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SAVE THE DATE!

UTAH FOSTER CARE SYMPOSIUM APRIL 23, 2020

PARK CITY
UTAH

CEUs AVAILABLE
We are pleased to announce Elsebeth Green, LCSW and co-owner of The Greenhouse for Growth and Learning is going to be the keynote speaker for our annual symposium.

Elsebeth has a Master of Social Work Degree from BYU and has worked with children and families for the last 20 years and specializes in relationships, attachment, and trauma.

She has worked at the Division of Child and Family Services as a family preservation worker and supervisor, at the Youth and Family Centered Services as their Family Services Director, and the Utah Foster Care Foundation, where she trained foster and adoptive families for Western Region, and at Family Support and Treatment as a therapist.

Finally, in 2004, along with her husband, Guerry, and business partner, Collette, she opened The Green House Center for Growth and Learning, where she serves as the Clinical Director. She uses a variety of modalities including EMDR, play therapy, sand tray and art therapy, as well as traditional CBT techniques.

Elsebeth enjoys presenting on a variety of topics professionally and as a volunteer in the community. She is the proud mother of six and the grandmother of 7. Elsebeth enjoys the outdoors, knitting, and traveling. She also loves spending time with family and friends. Her grandchildren are the light of her life.

We have other exciting speakers throughout the rest of the day. Watch Facebook for details!

Tickets will go on sale March 1st on Eventbrite with early bird pricing.
Calling all Wives, Kids, RFC's, Caseworkers, & Mothers-in-Law!

By Darcey Wiseman, Retention Services, Utah Foster Care

It’s time to nominate your favorite foster dad for Foster Dad of the Year 2020!

We are looking for five dads - one from each region of the state - to honor on Father’s Day week-end.

The awards will be presented on Saturday, June 20th in Salt Lake City at our annual Chalk Art Festival. There will be a luncheon to honor the dads following the ceremony. Families who must travel more than 100 miles one way will have one complimentary night stay in a nearby hotel on Friday, June 19th.

Children, wives, DCFS employees, friends, and other family members (mothers-in-law too) can nominate the foster dad they love the best! Utah Foster Care will begin accepting online nominations beginning March 1, 2020 at http://www.utahfostercare.org/fdoy.

Please note: This site will only be accessible from March 1, 2020-March 31, 2020.
Farewell 2019
By Tina Porter, Retention Services, Utah Foster Care

We did it! Great job! We not only survived the end of the decade, but, we conquered it! You all are to be commended!

There are so many people to thank for their expansive contributions to families caring for children. Wishing you all a very happy New Year!

Alfred Raso
Alta Vista Chiropractic
Alyssa Schoessow
Amy Coleman
Amy Dolbin
Amy Moore
Annie Nelson
Ashley Desmond and Family
Avalon Health Care
Barnes and Noble Murray
Bree Hale
Carol Anderson
Cooper Allen
Cowabunga Bay Water Park
Dance for Life
Deb Earl
Dr. David Guidry
Electrical Consultants Inc.
Elizabeth Cole
Emma Lou Nelson
Hannah Farr
Herriman Friends of Foster Care
Hill Air Force Base
Hilton Garden Inn
Independence University
Jen Sabol
Josse Horrocks
Kari Culbreath
Kidz Kubby Volunteers
Kim Gerlach
Krissi Karren
Laura Blum
Light Stream Communications
Lisa Field and friends
Marianna Gamboa
Marianne Boyer
Melissa Ward
Merrick Bank
Michael and DeAnne Mitchell
Mitzi MacKay
National Medtrans
Nicolas Atkinson
Ollie Leatham
Rachel Jensen
Rebecca Speroni
Rebecca Wright
Rick Scardina
Sarah Henderson
Scott and Allison Heninger
Shelley Horel
Sherry Sabol
Smriti Dhakal
Stephanie Betz
TD Williamson
The Tenneys
Verizon
Vicki Kasper
Village Inn
Wasatch Presbyterian Church
Wright Engineers
Xerox

UTAH FOSTER CARE (UFC)
Salt Lake Region UFC Staff
Tara Gailey
LEAD FOSTER-ADOPTIVE CONSULTANT
Amy Boyack
FOSTER-ADOPTIVE CONSULTANT
Esmeralda Malili
SPANISH SERVICES CONSULTANT
Tami Carson
FOSTER-ADOPTIVE CONSULTANT
Stephanie Benally
NATIVE AMERICAN SPECIALIST
Liz Rivera
TRAINER
Terumi Sagers
TRAINER
Tina Porter
RETENTION SERVICES SPECIALIST

UTAH DIVISION OF CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)
DCFS HQ (801) 538-4100
195 NORTH 1950 WEST, SLC

Salt Lake Region DCFS Offices
NEED TO REACH YOUR RFC?
CALL YOUR LOCAL DCFS OFFICE ...

Metro (801) 253-5720
1385 SOUTH STATE

Sandy (801) 253-5720
10008 SOUTH CREEK RUN WAY

Tooele (801) 253-5720
305 NORTH MAIN STREET

West Valley (801) 253-5720
2655 SOUTH LAKE ERIE DRIVE

FIND MORE RESOURCES ONLINE
utahfostercare.org/saltlake
**Clusters, What Are They?**

Clusters are peer groups for foster, adoptive, and kinship families who meet together on a monthly basis for support & required training.

Learn more, online!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kearns/Magna/WVC</td>
<td>Kylie (801) 916-8484, <a href="mailto:kylie.neff@live.com">kylie.neff@live.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy/Draper Cluster</td>
<td>Janet (801) 867-1552, <a href="mailto:jmclain6@outlook.com">jmclain6@outlook.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Valley West Cluster</td>
<td>Heather (801) 560-3238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Jordan Cluster</td>
<td>Ruthanne (801) 652-5500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray/Midvale/East Cluster</td>
<td>Nan (801) 808-3399, <a href="mailto:ntalor@yahoo.com">ntalor@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt Lake Metro Cluster</td>
<td>Rachel H <a href="mailto:rlhharb@gmail.com">rlhharb@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tooele Cluster</td>
<td>Stephanie (801) 682-5925, Blair (801) 200-8150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Cluster</td>
<td>Esmeralda (801) 994-5205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ Cluster</td>
<td>Adrienne (801) 722-8121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HEALING TRAUMA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules 3 &amp; 4</th>
<th>Terumi Sagers, BS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 24; 5:30-8:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred House Academy/14727Minuteman Dr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma Effects &amp; Building a Safe Place for Children: How trauma can interfere with a child's development and functioning and how to help them begin to feel safe.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules 5 &amp; 6</th>
<th>Terri Rowley, LCSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 30; 5:30-8:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred House Academy/14727Minuteman Dr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Feelings and Behaviors &amp; Connections and Healing: How to help children develop new emotional skills and positive behaviors.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules 7 &amp; 8</th>
<th>Terumi Sagers, BS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 27; 5:30-8:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred House Academy/14727Minuteman Dr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming an Advocate &amp; Taking Care of Yourself: Become a trauma-informed advocate and increase your personal coping skills and resiliency.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modules 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Trish Jensen, SSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 18; 5:30-8:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred House Academy/14727Minuteman Dr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care: Understanding how children may respond to traumatic events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mindfulness Brain Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terumi Sagers, BS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturdays: 10:00-11:00am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFC Murray/ 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February: 1, 8, 15, 22, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March: 7, 14, 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A class for kids ages 4-12 AND their grownups to learn about their brains and strategies for calming it down when it gets upset.

**RSVP for Classes & Clusters!**

If a class or Cluster is cancelled, moved or rescheduled, we can only alert you if you've RSVP’d! Help us, help you — RSVP!

**RSVP:**

Liz Rivera
(801) 994-5205 OR
liz.rivera@utahfostercare.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/Group</th>
<th>Event Title</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SVE/MURRAY/ WEST JORDAN</td>
<td>Strengthening Marriage</td>
<td>Melanie Jewkes, Assoc Professor, USU</td>
<td>February 13; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>We need to take care of each other and our marriages. Enjoy a meal together and learn simple tips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPANISH</td>
<td>Vaping</td>
<td>Marcia Peterson, SL Co Health Dept</td>
<td>February 22; 10:00am-Noon</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>Vaping is hurting our kids. We need more tools to help them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVW</td>
<td>Allegation Prevention</td>
<td>Michelle Ostmark, UFC</td>
<td>February 26 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>Herriman Library / 5380 Main St.</td>
<td>How you can be prepared if an allegation of abuse is made against you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID VALLEY EAST</td>
<td>Paperwork Review</td>
<td>Terumi Sagers, BS</td>
<td>March 11; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>So many forms and details. Come get a refresher on how to fill them all out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID VALLEY EAST</td>
<td>Big Feelings &amp; Foster Siblings</td>
<td>Terumi &amp; Sarah Sagers</td>
<td>March 16 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>Being a foster sibling is hard. This a class for you AND your biological children ages 8-15 to come learn some coping strategies and have a safe space to talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALT LAKE METRO</td>
<td>First Aid &amp; CPR</td>
<td>Michelle Ostmark, UFC</td>
<td>March 23; 6:00-9:00pm</td>
<td>Anderson Foothill Library / 1135 S 2100 E</td>
<td>Get your first aid and CPR training requirement done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVE/ LGBTQ</td>
<td>Baby Sign Language</td>
<td>Melissa Carr &amp; Adrienne Davis</td>
<td>March 27; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>Teach your little ones to communicate with sign language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVW/WEST JORDAN</td>
<td>Vaping</td>
<td>Marcia Peterson, SL Co Health Dept</td>
<td>March 31; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>Herriman Library / 5380 Main St.</td>
<td>Vaping is hurting our kids. We need more tools to help them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIRCLE OF SECURITY</td>
<td>Building Secure Attachments</td>
<td>Liz Rivera, MS, SSW</td>
<td>All Classes; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>UFC Murray / 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>Chapters 3 &amp; 4; February 27: Being “with” Chapters 5 &amp; 6; March 3: Path to Security &amp; Exploring our Struggles Chapters 7 &amp; 8; April 14: Repair &amp; Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASK A FOSTER PARENT: TEENS!</td>
<td></td>
<td>February 25; 6:00-8:00pm</td>
<td>Utah Foster Care 5296 S Commerce Dr #400</td>
<td>Fostering a teen can sound scary, but teens in foster care are just like the teens you already know: they worry about friends and clothes, and stress about the future. No matter their age, kids need a place to call home. Ask local families about their experiences fostering or adopting teens, at this casual forum offered by Utah Foster Care—what it’s like, why they do it, how to get started, and more! Dinner served!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RSVP: rsvp@utahfostercare.org

Inservice training hours available – be sure to sign the roll!
There have been many questions asked of DCFS staff in recent months about the Division’s practice regarding placement with kin. Moreover, there may be some misunderstanding that there has been a change in the Division’s philosophy or practice regarding placing with kin.

DCFS Practice Guidelines on this have been consistent for over ten years.

Section 301.3 reads:

To provide safety and maintain family ties, the child will be placed in the least restrictive/most family-like placement that meets the child’s special needs, according to the following priorities:

A. Placement with non-custodial parent. B. Placement with siblings, unless there is a documented safety concern. C. Placement with kin or extended family who are invested in preserving the child's kinship ties. D. Placement with a family who resides within reasonable proximity to the child's family and community if the goal is reunification.

Diane Moore, DCFS Director, in a memo to DCFS staff, summarized the Division's commitment to placing children with kin: “When a child cannot safely remain in their home, the best possible place for that child is to be with someone familiar with them who can keep them connected to their family, their community and their culture.” She added: “Non-kin foster families need to be aware that our priority is to place with kin, keep siblings together, and that the search for kin will be diligent and ongoing.” In a conversation I had with her recently, she clarified that the ongoing need to search for kin would be a greater priority for children for whom there was no other permanency option.

For example, if a child had been in foster home for several months and the foster parents were interested in adoption, this would decrease our need to continue to search for kin. Conversely, in a similar situation, if the foster parents were not interested in adopting the child, the expectation would be to actively look for kin.

Perhaps some of the confusion about DCFS’s position has arisen due to a lack of consistent communication and/or follow-up on the part of DCFS when children have been placed with foster parents but permanency with kin is being considered, particularly when an ICPC (Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children) placement is being considered. These are some of our most challenging and, honestly, most heart-wrenching situations. In my opinion, sometimes there isn’t a clear right answer to which family, kin or foster, is in the child’s “best interest.” There are pros and cons, gains and losses in either scenario.

“Best interest” is always a subjective measure. The decision for a child between stability in a loving foster home or being raised for the rest of his/her life with equally loving extended family can be often be debated.

However, DCFS’s philosophy is consistent with that of child welfare and adoption practice nationally, that permanency with kin is preferred when possible. Thus, if a relative has come forward, has passed an ICPC home study and continues to express an interest in having their relative child placed with them, in keeping with our practice guidelines, DCFS will typically support permanency with that relative.

In an attempt to strengthen the relationships between potential kin providers and children, as well as to minimize confusion amongst the Child and Family Team, we emphasize that caseworkers engage in the following activities on ICPC cases:

Make active efforts to engage and include kin in building a relationship with the child and in being part of the team.

Clearly communicate to the foster parents and the entire Child and Family Team that permanency with kin is the first option if reunification is not successful.

Include a goal in the Child and Family Plan to address kinship as the concurrent goal if reunification is the primary goal; include steps to actively involve the identified kin.

Include the status of kin involvement/ICPC on each Child and Family Team agenda.

Go above and beyond: there could be many reasons kin are not responding the way we think they should; intensify outreach efforts, ask about barriers, clarify expectations.

Consult with ICPC coordinator, Clinical Consultant, and/or Child Welfare Administrator regarding questions, to request case staffings, etc.

We recognize that often reunification doesn’t work out and there aren’t appropriate kin available, and foster parents are the best, most appropriate permanency option. We are extremely grateful to you that this is a possibility for these children. We’re hoping to alleviate the lack of communication. As well as to strengthen relationships between kin, children and Child and Family Teams when kinship is that concurrent plan. If you have questions please check with your caseworker.
Becoming a foster parent takes a great deal of consideration, preparation, and patience, mixed with uncertainty and family adjustments when a child in care enters a home through foster care. Families willing to open their hearts and homes to a child in care will need support once they receive that initial call for placement. We all began our foster care journey for different reasons: adoption, a need to help a family member, a desire to provide love and support. While we jump into this journey for many reasons, we go into it for the same outcome, to make a difference in the life of a child.

Do you remember sitting in your initial training classes, possibly thinking, “How hard can this really be?” Your trainer starts discussing the trauma these children may have experienced, the worst-case scenarios, self-regulation, and the ins and outs of the system. For a split second, you might have questioned yourself, but continued on this journey, full of excitement and motivation to make a difference. You finished your classes, went through the licensing process, then you waited. You get that first call and you’re nervous, excited and somewhat terrified by the reality of what is happening. You prepare and prepare and you pick that sweet child up and everything you learned in training is somehow missing, you go blank and panic sets in. Is there someone I call? What do I do next?

Do you ever think, “What did I get myself into? What was I thinking when I became a foster parent? Is this behavior normal? Can I really do this?”

Utah Foster Care’s Mentoring Program pairs seasoned foster families with newly-licensed families to help navigate the ins and outs of foster care. Offering support from the beginning of the foster care journey is necessary to empower outcomes and confidence in decision-making. Mentors will guide new foster families to understand and develop key values by instilling necessary skills to build confidence in themselves.

Mentors will encourage new parents to build and reinforce skills, using knowledge to find resources in their community, gain confidence and knowledge to care for the diverse needs of children in foster care through peer support. Mentors model through their own experience and knowledge to encourage new foster families to appreciate diversity and show respect to oneself, friends, fostering partners, children placed in their home and fellow foster parents.

The best learning does not come through lectures; it comes from experience. A seasoned foster parent who can mentor a new family through their experience can encourage them to become their own best coach.

New families are encouraged to participate in the Mentoring Program upon receiving their first placement however the program is also available for families who have had multiple placements and need support. For more information, I invite you to check out utahfostercare.org/mentors. Please don’t hesitate to contact me at Utah Foster Care by calling 1-877-505-5437 or by email michelle.ostmark@utahfostercare.org. You are not alone in this journey!
Here’s Why We Became Foster Parents, Even Though We Aren’t Looking To Adopt

By Stephanie Kaloi, Guest Writer, Huffington Post | 12/26/2019 08:30 am ET

Stephanie is a writer and editor for LittleThings living in the southern US with her family and a messy crew of adopted animals (plus fish!). She loves to talk about parenting, celebrity gossip, and politics for hours.

Our journey toward becoming foster parents began about five years ago, when we realized two truths: Having a second biological child would be nearly impossible and was not necessary for our family’s happiness, and there was a way to experience parenting many children (and for our son to have many siblings) while also doing our part in our community.

Enter foster care.

So we did what every potential foster parent does first: searched “What is foster parenting really like???” online. Unhappy with the results, which were largely a grab bag of blog posts from people who foster to minister religion to unsuspecting children and their families and people who are hoping to adopt their foster children from Day 1 of placement, I started sending a flurry of texts to a friend who also happens to be a longtime foster parent.

Her advice essentially boiled down to three things: One, the relationship you have with the biological parent(s) of your foster children is sacred and should be nurtured as much as the relationship you have with the kids. Two, foster care is unpredictable and there’s no point making plans for how it will go. And three, if you really want to do it ... stop taking up my time and sign up for a class already.

My husband and I signed up for around eight weeks of PATH classes, which are the classes that all foster parents take before becoming certified. It’s meant to be all-inclusive, but the reality is that you are in class for two to four hours each Saturday covering huge topics, like ethnic diversity and poverty and child abuse.

The path to becoming a foster parent seems bizarre in retrospect: You take the classes, complete the home study process and boom! You’re now qualified to raise someone else’s child in your home for an indeterminate amount of time.

Still, the training felt like one of the most intense, personal experiences we had shared together. We went into classes knowing we were hoping to foster children, but left classes knowing we wanted to foster children and foster their families — we wanted to support the birth parents of any children we might foster as much as we support their children.

We knew going into it that we could handle the babies and toddlers and school-aged kids of the world (we’ll get to teens ... one day), but we left class feeling reasonably certain that we could extend ourselves and support their parents, too.

Approaching foster care as fostering the entire family was a turning point for both of us. The idea gave us a phrase we could use whenever someone asked what our plans were. While the Department of Child Services and PATH leaders constantly remind you that the first goal of foster care is reunification with a child’s family, just about everyone in our classes was transparent about their desire to build their family through adoption.

As someone who wrestled with not being able to conceive a second child the easy way for years, I understood ... but as our classmates became more focused on their adoption goals and learning how to work the system in their favor, we became more focused on reunification goals, and learning how the system works against parents who lose custody of their children.

The more we learned, the more it became clear: Just as many in our society will call the cops the second there is even a hint of a perceived threat anywhere nearby, many in our society assume that having your children placed in state custody means you are a predator, a child abuser, an addict - that are you the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low.

And to be fair, there are plenty of people who are one of those things (or all of those things), and sometimes children are better off with foster and adoptive families. But in our experience ... there are just as many people who are simply poor, or uneducated, or who have no perceived alternatives to whatever struggle they are facing.

This is the idea that fed our goal to approach this experience as fostering families: If you don’t grow up with someone teaching you how to successfully pull off what many consider basic life feats, it can feel impossible to figure out how to get a job, pay rent, pay your bills, pay for childcare, provide food consistently, read to your children, play with your children, kick your addiction, etc. Without consistent, healthy support, just attempting to do so is often an insurmountable challenge.

If no one in your family has ever done those things, the odds are stacked against you. When you think about it, a lot of Americans are probably closer than they think to one mistake that could land their own children in DCS custody.
I am not saying that every parent who loses custody is an angel who just needs a leg up. I’m also not saying that every parent who adopts from foster care didn’t try to do exactly what we do. I think one truth all foster parents can agree on is that there is a lot of gray area in foster care.

We didn’t find out we were actually certified until we received a phone call asking if we would be willing to take a sibling set of two into our home. Let me tell you this straight out: I don’t know how anyone, especially first-time foster parents, says no to those calls. Our plan was to foster one child, up to age 8, and we ended up with two babies under 2 because I literally could not imagine saying no.

So what do we do, then, if we aren’t answering a higher religious calling to foster, we aren’t related to the children we foster, and we aren’t planning or secretly hoping to adopt any children? I mean, I suppose I am ministering, kind of: These kids have been introduced to a wide berth of music that we hold dear, and the youngest really enjoyed watching “Homecoming” when it came out.

But to be real, we begin by nurturing their families, their parents, from Day 1. We offer phone numbers, email addresses, Facebook Messenger access. We start the conversation by telling them our names, describing what our home is like, asking what foods their children like to eat, and telling them we aren’t trying to adopt their babies. We tell them to message us anytime, and that if they don’t hear from us within five hours or so, to message again.

We ask when we can supervise visits, when we can meet up at playgrounds and parks, way before social workers are talking about us doing so. We talk about their goals, their plans, and what they need to get from where they are to reunification of their family.

The “TL; DR” version is this: We begin each placement by treating the parents like they are human beings, like they are people who we might want to know, instead of like they are a scary Other who is standing in our way. Sometimes it doesn’t work, we don’t form a relationship and things go sour. Other times, it works but requires ongoing attention and support, and that’s an exhausting thing to give someone you have met a handful of times.

None of this is easy, and it often feels like foster care is a second full-time job. We are perpetually exhausted by the sheer emotional weight of this journey that we entered into willfully, and that’s not even including the lived reality of nurturing additional children, of loving them, holding them, waking up in the middle of the night with them, feeding them, reading to them, guiding them. Teaching them all the things we taught our son: the ABCs and 123s, who Elmo is and why we love him, the names of The Beatles because it might come in handy someday, how to sit up and how to use a fork. You know, the parenting part of foster parenting.

We have been lucky so far: We have worked with excellent social workers who are very patient, helpful, and kind. The parents we have co-parented with have been easy to talk to, love their children a lot, and a lot of the time, they just need someone in their corner. And this need is the crux of why we are fostering children and their families: For us, foster care is a kind of community service; it’s a gift that we can give.

Sure, it’s a lot more involved than donating books or cleaning a classroom on a Saturday, but it’s something that makes sense for us right now, in this season of our lives. We won’t do it forever, but we are doing it right now. One of the most important ideas our family tries to follow is that while we may not be able to effect meaningful growth and change in areas of the world that are far away, we can do work in our own community that will help people we live and work with grow.

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