

Resiliency in Fostering: A Qualitative Study of Highly Experienced Foster Parents

Authors : Ande Nesmith

Abstract : There is an ongoing shortage of foster parents worldwide to take on a growing population of children in need of out-of-home care. Currently, resources are primarily aimed at recruitment rather than retention. Retention rates are extraordinarily low, especially in the first two years of fostering. Qualitative interviews with 19 foster parents averaging 20 years of service provided insight into the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified sources of stress and resiliency. Key stressors included lack of support and responsiveness from the children's social workers, false maltreatment allegations, and secondary trauma from children's destructive behaviors and emotional dysregulation. Resilient parents connected with other foster parents for support, engaged in creative problem-solving, recognized that positive feedback from children usually arrives years later, and through training, understood the neurobiological impact of trauma on child behavior. Recommendations include coordinating communication between the foster parent licensing agency social workers and the children's social workers, creating foster parent support networks and mentoring, and continuous training on trauma including effective parenting strategies. Research is needed to determine whether these resilience indicators in fact lead to long-term retention. Policies should include a mechanism to develop a cohesive line of communication and connection between foster parents and the children's social workers as well as their respective agencies.

Keywords : foster care stability, foster parent burnout, foster parent resiliency, foster parent retention, trauma-informed fostering

Conference Title : ICSW 2018 : International Conference on Social Work

Conference Location : Zurich, Switzerland

Conference Dates : September 13-14, 2018