

The Texas Foster Care System:

A Consultation Report on Training

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Introduction

Throughout our research of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, we discovered several major flaws within the system that require reform. These flaws include underperformance in reunification and retention rates, decreases in the number of foster and adoptive homes, and underrepresentation of the LGBTQA+ community. Furthermore, research into the training for foster and adoptive parents revealed the need for more training that was customizable yet accommodating to the schedules of prospective parents. Due to the direct impact training has on the quality of parents caring for children and their livelihood, our recommendations for DFPS are within their current training programs. The goal is that improvements in training will lead to improvements in other areas within their current system and benefit the welfare of the children.

Identifying the Problem

Before focusing on how training could improve other pitfalls in the system, we first looked at the foster care system in Texas more broadly. Our research compared the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). Through our research, we gathered information from multiple sources including state websites, web articles, and other organizations. Research into the different processes in foster care helped guide us in assessing the quality of the Texas foster care system. The data gathered analyzed the strengths and weaknesses within the overall foster care system and more specifically, the DFPS.

An area containing crucial information is retention and reunification rates. Upon initial benchmarking, there was a collection of both positive and negative statistics. For starters, the

DFPS found that in 2020, there was a 34.13% reunification rate.¹ The average time of separation was 12.8 months in 2018.² According to the North American Council on Adoptable Children, on average, 56% of children in foster care were reunified in 2018, with an average time separated of 20 months. In this study, they did note that of the 56% of children reunified, 15% of them had been in foster care for over three years.³ While the average time for reunification was significantly lower in Texas than nationwide, the rates of reunification presented a stark contrast. The percentage difference of 21.87% between Texas and the entire country stood out as an area in need of improvement.

Despite lacking in some areas, kinship adoption rates are one of Texas' strengths. According to Texas' CPS, of the 5,270 children that were adopted in 2020, 2,551 of them were by a relative.⁴ This gives a kinship adoption rate of about 48.4% compared to the national average of 36% (Exhibit A). Texas' CPS also stated that in 2020, 2,719 children were adopted by non-relatives, a rate of roughly 51.6%.⁵ According to the DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services), the national average for children adopted by non-relatives was 64% with 52% going to current foster parents and 12% going to other non-relatives (Exhibit A). It was evident

¹ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Child Protective Services (CPS) Conservatorship: Children Exiting DFPS Legal Custody*. Retrieved February 18, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Conservatorship/Exits.asp.

² Pathways Youth & Family Services. (2019). *Foster Care Statistics*. Retrieved February 18, 2021 from <https://www.pathway.org/programs/foster-care/statistics/>.

³ The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). (2019, January 18). *Foster Care Numbers Up for Fifth Straight Year*. Retrieved February 18, 2021 from <https://www.nacac.org/2019/01/18/foster-care-numbers-up-for-fifth-straight-year/>.

⁴ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Child Protective Services (CPS): Adoptions Consummated*. Retrieved February 18, 2021 from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Adoption/Adoptions_Consummated.asp.

⁵ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Child Protective Services (CPS): Adoptions Consummated*. Retrieved February 18, 2021 from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Adoption/Adoptions_Consummated.asp.

that Texas was outpacing the rest of the country in this area, and as a result, we shifted our focus elsewhere.

In addition to reunification issues, we noticed LGBTQA+ disproportionalities, as well as open and unsolved abuse and neglect cases. Based on information found by the Movement Advancement Project, we found a noticeable amount of lacking legislation. To start, the DFPS or any CPA (Child Placement Agency) still maintains the right to deny child placement based on a conflicting religious belief.⁶ There are also no anti-bullying or nondiscrimination laws for LGBTQA+ students in Texas.⁷ As for abuse and neglect cases, a sizable portion of the filings have been ruled out. According to DFPS' website, only 24% of cases were ruled "Reason to Believe" over the last decade, with over one million cases being ruled out entirely. 10% of the cases were unable to be determined, coming out to over 161,000 cases total.⁸

With so many important shortcomings in the Texas foster care system, it is difficult to prioritize just one area to improve. However, we struggled to figure out how to have a positive impact on so many different areas of the Texas foster care system without overhauling it entirely. By the end of that struggle, we concluded that training is the area that could have the most widespread impact. We hope that by improving training, several areas within the system will subsequently improve. As a result, we've collected more data on training.

Data Collection

As we began our research, we used several sources to collect data. We started by going

⁶ Movement Advancement Project. (2021). *Movement Advancement Project: State Profiles*. Retrieved April 20, 2021 from https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/TX.

⁷ Movement Advancement Project. (2021). *Movement Advancement Project: State Profiles*. Retrieved April 20, 2021 from https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/TX.

⁸ Movement Advancement Project. (2021). *Movement Advancement Project: State Profiles*. Retrieved April 20, 2021 from https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/TX.

through the most important data on the Texas DFPS's website. That research included information like the reunification rates over time, annual budget, training requirements, child placement by type, goals set by the DFPS, and removal rates. We moved from the Texas DFPS to the Federal Department of Child Protective Services to find information relating to national averages of the aforementioned data. Finally, we collected information from various non-profit and watchdog groups in the world of foster care to collect any data we could not find elsewhere. By doing this, we came up with three distinct categories of data we could use to triangulate our interpretation and how we were to move forward in proposing a solution.

To implement changes to training, it is first important to understand where the training system in Texas stands. From our initial data collection, we found the training program in Texas, known as PRIDE (Parent Resource for Information, Development, Education) is designed to train foster and adoptive parents together.⁹ The process also involves a home study. On average, a home study in Texas can range from 2 to 6 weeks depending on various background checks required by the FBI and/or the state.¹⁰ The range is also affected by the availability of domestic hosts or stepparents. If there is a requirement for a mailed FBI clearance this period could potentially even be extended, however, there are expedited channels that exist, which could reduce it significantly.¹¹ After the initial PRIDE program, the Texas DFPS requires 30 hours of annual training for single-parent foster homes and 50 hours for two-parent foster homes with children receiving treatment services.¹² Otherwise, the total requirement per year for training is

⁹ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster Parent Training*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/Training.asp#.

¹⁰ Texas Adoption Home Studies. (2021). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved February 15, 2021, from <https://texasadoptionhomestudies.com/frequently-asked-questions/>.

¹¹ Texas Adoption Home Studies. (2021). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved February 15, 2021, from <https://texasadoptionhomestudies.com/frequently-asked-questions/>.

¹² Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster Parent Training*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/Training.asp#.

20 hours.¹³ However, this is not nearly enough information; a full audit of the training system would help us understand the effectiveness and quality of the training parents receive. Before any action is implemented, we would like to go through course syllabi, find an average of the actual amount of training parents go through, and participate in some of the courses ourselves. This will allow for a more holistic view of where the training program must be altered to achieve our overarching goal. Should we follow this path, along with the data we have already collected, we would have a foundational understanding of where the department stands with training, and what aspects of our current solutions may need to be adapted or removed. Once we have implemented changes, we will be able to come back and perform a similar audit to see how much they have affected the training system in the Texas DFPS.

Data Interpretation

The Texas DFPS foster-care training program has a few components that are either strengths or opportunities. However, there are a significant number of restraining forces that hinder its overall effectiveness. The fact that the DFPS is a public entity works strongly in its favor. The department has an annual budget of around 107 million dollars as of 2020¹⁴, which means it can reallocate some of its resources to training and foster parent advertisement should we deem this action necessary. It also works with the federal Department of Child Protective Services to offer reimbursements to parents. This policy may allow parents to participate in more training with a system in place to ensure they are incentivized to do so through some form of payment. On top of this, the Texas DFPS already has training systems and programs in place.

¹³ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster Parent Training*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/Training.asp#.

¹⁴ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (December 1, 2019). *Governors Report 2019*. Retrieved April 15, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Budget_and_Finance/Operating_Budgets/FY20-Operating_Budget.pdf.

This is an invaluable asset, as it means they do not have to reconstruct their entire training; they may simply have to make edits to their original program to develop a more effective means of training.

While the Texas DFPS has a foundation for foster-care training, it is important to note that there are numerous threats to the system in aggregate. The number of foster homes in Texas has been dropping significantly over the past decade. In 2011, there were around 2,600 homes whereas in 2020 there were only around 1,100.¹⁵ On its own, this may be manageable, but the number of foster children entering service has been on the rise. In 2020, over 50,000 children entered service in Texas. If this number continues to rise while the number of homes falls, there could be even more significant issues in the Texas DFPS. While the Texas DFPS may have been able to get by with the number of parents trained in the past, they are now very much reliant on the quality of training that current foster parents have received and are currently receiving. Coupled with this, is the expansion of child placement agencies. In times of overflow of reconsolidation, these agencies can be an asset to the department. However, currently, there are over 350 CPAs in the state, which may create a dependency on them to place children. When possible, it is best to keep foster children in the system, rather than outsourcing to other agencies. Keeping the children in-house may allow for better recordkeeping and a more standardized system.

Lastly, we researched the state's training process. In Texas, foster parents caring for children who only receive child-care services are required to complete 20 hours of training per

¹⁵ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster/Adoptive Homes*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Services/Adoption/Foster_Adoptive_Homes.asp.

year.¹⁶ Training hours differ for foster homes that care for children receiving treatment services. In this case, homes with one foster parent are required to train 30 hours a year, and homes with two foster parents must train 50 hours a year.¹⁷

Data Translation

Having identified the weaknesses in the DFPS we are proposing a few potential solutions Texas could incorporate to create a more robust and comprehensive training program for their foster parents. We recommend that DFPS make changes to the currently existing PRIDE program. This training program is held before parents take a child under their wing and assess parents based on their level of competency. It covers numerous topics ranging from sexual abuse, attachment issues, behavior intervention, and challenges associated with fostering a child. However, this training only lasts between 20-50 hours annually and this is not enough time for understanding and dealing with such complicated issues. We recommend increasing the length of training to at least one hour a week to ensure the information parents are receiving is current and engrained in their practices as a parent throughout their time with a child.

DFPS does currently co-train parents in this program however, several improvements can be done to make it more effective. First, is petitioning for the Assembly bill 407 (AB 507) that has been termed as the “Resource Families: Training topics”. This bill is a great way to improve the training within the foster care system in Texas as it allows training facilities to consult directly with foster parents and create training programs to meet their needs. Increased

¹⁶ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster Parent Training*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/Training.asp#.

¹⁷ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). (2021). *Foster Parent Training*. Retrieved March 19, 2021, from https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Foster_Care/Training.asp#.

customization would further increase the relevance of training ensuring the goals of parents and children are both met. In the state of California, the California Youth Connection had to petition and rally children in the system across the state to create and pass this bill.¹⁸ If DFPS does the same their system would exponentially benefit in the long run. This process would require a high investment of time and resources to be able to create different programs but will positively impact the lives of children across the state.

The second solution we have identified is incorporating the Chamberlain et al¹⁹ model into the training of foster children in the state of Texas. This model has an additional element of ongoing supervision into the training that takes place initially. There is an orientation to begin the training process that usually lasts around 2-3 days where they lay out the training program and the schedule for supervised training that happens after the child is in care. The supervision is extensive and ranges in frequency depending on the parents and their ability to financially and emotionally support the child. Parents are assigned a supervisor that works with them throughout the process to make them more comfortable and not have to work with strangers constantly. This also gives the child an added level of comfort as it ensures he/she will not have to interact with new faces too often. Chamberlain mentions “much of the actual ‘training’ in this model, therefore, comes from this ‘in vivo’ learning, rather than from formal classroom training”(Chamberlain, 1994; Chamberlain and Mihalic, 1998). This increases the level of

¹⁸ Ottaway-Chung, T., Lynch-Novakovic, I., House, S., Alvarez, S., Abong, S., & Writer, G. (2017, October 13). Better Training for Foster Parents Could Have Changed My Life. Retrieved from <https://imprintnews.org/youth-voice/ab507-need-relevant-responsive-resource-family-training/28441>.

¹⁹ Dorsey, S., Farmer, E., Barth, R., Greene, K., Reid, J., & Landsverk, J. (2008, December 1). Current status and evidence base of training for foster and treatment foster parents. Retrieved April 22, 2021, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3108010/#R14>.

retention in parents with the training material as they are allowed the opportunity to implement what they have learned into their parenting.

Third, as identified previously, the DFPS does receive state and federal funding to incorporate into their training and can request more. Using this funding we think they should invest in increasing the stipends for their parents. A study conducted by Chamberlain, Moreland, Reid et al²⁰ showed a direct correlation between increased stipends and willingness to care. The study by Chamberlain found that an increased willingness to take care of a child leads to a direct dampening effect on the level of oppositional behavior their child produced. Hence, better involvement in training and reduced opposition could potentially lead to decreased dropout rates. The study also found that there was an effect on retention with the combination of training and increased stipends which would allow parents to improve their level of care.

Fourth, creating a tailored training program for LGBTQA+ children could help parents better understand the challenges their kids face and help them come with ways to address them. Allowing the children to be involved in these discussions would significantly impact quality as it would incorporate all perspectives and be a thorough and robust training.

Finally, after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that having the ability to do training online is essential. We recommend creating an online training platform where parents can engage in training from the comfort of their homes and accommodate the training to their schedules. Most parents have difficulties sticking to the training schedules owing to misalignment with their

²⁰ CHAMBERLAIN, P., MORELAND, S., & REID, K. (n.d.). Enhanced Services and Stipends for Foster Parents: Effects on Retention Rates and Outcomes for Children. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patricia-Chamberlain-2/publication/21633220_Enhanced_services_and_stipends_for_foster_parents_Effects_on_retention_rates_and_outcomes_for_children/links/5a593e3baca2727d6081600a/Enhanced-services-and-stipends-for-foster-parents-Effects-on-retention-rates-and-outcomes-for-children.pdf.

own and hence, having a virtual platform with recorded lectures and evaluation at the end could allow parents to finish training at their own pace. It would also allow them to revisit the training if they need to while their child is under their care. This could help CPS be assured that the parents are determined to provide the best care possible for their child.

Conclusion

After months of research and analysis, we fully believe in our recommendations for the Texas foster care system. Using research models, mainly Nyquist and Wulff, we followed each step of the framework to identify problems, collect data, interpret that data, and eventually translate it into actionable steps. Petitioning for the AB 507 would allow for more tailored programs to suit each family. Usage of the Chamberlain model will allow parents-in-training the opportunity to apply their learning. Increased stipends will empower more homes to enter the program and increase overall care quality. Tailoring the program for LGBTQA+ children will create more inclusivity and build an understanding environment where all children can thrive. And lastly, online training will modernize the entire process and give people greater access to their training programs.

Following these implementations, we recommend two assessments that can be used to evaluate the system's success. On-site observation during training combined with post-training surveys will help hold the system accountable. This will allow managers to fully understand what their instructors are doing in sessions. It will also ensure that the families being trained can voice their opinion on ways to improve the setup, so the program can continue to evolve. Texas' foster care system is at a critical point in its development. There are areas that need to be refined

and improved. The best way to do this without changing too much will be through evolving the training process.

Exhibits:

A:

Relationship of Adoptive Parents to Child Prior to Adoption	Percent	Number
Non-Relative	12%	7,373
Foster Parent	52%	31,431
Stepparent	0%	55
Other Relative	36%	21,951

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