

Real Life Reunification...It Takes A Village.

By Elizabeth Freeland



"It takes a village to raise a child." We have all heard that phrase and here at DFS and it rings true! June is National Reunification Month and I wanted to reflect on how each one of us plays a part in the family's reunification. Everyone invested with a family receiving services from DFS wants to the best for the children involved.

We need to take a step back and refocus and commit to doing what is best for the family while ensuring the children's safety. The family (parents and children) are given a case plan through cooperation with their case worker to mitigate the safety concerns that brought the family to our attention.

After the children are removed, our families are 'lost' or 'feel broken'. How can we help them 'heal'?

I'd like to share with you a story about a family of eight I recently reunified. All in all, it was a two-year process with many accomplishments and setbacks along the way. If it were not for the foster family and their co-parenting style, I might have lost this family. The birth mother and I had a good relationship and good communication, but that was not enough for this family. Our team consisted of probation, therapists, foster parents and agency workers. As a team, we

worked well together, but the biggest impact for this family was the relationship that had been built between the birth mother and one of the foster parents.

I understand it might be difficult to let the adults in who hurt or neglected the kiddos that you are caring for in your home, but it truly is in their best interest. This foster family was able to offer a connection between the parent and child that we do not normally see.

Almost daily, they maintained phone contact, letting the birth mother know what was happening with the kiddo. They let her know of school activities or, on occasion, school infractions.

I can recall one instance where the birth mother let me know that the child was in trouble before the foster parents had a chance to let me know. This relationship also continued over to help facilitate open visitation with co-parenting. If the child was on restriction in the foster home, the birth mother continued it at home and vice versa.

When we work as a team, we succeed!



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