



National Foster Care Month Article, May 2017

Empowering Caregivers, Strengthening Families, Supporting Children.

During Foster Care Month, The Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) celebrates the crucial role of caregivers in nurturing youth and supporting and strengthening families. We value the excellent care that caregivers provide children in foster care. It is what helps heal. With nurturing care, children flourish and achieve permanency.

We Celebrate Excellence in Caregivers by Establishing Open Relationships of Respect

Caregivers provide excellent care to children when they are part of collaborative, equal, respectful partnerships. Respectful partners listen to each other, share information, communicate clearly and are responsive.

Caregivers should be treated as partners. This includes:

- ⇒ Information about how to contact permanency workers and get services.
- ⇒ Information about agency policies.
- ⇒ Timely responses from DFS.
- ⇒ Getting notification of and the opportunity to provide feedback in CFT meetings and court.
- ⇒ Supporting the caregivers' relationship with families of origin
- ⇒ Adequately preparing and training caregiver families to care for children placed with them.
- ⇒ Supporting the strengths of caregiver families and helping them address any challenges.

We Celebrate Excellence in Caregivers by Supporting Them as Advocates for Children in their Care

Caregivers are effective advocates for children in foster care because they know first-hand their challenges and what they need to succeed.

Caregivers can be great advocates by:

- ⇒ Asking lots of questions and being as informed as possible about the children in their care,
- ⇒ Building positive, professional relationships with the other members of the child's team.
- ⇒ Being persistent when seeking services, assessments or benefits a child needs and is entitled to.
- ⇒ Taking advantage of all opportunities to be heard in case planning meetings and in court.
- ⇒ Helping children prepare and participate in CFT meetings and in court.
- ⇒ Asking for help when it is needed.

We Celebrate Excellence in Caregivers by Supporting Their Role in Working with Families and Permanency Resources

Caregivers play a crucial role in helping children achieve permanency. They do this by supporting parents in reunification, nurturing sibling connections, etc.

Caregivers strengthen and support family bonds by:

- ⇒ Supporting sibling connections through placement and visitation.
- ⇒ Supporting/facilitating family visitation.
- ⇒ Including parents in decision making, events and activities that involve the child.
- ⇒ Modeling parenting skills.
- ⇒ Providing general peer support.
- ⇒ Helping children prepare for reunification.
- ⇒ Helping children prepare for transition to other permanent families when necessary.
- ⇒ Maintaining relationships with children after they leave their home and being part of their network of support.

We Celebrate Excellence in Caregivers by Supporting Their Capacity to Expose Youth to Activities, Interests and Develop or Discover Their Talents

Children flourish—and heal—when they have the opportunity to spend time with peers and participate in activities in the community and their schools. These activities bring joy, teach skills and build supportive relationships. Caregivers are instrumental in exposing children to these activities and can support children by:

- ⇒ Understanding the new normalcy laws that allow caregivers to make decisions about children's participation in activities.
- ⇒ Including children in family activities, excursions and trips.
- ⇒ Helping children explore activities in the school and community.
- ⇒ Helping children learn about their cultural, ethnic, racial or religious identity.