

FOSTER SHARE 1

"Foster Share" is an informational flyer produced by the California Coalition of Foster Family Agencies (CCOFFA) for our California State Legislators

Our State Legislators have to deal with thousands upon thousands of issues that cover hundreds of areas of interest, and it is impossible for any individual to understand all the nuances in any given arena, no less all of them. The purpose of this newsletter is to help our Legislators, or at least their staff, gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and demands of the foster care industry in California. Approximately one fifth to one quarter of all children in foster care nationally resides in California. Major changes are being made to limit the number of children being placed in foster care and to shorten their length of stay "in the system" before being able to have a permanent family with which to live. "Foster care" is a broad term that actually covers at least three major types of out-of-home, non-relative care and that is the focus of this edition of "Foster Share".

County Foster Homes

- Families are recruited, trained, and licensed by the County of residence to become foster homes.
- Generally speaking, county licensed foster homes work with children that are younger and/or commonly present fewer problem behaviors.
- Children in placement are normally seen by their County Social Worker monthly, have regular family visitations, regular medical and dental appointments, and may have counseling.

Foster Family Agencies

- Families are recruited, trained, and certified by the licensed private foster family agency (FFA) to become foster homes.
- Children *cannot* be referred to an FFA unless they qualify as a "special needs" child. Most commonly, "special needs" children are children who have failed in a number of county foster home placements. These children tend to have exhibited strong behavioral issues such as on-going defiance, anti-social behavior, special medical needs, psychological and/or emotional maladjustment and the like. At times "special needs" may be as simple as having a home that can take a large sibling group when there are no county foster homes with enough room at that time.
- Children in placement can be seen as commonly as weekly by the FFA Social Worker, have regular family visitations, regular medical and dental appointments, as well as doctors' visits for any medical conditions and/or medication monitoring, and most have regular counseling sessions, and some also have additional group therapy appointments.

Group Homes

- Group homes are developed by non-profit organizations and are managed and supervised 24/7 by hired staff.
- Generally speaking, children are referred to group homes when their behaviors are such that they need closely monitored care. Clients are placed in "treatment driven" group homes, meaning homes that specialize in working with youth who have chemical dependency issues, or are sexual predators, or are diagnosed as severely emotionally disturbed, etc. Frequently, group home clients have had multiple failed foster home placements.
- Children in placement are normally seen by their Group Home Social Worker weekly, and some daily, they may have regular family visitations, regular medical and dental appointments, as well as doctors' visits for any medical conditions and/or medication monitoring, and most have regular counseling session (frequently in the group home), as well as additional group therapy sessions.

County Foster Homes

- Homes are served by county social workers who may, depending on the County, be overseeing anywhere from 25 to 60 children. After hours emergency help is usually provided by the County's Child Protective Services division.
- County foster homes are monitored by the County that issued their license.
- In August 2007, California State Legislators granted County foster homes a 5% rate increase which was scheduled to go into effect in January 2008. However, in light of the current budget crisis, the Administration has proposed that they not receive the 5% rate increase, and that there be a 5% rate decrease of their prior rate. A 60 day disbursement delay has also been proposed.
- County foster parents are reimbursed approximately 55% of what the Feds say it takes to properly care for a child (see attached article).

Foster Family Agencies

- Homes are served by FFA social workers who can serve a *maximum* of 15 children each. This means that Foster Family Agencies incur two to more than four times the cost for social workers to meet the needs of the special needs children they serve compared to the Counties. Virtually every FFA provides 24/7 on call support services by their own social work staff.
- FFA foster homes are monitored by both their Foster Family Agency and Community Care Licensing, the State agency that oversees FFAs.
- FFAs' last rate increase was given in January 2001. Despite increasing costs of living for the foster parents and employee related costs for the FFAs, there are no scheduled rate increases for FFAs in the foreseeable future. With the current budget crisis, the Administration has proposed a 5% rate decrease as well as a 60 day disbursement delay.
- FFAs are reimbursed only half of what the Feds say it takes to properly care for a child (see attached article).

Group Homes

- The children in group homes are served by social workers, as well as hired staff (commonly at least 2 staff each shift) who provide 24/7 direct supervision for a maximum of 6 children in placement in a group home. Thus over a 24 hour period, there can be 8 to 9 staff per group home, as well as a Supervisor and overseeing social worker.
- Group homes are monitored by both their agency, Community Care Licensing, the State agency that oversees group homes, as well as oversight committees through the County.
- In August 2007, California State Legislators granted group homes a 5% rate increase which was scheduled to go into effect in January 2008. However, in light of the current budget crisis, the Administration has proposed that they not receive the 5% rate increase, and that there be a 5% rate decrease of their prior rate. A 60 day disbursement delay has also been proposed.
- Even with the scheduled 5% rate increase, group homes are reimbursed only 55% of what the Feds say it takes to properly care for a child (see attached article).

FYI, Counties commonly state that Foster Families Agencies get paid so much more money than it costs them to do foster care. However, in saying that, they are comparing the amount their County foster parents are paid (while NOT factoring in any of their operating costs) with the rate paid to the FFAs, which covers ALL the expenses incurred by the FFA (staff salaries and benefits, rent, transportation costs, utilities, supplemental services to the children, etc.). If ALL costs are factored in, the price paid to care for a foster child in County foster homes or FFAs is virtually the same, with the FFAs providing significantly more services to the children and foster homes.

In case you weren't aware, the reason why (private) Foster Family Agencies came into existence in the mid-eighties was that prior to the advent of FFAs, there were just County foster homes (to work with the easier children) and groups homes (to deal with the more challenging children), with the group homes being incredibly more expensive than the County foster homes. The FFAs came into existence to bridge the gap and deal with the more challenging children while still presenting a significant savings over the cost of group homes.