed
- ◆ Keep aware of youth whereabouts and activities
- ◆ Collaborate with the Team Lead before starting a new intervention
- ◆ Tell youth about expectations or plans ahead of time (pre-teaching)
- ◆ Monitor homework and school behavior
- ◆ Pay a lot more attention to when kids are doing the right thing
- ◆ Connect with youth as a supportive and nurturing mentor
- ◆ Notice when you have gotten caught in a power struggle without judging yourself
- ◆ Manage your own stress
- ◆ Help youth navigate important family relationships, even when complicated or imperfect.

As a result of growing confidence in their skills and abilities, most foster parents also reported increased confidence in their ability to serve challenging youth and to be an ongoing foster parent for future youth in need (see Figures 1 and 2).

Significance

In their training process, treatment foster parents must unlearn and then learn new strategies to manage youth behavior, develop their own competencies, and monitor stress. In many professions, there is

Figure 1. Since being a part of OCP, I have grown more comfortable taking challenging youth into my home. (n=14)
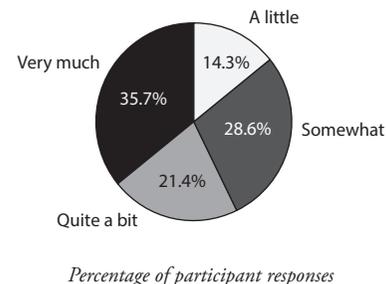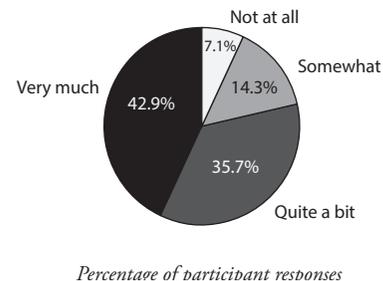

A little 14.3%
Very much 35.7%
Somewhat 28.6%
Quite a bit 21.4%

Percentage of participant responses

Figure 2. Since being a part of OCP, my confidence in taking multiple youth placements over time has increased. (n=14)

Not at all 7.1%
Somewhat 14.3%
Very much 42.9%
Quite a bit 35.7%

Percentage of participant responses

an understanding that early investment in the workforce cultivates an important future resource. Treatment foster parents are a special kind of workforce—a volunteer workforce. At any point, they can end their participation, and the community loses a critical resource for youth.

In the State of Oregon, the number of youth needing treatment foster care far exceeds the number of qualified providers. Strategies that focus on identifying foster parents who are already supremely skilled miss opportunities to expand the volunteer workforce sufficiently to meet the need. Additionally, these strategies often fail to expand the diversity and representation of potential foster parents who could be trained to provide outstanding care with the right type of guidance and oversight.

Possible Responses

Adjustments

- ◆ Provide additional or different training in the areas where survey respondents reported needing more training, especially helping

the youth navigate important family relationships, even when complicated or imperfect (71% of foster parents reported that more training in this area would be helpful.)

- Provide education and advocacy to foster care certification and licensing bodies to emphasize that the "on the job training" of TFCO is a valuable strategy to increase local and statewide capacity.
- Better articulate the necessary foundational qualities of families that can be cultivated into a good fit for TFCO
- Consideration and caution around potential equity discrepancies.

New Strategies
- By casting a wider recruitment net, the logical conclusion is that more good fit AND poor fit homes may start the certification process. The program might benefit by exploring and refining the stages of onboarding prospective families and what indicators exist that a family is on or off track with skills development, along with potential remedies (see "mindset shift").
- Advocating for rule changes to increase diverse and representative treatment foster families by ending rules that require 50% of direct care staff to have a bachelor's degree and/or provide an alternative option that emphasizes lived experience and cultural representation.

Experiments
- Establish and mark levels of skill development for new families at intervals and explore what factors move families more/less quickly along the path.

Finding 2: Foster parents' motivation comes from within.

Key Insight: Successful foster parents are most motivated by seeing the growth they help bring about in youth through their interventions and efforts.

Although stereotypes of foster parents who collect checks from the state persist, our data show that the reality is foster parents' commitment is primarily driven by internal motivation rather than financial compensation. This evaluation showed that the factors most motivating for foster parents are: (1) witnessing the youth in their home learn and demonstrate positive skills and abilities over the time they are in treatment foster homes and (2) observing foster children who too often are burdened with adult worries start to play and behave with childlike lightheartedness.

Nearly every foster parent interviewed commented that they feel especially energized when they see the youth in their home accomplish something that they couldn't do before.

We noted that the accomplishments were often modest in scope—moving from shyness to participation in sports, learning to make dinner, getting caught up on homework—but were experienced as highly encouraging for foster parents. Eighty-six percent of foster parents surveyed noted a significant increase in their ability to see the long-term positive difference they are making (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Since being a part of OCP, I am better able to see the long-term positive difference I am making on the youth in my home. (n=14)

Percentage of participant responses
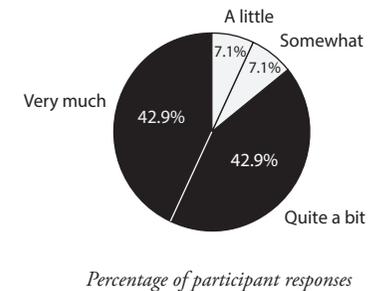
A newer foster parent reflected on the growth of a youth in her home:

He [was] just so sad all the time. You know, like almost depressed all the time. He would never talk and didn't ever want to do anything fun, and was always so quiet. I always was like, man, he hates us! He hates being here! It just felt like that because he was so reserved, I guess. And [then] to see him being so successful and doing things that he would never do before, like getting a job and saving money and being outgoing at

church. Going and doing things that he would not normally do on his own. He talked to us every day and shared with us what's happening in his life. It's just amazing to see this kid who had their shell completely closed to now having an open shell. Being willing to talk and willing to participate, and willing to show that he cares. He shared feelings and emotions. It's just so amazing to see them from where they start to where they end. There's no better feeling than knowing that I've been able to be there to support them and get them to where they are now.

Several parents also noted that it is sometimes hard to remember or access accomplishments, especially when there are challenging behaviors competing for attention. In these times, it was helpful when the program reminded them of growth. For example, noticing that problem behaviors on Parent Daily Reports were decreasing.

One long-term foster parent shared, "I like to keep a list of accomplishments…things that are positive. And then you look at those things, and it really helps me personally."

Additionally, multiple interviews highlighted that treatment foster parents consistently notice that the youth in their home exhibit behaviors that are atypical for youth of their age experiencing normative development. Many youth referred for treatment show "parentified" behavior. In other words, they have developed behaviors that are normally reserved for parents (e.g., worrying about money, taking care of younger siblings, too much adult information) at an unusually young age. As described by an interviewee,

So many of these kids don't have those boundaries or expectations appropriately set up. It puts so much burden on them to make [adult] choices. For young children, that's not age-appropriate, right? I mean, that's something they would start doing in 10 years, not when they're three, four, and five and on up….It's a relief for them to bump up against that boundary, to feel somebody hold the line for them…It takes away a burden.

Foster parents interviewed report that many of the youth entering the program have missed childhood experiences or demonstrate adult worries or stresses. When kids acclimate to the program, foster parents notice that the youth start to laugh or play more wholeheartedly, like their peers. Observing this shift is one of the commonly reported areas that generate fulfillment and satisfaction for foster parents and often leads to hope that youth can achieve other important goals like higher education and employment. Other foster parents commented that they see the work as "breaking dysfunctional family patterns" and "giving kids a mental picture of what a functional family can look like."

Significance

Recruitment and retention strategies often focus on extrinsic motivators for foster parents. While it is certainly necessary to reimburse treatment foster parents in a way that honors their skills and commitment of time and energy for youth in need, it is important to highlight that in the long run, treatment foster parents are motivated by the fulfillment of seeing youth change.

It is also important to understand that the types of youth growth that provide fulfillment and joy for foster parents are often small steps or humble beginnings. It is seeing the forward movement in youth more than the actual accomplishment itself that compels foster parents to continue.

Possible Responses

Adjustments

- ◆ Team Leads can highlight when foster parents share even small stories about youth developing new skills or increasingly behaving in an age-appropriate way.
- ◆ Team Leads can help establish the causal connection between the foster parent treatment efforts and these results to energize and encourage foster parents.

New Strategies

Shining a light on specific stories or examples of skill mastery or youth relaxing into age-appropriate play in recruitment materials may improve engagement or interest for potential foster parents by highlighting common motivation. Using photos or graphics that convey similar themes may also be helpful.

Finding 3: Feeling connected to a team is the key to retention.

Key Insight: Foster parent peer support accelerates learning and buffers secondary trauma and toxic stress. Program support takes unnecessary burdens off foster parents and improves their ability to respond to youths' treatment needs.

Foster parents often begin fostering with idealistic thoughts about what the experience will be like. Experiencing the reality of the day-to-day struggles of foster parenting can be discouraging at first. Our inquiry found that more than two-thirds of the foster parents interviewed reported that their views about the role of a foster parent changed very much or quite a bit as a result of their experience with the OCP training program.

Additionally, most foster parents interviewed described that working on a team was hugely important for keeping them motivated and engaged. Specifically, hearing the experiences of other foster parents in the weekly foster parent meeting was experienced as normalizing difficulties and building hope that progress can be made. Survey results indicated that as they participated in the OCP program, foster parents became more comfortable being vulnerable with one another and trusting the support and advice from other foster parents (see Figures 4 and 5).

Qualitative interviews included multiple examples of the importance of program and peer support. As one foster parent put it,

It can feel like, man, I gotta be the only person going through this! So, a lot of times, just hearing the similar struggles from other parents and maybe different ways that they've dealt with it helps. Sometimes I'll hear [other FPs] say something. I'll be like, 'Hey, I'm gonna have to try

Figure 4. Since being a part of OCP, I am more comfortable being vulnerable in the foster parent group. (n=14)
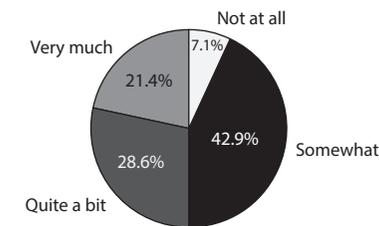
Percentage of participant responses

Figure 5. Since being a part of OCP, I have grown in my ability to trust support and advice from other foster parents. (n=14)
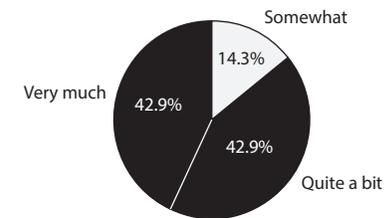
Percentage of participant responses

that next time!' So just, basically, the 'you're not alone' kind of feeling when you hear people going through similar challenges.

Another foster parent shared about the foster parent group,

It normalizes it to a certain extent. You can approach it maybe in a different way or give an idea [to someone else] how to approach it in a different way. There was always good feedback about stuff or so often to just have a good laugh! It does lighten it because it feels really heavy sometimes. Especially when you first read the case history, you know. It can be very disturbing. I think it is good to relieve some of that tension there and share those feelings.

In summary, the peer support and team approach of TFCO was reported as very helpful in stabilizing and encouraging foster parents

and motivating them to continue. One experienced foster parent noted that it helps to hear from someone who had lived through it before and offered the following advice to newer foster parents,

> *Just give yourself a break when you maybe don't handle things the way you wanted to. Use it to learn from rather than to beat yourself up. I tended to give myself a hard time when I saw where I could have done things better, but you know, we all go through challenges.*

Significance

Very few treatment foster parent programs offer the level of peer support that is offered by TFCO, and it is perhaps one of the most critical components of the program. The team approach also shelters foster parents from non-treatment-related system demands, which improves longevity and capacity to focus on youth needs. The complexity of foster youths' decision-making teams has increased in recent years, and even with program support, it has significantly increased non-treatment-related demands on foster parents. Scheduling alone can be a time-consuming task when a youth has multiple adults on their case (caseworker, CASA, attorney, ICWA worker, permanency worker, wraparound coordinator, ILP liaison, etc.).

Within the TFCO model, the foster parent is prioritized as the primary treatment provider for the youth. The Team Lead shoulders many of the case management and scheduling demands to free up the foster parent to be quickly responsive to youth needs and to implement the treatment plan in the foster home. TFCO is unique in this respect—most other treatment foster care settings task the foster parent with managing logistics like scheduling home visits, respite, updating multiple system partners, etc. Foster parents find it very supportive to rely on the program to navigate scheduling and communication with multiple stakeholders, improving efficiency and reducing miscommunication.

Possible Responses

Adjustments

- ◆ Refine the process for introducing the youth's decision-making team to the TFCO communication process and the value of starting inquiries with the Team Lead, especially when the youth's state worker is unfamiliar with the TFCO model or the team is very large.

New Strategies

- ◆ Continue to adapt to the changes/challenges associated with balancing in-person support and video conferencing options, including investing in technology that makes hybrid meetings feel more natural.
- ◆ Advocate to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on treatment foster parents.

Experiments

- ◆ Shift to a hybrid foster parent meeting model permanently in which most meetings are virtual, but there is an option for in person participation in all meetings. Maintaining some frequency of in-person meetings would still be a priority.

Finding 4: A "mindset shift" that makes fostering more fulfilling.

Key Insight: Foster parents who learn to use the key TFCO skills experience a shift that makes the work easier, more enjoyable, and more effective.

Our data show that many foster parents were surprised that TFCO asks them both to learn and unlearn parenting skills. Often, they found that the strategies and skills that they utilized in parenting their own children needed to be supplemented or even let go as their skill in implementing TFCO expanded. To illustrate, 86% of surveyed foster parents reported that their confidence in using TFCO strategies had increased "very much" or "quite a bit." Fourteen percent of respondents

said their confidence had grown "somewhat" or "not at all." Although challenging at first, this unlearning often yielded significant benefits. One foster parent interviewed describes how she experienced a key learning moment:

For me, unlearning would be the controlling piece of it. It actually has taught me to be a better mom all around, honestly, which is kind of funny. Because I have always been so controlling of my own children, and then I'm realizing the more controlling you are, and the more you push their buttons and try and tighten them in, the more they're going to want to do the opposite.

Another foster parent offered:

I had my doubts at first that this method was going to work. We're old school, you know. Things were done a little bit differently with my children as a whole. But I wanted to learn new techniques, and I am glad that I have been a part of this.

As foster parents develop skills and experience, they tend to endorse program skills more emphatically; for instance, the importance of skills like high supervision and monitoring of youth and paying more attention to what kids are doing well than what needs to be corrected. Families who grasp these concepts become motivated to think creatively to increase success. The following foster parent describes the TFCO model's approach to adjusting caregiver strategies to improve youth outcomes,

So, in my mind, I was always having to think, well, how could I tweak this to do a better job at managing this child's behavior? Who could I talk to about that? What resource could I look at to kind of redefine to have my responses provoke the response I wanted to see from the child? So, it's just continually finding new ways, alternative ways to deal with behaviors or attitudes that the child would have had.

A common refrain in our data was that treatment foster parents typically did not appreciate the value of "role stratification" initially, but once they

experienced the value, it resulted in meaningful improvement for both them and the youth. Role stratification in TFCO is the effort to create a team of support staff who target specific needs and skills for the youth so that treatment foster parent has support. Chief among role stratification strategies is the assignment of "limit setter" to the Team Lead in order to allow the treatment foster parent more flexibility to align with the youth to navigate challenges. For instance, the Team Lead might privately consult with the treatment foster parent about the dress code limits for the upcoming school dance. They would develop some parameters for what is permitted and prohibited, and the Team Lead would deliver that message to the youth. If the news was disappointing to the youth, then that negative energy is directed to the Team Lead rather than the foster parent. This allows an increased degree of freedom for the treatment parent to align with and support the youth with navigating requirements and diminishes power struggles.

One foster parent offers the following about how she came to recognize the value of letting the program be the limit setter for the youth,

The moment that I started doing that, it became so much easier. Every kid after that kid, it was like, okay, I think I understand the model. That's why it's so important to do it that way now. It is probably the biggest thing that I've learned: to be a support for the kid and to let the program do all the rest of it. And that's just made my life and, honestly, the kid's life, either way, easier than when it was a back and forth between me and them.

She went on to describe that the value of role stratification is primarily for the youth, who may be expecting conflict in caregiving situations:

It's so nice to be able to only be the support person and to keep that good relationship with the kid no matter what is happening. Because then [the kids] don't feel disconnected from us in the home. They can disconnect from the people that are giving them the consequences [Team Lead] but feel fully supported and loved here.

Interestingly, when surveyed about how much more likely they are to utilize role stratification since participating with OCP, there was a notable split in responses. Fifty-seven percent of those surveyed said they were "very likely" to use role stratification, and 43% reported they were "somewhat" more likely (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Since being a part of OCP, I am more likely to use role stratification (letting your Team Lead be the limit-setter) to manage challenging behaviors. (n=14)

Very much   57.1%   42.9%   Somewhat

Percentage of participant responses
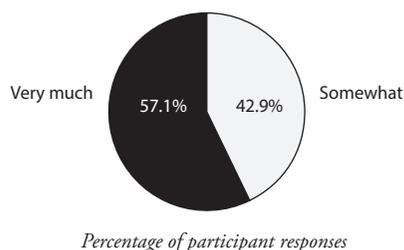
We hypothesize that this split might reflect the different stages of growth for treatment foster parents. It might be enlightening to further explore whether treatment foster parents who are less likely to use role stratification (or other key program components) exit foster caring sooner than foster parents who endorse seeing the value in those strategies.

Significance

If a mindset shift indicates that a treatment foster parent is poised to become more successful and fulfilled, then adjusting approaches to achieve that shift (or achieve it more quickly) becomes important both for treatment efficacy and longevity of treatment parents.

Possible Responses

Adjustments

◆ Assess whether FPs have demonstrated such a shift and identify what factors most contribute in order to accelerate it.

◆ Consider if the youth placed with foster parents who don't clearly make the mindset shift have different treatment success rates.

New Strategies

◆ Get further feedback from FPs about what contributes to this mindset shift. When did they experience it? What made the difference? Is there a way they could've arrived there more quickly or with less suffering?

◆ Overtly discuss these findings with our treatment foster parent group and share a summary of the findings for further input.

Experiments

◆ Experiment with randomly assigning new foster parents to shorter vs longer shaping curve (i.e., try to initiate mindset shift more quickly)

◆ Monitor for how race, ethnicity, language, or other cultural factors may intersect with this work.

Finding 5: Different family structures have different support needs.

Key Insight: Single parents and parents with their own minor children in the home face unique challenges as foster parents that must be taken into account in designing effective supports.

Although all foster parents sometimes need a break, our data show that single foster parents have fewer natural options for self-care than co-parenting foster parents. With two caregivers in the home, each parent can "tag out" when needed to re-regulate, recharge, or otherwise manage stress. Single households tend to rely more on the Team Lead to buffer their relationship with the youth when limits need to be set, for example when the Team Lead intervenes to set limits in a manner that allows the caregiver to remain aligned with the foster youth. This role stratification reduces power struggles and caregiver stress substantially across caregiver types but is of particular value for single parents.

Additionally, the financial cost of supervision for youth is higher for single-parenting foster parents. Within the TFCO model, program youth are required to be supervised by an adult at all times. In co-par-

enting households, supervision is more easily changed over, but in single-parent homes, foster parents must often identify other supervision resources that can meet the needs of their youth, which typically are of substantial cost.

Similarly, our data show that foster parents (both single and dual) with their own minor children in the home have specific worries related to perceived risk and safety for those children. Parents express concern with buffering their children from modeling of problem behavior or worrying about the risk of physical harm. In our data, foster parents with their own children in the home typically noted that if something dangerous occurred, that would decrease their ability to continue fostering. Typically, program support was identified as helping reduce these risks. One foster mother with young children described the biggest factor for her in considering whether she can continue fostering, saying,

For me, it has been probably the treatment of my kids. I have kids that have totally loved my children. And then I've had kids that have totally been bothered by my children and have even used them as an excuse for why they weren't successful. Probably the biggest worry when I have a kid, is how they're going to treat my kids because it's been different with every kiddo. And even though I do think it's really good for my children to understand different people's backgrounds and where they're coming from, it's still hard for them to figure out because they're pretty little.

Significance

It is worth mentioning that TFCO foster parents of many family constellations can be successful in implementing the program and helping youth achieve their treatment goals. Some youth referred do better in a single-parent home, and matching youth needs with foster home strengths is a core tenet of the program. We believe with the right supports, even youth with significant behavioral challenges can benefit from TFCO in a single-parent household, so identifying supports that keep it manageable are critical.

By providing supports targeted to the specific needs of different fam-

ily compositions, foster families will provide better support to program youth and experience more satisfaction from their work.

Possible Responses

Adjustments

◆ Orient new foster families who are single parenting or parenting with children to the importance of self-care, supervision, and role stratification. Provide more targeted follow-up.

◆ Expand the set of approved "helpers" for each family.

◆ Advocate for common sense regulatory changes that could expand access to helpers while still maintaining youth safety, such as:

➤ Extending the length of time approved helpers are allowed to provide care (some programs limit to only 3 hours at a time).

➤ Increase the allowable number of approved helpers for single parents, which are currently limited by the criminal background check unit, to a maximum of four.

New Strategies

◆ Consider easing the financial burden on single parents to access quality supervision resources by:

➤ Identifying program-approved respite options and supporting the use of "by the hour" childcare.

➤ Investigate partnerships with a few high-quality childcare options to ease access.

Experiments

◆ Increase reimbursement stipends for enriching childcare for single parents. Some challenges might be how to do this in an equitable way.

Conclusion

Insights Into Impact

When we initiated this program evaluation project, we hoped to better understand how our treatment foster parent recruitment and training program was functioning, especially with regard to how effective we are in motivating foster caregivers to continue their work for multiple youth. We hoped that participation was fulfilling for treatment foster parents and would encourage ongoing participation.

After examining the results of our qualitative and quantitative research, we have a better understanding of some of the specific areas where we are often successful and where we might target our energies to improve. We are proud that our efforts to cultivate foster parent peer support were highlighted by so many as a critical component of their learning and motivation for perseverance. It was gratifying to see how the Team Lead contact was experienced by treatment parents as both supportive and a source of growth.

Steps Forward

As first steps in utilizing these findings to improve our programming, we are planning to target the following primary objectives:

1. Speak to underlying motivations in marketing. We plan to target marketing efforts to highlight the factors that we have learned are most meaningful and fulfilling to foster parents. For example, we might feature images or stories about youth mastering new skills or learning how to let go of adult worries to engage the attention of prospective foster parents.
2. Make virtual meetings safe for vulnerability and learning. While we had originally imagined a full return to in-person meetings, our foster parents have shown that hybrid meetings have some benefit to them if we can use technology well. We are looking into different platforms for this purpose so that the peer support can continue. Helping keep a safe and natural feeling is important to encourage vulnerability and support.

3. Advocate with funders and regulatory bodies. We believe that sharing some of these findings and perspectives may be compelling to state and community decision makers to illustrate some of the areas where regulation might be adjusted to support the goals of expanding the capacity of safe, high-quality, evidence-based treatment foster care. We hope that the data from this project can help illustrate the opportunity to invest in programs that add capacity to the treatment foster care system.

Opportunities for Future Evaluation

Our team was most energized to further explore the concept of a "mindset shift" that treatment foster parents experience and the implications for the quality of treatment and retention of foster parents. Further study might yield adjustments and new strategies that could help us achieve mastery of program components more quickly or with less stress.

Our team also discussed how we might investigate strategies to mark advancing competency in the TFCO model more overtly for treatment foster parents. We observed that the treatment foster parents in our program are at varying places in their development of key skills and that better pinpointing where in their growth trajectory they are might be helpful in providing targeting support or training to advance them to the "mindset shift" point where long-term retention is more likely and sustainable. TFCO emphasizes shaping and learning on the job as an effective and engaging tool for pacing learning, but there might be some specific intervention points where more targeted feedback might create change more quickly.

Finally, while this project focused on the impact OCP has within our foster parent training program, the ultimate OCP mission is to provide effective treatment to our youth participants and their families. To that end, our foster care programs plan to prioritize developing qualitative interview questions to be targeted at the youth graduates that can be delivered near youth graduation dates. If possible, we would love to explore offering the opportunity to provide feedback to both recent and

past graduates of our programs. As part of this process, we created some preliminary outlines of intended impacts and indicators on youth participants. Developing these into an interview that can be delivered near youth graduation dates and, ideally, at some interval post-graduation would likely yield important information about longer-term impacts.