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## Report: Agencies Must Forge Partnerships With Foster Families



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A new report emphasizes the importance of good relationships between agencies and foster parents in creating stability for kids. (Latino Outdoors)



PHOENIX – Last year, 20,000 children in Arizona were in out-of-home placement, including foster care. A new report has insights on how to improve their care by giving foster families more of a say in the system.

In the [report](#), researchers from The Annie E. Casey Foundation recommended that foster families be valued as important members of the foster-care team, not viewed as mere beds in the system. Dr. Denise Goodman, a child-welfare consultant, said the people who have the most contact with the child - and hopefully the closest bond - should be given as much training and support as possible.

"A family that they've never met before has to have the skills and abilities to engage a child who they don't know, who is likely to be experiencing a very difficult time," Goodman said. "Particularly those first several days are crucial and require very committed foster parents. "

The report suggested that foster parents be encouraged to develop a strong personal relationship with the child, whereas in years past they were told to keep their distance emotionally to facilitate reintegration with the family. The report also said foster families should be given legal protections and be empowered to make everyday decisions about things such as haircuts, after-school activities and sports.

Torrie Taj, CEO of ChildCrisis Arizona, said her agency works hard to retain staff so they can build strong relationships with foster families, who, in turn, can provide more stability for the children. She said at her agency, only three percent of foster placements are unsuccessful.

"Every move that a child makes in foster care to a different foster provider is estimated to set children behind by one year socially educationally and emotionally," Taj said.

The Arizona Department of Child Safety said it takes many steps to support foster families, including staffing a phone number foster parents can call for advice if they can't reach their child safety specialist right away, and facilitating communication through multiple newsletters and surveys for foster families.

Suzanne Potter, Public News Service - AZ

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