Foster Care: The Good, The Bad, and The Necessity for Reform

Too many orphans and homeless children have died due to their lack of proper care. The foster care system is not working as effectively as it can and as it needs to. Given that over 500,000 children are in foster care, the ineffectiveness is unacceptable (Puig). The American government should institute a foster care system that is more beneficial towards children by making the system more cohesive and coordinating among agencies across the nation to increase child morale, care, and experiences. System reform will improve the health of children in foster care and group homes.

Our current foster care system doesn’t seem to be working. The government has experienced major issues with the system, and a large percentage of lobbyists believe that it should be reformed. Princeton’s journal suggests that America’s current foster care system is “really not a cohesive system but a combination of many overlapping and interacting agencies, all charged with providing services, financial support, or other assistance to children and their families. Lack of coordination among assorted agencies, underfunding, and low enthusiasm have led to a system that hurts everyone involved in it” (Bass et al). Many have been negatively affected by the lack of organization, including nineteen-year-old Brian Jackson, who was being
starved by his adoptive parents, dug through trash for food, and weighed only forty-five pounds (Bass et al).

America’s need for an effective and efficient foster care system is increasing. There has been significant growth in the number of children introduced to foster care, with infants and young children being the fastest growing age groups, displaying the utmost importance of good child welfare, as these ages are crucial for physical and mental health and development. Over two-thirds of the children in the system are reunited with their families, though a third of the children stay in care for over thirty months (Wulczyn, et al). Foster care agencies have begun to rely on relatives as foster parents, as relatives already have bonded with the children. This can become a problem, due to the lack of professional childcare service training that “traditional” foster parents receive. Kinship caregivers are also offered fewer services than non-kin foster parents in spite of the fact that kinship caregivers have more needs. Relatives frequently encounter barriers to services that are granted to non-kin caregivers. The American government needs to treat kinship caregivers with the same level of privilege and respect that most others receive, and that will promote further involvement in foster care and encourage other families to participate in the system. Almost two-thirds of America’s entire youth population has experienced at least one traumatic event during their life. Youth in foster care particularly have a high exposure to traumatic events such as child abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, and the violent death of a loved one. Youth in foster care are also significantly more likely to have been abused or neglected directly (Dorsey). Foster care is meant to act as a safe place for abused children that have been removed from their families, but that is, on many occasions, not the case. A large
percentage of the children in foster care have encountered further abusive situations. Even in good situations, the foster care system is fraught with problems: The number of children and families who require foster care services has grown substantially over the past two decades, and these families are typically dealing with many challenges like mental illness, unemployment, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Child welfare agencies face a lot of organizational challenges that restrain their ability to provide appropriate case management, services, and supports to the children and families in their care (Bass, et al). Along with children leaving juvenile care systems (100,000 annually), children exiting the foster care system (over 25,000 annually, usually at age eighteen) frequently encounter poverty, low education, unemployment, and issues with housing (Muller—Ravett, et al). These problems contribute to a difficult transition to adulthood, including issues with college attendance and acquisition of degrees. Even though more people are going to college, low-income youth (especially fostered children) have a much lower probability of attending college. As little as 4% get a degree (Kirk, et al). All of these issues can be lessened with careful reform and adjustment to the system.

Organizations have proposed reform ideas and performed social experiments, all of which could potentially better the child welfare system when put into effect. Many agencies and organizations are working together to reform and refine child welfare policies. In 2005, The Stuart Foundation funded The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning (CFTL) and the Learning and Mental Health Advocacy Services (LMHAS) to achieve collaboration with California’s public education and child welfare. They created the California Education Collaborative for Children in Foster Care, charged with finding ways for public education and
child welfare to work together, along with convening regional meetings to bring influential players together to better discuss research in their communities at a county level (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning). This was a great first step to bring to pass changes. In 2011, Cottage Housing, Inc., instituted a program called Serna Village, in which 293 children from over 150 families lived for a period of seven years. The program proved effective, with interesting results: Outcomes from the program illustrate that it is possible to end recidivism into the child welfare system for homeless families by providing them with permanent housing and comprehensive support services. Although homeless and marginally housed families have high rates of involvement in the child welfare system, this study found that permanent and stable housing, social support and case management services can prevent these disenfranchised families from re-entering the foster care system. The intervention of supportive housing—housing and services focused on the unique needs of adults and their children exiting homelessness—may break the cycle of abuse and neglect among these families (Lenz—Rashid, et al).

This may be a solution to the housing issues. The results prove that these housing programs can provide homeless parents and their children with stable living for a significant period of time. Supportive housing programs also may give homeless parents an opportunity to find and keep jobs, work on their education, save a substantial amount of money for move-out costs, learn daily living skills, experience a real-world living situation and prevent re-entry into the child welfare system (Lenz—Rashid, et al). Teachers in three counties: Orange, Fresno, and Sacramento have discussed the issue of improving education for children in foster care: “One teacher — a foster parent herself — noted that the foster parent approval process can be
expedited for teachers (similar to the streamlined approval process in place for family members), taking as little as 30 days. She enjoyed it so much that she encouraged other teachers to consider becoming foster parents, and she wanted to help start a foster parent recruiting campaign specifically for teachers” (Center for Teaching and Learning). The teachers also saw the community as an "untapped” resource for potential foster parents, as the need for parents is large but the supply miniscule (comparatively). They have continued to encourage the community to vote for better child welfare. Their efforts at reforming child welfare are working, and many reform laws are already on the waiting list. This proves that united, seemingly insignificant people can accomplish a monumental purpose.

Although this nation’s child welfare system has many edges that need not be cut, and many splinters that need to be sanded out, people are working to polish child welfare through appealing to the public via social media and through the Internet in general. People have fought and fought to get children better care and in recent years are starting to achieve their purpose. Many neglected children have nowhere to go and are in horrible situations, but that can be changed. People should vote to reform America’s foster care system to help children nationwide with their safety, education, health, and development.
Works Cited


Lenz-Rashid, Sonja, and Foundation Sierra Health. "Supportive Housing For Homeless Families: Foster Care Outcomes And Best Practices. Summary."

