

Fostering Care for Foster Care

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Abstract

In this essay, I will examine the Arizona foster care system and why it is seen as “broken”. I will focus on the need for education, specifically educating the public on what the foster care system is. I theorize that, if the public were more knowledgeable about the foster care system and how it works, people would be more inclined to become foster parents and/or use their voices to speak up for the kids in its care. While there are universal problems in foster care such as aging out and abuse, I believe that if more people are educated and there are more resources available to both the foster child and foster parent alike, these numbers would decrease. I interviewed a foster care licensing specialist and delved into what it takes to become a foster parent, and what current problems children are facing today. I also surveyed the public to gather information about the general knowledge, or lack of, regarding the local system. In conclusion, it is my goal is to educate the public on what foster care is, and hopes of rebuilding and rebranding the foster care system in a better light.

Fostering Care for Foster Care

The phrase “family comes first” is a common mantra in American culture. Families provide children the necessary foundation they need to properly develop and grow into mature, stable adults. What happens if a child’s family cannot provide that stability? What happens if a parent or guardian can no longer provide that necessary care? If either of the former were to happen, a child would be taken into state custody and rehomed. This practice is called foster care. When children are placed into new family units, it can be quite difficult for them to process; they are expected to live with strangers without proper support. This missing support comes in the form of proper education and training for prospective foster parents. Although foster parents are screened and tested before receiving their license, too many unsafe candidates often slip through undetected. This can lead to traumatic experiences stacking on top of the shock of losing a parent or guardian, which has given foster care the stigma of being broken. If more qualified families and adults were educated and encouraged to apply to become foster parents, there would be more safe and stable homes available for children in need. Many adults and parents are fearful of the system, as they believe it will upend their life and destroy what they have already built. Support and education for the foster care system is the essential missing component needed to create stability for all parties involved: the children, foster parents, related guardians, or biological parents. By focusing efforts and funding on developing detailed support infrastructure, the foster care system will reduce its broken stigma, increase the number of quality foster families, and thereby improve its reputation and credibility.

Interview

On March 9, 2020, I reached out to Foster Care & Adoption Licensing Specialist for

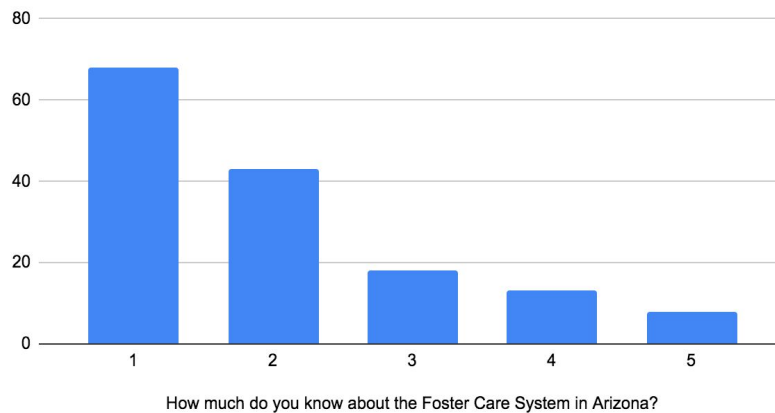
Child Crisis Arizona, Taylor Rogers, via email. We communicated via email for the next few weeks, and she was very happy to help. I had originally imagined that the interview would be in person, but decided to set up an interview via email due to the breakout of COVID-19. On March 19, 2020, I sent her a list of questions and a few days later I received a response. I was curious to learn more about the process of actually becoming a foster parent, and what some of the requirements were. When asked about this, she replied with an in depth summary of the process and requirements of becoming a foster parent. In this she described essentially a four step process to become a foster parent. The first step was a “‘meet and greet’ with an agency of their choice”, followed by an abundance of paperwork. The next step was a “5 week foster parent college” which explains their future duties as a foster parent. After that, a specialist, like Rogers, visits the home to make sure it is safe, and follows all guidelines and precautions. Finally, the specialist’s notes are shipped to the Office of Licensing and Registration, who will then visit the home again to verify its checklist. Once all those steps are completed, Rogers adds, “[t]hen, if all goes well, the family will be licensed!” I was pleasantly surprised to learn of the 5 week college in this process, as it helped solidify my claim that education plays a proper role in foster care. I also asked Rogers if there were any problems in Arizona’s system that she was aware of, and if she had any ideas on how to correct them. She responded, “I believe that there will never be a “perfect” system however I think that some things that we could do better in this community is educate the public on the importance of their voice... Educating others is definitely key in helping Arizona combat child abuse and neglect.” I was very glad to know that Rogers and I were on the same page when it came to education. We both believe that although there may never be a perfect solution, education is the closest thing there is to fixing the system. (T.

Rogers, personal communication, March 23, 2020)

Surveys

To better understand the public's knowledge of the foster care system in Arizona, I conducted two surveys regarding the public's knowledge of the foster care system. In total, I

How much do you know about the Foster Care System in Arizona?

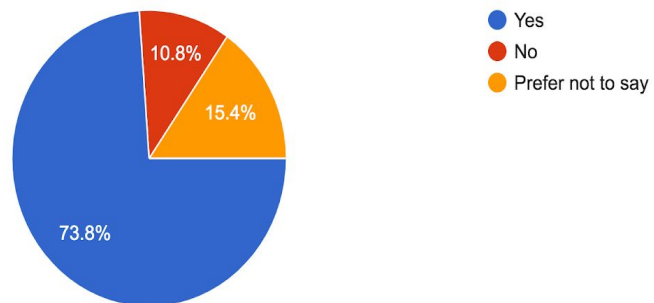


gathered 150 responses from a slew of different people.

When asked on a scale of 1-5, 1 being not very knowledgeable and 5 being very knowledgeable, “How much do you know about the

Foster Care System in Arizona?” 68 people answered 1 and only eight people answered 5 (very knowledgeable). This proves the fact that the public does not know much about the foster care system in Arizona. However, of the 65 people questioned in Survey 1, 48 people believed there was a problem with the foster care system. This just goes to show how much of a stigma there is around the foster care system in Arizona. The

Do you believe there are any problems with the Foster Care System in Arizona?
65 responses

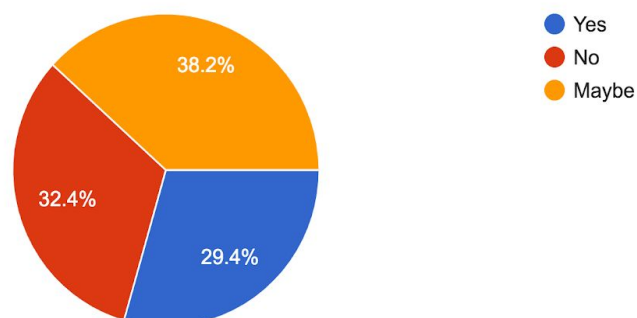


fact that 74% of responders had little to no knowledge of the foster care system thought so poorly of it shows the severity of its negative stigma. In Survey 2, those above the age of 21

(which is the legal age to foster children) were asked if they would consider fostering kids. Of the 34 respondents, it was a pretty even split between “yes”, “no”, and “maybe”, with maybe

leading slightly more than the other two. When asked why or why not they would foster, answers ranged from “I’m already foster parent” to “I am too old at this point in my life.” The

Would you ever consider fostering children?
34 responses



reasonings varied from entry to entry, but one thing that was clear throughout most of the responses was an interest in or support for fostering kids. Most people had reservations about fostering kids because they either did not want to uproot their life to take care of another child, or they just did not know enough about it. One response said they would love to foster, they just did not know enough about it to be able to. Which brings me to my point of publicizing education of foster care. If more people knew what it was and how to handle it, more people would be willing to do so.

Anticipated Solutions

I anticipate that the foster care system will improve if, and only if, the public does not fear it. Since so many people have heard so many negative things about the system itself, many are fearful to partake in it, which leaves the children involved at risk. Instead of a steady stream of capable and excited parents for children, they are cycled through families that may not be the most loving or caring to their kids. Families in the system already may have ulterior motives, but

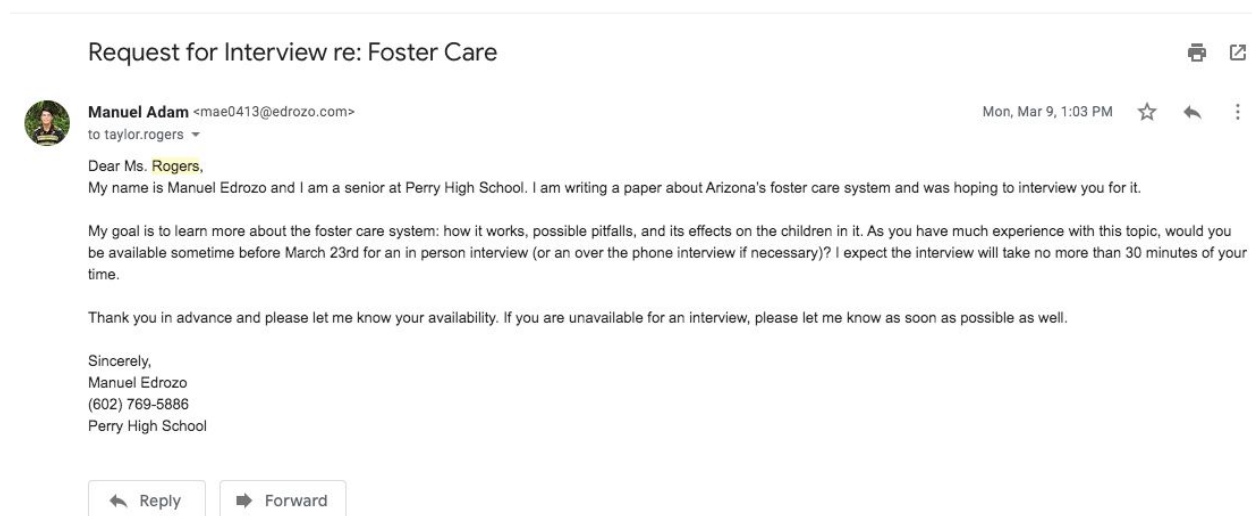
if enough qualified and capable families are involved, it would significantly reduce the number of bad apples in the bunch, leaving a more safe and secure environment for all parties involved. For those children still involved in a negative home life, they would have more people to tell and more individuals to speak up for them, which could save them from someone who uses the system for money. In short, education is key. If people were not so afraid of the foster care system and instead embraced it, there would be more safe spaces for children to call home and have a family. No one would be forgotten or left behind, which is the very definition of family.

References

Rogers, T. (2020, March 23). Email.

Appendices

Appendix A



Appendix B

1. What is your name (and title) and job/position?

My name is Taylor Rogers and I am a Foster Care & Adoption Licensing Specialist for Child Crisis Arizona.

2. What do you do for your job/position?

It is my job to help people become licensed foster parents. What that means is that when a person or couple wants to get into foster care, they have to complete a number of tasks and classes before they can become licensed. Once they complete their required classes, they will be assigned a specialist to conduct a home study and submit for licensing (that's what I do). Once the home study is complete, by me, I send it to OLR (Office of Licensing and Regulation) for final review and from there they send us and the family their foster care license. Once a family is licensed, they can be put on the list to receive a

“placement” or foster child. Once they receive a placement, I will go out to the home to monitor the family and act as a support to the family as they navigate through having a foster child in their home.

3. What is the purpose of Child Crisis Arizona?

Child Crisis Arizona has been serving families in Arizona for over 40 years. Our mission is to provide children and youth in Arizona a safe environment, free from abuse and neglect, by creating strong and successful families.

4. What is a foster parent/what do they do?

A foster parent can be anyone really. It takes commitment and dedication and it is not an easy road. But it is rewarding and so helpful to the community. Foster parents are held to a very high standard as they are stepping in to parent children that are not their own, while the biological parent takes a step back from parenting to work on and develop better parenting skills to keep their children safe. A foster parent is responsible as the physical caregiver for every foster child in their home which includes taking care of them, getting them to doctor’s appointments, therapy appointments, school and giving them a safe environment to live in.

5. What are the requirements to become a foster parent?

To become a foster parent, one has to complete a “meet and greet” with an agency of their choice (Arizona has a ton of foster licensing agencies!) which goes over everything it takes to become a licensed foster parent. Once that is complete, they will fill out paperwork which includes their household information (who lives with them, any children of their own, any pets) financial information for themselves, background checks

on all adults in the home, providing copies of driver's license, fingerprint clearance cards, MVD records, car insurance, etc. The list is extensive and there is a lot of paperwork to do. Once they have completed their paperwork, they will attend a 5 week foster parent college, which goes more in depth about the foster care system and their role as a foster parent. After that, their specialist (someone like myself) will go out to their home, interview all household members and do a Life Safety Inspection of the home. An LSI, is just a home check with a checklist of things that need to be in compliance per OLR. Once that is complete, their specialist will send the home study to OLR and OLR will come out to the home to do one final walk through of the home to make sure it is in compliance. Then, if all goes well, the family will be licensed!

6. What happens if a child ages out of the system?

Unfortunately, children age out all of the time. Sometimes, they are given the opportunity to enter into the Young Adult Program with DCS (Department of Child Safety) which will help them navigate through "adulthood." Once a child turns 18 and is still in foster care, it is ultimately up to the child what they want to do as they are no longer under the care of DCS. However, there are resources given to them to help them figure out life.

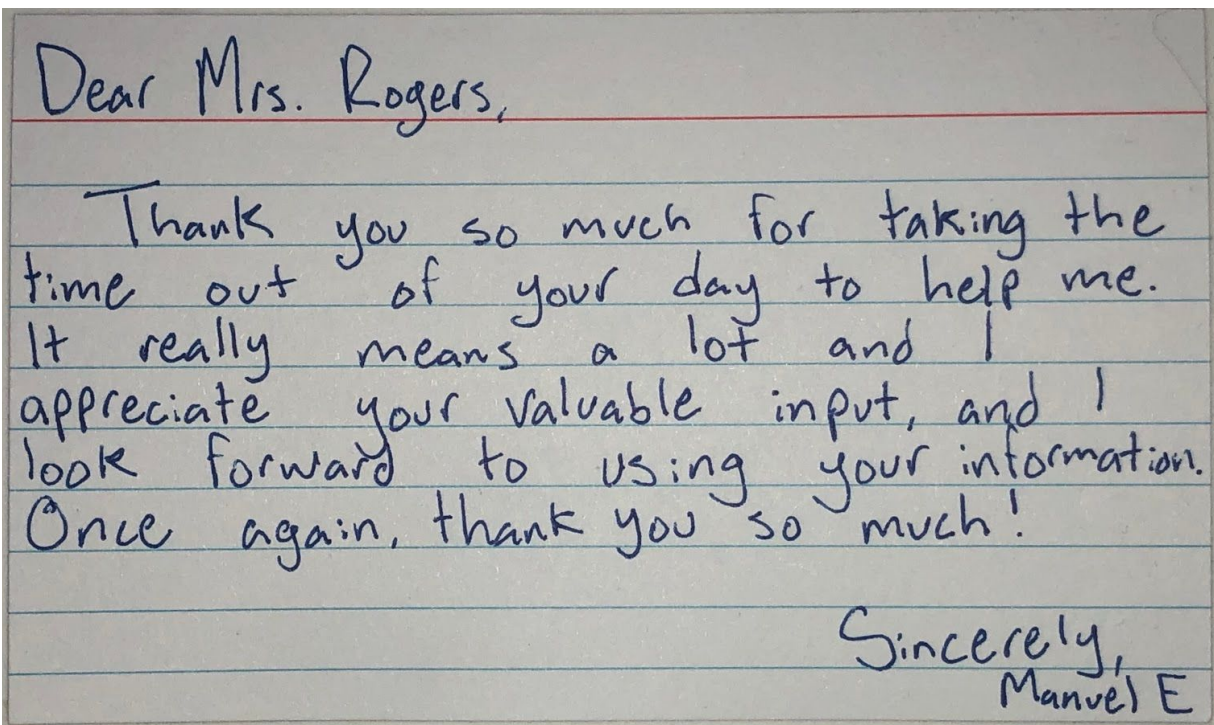
7. What happens when a child needs to be/is relocated?

If a child needs to be removed from their foster home, they will need to be put in a 30 day notice to both their licensing worker and DCS unless it is an emergency removal which includes the child is a danger to themselves or others in the home. In that case, a call to the Child Abuse Hotline will need to be made to have the child immediately removed or disrupted from the foster home.

8. Do you believe there are issues with Arizona's current foster care system? If so, are there any possible solutions? Please explain.

I believe that there will never be a "perfect" system however I think that some things that we could do better in this community is educate the public on the importance of their voice. It is important that the public knows how imperative it is to have their help in stopping child abuse and neglect from continuing to happen or starting. Calling the hotline to report abuse or neglect is essential, becoming a foster parent when we need more homes for children, if you can't become a foster parent you can volunteer or donate. We need more public involvement with our foster care system, and that does not mean media coverage. Educating others is definitely key in helping Arizona combat child abuse and neglect.

Appendix C

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in blue ink. The note is addressed to Mrs. Rogers and expresses gratitude for her help. The signature is 'Manuel E'.

Appendix D

Foster Care System 1

*** Required**

How much do you know about the Foster Care System in Arizona? *

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all knowledgeable ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very knowledgeable

Approximately how many children each year are involved in Arizona's Foster Care System? *

Please do NOT look this up, and take your best guess. This question was asked to measure awareness

Your answer

Do you believe there are any problems with the Foster Care System in Arizona? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

If you said "Yes" to the previous question, please list any problems you see with the Foster Care System

Your answer

Do you believe the Foster Care System can have a lasting negative effect on children? (Psychological, physical, emotional, etc.) *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

How old are you? *

☐ Under 21

☐ 21 or Older (and WILL answer additional questions)

☐ 21 or Older (and will NOT answer additional questions)

Next

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21 or Over

Are you married? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Do you have kids? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Pregnant/expecting

☐ Prefer not to say

Would you ever consider fostering children? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

Please explain your answer to the above question *

Your answer

Back Submit

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Appendix E

Foster Care System 2

* Required

How much do you know about the Foster Care System in Arizona?

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all knowledgeable ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very knowledgeable

Do you know what "aging out" means? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Aging Out

"Aging out" is when a child turns of legal age (usually 18 or 21) and their foster parent has no legal requirement to take care of them anymore. Many times, these new adults are kicked out without any financial aid or assistance, and often end up with no place to go.

Do you believe that aging out is a problem that needs to be fixed? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you know what a group home is? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Group Home

A group home is a house with multiple children of one gender and adults who work in shifts to care for the kids. No one lives in the home with the kids but an adult or adults are present 24/7. These are licensed by the state.

Do you believe that a group home is a good place to house children? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Depends on the child's age

Submit