

Training **MATTERS**



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- NC Division of Social Services
- NC Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Appalachian Family Innovations
- Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want to Hear from You!

If you have questions or would like to comment about something that appears in *Training Matters*, please contact Kathy Dobbs, Child Welfare Services, NC Division of Social Services, 2412 Mail Service Center, 325 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh, NC 27699-2412, Courier: 56-20-25, Tel: 919/334-1176, Kathy.Dobbs@dhhs.nc.gov,

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This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by Mellicent Blythe and John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Foster Parent Training in NC

In July 2010, the NC Division of Social Services asked the Family and Children's Resource Program within the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work to help it assess foster parent training in our state and explore ways it could be strengthened.

The Resource Program reviewed the research on foster parent training, studied other states' approaches, and examined North Carolina outcome and administrative data. It also consulted foster parents and staff members from county departments of social services, private child-placing agencies, and the Division's MAPP/GPS trainers.

In February the Resource Program issued a report that describes fundamental strengths of North Carolina's current infrastructure for foster parent training. The report also highlights the need for a more holistic and comprehensive approach to the continuum of foster parent development needs: from screening and preparation before licensing through post-placement training and coaching. While North Carolina has much to be proud of in its current foster care training system, it has an op-

portunity to make improvements to better meet child and family needs.

How do NC's requirements compare to other states'?

Our training requirements, as well as the system in place for fulfilling them, are illustrated on page 2.

Our requirements are similar to those of many other states. Today the vast majority of states require foster parent pre-service training; most also require some in-service training (Grimm, 2003). About half the states require a specific pre-service curriculum by statute; nearly all specified curricula are MAPP or PRIDE (Dorsey, et al., 2008).

North Carolina's 10 hour per year in-service requirement is in the middle of the 4-20 hour per year range across the country. A number of states have a higher requirement than North Carolina for in-service training during the first year of fostering (Grimm, 2003).

What outcomes does our foster parent training system produce?

Using the current foster parent training system, child-placing agencies recruit, train, and license a large number of foster parents each year. For example, in state fiscal *continued* →

Assessment Findings

- MAPP/GPS is the most common NC foster parent pre-service training.
- Most responding agencies and foster parents are satisfied or very satisfied with the pre-service training their agency uses and believe it supports mutual selection.
- Though generally satisfied, foster parents and agency staff believe MAPP needs updates and its content needs to be expanded.
- 35% of agency survey respondents said their agency didn't have enough foster parent pre-service trainers.
- Foster parents and agency staff agreed that managing children's behavior is the most important foster parent in-service training topic.
- Respondents from private agencies were less likely to see shared parenting and parent-child visits as priorities for in-service training.

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year 2009-10 North Carolina licensed 1,176 new foster parents.

The training provided may have a positive impact on foster parents' attitudes. Research has shown that training can increase foster parents' feelings of competency (Christensen & McMurtry, 2007; Treacy & Fisher, 1993), positive attitudes towards children with behavioral problems (Runyan & Fullerton, 1991) and, in some cases, their parenting skills (Piescher, et al., 2008).

However, given the wide range of case-specific and systemic factors that influence what happens to children and foster families, it's difficult to measure the effect of foster parent training on child and family or administrative outcomes.

This is not just a North Carolina concern. In fact, with the exception of an evaluation of the KEEP behavior-management curriculum (Price et al., 2009) and *Together Facing the Challenge* (Farmer, et al., 2010), researchers have not been able to measure the effect of specific foster parent training curricula on child outcomes (CEBCCW, 2010; Christensen & McMurtry, 2007; Turner et al., 2007, among others).

At the same time, we know the degree to which foster parents are prepared and supported does affect children. Certain outcomes—such as maltreatment in foster care and placement stability—are clearly linked to training goals of realistic foster parent assessment and improved skills, attitudes, and knowl-

edge. Other outcomes—such as length of time in care and success of reunification—can be at least theoretically linked to how well the foster parent training system reinforces such priorities as reasonable efforts for reunification, timely permanency, and shared parenting.

How is the Division responding to this assessment?

The Division is beginning conversations about revising our foster parent pre-service training, exploring tools to screen foster parent applicants, and increasing its emphasis on in-service training. The Division states that “this will be a long-term project but we feel this document and ongoing discussions with our public and private partners will assist us in strengthening our training requirements for foster parents.”

What are the implications for my agency?

Based on this assessment, North Carolina child-placing agencies seeking to strengthen foster parent training may wish to focus on:

Maintaining Model Fidelity. The effectiveness of MAPP/GPS could be undermined if you deviate significantly from the curriculum. For example, although the curriculum strongly recommends the course be co-trained by a foster parent/child welfare professional team, just 14% of private agency staff and 22% of public agency staff say they do this.

The Division has created a MAPP/GPS Leaders listserv to promote networking and help agencies maintain

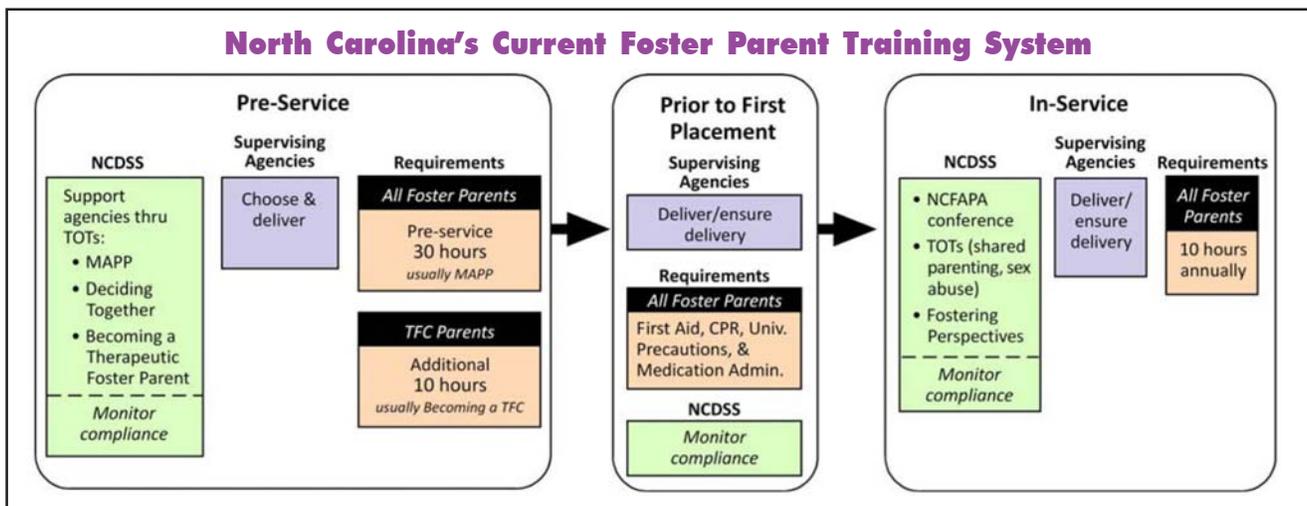
model fidelity. To join, send a request to joanne.scaturro@dhhs.nc.gov.

Coaching. Classroom-based training alone cannot bring about the skill development and practice change we would like to see in foster parents. Coaching of foster parents in their homes could be an important and effective way to develop foster parents and support child placements. Before increasing in-home coaching, agencies should make it clear to applicants and foster parents that they should expect regular, ongoing coaching as a part of their professional development. Agencies should also make sure staff know how to coach effectively. Two Division-sponsored courses teach coaching skills to child welfare staff: *Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents through Teachable Moments*, and *Staying Power! A Supervisor's Guide to Coaching and Developing Child Welfare Staff*. To learn more, go to www.ncswlearn.org (note: these courses have prerequisites).

Finding a Balance. The methodical, ongoing professional development of licensed foster parents has the potential to meaningfully impact child well-being and other outcomes. If you find your agency spends the majority of time and effort on foster parent pre-service training, consider ways you might shift resources to strengthen in-service training.

Read the Full Report

You can find the full report online: <http://tinyurl.com/3og3mzg>



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