

Oregon CAPTA Citizen Review Panel Report 2015-2016

History of CAPTA Panels

The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires every state to create at least three Citizen Review Panels (Panels) to review systemic issues in the child welfare system and make recommendations to improve related policies, practices, and procedures. In September 2012, the Department of Human Services (DHS) transferred responsibility for administering the Panels to the Oregon Judicial Department's Citizen Review Board (CRB), Oregon's foster care review program.

Panel members include CRB members and staff, judges, DHS staff, attorneys, court appointed special advocates and staff, foster parents, service providers and other community stakeholders involved in the child welfare system.

CAPTA Panel Focus: 2015-2016

This year, the three CAPTA Panels were in Lane, Multnomah, and Douglas counties. This is the second year for the Panels in Multnomah and Douglas counties, and the third year for the Panel in Lane County. The Panels met on July 13th at the Valley River Inn in Eugene for a kickoff planning session. Attendees heard from AJ Goins, Planning and Resources Manager of Federal Policy at DHS' Office of Child Welfare Programs, about agency priorities and how Panels could be most helpful to DHS. Panels were then asked to brainstorm a list of system issues of concern in their counties. Each Panel prioritized those issues and selected one topic to explore in detail throughout the year.

For the first time since the CRB has taken over the administration of the Citizen Review Panels, the three Panels individually decided to analyze the same issue – how to better recruit, support and retain foster parents.



Foster parents are a crucial partner in the child welfare system. When children are unable to safely remain at home, it is imperative that DHS be able to place children in safe, appropriate foster homes. Having adequate numbers of certified foster homes is critical to the success of the child welfare system. Over the past two years, DHS has lost over 400 foster homes statewide. This attrition has made it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for DHS to appropriately match a child with a foster provider. When children are placed in a foster home because it is the only space available rather than it being a therapeutically and developmentally recommended placement, it is more likely that the placement will disrupt.

One study on placement disruptions found that about 70% of placement changes were made to implement procedural, policy, and system mandates (e.g. moves due to temporary emergency placements or moves to place children with siblings), about 20% were linked to the children's behavioral problems, and the remaining 10% of the moves were related to both foster and biological family issues.ⁱ

In 2015, Oregon had approximately 7500 children in care. Over a third of those children, 37.4%, have had three or more foster placements.ⁱⁱ We know that a large body of research links multiple

CAPTA Citizen Review Panel Report 2015-2016

foster care placements with behavioral and mental health problems, educational difficulties, and juvenile delinquency.ⁱⁱⁱ

While placement stability is often considered a child well-being issue, it also raises safety concerns, especially with rapid placement changes and placing children in foster homes that are not equipped to handle them or are overcrowded. Many of the children entering foster care have a history of trauma, abuse, and neglect. They need a level of parenting and therapeutic intervention that is often much higher than their peers. Foster parents need support from the child welfare agency in order to effectively and safely maintain a placement. Without this support, placements may disrupt.

We know that it is important that children have permanency and stability in their living situations. In fact, the number of placements a child has within the first 12 months in care is one of the performance measures of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs), a partnership between the federal and state governments that examines state child welfare programs. Having three or more placements within a 12 month period is considered “placement instability.”

In order for DHS to ensure placement stability for children in foster care, more certified foster homes need to be available. Current foster parents need better training and support so that they remain foster care providers. A lack of sufficient numbers of foster homes is one of the barriers to placement stability for children, and the focus of the three CAPTA Panels. By examining the same topic, the Panels were able to address the issue from a broad perspective that is more representative of the state as a whole.

The CAPTA Panels worked from August 2015 through April 2016 to identify barriers to foster parent recruitment and retention, developed surveys and focus groups to hear directly from

foster parents about their concerns, and collaborated with community stakeholders to draft recommendations.

The Panels had regular communication with the state’s GRACE Program Administrator about the work of the GRACE program, a federal government grant to six districts in Oregon focusing on the diligent recruitment and support of foster parents. Both Douglas and Lane counties are GRACE counties. The Panels learned that the GRACE initiative has administered three rounds of surveys to foster parents throughout Oregon, although the response rate has generally been low.

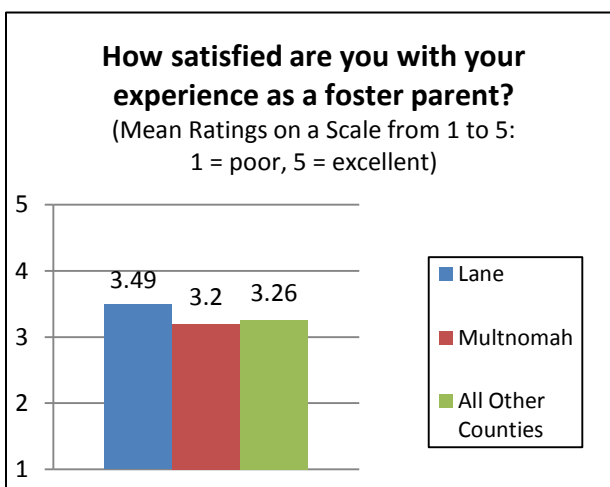
The GRACE Program in Oregon has initiated the following to better recruit and support foster parents:

- All GRACE districts have started constructing Foster Parent Welcome Packets to ensure that all foster families receive timely information and resources regarding the children placed in their care.
- GRACE Action Teams (GATs) in each GRACE district are designed to bring community partners together with DHS to discuss and plan support of foster parents, as well as recruitment and retention demands.
- GRACE/DHS has a partnership with the Portland Leadership Foundation and their Embrace Oregon project in an effort to build stronger relationships within communities and bring customer service and foster parent support needs to the forefront.
- GRACE/DHS will be rolling out a revised Foster Care Customer Service training to local branch staff that will highlight best practice and build on the belief that each participant in the child welfare system is a valued member of the team.

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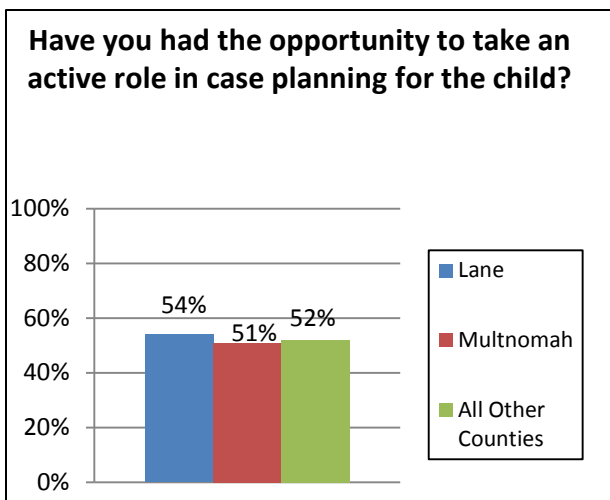
Building on the surveys by the GRACE Program, the CAPTA Panel in Multnomah County developed a foster parent survey. The Lane County Panel chose to modify the survey and use it as part of their information gathering, and the Douglas County Panel relied on the results from Multnomah and Lane counties. Statewide, the survey was completed by 264 foster parents.

three Panels, as well as with members of the public during the public forums in each CAPTA county. The survey results, taken with information gleaned from foster parent focus groups, presentations from the GRACE Program administrator, and other sources, informed the recommendations from each Panel.



On the biggest challenges as a foster parent:
“When DHS calls on a Friday evening and wants to place a child with you just for the weekend. I try to help out but when Monday comes around, there is no place for the child to go. I have had three occasions where the child was to come for the weekend and two of them were with me for 4 years and another one is going on 2 months. I think DHS needs more foster parents.”

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent



On the biggest challenges as a foster parent:
“Burn out...lack of being able to participate in family planning. Because there are not enough homes, being expected to provide care for kids you took as a shelter placement only. Many times you need to get an exception for these kids because it’s over your limit. You do it to help, but then are put in an uncomfortable position to have to ask for a child to be moved because it’s longer than you had agreed and more than you feel comfortable with.”

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent

Among other things, foster parents were asked about the level of information sharing from DHS, their level of participation in case planning, whether they feel supported and by whom, access to respite care and grief counseling, and their experiences with foster parent support groups. The results of the survey were shared with all

The recommendations from each of the three CAPTA Panels, when taken together, provide a strong framework for improvements to foster parent recruitment, support, and retention in Oregon.

Lane County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

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MEETING DATES

September 18, 2015

October 16, 2015

November 5, 2015

December 11, 2015

March 3, 2015

PUBLIC FORUM

March 17, 2016

The Lane County CAPTA Panel focused its work on how to better support and retain current foster parents. Although an important issue, the Panel chose not to focus on foster parent recruitment due to the ongoing work of the GRACE program in the county and its emphasis on recruitment. This is the second of five years of GRACE involvement in Lane County.

After conducting a review of DHS policies and practices, the Panel obtained statistics from DHS about the number of foster homes and the different types of placements in Lane County. In September 2015, there were 560 foster homes, approximately half of which were relative homes. The Panel completed multi-jurisdictional research about successful practices in other states, held focus groups with foster parents, and sent out the foster parent survey. The local GRACE coordinator shared that DHS has already made several recent changes within Lane County, such as the creation of a foster parent advisory board, the development of welcome packets to new foster parents, regular foster parent focus groups, and publishing a newsletter for foster parents twice a month to improve communications. These changes have been viewed positively by both DHS and foster parents.

Foster Parent Focus Groups

The Panel held two focus groups for foster parents to obtain their input about the foster care system in Lane County. The participants at the first focus group were therapeutic foster parents, who receive additional supports from a local service provider. The second focus group was held during one of the Foster and Adoptive Parents Association of Lane County's (FAAPA) monthly meetings. In total, 24 foster parents kindly volunteered their time. Several important themes were identified at the focus groups, including:

Respect – many foster parents do not believe they are respected or that they are considered a member of the child's "team."

Respite care – foster parents would like more respite care. Most foster providers have to find their own respite providers and would like DHS (or another organization) to maintain a list or to cultivate a network of respite providers.

Mentors/Navigators – some foster parents have stated that they could benefit from a foster parent mentor or navigator to help them understand the complexities of the system, especially when they first become foster parents.

Support Groups – Lane County has an active foster parent association that provides support to foster parents. However, FAAPA does not receive any funding and it is often difficult to provide child care during monthly meetings.

Grief Support– many foster parents do not feel adequately supported during the grief process after a child leaves their home.

Lane County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Foster Parent Survey

To hear from a larger group of foster parents, the Panel administered a survey to foster parents. The Panel used the survey created by the Multnomah CAPTA Panel but modified it by adding some extra questions about respite care, foster parent mentors/navigators, mental health services for foster children and support for the grief process. DHS sent a copy of the survey link to foster parents via email and FAAPA also posted the link on its Facebook page. A total of 114 responses were collected from Lane County.

The results from the survey were eye-opening; only a quarter of the foster parents in Lane County receive respite care, though the vast majority of those who do find it to be helpful.

“Finding GOOD respite care is difficult. It is often easier to go without respite care than to use the sub-par respite care that is easy to find. If my preferred providers are not available, we have gone without, as that would be the lesser of two evils.”

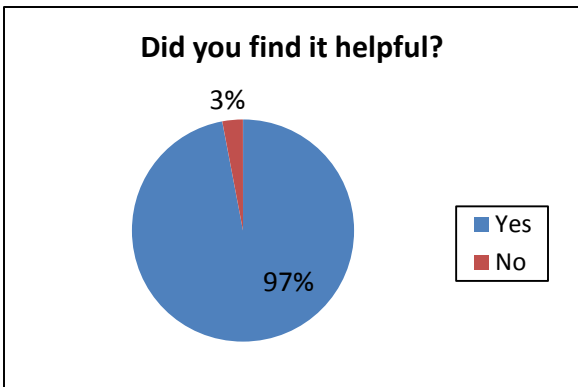
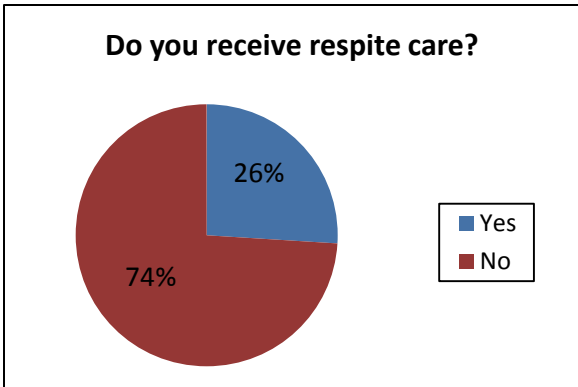
- Foster Parent Survey Respondent

The majority of respondents felt that the lack of clear communication from DHS was an impediment to their ability to provide quality substitute care, and that better responsiveness from the DHS caseworker would improve the satisfaction with being foster parents.

Public Forum

During the public forum, several foster parents in attendance shared the need for an after hours support line for issues that don't rise to the level of a safety risk, but which the foster parents need guidance from a person knowledgeable of DHS policy and procedure. There was discussion about whether DHS could partner with the community help line 211 to provide support specifically for foster families. The 211 help line is not currently staffed by a person with knowledge specific to DHS child welfare. Additionally, 68% of survey respondents indicated that grief support when a foster child leaves their home would be beneficial.

The final issue related to foster parent support and retention is financial- the high cost of child care is often not fully covered by the foster care reimbursement rate, forcing foster parents to pay for the cost of child care out-of-pocket. This is a prohibitive expense for many potential and current foster parents, and is seen as an impediment for both relative and non-relative foster parents. A child care subsidy program would greatly expand the number of potential foster parents in Oregon, both relative and non-relative.



Lane County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Lane County CAPTA Panel Recommendations for Lane County DHS:

1. Respite Care

- Compile and maintain a list of background-checked respite providers and provide this list to foster families.

2. Foster Parent Support Staff

- Secure funding to continue a foster parent retention and support position, modeled after the position currently funded through the Grace Initiative.

3. After Hours Line

- Provide foster parents access to an after hours phone support line with an operator knowledgeable about DHS policy and procedure.

4. End of Placement Support

- Develop and implement closure procedures for caseworkers to carry out with foster parents when a child leaves their care.
- Provide caseworkers with professional development training on the impact transitions have on the foster family. The goal of this training should be to give caseworkers the tools to implement mindful transitions that are individualized, compassionate, and thoughtful.
- Train caseworkers on resources that are available to foster parents who need additional support such as grief counseling and support groups.



5. Child Care Subsidies

- Seek funding opportunities to create and expand a child care subsidy program for children in relative and nonrelative foster care.

6. Communication

- Create a cost benefit analysis on caseworker use of smart phones in order to improve communication and response times with foster families and foster youth.

“As 2 working professionals, it is a must to have him in child care. The cost of child care for just 3 days a week is nearly \$1000 for him. Of course we have made the choice to use a very quality day care, the same one our son is enrolled in and know that DHS does not pay for child care. But between that and extra we spend on him on top of WIC and the basic necessities we are usually way over the reimbursement. We are lucky to be able to afford it at this time. Sadly I know a lot of amazing professionals who would be foster parents if they had assistance with child care.”

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent

Douglas County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

PANEL MEMBERS

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MEETING DATES

September 30, 2015
November 4, 2015
January 13, 2016
February 11, 2016

PUBLIC FORUM

March 17, 2016

The Douglas County CAPTA Panel began their work by examining county, state, and national data and research about foster care. The Panel heard presentations from DHS staff, including the local GRACE Program Coordinator, the foster care certification supervisor, foster parents, and program managers. The data collection, research, and presentations yielded the following information about foster care in Douglas County:

- More than 400 children are in foster care.
- There are 195 foster homes.
- Relative, caregiver, and kith/kin placements are increasing in Douglas County at a rate higher than the national average.
- The local DHS Certification Unit consists of 6 caseworkers and one supervisor – one caseworker performs relative searches, two caseworkers assist adoptive placements, and three caseworkers are assigned to the remaining foster care families.
- In 2015, Douglas County lost approximately 25 (11%) of their foster families, which is less than the national average for foster family reduction.
- DHS does not conduct exit interviews for foster parents leaving the system.
- The process for foster parents to become certified usually takes 4-6 months. As the process is currently structured, it lacks creativity and flexibility for potential foster parents.
- Children are often placed in foster homes due to availability of bed space, not because they are the best match between the foster family and the child.
- Some foster parents feel that they are not respected by DHS due to the lack or absence of: ongoing training, especially child specific training and foster parent rights; timely responses from caseworkers; support during investigations; foster parent mentors or navigators; grief and loss counseling when a child leaves the foster home; and qualified respite care.
- There is currently no active foster parent association or support group in Douglas County.
- DHS currently does not provide periodic or monthly foster parent training, although online training modules are available anytime.
- Word of mouth is the most successful approach to recruiting efforts in Douglas County.

The CAPTA Panel identified an issue of particular concern: the lack of ongoing support for foster parents. Examining the results from the foster parent survey administered in Lane and Multnomah counties, the Douglas CAPTA Panel noticed a theme: approximately 50% of respondents cited a lack of clear communication from DHS as one of the main impediments to being effective as foster parents, and approximately 40% cited the need for better responsiveness from DHS. With the creation of a foster parent support position within the local branch, communication and responsiveness would greatly improve. While the attrition of foster parents in Douglas County is below the national average, it is still concerning

Douglas County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

that they lost 13% of their foster homes in 2015. Improving the support that DHS is able to offer foster parents would lead to great satisfaction from foster parents.

On the biggest challenges as a foster parent:
“Not being treated with respect or included in all the information available about the child and the case. Too often we are not given updates on changes in the case. This needs to change if DHS wants to keep top-notch foster parents caring for these kids. Otherwise, they will continue to lose foster parents and see kids bounce around.”

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent



DHS program managers repeatedly said that current foster parents are the best tool to recruit new foster parents; when current foster parents are not feeling respected by DHS and are not receiving the support that they need to be effective, they stop being a recruitment tool.

Douglas County CAPTA Panel Recommendations for Douglas County DHS:

1. DHS add one full-time foster parent support position to the certification unit to enhance foster parent recruiting, training, support, and retention. The position should:
 - Increase training options for foster parents,
 - Ensure foster families feel respected, valued, and an important member of the team,
 - Create and maintain a foster parent support group and/or foster parent association,
 - Maintain a current registry of respite care providers, and
 - Design and implement an exit interview process for those foster parents who choose to no longer foster.

Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

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Alicia Knox

MULTNOMAH CO. JUVENILE COURT IMPROVEMENT

Mary Geelan

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Liz Delmatoff

MEETING DATES

August 12, 2015
September 24, 2015
October 27, 2015
November 19, 2015
January 21, 2016
February 25, 2016

PUBLIC FORUM

April 7, 2016

The Multnomah County CAPTA Panel chose how to better support and retain foster parents as its area of focus. Initially, information was provided to the Panel that Multnomah had a robust system to support and retain foster parents. For instance, DHS reported that there were more than ten foster parent support groups, including specialized groups for grandparent and Native American foster parents. However, after some investigation by the Panel it was determined that there is only one active foster parent support group in Multnomah County.

The Panel also asked about the foster parent mentor system, which the Panel learned about in last year's work. DHS reported that the list of foster parent who are willing to serve as mentors has been updated with current information. The Greater Metropolitan Foster Parent Association also has a Foster/Adoptive Parent Mentor and Support Team which maintains a list of mentors who provide support for foster and adoptive families and acquaint foster/adoptive families with available community resources. This foster parent mentor network is providing some needed support for new and struggling foster parents.

To learn more about innovative local programs to support foster parents, the Panel toured Bridge Meadows, a co-housing program for elders and foster providers in Portland. The Panel heard from a relative foster parent during its 2014-15 work that the Bridge Meadows program was extremely supportive of her, so the Panel was interested in touring the facility and learning about the program's efforts to support the foster parents who live there. While the program cannot be duplicated for every foster parent in Multnomah County, it does provide a blueprint for how a supportive community approach to foster care can be achieved.

In September and October 2015, the Panel reviewed two surveys which had been used previously with foster parents. The Panel then developed its own survey to learn more about foster parents and their level of satisfaction with the foster care system. The survey was available for foster parents to complete at the Shoulder to Shoulder conference in Portland on October 16. In January 2016, the Panel distributed the survey through email to foster parents listed in the DHS email directory of providers. Panel members also followed up with foster parents who indicated that they wanted to talk further about foster parent support when they completed their surveys.

After reviewing the results of the survey, the Panel identified two main issues: the need for better foster parent training, and the inadequacy of the foster parent reimbursement rate. Multiple foster parents spoke to the need for more population-specific training (ie. teens, young adults transitioning from foster care, culturally specific personal care needs, effects of trauma, understanding and supporting children with various diagnosis, etc.). Much of this is covered in the initial foster parent training, but then never offered again. Some foster parents reported that DHS offers the same trainings year after year, which means that for longer-term foster parents, they may receive the same training

Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

multiple times in order to complete their training requirements for certification renewal.

Survey respondents also commented on the foster care reimbursement rate. In January 2012, DHS lowered the base reimbursement rates for all age groups.

Foster Care Reimbursement: Base Rate Payment (as of 1/1/2012)	
For a child 5 years of age or younger:	\$575 (previously \$639)
For a child 6 through 12 years of age:	\$655 (previously \$728)
For a child 13 through 20 years of age:	\$741 (previously \$823)

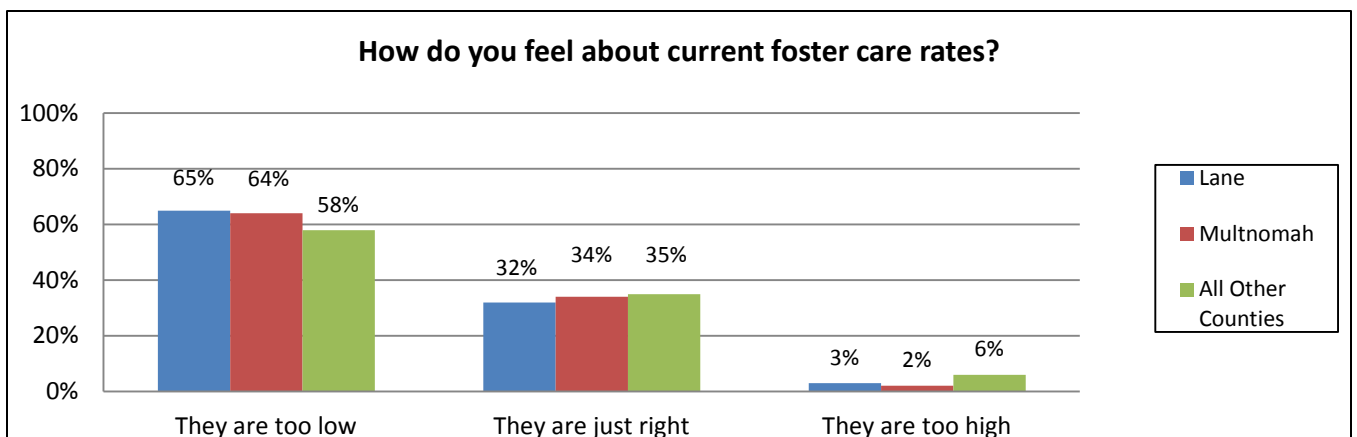
The rate has not increased since January 2012, and many survey respondents indicate that they spend far above the reimbursement rate to provide their foster children with the same care, opportunities, and experiences of other children in the home or neighborhood. Almost all respondents to the survey indicated that even if the reimbursement rate covers the basic costs for the child, it does not cover the cost of child care.

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature passed two new pieces of legislation that ensure that every child in foster care has the opportunity to engage in developmentally and age appropriate extracurricular activities. These new laws were passed to ensure that children in foster care have access to the same experiences and opportunities as children not in foster care. This places a potential financial burden of the foster parents, as the reimbursement rate is meant to cover the cost of the extracurricular activities as well as all other costs associated with the child.

“The foster care rate has been more than adequate to meet the needs of our kiddo; however, the cost of daycare is about double the cost as our current rate and is the only barrier at this time to us having more than one child in our care.”

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent

The state asks foster parents to take children into their home, provide them with love, stability, security and care, as well as opportunities for extracurricular activities, on a reimbursement rate that was reduced in 2012 and has not been adjusted since. For foster parents with a limited income, fostering can be a financial burden on a family.



Multnomah County CAPTA Citizen Review Panel

Multnomah County CAPTA Panel Recommendations for Multnomah County DHS:

1. DHS update the foster parent trainings to include more population and issue specific trainings that address the challenges and concerns foster parents have.
2. DHS seek funding to increase the foster parent reimbursement base rate payment.

"I would like DHS to know this: I love what I am doing and would not trade my life for anything. I care about the children in my care as if they are my own and each child has a special place in my heart. I would like to be treated like a parent and not just a substitute caregiver. I know and hope that most of these children will be able to leave my home and be successful in their return home plan and/or adoption, but I am more than a babysitter. I know these children much better than the caseworker, the lawyer, the CASA or any of the workers involved in their lives. I see their tears, their joys, their fears. Please trust that I have their best interest in mind and that my input is very important. Please trust me with the children you put in my care."

- Foster Parent Survey Respondent



References

ⁱ James, S. (2004) Why do foster care placements disrupt? An investigation of reasons for placement change in foster care. In *The Social Service Review*, December, 2004.

ⁱⁱ DHS ROM site https://rom.socwel.ku.edu/Oregon_Public/MyHome.aspx

ⁱⁱⁱ Children and Family Research Center. (2004). *Multiple Placements in Foster Care: Literature Review of Correlates and Predictors*. Retrieved on November 15, 2009, from: <http://www.cfrc.illinois.edu/LRpdfs/PlacementStability.LR.pdf>