

FOSTER & KIN CARE *Mentor* PROGRAM

Welcome to the Foster & Kin Care Mentor Program!

A successful mentoring program is established by having experienced caregivers support new foster and kin caregivers who are caring for children involved with the child welfare system. There is so much to learn as you become acquainted with the systems involved with fostering a child. It is the division's belief and the testimony of current caregivers that peer support can be an incredible asset to new caregivers as they venture more deeply into their roles.

What other foster and kin caregivers have said about the importance of a mentoring program:

- Foster parenting is exciting, fulfilling and comes with many challenges!
- The most vulnerable time in a foster care placement is the first six months. During this critical time, foster parents decide whether to stay with the work, in part based on the support they receive when caring for children and youth.
- Mentoring matches new and experienced foster parents to provide the extra support needed in the early days of navigating the child welfare system.
- Foster and kin caregivers who feel supported are more likely to feel confident, continue fostering, and maintain placement stability for children and youth.

Mentors and their mentees are encouraged to have regularly scheduled weekly meetings for the first month. This support can ease worries and support growing your knowledge and skills. It's important to make the time to get to know other caregivers in your community. You are not alone. Once your relationship is established, you can decide how often to meet and in what forum the meeting will occur. These meetings can be face-to-face or by phone, email, or text. It is also encouraged that you establish boundaries with your method of contact and when to communicate regularly or in the event of the need for an emergency meeting. For example, asking that a mentor or mentee not be contacted during the dinner or bedtime routine, but after 8 pm is fine to call or text. This will assist you in developing a respectful relationship. A typical mentor/mentee relationship lasts approximately 6 months. You may have a friend and support for life.

Mentee referrals can be made:

- Upon completion of Foundations.
- By the Resource Coordinator, Recruitment and Retention Specialist, or self-referral.

All referrals will be discussed with your local Resource Coordinator.

A qualified mentor candidate:

- Has been a licensed kin/foster parent for a minimum two years, has had at least one placement, and is in good standing.
- Has completed required training including:
 - Orientation, Online Foundations for Foster and Kin Parents, Learning Networks, and Fostering to Forever for Adoptive parents
 - Other approved "Alternative Training" *Please explain or attach a copy of the certificate.
- Has been a licensed kin/foster parent who has closed their license within the past two years in good standing with the division and would like to support foster care in another way.
- Has been a licensed kin/foster parent who has closed their license longer than two years ago and is willing to take Orientation and Foundations training in addition to the Mentor training to ensure they have up to date knowledge of working with FSD.
- Has history of providing stable placements for children and youth in foster care and/or has participated in a healthy transition for a child or youth.
- Has worked with families toward a case plan goal.
- Has demonstrated willingness/history of working cooperatively with FSD, including Residential Licensing & Special Investigations interventions.
- Can identify "specialized" experience in a certain area/competence area.
- Demonstrates knowledge of current DCF policies and procedures as evidenced through their caregiving practice and training
- Demonstrates a willingness to attend education/advanced training opportunities, including ongoing training in trauma-informed caregiving and:
 - RPC + Training (strongly encouraged)
 - VFAFA/VKAP/VAC conference
 - Other related training, experience or education
- Demonstrates working knowledge of trauma-informed approaches to caregiving
- Can commit to meeting with a mentee regularly for six months. This can be in person or by phone, email, or text.

Talk to the Resource Coordinator or Recruitment & Retention Specialist in your [district office](#).