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Parent Advisory Council Provides Mentorship, Support, and Insight

(Salem, Ore.) – May is National Foster Care Awareness month, and this year’s theme is “Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents.”

When biological and foster families work together for successful reunification of children in care, everyone involved experiences long-term benefits. Communication between these families plays a crucial role in creating the support, resilience, and connection that children in care need and deserve.

In Oregon, the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) models this by mentoring parents with children in care and changing the stigma around family communication.

The PAC, facilitated by Morrison Child & Family Services, is composed of seven parents who have successfully navigated their own Oregon Child Welfare cases. The Oregon Foster Parent Association is also a member, working to increase positive relationships between foster families and parents in Oregon.

Says Rebecca Jones Gaston, Oregon Child Welfare Program Director, “All children deserve love and support. The Parent Advisory Council and Oregon Foster Parent Association reflect what we know works for children and society’s long-term success. By supporting families working together and building a strong child safety network, we can strengthen communities.”

The PAC believes that foster families play a vital role in healing families and successful reunification and recently developed a training to teach foster families best practices for collaboration from the parent perspective.

When the PAC was unable to provide in-person training due to the COVID-19 pandemic, PAC parents stepped up to deliver it virtually to foster families across Oregon.

"The humility, support and ongoing mentoring that my resource (foster) family provided me was imperative to my success as a parent and the reunification of my family", says Daniel Pallas, PAC member since 2016.

Here are five proven suggestions for foster families from parents who have successfully worked through child welfare cases:

1) Communication is key: Children pick up on the way foster families communicate with their parents. Encourage a healthy parent-child relationship by modeling a healthy co-parenting relationship and use creative communication tools such as journals or photos.

2) Transitions matter: Ease the pain and trauma for the child and parent when they are separated by allowing them a phone call on the first night and advocating for an early "icebreaker" meeting to make a co-parenting plan.

3) Small acts have big impacts: Some ideas include: asking for the child's special belongings and cultural practices, putting up pictures of the parents in the child's room even if they are an infant, and referring to the child's parents as "mom" and "dad."

4) Work as a team: Unity and consistency in co-parenting supports the immediate and long-term wellbeing of children. When parents and foster families work together, children experience less detachment, increased attachment resilience, and supportive transitions home.

5) Have hope: Parents can and do change. No matter how challenging things seem right now, every parent loves their child. Convey your hope to the parent! Tell them YOU believe they can change, too.

For more information about the Parent Advisory Council, please contact the Council Facilitators: Brittany Kintigh (971) 803-1804 or Leah Hall (503) 313-8959.
