

FosterlineBC

BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations



**Happy
Foster Family
Month**

**Foster Family
from Different
Perspectives**

 **foster
parents**
British Columbia
Fall 2021 Volume 19, Issue 3

**Self-care and
Resilience
Planning**

**What We Admire
Most About
Foster Parents**

BC FEDERATION OF FOSTER PARENT ASSOCIATIONS (BCFFPA)

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The BCFFPA Provincial Office is located on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Matsqui and Semiahmoo peoples.

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Submissions — Forward articles, personal stories or ideas to the BCFFPA provincial office. Materials may be edited for length and suitability. To be added to our Foster Community Resources list as a regional or agency contact, please email Michelle Relevante at michelle@bcfosterparents.ca.

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President's Report



Hello Fellow Foster Parents:

Firstly, I would like to wish you all a Happy Foster Family Month and thank you all for your tireless commitment to the children in our province. Your love and guidance for these vulnerable little people do not go unnoticed and you can all know that you have made an impact, either small or large, in someone's life. Every day that you foster provides love and stability to a child. We know some days are much harder than others and we thank you for your perseverance to push on.

This past year has shown itself to be especially difficult and when you needed us most you reached out. We are a great team! We took your concerns to the Ministry, and we rallied for a solution. Some things have proven more difficult to find a solution, but we press on. We know that it's challenging to navigate something as crazy as a global pandemic, but you've done it, one day at a time. You have sought out creative ways to stay connected to your communities, families, and friends. I know for myself that not having human contact was the most difficult to endure. You have all worked so diligently to keep yourselves and families safe and we know you will continue to do so. Kudos to your resilience and creativity.

Our province has endured so many devastating fires this summer. My heart breaks for families who have lost their lives, homes, livelihoods and culture. To those displaced, we are thinking of you and should you need us, please reach out. For those assisting others, we thank you for your commitment to community and humanity.

We are pleased to announce that the BCFFPA 2022 AGM will be in our beautiful capital city of Victoria. We are excited to bring the AGM to the island and as soon as we have secured the venue, we will announce that to you. We are optimistic that we can have a full in person AGM like we are all used to so we can enjoy the networking and training together. Oh ya, let's not forget the food!

We are thrilled to announce that the changes to Chapter 5: Children and Youth in Care Policies are complete, and now support the foster parent rights. The information will be distributed throughout the province over the next few months. Our past President, Marcy Perron, has worked diligently (even as our Treasurer) on this, and I couldn't be more pleased that she got to see her hard work and determination come to fruition. Congrats Marcy, well done. This is the stuff the BCFFPA is made of.

We are still at the table with MCFD on the System of Care work and will be addressing it directly during meetings in Victoria this fall. There are some things in the works but nothing finite yet so stay tuned and know that we are working persistently on this. We know that a raise for the foster parents is long overdue and MCFD agrees, however these things take time and are not always on their agenda. So, we work diligently to keep it in the forefront. Thank you for your continued patience on this.

Once again, I'd like to wish you all a Happy Foster Family Month and please know that your dedication and time are appreciated. Enjoy your kids and stay safe.

Julie Holmlund
BCFFPA President

OUR MISSION

To represent and support all foster parents who provide quality in-home family care in BC.



OUR BELIEF

Supported and resilient caregivers raise empowered children and youth.



OUR VISION

Supporting children and youth to reach their full potential through exceptional care.



The BCFFPA is a provincial organization for foster parents, run by foster parents. We are a registered non-profit charity which aims to bring together foster parents, social workers and other stakeholders who are working to continuously improve the standard of care for children in our province.

We provide information to the general public about fostering and recruitment services to the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies. We offer our community a support network through our local Branch affiliations and our Solutions Program, accessible fostering information and education, a hub to share news across our sector and insurance resources for foster caregivers. For over 50 years, we have consulted about the revision and development of policy and practice within BC's child welfare sector.

BCFFPA's structure facilitates contact with all foster parents in the province. We provide funding to our Branches and Regional Councils, and we maintain a Board of Directors that represents our diverse BC culture. BCFFPA's Board of Directors provincially, regionally and at a community level are all volunteers, elected by their foster parent membership community.

Message from the Honourable Mitzi Dean, Minister of Children and Family Development



This October marks the 31st anniversary of Foster Family Month, and my first opportunity as Minister to thank you.

Since I am a new-to-you Minister, I'd like to tell you a little about myself and where I come from. My background is in social work, child protection and working with vulnerable individuals. More recently, I served with a non-profit counselling agency that helped children and families impacted by trauma, violence and mental health challenges. Supporting those in need is a drive and passion I share with you and your organization.

This past year-and-a-half has been described as “unprecedented”. We're in a better place than we were a year ago but emerging from this pandemic is still going to take time and patience. I want to thank you first and foremost for not only doing what you do on a daily basis, but for doing so under conditions that none of us ever foresaw. Your commitment and determination to support B.C.'s most vulnerable young people have been under many additional stresses. Please know I am grateful for your continued selflessness, and know we are working on improving and expanding supports for you.

Foster parents are the foundation of our network of care and we are taking steps to ensure you have access to the supports you need. Part of this work includes improving access to specialized supports such as respite care and stabilization services for children and youth. This is part of the Specialized Homes and Support Services (formerly known as Contracted Residential Services) redesign. I know that as Foster Parents you go to great lengths to meet the needs of children and youth – you leverage training supports, financial supports, and communities of peers, all in an effort to respond to the unique kids in your care. Specialized Homes and Support Services will complement these efforts by providing additional supports that help you and the child or youth in moments of crisis. Please visit [govTogetherBC](https://govtogetherbc.ca) and lend your voice to shaping these services.

As we continue to work through these times, the work by agencies like the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations to support foster families is critical. To all the caregivers and supporters, please accept my heartfelt thanks for your work and dedication to these young British Columbians who need you. What you do comes from your heart, and that is needed more than ever!

I wish you all the best this year and hope to see you in person at our next opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Dean".

Mitzi Dean
Minister of Children and Family Development

Message from BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth



Hello everyone,

Foster Families Appreciation Month is an important milestone that allows us the opportunity to acknowledge the incredible work that foster caregivers do all year round. On October 1 and throughout the month, join me in recognizing the effort and determination that foster caregivers and families have shown in raising children and youth, especially throughout the ongoing pandemic.

I am always impressed by the enormous compassion, thoughtfulness and resilience shown by foster caregivers. Whether they are dealing with a global pandemic or just helping children make good day-to-day decisions in life, the value of their work is immeasurable. As COVID-19 continues to add new and ever-changing challenges to all of our lives, I am deeply appreciative of the effort and flexibility they bring to their roles as care providers.

Since I last wrote, some of the highlights of RCY's work have included the release of a report on the importance of belonging, a presentation of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth (SSCCY) and my statement on FASD Awareness Day.

In April, I was joined by parents of children with FASD to speak with the SSCCY – the all-party committee of the Legislature to whom my Office reports – to present our report, *Excluded: Increasing Understanding, Support and Inclusion for Children with FASD and their Families*, and to relay the challenges their families face day-to-day and the profound lack of supports available. Their perspectives have been vital to our work at RCY, showing us the value of inclusiveness and helping us to gain further understanding of FASD.

In September, to mark FASD Awareness Day, I released a statement to highlight the challenges families of children with FASD face on a daily basis. I wanted to emphasize my commitment to the children, youth and families with FASD and to advocating for enhanced awareness and equitable access to non-stigmatizing, culturally relevant and strengths-based supports and resources.

In June, RCY released *Skye's Legacy: A focus on belonging* – a report that vividly illustrates the ongoing impacts of colonialism. The report tells the story of Skye, a First Nations girl who died of an accidental overdose on her 17th birthday.

Skye's story—while uniquely hers—is tragically not an outlier. It highlights the trauma of being denied meaningful opportunities to know and be connected to family, culture, community and a positive sense of self and identity. It speaks to the impact of being unable to realize—through no fault of one's own—the sense of belonging that all humans need and seek. In the report, I made three recommendations that call upon MCFD leadership to ensure that Skye's story can help other young people who are in similar situations realize a sense of belonging.

Speaking of belonging, our very own Social Media Youth Team member, SEMA'TSE Jordan, recently shared her own experience with belonging and what it feels like to be included and accepted by her 'second home' with an amazing foster family. Her latest episode Storytime series with the Kid Advocate – Second Home, delves deeply into the importance of inclusion and acceptance, and illustrates the real difference that foster families can make. Visit the [RCY website](#) and listen to her amazing story.

This fall, we will also be releasing a report focused on child and youth participation in child protection and family law legal processes. The report will centre the voices and experiences of children, offering their perspectives on how they might be able to participate in Child, Family and Community Service Act and/or Family Law Act legal processes in more meaningful and inclusive ways.

Once again, I want to sincerely thank caregivers all over BC for continuing to do the vitally important and skilled work you do. And I would like to offer a reminder that, to get help from an RCY Advocate, children and youth can reach our Office through our new text and chat functions: text 1-778-404-7161, or find chat through the button on our website youth page. Foster families and caregivers looking to connect with an RCY Advocate or for general questions or comments, can contact us by email (rcy@rcybc.ca), phone (1-800-476-3933) or by using the secure and confidential form on our [website](#).

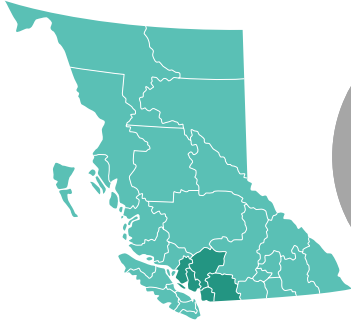
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J Charlesworth".

Jennifer Charlesworth, Representative of Children and Youth

Coast Fraser Delegate Report

by Jeanette Dyer



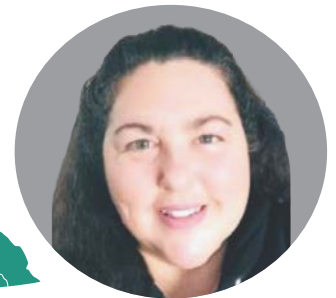
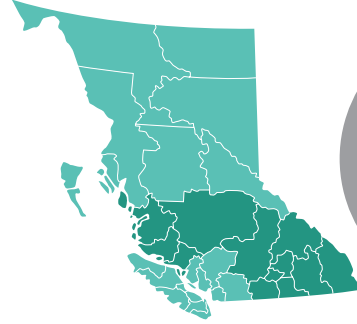
Hello again to all of you and welcome to Fall! There is not much news in the Coast Fraser region. Beds are down yet placements are up. It's been a difficult time for foster parents. We are, for the most part, still missing the personal face-to-face time with our fellow foster parents at branch meetings, get-togethers, and workshops. Archway Community Services, through the Foster Caregiver Support Group's "Fostering Connections" is starting up their in-person sessions, if government regulations permit. In September, a training called "Documentation and Court Prep" was hosted. A lawyer from MCFD was available to answer questions from attendees.

Remember folks, we need each other so reach out! The Coast Fraser region have had it better than some other regions in BC due to the wildfires, COVID outbreaks, and the opioid crisis. Let's open our hearts and lend our hands to those in need right now—we can donate clothes, food, cash, and other essential items to agencies working hard to support displaced British Columbians.

Please don't forget to reach out for support. Foster parents face many difficulties and challenges everyday but we continue to step up, step in and be the safe haven for vulnerable children and families. You deserve so much more than just "thank you" but I truly thank you. I am proud to be a part of our BC fostering community. I continue to be here for you. If you have a concern or just want to someone to talk to, you can reach me at jfcdyer@gmail.com or 604-826-9348.

Interior Delegate Report

by Raquel Lesieur



Happy Foster Family Month! To all the foster families in our province who put their hearts and lives on the line to care for children and youth that are unable to live with their families, thank you! There are more than 2,300 foster families who have opened their hearts and heir homes to BC's most vulnerable children and youth. Many of our future leaders, parents, teachers, first responders, social workers, doctors, artists and changemakers have lived in your caring homes. My hope is that more families will open their doors to children and youth in care so that they don't grow up believing that all of life's doors have closed on them.

Things have been quiet in the Interior in terms of training and activities for foster families. While it's unfortunate that Kamloops wouldn't be able host a hybrid BCFFPA Annual General Meeting, I am glad that we can all get together virtually. BCFFPA's first priority continues to be the safety and health of our attendees.

While we thought 2020 was a difficult year, 2021 has become even more of a challenge for everyone. We have all faced unique stressors over the past 18 months. As we continue to grapple with the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, the opioid crisis and a devastating wildfire season, I cannot help but reflect on the inspiring resilience of British Columbians. Our province even battled hundreds of active wildfires at once which have placed thousands of lives in danger. I'm incredibly grateful for the dedication of healthcare workers, firefighters, first responders and everyone working hard to help those in need.

Sector News & Updates



CONTENT WARNING: This news contains details some readers may find distressing or triggering.

Historic child welfare deal inked

The Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan became the first Indigenous group in Canada to ink an agreement with the federal government for funding of locally controlled child welfare services since the Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families came into force in January 2020. The act allows for First Nations to assume authority over local child welfare systems under co-ordination agreements and paves the way for children in care to remain in their home communities. The deal also comes with \$38 million in funding over the next two years to support the band's implementation of its own child welfare system.

Cowessess has not had decision-making power over children in care since it was stripped of it in 1951. More than 80% of children and youth in care in Saskatchewan are Indigenous. "One day there will be no children in care", said Cowessess First Nation Chief Cadmus Delorme at the

signing ceremony in July. As of June 2021, Indigenous Services Canada received requests from 38 bodies representing 100 Indigenous groups and communities who want to follow in the same footsteps as Cowessess First Nation.

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, applauded the agreement as the first step in ensuring better outcomes for Indigenous children and youth in care. However, she believes that funding must also be available to address the underlying socio-economic factors that land Indigenous children in care in the first place which include poverty, housing, substance abuse and mental health issues related to residential school trauma. — **Source: CBC**

For emotional and crisis referral services:

National Indian Residential School Crisis Line:
available 24/7 at 1-866 925-4419

KUU-US Crisis Line Society: available 24/7 at
1-800-588-8717 or online at kuu-uscrisisline.com

Return to school for children and youth in care

MCFD supports and promotes children/youth returning to school based on the guidance and advice of the Provincial Health Officer. Most children will be able to attend school safely in person and this is the preferred option for children and youth in care.

Social workers should review with the child/youth circle of support/care team to discuss return to school planning where necessary. Options for children and youth who may not be able to safely attend school in-person should be discussed.

For students who are immune-compromised or have complex medical conditions, guardianship social workers and caregivers are encouraged to consult with their health care provider to determine their level of risk regarding return to school. If a student cannot attend school due to their health risks, the school district will work with the family to review alternative learning options for the student. Students who need to stay at home must have an at-home learning plan and an educational program provided by their school district. — **Source: MCFD/COVID-19 Practice Bulletin #17**

COVID-19 vaccine for children and youth in care

The Provincial Health Officer has announced that BC youth between 12 and 17 years old (born in 2009 or earlier) can now register and get vaccinated against COVID-19, recommending that everyone 12 years and older get their COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves against the virus and its more infectious variants.

There are many children and youth in care with unique health circumstances and their individual needs must be considered. MCFD believes that it is important to talk with children/youth in care about their ability and choice to receive COVID-19 vaccine. Guardianship social workers need to consult with the child/youth's physician about their unique health needs if they are

vulnerable and/or if they have allergies or pre-existing conditions such as asthma or diabetes. Caregivers who provide day-to-day care for children and youth in care do not have the authority to make health decisions regarding immunizations. At the request of the social worker, a caregiver can register and subsequently schedule a vaccination appointment and take the child/youth for their COVID-19 vaccine. — **Source: MCFD/COVID-19 Practice Bulletin #18**

We all turn 19: Youth in and from care celebrate turning 19 and call for change

On August 20, over 40 youth and allies gathered outside Vancouver's City Hall to push for change. "Every youth should look forward to turning 19 and after turning 19, the supports just aren't there", said Susan Russell-Csanyi, an organizer from Fostering Change. Fostering Change is a campaign which aims to improve outcomes for youth leaving government care. "Many of us spent our 19th birthdays, not celebrating, but packing up our belongings into garbage bags and leaving all the safety and stability we have ever known. This event is the 19th birthday that we deserve. We've got cake, we've got food, we've got gift bags, and we've got lots of love and support", said Anita Shen who is also part of Fostering Change. — **Source: Indiginews**

Rider Insurance Program update

The Rider Insurance Program provides coverage against loss or damage to buildings or contents owned, rented, used or occupied by a caregiver due to the acts of a child placed in their care. It follows the underlying homeowner or tenant property policy to provide up to the same limits and coverages. Effective July 1, 2021, the minimum deductible has increased to \$10,000 per claim or the deductible stated on the foster caregiver's policy, whichever is greatest. If the deductible is less than \$10,000 or the cost to replace/repair the damage is below \$10,000, the foster parent should speak with their Resource Worker about the damage/loss. The process for filing a claim as well as the claiming requirements remain the same. — **Source: BCFFPA**

STAFF REFLECTIONS

**What we admire
most about
foster parents**

Happy Foster Family Month!
We are honoured to serve and work with many foster families who are making a difference in the lives of children and youth. By opening their homes and hearts, foster parents leave an indelible mark on our communities, on future generations, and in our hearts.



KRISSY

What I admire most about foster parents is their strength and love for the kids in their care. They do whatever it takes to show kids acceptance and love even in the worst of days.



JAYNE

Watching foster parents accommodate the needs of each child or youth, no matter how complex, is so inspiring. They are true warriors with the biggest hearts.



ANNETTE

I admire the resilience and the capacity of foster parents to care for children, youth and their families regardless of surrounding circumstances. Their nurturing skills support children's experience of belonging, which in turn supports all their attachments, development and future well-being.



RONDA

I admire the sacrifice that they choose to parent children who are not their own and stand in the gap for birth parents as they walk through and recover from their traumas. Loving a child as their own while knowing that one day they will have to leave their home is not an easy task to do.



SAARA

What I love most about foster parents is the way they open their homes and hearts to children and youth who need it the most.



MICHELLE

Foster parents are patient and tenacious in the face of challenges. They persevere in the ups and downs of fostering—even and especially—when the odds appear to be stacked against them.

5 SIMPLE WAYS TO CELEBRATE FOSTER FAMILY MONTH

1



Send thank you cards or care packages to foster families.

2



Host a virtual or drive-thru foster parent appreciation event.

3

Use social media to share inspiring stories about foster families as well as foster parent recruitment campaigns to create awareness about the need for foster parents in your community.



4

Contact a local or provincial foster parent support agency and ask how you can help. They may be looking for community members to get involved with some programs or community celebration events. You can also donate or plan a fundraiser.



5

Ask foster parents how they want to be supported and empowered as you celebrate them. They know best what support they need.



BCFFPA Members have access to discounts through our partnership with Canada's leading perk program!



Step 1: Go to Perkopolis.com and click 'Register' in the top right corner.

Step 2: To access all perks, you must register by using a valid email address. Then, you will receive an email to activate your registration. – click the link within this email that says "Complete my profile".

Step 3: Enter your member ID code which is BCFFPA + your 5-digit membership number (e.g. BCFFPA12345). Once you are logged in, click on your name in the top right corner of the screen, then choose 'Profile'. Your BCFFPA Membership Number will appear as the first item under 'Your Information'. You can now navigate back to perkopolis.com.

Step 4: Enter the required information. Click the 'accept terms and conditions' box. Click 'Confirm'.

You're all set to start saving!

Use your BCFFPA membership to enjoy savings on North America's top travel, entertainment, health and wellness, and lifestyle brands!

Adidas	The Brick
Apple	Carter's
Cineplex	Cruises.ca
Cirque du Soleil	Columbia
Disney on Ice	Club Monaco
Disneyland	CityPASS
Dyson	Dell
Great Wolf Lodge	Ever New
Hunter	HP
Indigo	KitchenAid
La-Z-Boy Furniture	Kiehl's
Landmark Cinemas	LE CHÂTEAU
LEGOLAND	RW & CO
Lenovo	Matt & Nat
Petsecure	Panasonic
Reitmans	Sorel
Samsung	TurboTax
UGG	Walt Disney World
Universal Orlando	WestJet

FREE TRAINING FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Anxiety in Children and Youth - Practical Intervention Strategies

Gender and Sexual Diversity in Youth

Wellness Strategies - Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Resilience

Download your certificate upon completion of the webinar and test. Enjoy access to 3 webinars until September 2022.

To register, please email office@bcfosterparents.ca or call 1-800-663-9999





Camps for Kids Grants are now open for applications for the Fall/Winter cycle!

We have opened a Fall/Winter cycle to alleviate some of the costs BCFFPA members encounter when sending their foster, adopted, or birth children to camp.

Application Dates

Applications are accepted from August 1 – October 31.
Awards will be made in November.

Amount of Grants and Grant Cycle

The Fall/Winter grant cycle provides grants of \$300 per eligible family.

How to Apply

Download the application form [HERE](#) and complete the form outlining the name, type of camp, and proposed dates of attendance for each participant in the family being applied for, and the full cost for each child/youth to attend. Depending on funds available, grants will be awarded to eligible applicants chosen at random who have applied with all relevant documentation.

Not covered by a group health plan? Concerned about health & dental expenses?

Find the coverage that's right for you and your family with a **Health Assist plan** from **Green Shield Canada (GSC for short)**.



You can choose a plan that offers prescription drug coverage, dental or a combination of both. Plus, all plans provide coverage towards vision care, extended health care (like registered massage therapists and chiropractors), and emergency medical travel protection. Your acceptance is guaranteed for many plans – no medical questions asked*. Best of all, Health Assist plans are easy to understand and easy to get.

It's all about you and what you need.
Want more info?

Contact

Candace Dodson-Willis

in strategic alliance with Group One
Candace_Dodson@icloud.com

Plans provided by **Green Shield Canada (GSC)**

*Acceptance is guaranteed for select plans as long as GSC receives the initial payment; other plans require completion of a health questionnaire and medical underwriting.

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FOSTER PARENT VOICES: MEET SOME OF BC'S FOSTER PARENTS



Rebekkah Ambrosone
Castlegar, BC
Foster parent for 6 years

What life lessons do you hope to impart to the kids in your care?

I want them to know that, no matter what their story is or how their story began, they are in control of how their story ends. They get to make choices and be in control of how they respond to life's challenges. Their story made them. They own it, can learn from it, and can choose to be better because of it.

What have you learned about yourself in your fostering journey?

I've learned that my heart holds no room for judgment—that I truly don't know what it's like to be in someone else's shoes and I can choose to feel compassion and empathy for the kids and their families rather than feel judgment.

What's the best thing about fostering?

The breakthrough moments...the kid who came in my home so terrified to open up and love that pops on my lap...the kid who called me every name in the book that ends up trusting me and calling me for help...the kid who screamed for hours in terror every night who becomes the kid who feels safe to sleep under my roof. The path to breakthrough moments isn't smooth and easy but the rewards are endless.

What have you found to be the most difficult thing about fostering?

The trauma—helping them process it and heal from it. It's tough to come face-to-face with some heartbreaking realities that happen to the most innocent, through no fault of their own. Helping children recreate a positive narrative is everyday hard work.

How important is a good support network to a foster family?

It's the only reason I'm still a foster parent. I can't count the amount of times I've leaned on my support network. You wanna talk success stories? Working collaboratively with my team has seen kids through to their happily ever after over and over again.

What is one thing you wish you knew before you started fostering?

That it's tough on a marriage.

What advice would you give to families interested in fostering?

One thing I hear all the time is "*I couldn't do it I would get too attached*"—that is the very reason they should be a foster parent. Children are supposed to feel loved more than anything in the world. They are supposed to be "loved too much" that it's hard for us to let them go. Show them how it feels to have someone love on them and redefine love for them!



Cindy Piech
Kelowna, BC
Foster parent for 15 years

What life lessons do you hope to impart to the kids in your care?

I want them to know that they are loved, wanted, and safe in my home.

What have you learned about yourself in your fostering journey?

I've learned that, not only do I need to take care of the kids that are placed in my home but I need to take care of myself as well.

What have you found to be the most difficult thing about fostering?

To be honest, finding the balance between policy and what the child truly needs. It can also be difficult navigating relationships with birth families.

How important is a good support network to a foster family?

I think it's very important! It helps to bounce ideas off of each other, to lend a listening ear and to possibly provide/receive respite care when needed.

What's the best thing about fostering?

Helping kids that are hurting and giving them a safe space to heal from trauma in order to move forward. Fostering is truly rewarding!

Has your experience as a foster parent changed your definition of "family"? How has it changed?

Family is much more than just those in your own household! Taking in children has helped us grow in every way. Two of my daughters work as teachers and are extremely good at what they do because of their experiences with kids that have come into our home. They learned to be caring, compassionate, selfless, generous and secure in who they are by being part of a foster family.

What lessons have you learned from the kids in your care or have been your care?

They taught me that a sense of belonging and feeling included is truly important. My foster kids have told me how much they appreciate how I treat them as part of the family. Fostering has also taught me the value of structure. The structure in my home help children feel safe and secure because it gives them the stability they need as they know what to expect in my home.

What is one thing you wish you knew before you started fostering?

Not to be so nervous or self-doubting about taking in kids. I doubted myself and questioned whether I would be any good at fostering. Once I started, I realized that the kids just wanted someone who cared about them. Once they learn to trust you, the rest would follow.

What advice would you give to families interested in fostering?

Ask all the questions you can think of! Maybe start with providing respite care and then build up to fostering full time.

"Not only do I need to take care of the kids that are placed in my home but I need to take care of myself as well."



Alice Sexton
Terrace, BC
Foster parent for 15 years

What life lessons do you hope to impart to the kids in your care?

I want them to always know that there's somebody out there that cares and believes in them. They have become a part of my family so all the activities I do with my own children, I do with my foster kids as well and they will never feel excluded. I want them to know that life is about the memories we make and who we make them with. I want them to have as many happy memories as possible. I want them to feel safe, secure and supported. I also try to immerse myself in their world. I get to know their teacher and other members of the care team. I put them in all the programs they need and take advantage of community resources where they can learn life skills that will help them find success as adults.

What have you found to be the most difficult thing about fostering?

Dealing with "the system"—there's a lack of responsiveness and consistency.

What lessons have you learned from the kids in your care or have been your care?

That I am way more patient than I ever thought it was. I can handle a lot more than I ever could. I take a lot of special needs kids and right now, three out of the four I'm fostering have been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The daily challenges keep me on my toes but I wouldn't change a thing.

What's the best thing about fostering?

I get to show just how much love I have for these little people in my home. My parents were not surprised when I told them about my decision to foster. Growing up, all the neighbourhood kids always came to our house to hang out. There were always lots of kids around. As a foster parent, I've become "mom" and they just randomly start calling me mom but not because I asked them to. I've been lucky that the birth families of the kids in my home right now don't have an issue with it. When they first come to my home, I will take time off from work or I'll take them to work with me at the daycare. I'll do a lot of one-on-one time with them to get to know them then start doing some family activities together. We would go camping, hiking and spend time with our horses and chickens. I like going on trips with them as these are things they likely don't experience with their families.

How do you build a good relationship with birth families?

I am open with them right off the bat. I advocate for the birth parents because I firmly believe that they should maintain contact with their children when it's safe. They need to know what is happening in their lives. I make sure I have photo albums so when the children go home, they have pictures to remind them of the memories they have made in my home. It should always be about the child and never about us.

Has your experience as a foster parent changed your definition of "family"? How has it changed?

Family is way more than just blood. I am lucky to have two of my own birth children who have fully accepted the kids I foster as their siblings. Everyone in my family has been very accepting and supportive.

What is one thing you wish you knew before you started fostering?

I wish I had started with a bigger house with more space.

What's it like fostering during a global pandemic?

The first three weeks was incredibly hard because I'm diabetic. I can't afford to get sick. I left my job at the daycare and came back after three weeks. We strictly stayed home but I also wasn't capable of homeschooling them while doing everything else. Luckily, I was able to hire an EA to work directly with the kids. They had their own room in the school where there were no other children. The kids didn't mind the isolation as we spent more time outdoors like hiking and riding horses. We spend way more time together than we ever had before.

We continue to be very cautious. The boys do not have a problem wearing a mask. We had a discussion where we talked about the virus as this big thing happening in the world and a lot of people are getting sick and dying from it so if we want to stay healthy, we have to wear a mask and sanitize our hands so we can protect ourselves and other people. The kids understand that we have to keep each other safe and that I'm diabetic. They understand that, if a person with the virus comes in and I accidentally get sick, it could mean that I end up in the hospital. They understand that I need them to be healthy so I can stay healthy.

How do you take care of yourself?

I ride horses and my foster kids have learned to love riding horses too. We have nine horses so they keep us busy. Riding horses is something that we do a lot together and I've been fortunate that I've never had child in my care that didn't want to ride horses. It is a big part of our life. One of the boys have developed quite a bond with animals and a lot of what we do with him involves horses and chickens. Horse therapy helps! When it feels like I'm getting burnt out, then I will take a trip on my own or go hiking on my own.

How important is a good support network to a foster family?

Oh, it's huge! Everyone needs a good support network. There's no way I could do this all on my own. I have a friend who has become a role model to my foster kids. He would spend time with them—help fix bikes and build ramps. I can't do that kind of stuff so it really helps to have some support. My best friend who works at the daycare with me also spends a lot of time with them—so if they need a break from me, they just go and hang out with her.

What advice would you give to families interested in fostering?

Ask as many questions as it takes to establish clear expectations and accountabilities. Once you become a foster parent, get everything in writing upfront. Documentation is very important.

Don't foster in isolation!
Our Solutions Program Team is here for you. We can all do so much more together than we ever can alone.
Call 1.800.663.9999 for support.



What's it like to be a birth child in a foster family?

By Rachel Cuell



My parents started fostering before I was born. As a birth child in a foster family, I have learned to accept others by embracing them without judgment. As a kid, I was constantly embracing new siblings into my life. Each child brought with them a unique story, a unique personality, and a different background. Growing up with them taught me about trauma and its effects. When my siblings had outbursts, I understood that the behaviour was usually outside of their control.

The most important thing that being a member of a foster family has taught me is to treat others with kindness and compassion. Most people assume that children in foster care have been taken from unfit parents. In my experience, however, children are taken from parents who do not have access to the supports that they need to safely take care of a child. These parents, often struggling with addiction, likely have experienced trauma in their lives, or have developmental disabilities such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder, or have had very few positive role models in their life. Through my foster siblings, I learned that these barriers have added to the stress of caring for a child. As my siblings and I got older, these risk factors, especially addiction, became more evident. Many of my foster siblings have experienced more trauma at five years old than most people will experience in a lifetime. Because of their family histories and life experiences, they were already at high risk for addiction—through no fault of their own. Although they appear neurotypical, they are unable to grasp the concept of long-term consequences versus immediate reward. Understanding that anyone in life—from peers, to teachers, to strangers—could be going through complex issues without my knowledge taught me to treat others with kindness.

My life experiences as a birth child in a foster family has shaped my choices and values. At United World College-USA, the school I attended with students from over 90 different countries, I used the skills I've learned as a birth child in a foster family to understand perspectives that were

wholly different from my own. I found that I could easily create close relationships with people whose personalities and opinions directly opposed mine when I viewed the world through the lens of their culture and their life experiences.

The unpredictability in daily life at home taught me how to be adaptable in the face of new challenges. Many of my foster siblings had behavioural challenges that ranged from verbal outbursts to punching holes in the wall, to opening the car door while we were driving. These incidents helped me develop the ability to remain calm in stressful situations. As a Residential Advisor at UWC-USA, I was called upon to help my peers in times of mental crisis. During these high-stress situations, my experience with crisis intervention gave me necessary tools to keep myself calm enough to think clearly and help my peers effectively. Currently, I am working with L'Arche Edmonton as a live-in caregiver. I support a group home of four adults with developmental or intellectual disabilities who have similar behavioural challenges as my foster siblings who I grew up with. My background made it easy for me to adapt to my new environment and has prepared me to better support them.

I would not be the person I am today if I had not grown up as a member of a foster family. Through all of my experiences, I have learned acceptance, adaptability, empathy, kindness, and compassion. Real-world issues like addiction, trauma, and poverty have become deeply personal for me, motivating my passion for helping others.

What's it like to be a member of a foster family as an adoptee?

By Abigail Berg

I was born in Zambia and spent my first 12 years there. I had been orphaned just days after being born due to the AIDS epidemic which had ravaged that part of the world. Those first 12 years held a lot of challenges for me because I lived in an orphanage but I am thankful for the loving care that I received there. At 12 years of age, I was adopted into a family in Canada. My new life in Canada gave me new challenges as I quickly discovered that my adoptive parents are also foster parents. Many children come and go from our home. These children need different types of support. Most importantly, they need love and care. Being part of a foster family has given me the opportunity to reflect on my own life and how thankful I am for the love and care that I received in the orphanage as a little baby.

Being a part of a foster family has left me heartbroken at times when I find out that the children have been taken away from their parents due to drug addiction or physical abuse by parents who are not dealing with their own hurts in life. These children often come from homes that don't know how to love or show that they love them. Foster children have experienced more difficult situations and hard times than many adults ever will. It's very sad to see. At the same time, these children have brought happiness to my life as I watch them grow and overcome some of their own hurts.

When a foster child leaves our home, I know that their lives may not be easy for them. It most often is not. Our hope is that they grow up remembering that they were loved and cared for by us. We hope that they return to their parents after they have received the help they needed to overcome their own challenges, or at least be put in homes that will show them the love and care that their birth parents could not. Unfortunately, not every child gets this type of experience in life. Often, due to their past traumatic experiences and the hard times they have gone through in life, they face more barriers in finding success as adults.



Seeing these children leave our home is very hard. It's easy for me to get attached to them. I enjoy making memories with them. These memories are a part of my life and they don't just go away. Many foster families choose not to continue to foster other children after a child has left their home. It is easy to get attached to these children and some leave a deeper impression on us than others. I still wonder about and even sometimes, worry about some of the children that have left our home. They are precious little people and hard to forget.

When I first came to Canada, I didn't know how to interact with my siblings or the different foster children coming into our home because of my experiences coming from Zambia. It took some time for me to realize that my adoptive parents loved me and accepted me for who I am. When I realized that they would always be on my side, I knew that I could be successful in whatever I wanted to do. When I came to Canada, I also struggled with school and friendships because it took a long time to trust people. Now, I have graduated from high school and I have a lot of great friends who support me.

Though it is difficult to be away from my biological family and culture of origin, I have had many opportunities that I would not have had if it weren't for my adoptive family. I have been able to play soccer at a high level, to learn a new language, and to go to college.

Self-care and Resilience Planning for Foster Parents

Foster parents are great at taking care of others but sometimes forget to take care of their own well-being—until it's too late and they are sick or burnt out. Self-care means taking responsibility for yourself to maintain a healthy and balanced life through individually determined, proactive activities. Building self-care into your daily or weekly routine can greatly improve resilience and prevent burnout.

Step 1: Determine your stress level.

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Changes in mood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal mood • Calm • Confident 	Changes in mood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritable • Sadness • Impatient • Nervous 	Changes in mood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxious • Angry • Pervasive sadness 	Changes in mood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily enraged • Excessive anxiety/panic • Depressed mood/numb
Changes in attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good sense of humour • Takes things in stride • Ability to focus on tasks 	Changes in attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaced sarcasm • Intrusive thoughts • Sometimes distracted or unable to focus on tasks 	Changes in attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative attitude • Recurrent intrusive thoughts • Constantly distracted or unable to focus on tasks 	Changes in attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-compliant • Suicidal thoughts • Inability to focus/memory loss
Changes in behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically and socially active • Performing well 	Changes in behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased activity/socializing • Procrastination 	Changes in behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance • Tardiness • Begins to pull away from family/friends 	Changes in behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal • Absenteeism • Not mentally present
Physical changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal sleep patterns • Good appetite • Feeling energetic • Maintaining a stable weight 	Physical changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trouble sleeping • Lack of energy • Changes in eating • Weight loss or weight gain 	Physical changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restless sleep • Loss of appetite • Some tiredness/fatigue • Fluctuations/changes in weight 	Physical changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot fall asleep • No appetite • Constant fatigue/tiredness • Extreme changes in weight

Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada

Step 2: Create a self-care and resilience plan. You can use this list to create self-care practices and resilience-building strategies that you can incorporate into your daily or weekly routines. Remember that self-care looks different for everyone. Find your own rhythm and routine. If you want to get creative and compete with yourself, you can turn your self-care and resilience plan into a bingo card.

Identify what you need support with and find people and resources that can support you. Take time to discover these supports so they will be easier to access when you actually need them.

- Write in a journal
 - Volunteer for a cause meaningful to you
 - Make a gratitude list
 - Take a fresh air break
 - Meditate or listen to guided visualization
 - Cuddle with pets
 - Treat yourself to a nice meal
 - Take a nap
 - Listen to music
 - Practice yoga
 - Lay in the grass
 - Photography
 - Read a good book
 - Write a blog
 - Spend time outdoors, if possible
 - Go for a drive
 - Exercise
 - Join an online social club
- Turn off electronic devices (digital detox)
 - Have a movie marathon
 - Play a game
 - Dance
 - Wear something that makes you feel confident
 - Join an online support group
 - Have a virtual game night with friends
 - Work in the garden
 - Get creative: draw, paint, write a song, or cook a new meal
 - Try a new hobby
 - Have an adventure day
 - Creative arts
 - Spend time with your children–read to them, listen to their laughter, play with them, etc.
 - Create a poster with images of a positive vision
 - Nutrition–increase healthy food choices
 - Listen to enjoyable podcasts or videos

Step 3: Identify what you need support with and find people and resources that can support you. Take time to discover these supports so they will be easier to access when you actually need them. List your top 3 items and plan when, how and who can support you.

MY TOP 3 SELF-CARE STRATEGIES	WHEN/HOW/WHO CAN SUPPORT
1.	
2.	
3.	

Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada



Did you know?

Each year, approximately
42% of all adoptions
in BC are **foster parents**
adopting the children in
their care.

Adopting your foster child? We're here for you!

AFABC is here to help foster parents with the transition to adoption!

Connect with a Family Support Worker. Family Support Workers provide free, one-on-one support to adoptive, waiting, and prospective adoptive parents.

Visit www.bcadoption.com/familysupport to meet the Family Support Worker for your region.

Join one of our 10 Facebook groups and find a community for every stage of your adoption journey.

Find us on Facebook @bcadopt.

Visit www.bcadoption.com or call us at 1-877-ADOPT-07 to learn more.

Safe Babies online workshop

Learn about infant development, substance exposure, sleep issues, household and infant safety, support services, self-care, and more in this three-part online webinar workshop! **Contact** education@bcadoption.com for more information or visit bcadoption.com/online-workshops to see upcoming workshop dates and registration details.

FOSTER COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Provincial Resources

BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations www.bcfosterparents.ca	1-800-663-9999
After Hours Foster Parent Support Line	1-888-495-4440
Indigenous Perspectives Society www.ipsociety.ca/foster-caregiving	1-844-391-0007 ext. 229
Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks www.fbcyicn.ca	1-800-565-8055
Adoptive Families Association of BC www.bcadoption.com	1-877-236-7807
Pacific Post Partum Support Society www.postpartum.org	604-255-7999
Parent Help Line	1-888-603-9100
Parents Together	604-325-0511
Parent Support Services of BC www.parentsupportbc.ca	1-800-345-9777
Representative for Children & Youth www.rcybc.ca	1-800-476-3933
FAE/S Support Network	604-507-6675

Interior

For contact information for local foster parent groups or support in your area, please call 1-800-663-9999.

Okanagan Foster Parent Association www.okfosterparents.ca	
Central Okanagan	250-870-8991
North Okanagan	250-558-0939
South Okanagan	250-462-6907
Shuswap	250-515-1522
Okanagan Metis Children & Family Services	250-868-0351
Interior Community Services www.interiorcommunityservices.bc.ca www.icsfp.info	1-877-376-3660
East Kootenay	250-426-6013
West Kootenay	778-460-5174
Cariboo	250-609-2017
Kamloops and area	236-421-0031

Island

For contact information for local foster parent groups or support in your area, please call 1-800-663-9999.

Foster Parent Support Services Society (FPSSS) www.fpsss.com	1-888-922-8437
FPSSS (South Vancouver Island)	778-430-5460
FPSSS (Central Island)	250-618-8327
FPSSS (Comox/Courtney)	250-898-4488
FPSSS (Cowichan Valley)	250-818-3293
FPSSS (Upper Island)	250-204-1566
FPSSS (Port Alberni)	250-735-1124
FPSSS (North Island)	250-949-7419

North

For contact information for local foster parent groups or support in your area, please call 1-800-663-9999.

AXIS Family Resources www.axis.bc.ca	1-877-392-1003 (Press 205)
Community Bridge (Fort St. John) www.communitybridge.ca	250-785-6021 ext. 235

Coast Fraser

For contact information for local foster parent groups or support in your area, please call 1-800-663-9999.

Hollyburn Family Services www.hollyburn.ca	604-987-8211
Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society www.vacfss.com	778-331-4500
Foster Hub www.fosterhub.ca	1-877-926-1185
Archway Community Services www.archway.ca	778-880-8555
Fraser Valley Foster Parent Association www.fraservalleyfosterparents.org	1-877-797-7701
South Vancouver Youth Centre www.milieu.ca	604-325-2004
Pacific Community Resources Society www.pcrs.ca	604-587-8100
The Children's Foundation https://www.childrens-foundation.org	604-434-9101

IT PAYS TO BE A MEMBER!

Please complete and return to BCFFPA: 208-20641 Logan Avenue, Langley, BC V3A 7R3 or join or renew via our website at www.bcfosterparents.ca

Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____ Region: _____

Local Association (BCFFPA Branch): _____

Level of Foster Home: (select one)

Restricted ____ Regular ____ Level I ____ Level II ____ Level III ____ Contractor ____ Other ____

This is a: New Membership ____ (OR) a Renewal ____

1 year: individual \$30.00 ____ OR couple \$35.00 ____

2 year: individual \$50.00 ____ OR couple \$60.00 ____

*\$10.00 of this membership fee will be used by the provincial office for administration of the program and development of services to foster parents. The balance of the fee will be returned to your regional board or local association.

I/we contract with ____ MCFD ____ Delegated Aboriginal Agency Other: _____

OR my affiliation with the BCFFPA is (i.e. staff, MCFD, non-foster parent): _____

As members of the BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations, I/we agree to abide by the Bylaws, Policy and Procedures, and Code of Ethics of the Federation. _____
[signature(s)]

Please bill my VISA or MC # _____ Expires ____ / ____

[signature for approval]

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