

My name is Kathleen Paydo. My husband, Ron, and I have opened our home to area foster children for most of our 38 year marriage. We have fostered 202 children, some for as little as a few weeks but most long-term, which can be as long as 2 years. We have gained insights with our experience from all of these unique children and their families. I am here today to advocate for day care benefits for foster parents and kinship providers who work or go to school.

Imagine your 12 year old is having a slumber party and the chaos and fun that comes with having 10 little girls sleepover at your house. After 24 hours you are ready for the children to leave, and sit down in exhaustion to recover from the party. This story is what living in a foster home is like everyday, except foster parents don't get that break. The extreme level of parenting that is needed to keep everyone not only thriving but safe is non-stop. Most foster children come from chaotic backgrounds where some form of chronic stress or even trauma has been witnessed. This often leads to supersized behavior problems. Foster parents play the role of detective in trying to understand the behavioral needs and the physical/emotional problems the children come with. Foster parents need help in maintaining the safety, health, and well being of these complex children and daycares can provide that assistance- especially while we tend to work and school responsibilities.

"Trauma parenting"- which is often needed in foster care, requires a high degree of patience, skill, understanding, and stamina. In reality, trauma parenting is where you need to be an active, alert parent at all times and have direct eyeball supervision most of the time. There is very little down time. Even at night time, alertness is necessary. One night (2am) my teen daughter went downstairs to get a Tylenol for a headache and found our 12-year-old on her school issued Chromebook, which was obviously a time when she was not allowed on electronics. Limit setting and redirecting towards appropriate behaviors is a constant job of a foster parent. When each child goes home we start over again with the next placement. The stamina needed not to quit is remarkable.

Daycare is excellent for foster children for many reasons. The first is that it is a new activity that helps broaden their experiences. The children hear directions and rules from others and this helps their thought processing grow and development. A high number of foster children have developmental delays and thrive from the extra activities that daycare provides. Daycare staff also act as an added degree of safety because other adult eyes are on the children frequently for both assessment and safety purposes. Staff sees the children in a different environment and brings to light developmental skills as well as behaviors they witness and document these findings to the foster family and ultimately agency staff. Lastly, daycares provide foster children

with new friends. Foster children often have few friends because they're constantly being moved around so peer interaction is extremely important for social skill development.

Let me walk you through a recent placement I had with 4 foster children who were brothers: they were ages 5, 4, and 3-year-old twins. From the state of Ohio we receive \$100.24 per day reimbursement which is to be used for our increased household expenses that are incurred with extra children. When I need a break for work I would place the four children in daycare. At my daycare: toddler class is \$50 a day per child (\$250 a week) and preschool is \$44 a day per child or (\$220 a week). I had two in each class. The daily daycare cost for my foster children is \$188, an \$87.76 deficit per day from my total allotted stipend for all of the children's daily needs (\$438.80 per week). It was important to Ron and me to keep these siblings together so that's why we took them in, though this cost is a deterrent for many families.

I believe stable daycare can significantly help promote positive lived experiences, strong placements, and fewer disruptions for the children. Ultimately, publicly funded child care alone would be an excellent recruitment tool and would help retain current foster families as well.

An excellent foster care experience supported by a great daycare can change the trajectory of a child's life and even help prevent a broken adult tomorrow! We present foster care to each child as a chapter in their life, where healing will be promoted, gifts and talents will be encouraged, and momentum will be the focus (plus we will have lots of fun days along the way)!

Thank you,

Kathleen Paydo RN
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