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Amy: Thank you for joining us for Fostering Conversations. I'm Amy your host

Liz: And I'm Liz Rivera. I'm also , the co host, but not for long. Actually, today is going to be my last day sitting in the co host seat. [00:01:00] It's been about four and a half years since we've been doing this, and I've absolutely loved it. We're going to shift just a little bit of the direction. Amy.

Since you've come on, you've really opened our eyes to other things this podcast could be. And so we're really excited to give you the full reigns and we'll be having different folks acting as co host and doing just really fun and exciting things. So fostering conversations is still here.

I'm still here too. I'm still, foster care, but I'm just not going to be on the podcast as regularly.

Amy: I love it. Okay. Well, today I am so excited. We have Laura joining us. She is a content creator. She runs the Instagram Foster Parenting, which I am sure every single person that is listening has heard of and views because it is phenomenal.

Laura: So welcome, Laura.

Yeah. so much for having me. I'm super excited.

Amy: . So when we were going back and forth just chatting, getting this set up, Laura asked, you know, what questions we'd be going over. And it honestly was really hard for me to choose what questions to ask because your Instagram and you as a person are a wealth of knowledge.

So I hope we go in a good direction for our listeners because I feel like you're like [00:02:00] just a wealth of knowledge

Laura: , it's all because of the community. I have learned so much and have gathered so much information from everyone who contributes, so it is definitely a group effort.

Amy: It is, but you're contributing a lot to it. So thank you for contributing. So why don't you just introduce yourself and how you became passionate about foster

Laura: Sure. So I'm Laura and my foster care passion started, honestly, when I was a teenager, I saw a TV show that talked about foster parenting and youth and foster care. And that really, to be honest, planted the seed for me. And it was something that I was always thinking about and considering and, through college and ultimately when I met my.

Now husband Chris about something that I wanted to know more about and to see if it would be a good fit for me. So we signed up, got licensed in early 2019 and became foster parents having never parented before, which was obviously a very unique experience. situation for us. And so then [00:03:00] a few years into that, I started making content online, just educational content for hopeful and brand new foster parents, which only deepened my passion for supporting the causes and the needs of families and youth in the system, which are vast.

And I think, anyone who has been introduced to foster care will probably agree that once you see the need, You can never really focus on anything else or forget it. It's always there and ever presses and it changes you. And so I think, obviously my personal experiences are really, valuable to who I am today, but also the community online has really opened my heart and mind to so much more and has only just enriched my passion for supporting families and youth impacted by foster care.

Amy: I love that. I was telling a friend the other day, a foster mom, I said, I really wish I could just turn my back, but I can't. Like, [00:04:00] like you say, as soon as you see that need and it, it's a huge need. You can't, you can't turn your back. Maybe you can't take kids anymore, but you can create content. You can support other people.

You can do respite, you can do donations. There's so many things you can do, but, but it's a huge

Laura: Yeah. It affects every aspect of our communities not just child welfare, it impacts our medical system, our school system, all of our systems and our community. And so I think everyone, should be mindful of our foster families and the families impacted. In their daily life. And so that, I hope I can, I spread awareness of all those needs, but it definitely, it changes you for sure.

Amy: It does,

Liz: Was there something specific that led you to want to get the information out there to a broader audience? So is it just because social media is a big part of our lives and so that just was a natural place for you to go? Or was there something else that spurred you on?

Laura: Just a couple of things, and it obviously has [00:05:00] changed. I have to make, this like mindset commitment that I'm going to keep making content every year. Cause it's a huge undertaking. Initially it was post COVID times that, I felt really isolated. I think a lot of foster parents feel that way at some point.

And we were going through all these very unique situations, and I was wondering if anyone else was experiencing that too. Obviously, I had a phenomenal support group, but, that was limited to their experiences as well. I went online just a little that was like, what are other people doing or saying?

And I felt like some of the topics or the nuances or the specifics. I wasn't seeing that and I had a friend who was the larger content creator who just encouraged me to just try it and see. And I made, a video on TikTok and the rest is history. That one became very viral and then, I've navigated it since then.

Amy: I mean, that was the first [00:06:00] place I went to when I was considering foster care was, what experiences can I learn about, who has done this, and what's it like?

I think that's where we go.

Laura: and I think, I saw definitely , a hole in the content, at least in my opinion. There was a lot of really amazing content from families and sharing personal experiences, but I didn't see a lot of the day to day, what does this situation look like? And I had an amazing trainer in one of my classes that would do these scripts or talk This moment is happening.

Yeah, and I owe it all to Jocelyn. Thank you Jocelyn I mean she was amazing she would do this and I was like, oh my god So that's what it looks like or that's what you say And you know in the moment you have to make what works for that moment, but at least it was a starting point I wanted to help give people some confidence that they could enter these First moments, saying hello to kids, meeting their parents for the very first time.

[00:07:00] If you've never interacted in anything related to foster care, that might be incredibly intimidating. It was for me.

I was a ball of energy. And still am sometimes

Liz: That's good.

Laura: I wanted to show people maybe what it could look like, so at least they could feel a little bit more confident, maybe, so that they could do it.

That was the goal.

Liz: Yeah.

Amy: No. And I love that. And it does help so much to just see what words you use, how you pause. I, I love some of your videos that are like, are you so excited about this room? Look how cute this room is. No, no, no. Like take a breath.

Laura: It doesn't mean that those moments are traumatizing children. I think a lot of people think Oh, I'm so worried I'm going to ruin something. And that's not the case. It's just like we have these experiences and we improve upon them as we learn and enrich our understanding of providing trauma informed care and just, meet more kids and

Amy: Yes.

Laura: I'll hear from people like that technique I would have hated.

And it's yeah, because it [00:08:00] varies. That's what makes it hard. Yeah.

Amy: I've had kids come into my house that are like, this is the coolest house ever, I'm so excited to be here, and other kids that are sobbing like, where am I, this is terrifying. So yeah, you don't, you don't

Laura: Yeah, it's all about matching

Amy: are humans. Yeah.

Laura: Yeah.

Amy: Yeah. Yep.

Laura: Absolutely.

Liz: love too that you're you're using your own, like learning experiences too, so you're not speaking from this place of I've done everything right and I'm doing everything right, but you're speaking from

Here's what I've learned

Laura: And to be honest, as my community has grown, they share their experiences, so I will showcase some of their learnings and, listen, we all learn. I wouldn't, I try to share things that haven't happened to me, but now I'm glad I know. And maybe you know now too.

And and it's all and that's what it is. I think Foster parents have their pre service training their ongoing training, but there's only so much that can be covered and these nuanced moments though are critical and they matter and Our tone our vibe like, [00:09:00] you know how we're navigating and moving through our home.

All those moments really do matter and so I understand also all the pre service training. That stuff matters too. It's just there's too much to

Liz: And when you're in the moment, we always say this, especially pre service, it's like a fire hose of information. It's so much information. And a lot of it's still theoretical because the kids, they're not caring for the kids. And once they're caring for the kids, they're like, Oh my gosh, what did I learn in pre service?

And I might remember like maybe 10%, maybe, and so that ongoing opportunity to have that, those real life examples right in front of them. So easy as picking up their phone is invaluable.

Laura: Thank you. I try. I think that there's so much good that can come from social media and I have learned so much from, creators in all aspects. I follow teachers, medical providers. There's just so much that we can pick up on and learn using these platforms.

Amy: I want to switch gears a little bit. What would you say to somebody that is considering foster care? Like you talked about the spark came [00:10:00] to you as a teenager. I can't even. Think why I got into foster care. I'm like, I don't know. I'm want to be a decent human and help the community I don't know.

But what would you say to people that are you know, like, oh, I'm feeling the pull But I'm afraid or you know, what do you say to those parents

Laura: I have a lot to say, but I would say just to sum it up, I would say you are never going to be 100 percent ready and feel 100 percent equipped to do this tremendous job. And I think that

From a lot of people, I don't know enough. I don't know if I'm ready. There's so much uncertainty and yeah, you need some basics ready.

Like you need, a stable place to live. You're not gonna be moving anytime soon. You need, consistent income, reliable income, reliable relationships and support. Like there, there are some kind of like base levels, but there isn't going to be a moment that comes to you. That's this is it.

And, we know a lot of caregivers, foster parents, step in without any awareness because they're kinship [00:11:00] providers. And then it is truly just go time, and so I think if you're considering fostering, I would encourage you to dig in and, get to know the community. Attend an introductory session or, call the department or an agency and get some initial information.

Start there. I think. And that's a lot of foster care. You have to start with the small steps. It's so easy to get fixated on the outcomes and the end. What's going to happen? But I think, take it a day at a time. Think about the practical things in your life today. Do you have time in your schedule?

Can you handle the training? Can you make that work? And is that going to be a huge hassle? Because then maybe that's not the right time. Or, do you see how that folds in nicely and are you looking forward to that added level in your life? And start one step at a time. You can always pause. I know plenty of people who started the trainings and didn't go all the way to the end.

[00:12:00] And even when you're licensed, You can take a moment to breathe and just know that those kind of pause moments do exist There's also a lot of waiting periods and getting licensed. So there's Natural pauses and we see that in foster care as well. So I would say just know everyone is feeling The fear and anxiety and like anticipation and You're not and your life is never going to be exactly ready and I'd encourage you to at least Start go to the first session go to the info session and learn a little bit and see how that feels and then reflect with your family

Liz: Yeah. So nationally we have a significant decline in the number of folks stepping forward to become foster parents. what are some of your ideas about why that is this kind of, this huge shift away from families choosing to do foster care?

Laura: There's a lot of things right? A lot of families are struggling just like Individually, we know that there's, intensive financial pressures if prices go up. We see just a lot of things [00:13:00] happening and instability in our country and the world. I think generally that has affected a lot of families and their abilities to give more of themselves.

I think there's also just not enough awareness of all the ways that foster parents can plug in and I think, a lot of the marketing is about. Adoption or those final moments. And I think what would really serve in finding foster families is talk about all the smaller ways that you can get started and build from.

Every county is different, as you guys know, and what services and programs they have. But there's sometimes respite or emergency shelter or short term emergency care that is just a couple of weeks to start. There's also, um, different kinds of cases and different kinds of needs.

Laura: Maybe you are interested in helping an older youth transition into adulthood, or maybe a [00:14:00] pregnant youth, and you're, interested in helping in that way for the community. And I think, There just isn't a ton of awareness of the different ways that you can and how that folds into people's lives, I think you know Everyone is very busy working all the time and it's hard to imagine adding this huge life changing commitment to your plate so I think if we can explain what that commitment actually is And what it means it might help but I think generally You Unfortunately, a lot of our communities have become very self centered and there isn't as much opportunity for community to get together.

I even look at, the kids school. After COVID, those community and parent meetups really never came back. Support groups stayed virtual. A lot of things never returned to the way it was, where. We would all be together more [00:15:00] often. And I think that harms we don't have a chance to get to know the needs in our community.

So I don't know. I think that it's tough. I, there's also just general, not understanding what, about CPS and about families in crisis and in need. What does that look like? I think just people don't have all that information.

Amy: I, love that you talk about like showing people what the varying options are. I was talking to my parents a few weeks ago and I said, we live in Utah, like such a Christian based community. Why do we not have more foster parents here? It actually. It's a little sore subject for me, honestly, which we

don't need to get into, but anywhere we go, why don't we have more foster parents?

Why aren't people wanting to give back more? And my parents who are older said, well, I thought people just did it for the money. I'm like, Oh yeah, 17 a day is so lucrative, you know? And so I think, I think the education is lacking [00:16:00] still in so much of our community. They, people don't know why, like, They don't see it as a give back.

I'm just talking about my parents perspective. But I think other people have that perspective. But we need more education on why do we do this. We do this because we're bettering the community. We're serving the community. We're trying to get these kids back to a functional family. And that benefits the

Laura: Everyone. Yeah. And I think just growing awareness of that, foster children are, in all of our schools, in all of our classrooms, families who are in crisis and maybe still, they're. Their children are still with their parents, but still in crisis. It's just a matter of like awareness of needs and And then how to help right?

I think there's also that piece too is Being a foster parent feels so big and it is very big

but um There are smaller steps that you can take to Step into the [00:17:00] community and to Be more on the front lines in that support.

Amy: Yeah. I love that. I think that's such a great, like, education piece we need. That you don't have to be a foster parent. You don't have to have 20 kids. You don't have to adopt all of them. There are all these other steps before that. Or even opposite of that, you know.

So,

Laura: I'd love to see, to be honest, I'd love to see more, foster families represented in media, and just be more, considered and talked about as something that's just common, that people do, and you could do it too or not, but it's something that, that you should learn about and see, as a way to engage.

Liz: Yeah, which is what you're doing. You're, yeah.

Laura: It's a

Amy: Oh, you're doing amazing. But yes, you're carrying a heavy burden because it's, it's not super everywhere.

Laura: For sure.

Amy: So I love all those ways that, you know, people that are considering foster care, listening to this, that that's a great way. Once you become a foster parent, which does take a great deal of work, you mentioned it a little bit, but it does, it takes months, it takes multiple [00:18:00] trainings, your house gets walked through, it is extensive, which it should be.

We're bringing kids into our home. But once you are a foster parent, where are good resources to to continue trauma informed training? Where are places that you could recommend?

Laura: There's so much information online. I would get really specific. I think if you're trying to learn about, supporting children at school, I would look for trauma informed practices in the classroom. And you can find a whole slew of information. There's videos on YouTube that are very hyper focused on school staff, admin, school policies, teaching.

if you're trying to become trauma informed, whether as a foster parent or a community member, I would focus on the spaces you are, the workplace, You know all of that I think for in the home I like talk about this book all the time. The only book I feel is like yes is A to Z of Therapeutic Parenting by Sarah Nash or Nash.

I'm not sure how to say [00:19:00] her last name that one 10 out of 10 recommend That really gives you practical advice and ideas there is also um some of the colleges throughout the country and local colleges have free trauma informed care trainings that you can find on their websites. There's Foster Parent College for 15.

They have courses, but a lot, if you are a foster parent, a lot of times agencies and departments will cover those fees if needed. Can't hurt to ask. And I don't

know. And I would, and in terms of like supporting children, I would think about like their specific needs and, general classes about trauma informed care are helpful for your initial understanding, but digging into specific need areas, for example sleep.

Getting a training specifically on supporting sleep for kids who have experienced trauma will showcase what you can do and how to support and that just [00:20:00] all of the trauma and for care practices that are focused in on the needs in your home, a child who's experienced something traumatic at night is going to need a different sleep routine than a child who has experienced neglect and spent a lot of time in their bedroom.

And so really focusing in on the need areas, are the better learning sources. Our time is very limited and I always suggest for people to focus on the greatest area of need in the home or in their community and going to trainings for that versus general practices because that's really hard to understand general values and fundamentals of trauma informed parenting.

What does that mean for when? I'm bathing a child. It's just a little hard to sometimes.

Amy: Very overwhelming when you're like, I just really need this one specific thing to get figured out. that's need to know about the amygdala today.

Laura: no, but that, but I think that's like really important because that, when they start talking, and these courses are [00:21:00] amazing, but when you start talking about the brain, it's what about at the dinner table?

And they're, refusing five dinners I've made. Yeah. And I, what am I doing wrong? It's very stressful and as a caregiver to navigate these situations and I do think it's super nuanced depending on the specific trauma the child has experienced. It does alter, in my opinion, the type of care and intervention slightly on how we approach those moments and move through them, right?

Because we're not always going to be in the crisis time.

Liz: Absolutely. I love what. Yeah. Hopefully not. Yes. Sometimes it feels like it. Yeah.

Laura: Yeah,

Liz: and I feel like one thing I've heard you say in different ways is you're taking this huge thing of foster parenting and you're making it very specific, very particular. And I love that because I think sometimes the big thing, it's so overwhelming, but then when you can bring it down to this moment, this kid, this situation.

This is what I do. It's just more manageable and helps [00:22:00] us to feel like we actually have some control in this work we're doing

Laura: yeah, and it's very possible. Every child is going to be very different, but I think if we navigate it with curiosity and compassion and just, calm and comfort, we can discover what they need. It can be very hard though, so I would always recommend professional support, trainings, all of that.

Even support group talking to other foster parents who've dealt with something very similar. There can be all these aha moments. I know I've experienced that. That it's oh, I can't believe I never thought of it. That seems like so basic.

Amy: I've literally had an aha moment while talking to you right now. Yeah, that that's actually what I need to be focusing on. One of my kids really has a struggle and one of their particular traumas totally correlates. And why have I not thought of that yet? So,

Laura: it's hard. when you're in it. I do it, too. It's easy for me to sit here and talk, [00:23:00] right? So much harder. And don't be fooled. I go to two support groups. I have two parent mentors. We always are using, therapist, wrap around support heavily serviced family over here, we, because I don't have all

Amy: But I love that. I love that because you're right. It, we can look at somebody else's situation and be like, Oh, you should do this, this and this. But then we look at ours and we're like, why is this so frustrating? I can't figure it

out. And I don't know. It's

human nature, I guess. I don't

Laura: because we care.

Amy: But

Laura: We just want, we want them to feel good and feel

Amy: Yeah. And loved.

Laura: And loved. And that's what we want. It's hard to navigate through that.

Amy: It is. Yeah. Where have been the best places that you have found support? You talk about you have parent mentoring and support groups, but where have you found those things?

Laura: So I am all for asking for referrals and asking around. I, so any, [00:24:00] I'm always asking workers like, do you have this? Do you know of anything? I know it sounds silly, but there's a lot of localized Facebook groups for individual counties and individual states with foster parents that have

so much knowledge. So I have found some support there. And then, I spend a lot of time with my friends and family and educating them and they support us tremendously. It takes a lot of effort to, foster those relationships and say yes. , it is hard to say yes, and to help and support.

But I think Asking around for support groups or where you can find care communities or what nonprofits exist for this specific situation. Lots of Googling but I think, you got to plug in and I know it's exhausting, but asking the people who are doing these classes, they have a wealth of knowledge.

Other foster parents in the room, raise your hand, ask about [00:25:00] it. Because I guarantee you, someone else is looking for a friend, who needs, who wants to get coffee, or can come over and just spend time in the home with you, with the children I, I know that we all are wanting that, because it can feel

isolating at

Amy: it, it does. And, and I love that you've been able to find those communities. And I know Utah Foster Care is providing, I mean, we have monthly support groups. We have these care communities that are wrapping around specific families. And so I know specifically Utah Foster Care is doing so much to provide this, but I know not everybody listening is part of Utah Foster Care.

We, you know, anybody nationally needs to find those

Laura: And these things do exist. You do have to ask and you have to say yes, even if you think your situation is not as severe. as another family, I would still encourage you to say yes to getting help and, allowing people to come in and support your family.

Amy: Yeah. Yeah. And I would say if you can afford it, a personal therapist is really amazing too. I know when we [00:26:00] were going through some really

hard times with some, a child we were fostering and a potential adoption, that therapist was able to really walk me through and, and help me make the choices that long term,

We're going to be the best choices for everybody involved.

So, And I know that there are some non profits that are, Localized by the state that do provide some free counseling for foster parents again. You got to ask and sometimes that gives nonprofits ideas they're like, oh we didn't think but we could go to the community college We could you know resource that and provide, a couple sessions for any foster parent, it's okay to ask

Yeah, for sure. What are they going to say? No? Oh

Laura: Yeah, then you

move up with that's we're used to that's

Amy: Then you go to the next person and ask

Liz: That's right. You never know. Keep knocking on those doors.

Amy: Exactly. I

love it. Well, you have shared a wealth of knowledge as usual and your Instagram truly is phenomenal. Like just, I hope everybody follows it. They do. I've seen the numbers they're following.

Okay. But just as we [00:27:00] close out, would you be willing to share any of your favorite moments, either as a foster parent or as a mentor, an educator, anything that really sticks out to you that has just been a wonderful experience for you?

Laura: think that, it's hard to label foster care experiences as wonderful. I wouldn't use

Amy: That's true.

Laura: I would, but I would say that I have seen a situation, the situation work out. And I think You really have to hold tight to those experiences when kids come into your care and are safe from a situation that was very dangerous.

Parents, working and changing the circumstances, and then kids going home. It's a good feeling to see the full picture and I hold on to those moments dearly and I will remember them the rest of my life. Sadly not all work out in that [00:28:00] perfect way, but sometimes it does and you really do have to hold tight to that.

And I do. It's, it, those moments have changed my life. And then in terms of, working and educating, I love hearing when people say Oh, I saw your video and it made me look up being a foster parent and now we're licensed, or I

became a CASA

Liz: That's

Laura: I saw that and I, my husband didn't want to do it.

So I just decided to be a CASA or I'm mentoring, former foster youth at my local city college. I love hearing that because I think it just It's okay let's keep making

content because it's, yeah, it is, it's worth my time for just a single person to engage.

Amy: Yeah. And content creation is very difficult. I did it for Utah Foster Care for like two seconds and it was very hard. So I admire people who can do it because people think it's easy. It is not easy and it's very time consuming

Laura: you. It is not easy. I would agree.[00:29:00]

Amy: no.

First, you have to think of it, second, you have to produce it, then you have to edit it,

Laura: Yeah, it's all of it.

Amy: Yes, you do a beautiful job and what you share is so valuable. So thank you for all that you're

Laura: I'm grateful for the community That's, has enriched the content because I think that's what makes it really special is everyone that can chime in and

share their experiences and add to, this basic idea I've presented. And now we all get to continue to learn and become better caregivers together.

I think it's really special.

Amy: Yeah, it is. Well, you're a part of it. So thank you

To learn more about foster care, head over to our website, utahfostercare.org.