Voluntary Closure Study: Former Foster Care Families in Arizona
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I. Executive Summary

The former Division of Children, Youth and Families, now the Division of Child Safety and Family Services (Division) requested ASU’s assistance in 2013 with the development, administration and analyses of a survey designed to better understand foster parent recruitment and retention within Arizona’s foster care system.

The Division is deeply committed to the goals of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes. This survey of family foster homes who voluntarily discontinued foster parenting establishes baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It also attempts to respond to a number of the retention issues reported by agency stakeholders within Arizona’s 2008 second round federal Child Family and Safety Review (CFSR) (Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2008).

In 2008, Arizona was one of only 19 states to be in substantial conformity with federal CSFR standards regarding Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention (Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau). Arizona received a rating of “strength” in this area because the State was found to have in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families.

In 2012, Arizona was ranked by the Foundation for Government Accountability as the second best state in the nation for establishing “Forever Families ASAP” (Bragdon, 2012). In addition Arizona was ranked as a Top 10 state both in 2006 and 2012 for, “Which State Child Welfare Systems Are Right for Kids?” (Bragdon, 2012).

National studies have estimated over half of foster parent cease providing care within one year of their first placement (Gibbs, 2005). Respondents of this survey reported an average length of service of 3.28 years.

- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 4.92 years stated their primary goal was altruistic, responding to the need for foster care in their community (17% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 2.81 years stated their primary goal was temporary care for a child (13% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 2.51 years stated their primary goal was adoption (29% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 1.75 years stated their primary goal was legal guardianship (7% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 1.31 years stated their primary goal was temporary care (23% of respondents).

Over 85% of the survey respondents indicated they felt they were successful in meeting their primary goal in becoming a licensed foster parent.

Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated they felt child placements in their homes were consistent with their preferences. Comments from those who felt placements were not consistent
indicated that once a need outside of their preferences was made known, most accepted the placement and did not feel negatively about their decision.

Primary closure reasons reported by survey respondents were adoption (43%) followed by other life priorities. Comments made by foster parents who had closed due to adoption, indicated a number of them would be interested in providing some care in the future but needed time to stabilize their newly formed family unit. Dissatisfaction with either the Division or licensing agencies represented only 14% of the respondents.

Survey respondents also were invited to share suggestions for improving the experience of foster parents. Their responses included: More involvement in the decisions about a child’s welfare (22%); More appreciation and respect from DES/CPS and/or Licensing (21%); Additional funds to support the needs of children in my care (12%); Behavioral Health Services that provide more adequate care (12%); Additional Child Care or Respite services (9%); and Better Supports for Kinship Parents (7%)

In addition to the set of survey questions, a separate opportunity was provided for former foster parent to communicate their interest in re-opening their license. Ninety-seven individuals responded to this question:

- Thirty percent were not interested in re-opening their license.
- Forty percent indicated that they were interested in re-opening their license
- Thirty percent reported being unsure of whether or not they were willing to reopen their license.

Recommendations and opportunities for consideration include:

- Utilize Administrative Data from Licensing Records in the assessment of survey responses.
- Inquire at the point of licensure as to the intended goals are for foster parenting, including what time frame they are hoping to accomplish those goals in.
- When a foster home closes their license due to adoption, ask permission to follow up with them down the road for consideration of re-licensing, either for foster care or even respite services.
- When a child-specific home (kin or non-relative) closes their license, inquire about the interest in continuing to provide services to a community child (non-related) or in providing respite services to other foster families.
- Administer this survey on a continuous and ongoing basis.
- Involve Foster Parents, HRSS Licensing Agencies, Foster Parent Associations, and other Stakeholders.
- Fully support foster parents and relatives in the care of children placed in their homes.
- Continue targeted recruitment with messages specifically aimed to capitalize on new areas of interest in the general public related to foster care and/or adoption.

The creation and administration of a survey for foster homes who voluntarily discontinue foster parenting services is intended to establish baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It supports the Division in reporting progress against federal CFSR outcomes, responds to issues identified by stakeholders, utilizes collaborative partnerships, and reflects the voices and experiences of foster parents with the ultimate goal of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes for Arizona’s children in need of out-of-home care.