SESSION I

ORIENTATION TO

FOSTER CARE, ADOPTION, AND KINSHIP CARE

Skill Set and Competencies

Skill Set: Basic understanding of foster care, adoption, and kinship care

1. Aware of the primary goals of child welfare services. Aware of the types of services that can help abused and neglected children and their families.

2. Aware of the differences between foster care, adoption, and kinship care. Aware of the purpose of each type of care in the child welfare system.

3. Aware of why it is important for caregivers and adoptive parents to assess their ability to care for abused and neglected children.

Agenda

I. An Overview of Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care
II. Rules of the Road
III. Goals of Preservice Training
IV. Video: Diary of a Metis Child
V. Nuts and Bolts: Specific Program Information

Handouts

#1 Goals of Preservice Training
#2 Diary of a Metis Child: Focus Questions
Section I.  

15 minutes

An Overview of Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care

Introduction

Trainer Instructions: The trainer should welcome participants to the training and introduce himself or herself. The trainer should outline basic housekeeping details, including location of, and plans for, the following:

- Rest rooms
- Vending machines
- Smoking arrangements
- Schedule of training, including breaks

The trainer should explain that trainees must sign in at each session in order to receive credit for their participation. The trainer should stress that trainees must attend all 8 sessions as part of completion of the family assessment (homestudy) for foster care or adoption.

The trainer should ask participants to find a partner (not their spouse), interview the partner, and then briefly introduce each other to the larger group.

Section II.  

30 minutes

Rules of the Road

The trainer should review a prepared flip chart that lists the following Rules of the Road:

- Attendance policy regarding missed sessions
- Sessions will start and stop on time
- Both parents in a two-parent family must participate
- Participants must sign in for each session
- If trainees decide not to return to classes or follow through with an application, they must call the trainers to discuss their reasons
- Any other rules established by trainer or agency

The trainer should review the Rules of the Road with trainees and post them on a wall during the next two to three sessions.
Trainer Instructions: The trainer should ask participants if they have children. The trainer should then ask if any of them have a picture of one of more of their children. The trainer should ask for one parent's pictures and walk around the room showing each of the participants the picture. When all have seen the child(ren), the trainer asks the parent, “If something happened to you today, would you feel comfortable having anyone in the room take care of your child(ren)?” Parents will likely respond negatively. The trainer should ask, “Why not?” The parent will usually respond, “Because I don’t know these people, they are strangers.” The trainer should then ask the parent, “What would you need to know about these people to help you feel more comfortable in allowing them to care for your child(ren)?” After the parent responds, the trainer should ask the large group to add things that they would want to know about people who would care for their children. The trainer should explain that the purposes of Preservice training, and the foster care or adoptive family assessment are: (1) to help participants make an informed choice about whether to become caregivers; (2) to begin to prepare participants to care for children; and (3) to begin to develop a team approach between caregivers and the agency.

Section III.  15 minutes

Goals of Preservice Training

Use: Handout #1

Trainer Instructions: The trainer should distribute Handout #1, Goals of Preservice Training, and briefly outline the following goals of Preservice Training.

To promote awareness and self selection based on realistic criteria, and to begin educating prospective parents and caregivers about what they can expect from foster or adoptive parenting

Prospective parents and caregivers need considerable information before they can make an informed decision about whether to parent a child not born to them. Are they able to parent a child who has been traumatized by maltreatment and separation? What age child could they be most successful in parenting? Should they consider foster care, kinship care, adoption, or legal risk adoption? Prospective parents should fully understand the various options, and be given opportunities to explore their expectations of themselves, their spouses, their “permanent” children, and their extended families. Prospective parents also need to know what they can expect from the children in care, their birth families, the agency, and the community.
To promote an atmosphere for mutual assessment and exploration of each prospective parent’s values, strengths, and needs

Each participant will have to determine whether they have, or can develop, the necessary skills and attributes to meet the challenge of providing foster care, adoption, or kinship care. The caregivers or parents must also decide if any aspects of the current child welfare system are in sufficient conflict with their personal value system that they will not be comfortable working within the system. As an example, some foster caregivers believe that spanking is an appropriate form of child management. However, in child welfare, corporal punishment is not permitted for several reasons, which will be more fully discussed in a later session. Therefore parents and caregivers must decide whether they can be comfortable working within the rules and policies set by the child welfare system.

If prospective parents or caregivers decide to withdraw from the foster care or adoption process, they will not be negatively judged or labeled. Trainees are not "bad people" for coming to this decision; they are just honest and willing to accept their own personal limitations and the realities of the foster care, adoption, or kinship care system.

To create an awareness of the commonalities and differences between fostering, adopting, and providing kinship care services

Parents and caregivers might consider the job of caregiving for a variety of personal reasons. Prospective parents and caregivers may have room in their home for another child and want to offer it to a child in need. They may have wanted a larger family and see this as a way to achieve this need; or parents and caregivers may want to help maltreated children. There is nothing wrong with any of these motives. Prospective parents and caregivers should be encouraged to consider which of the options will best help them achieve their personal goals.

Each type of caregiving is unique, even though they have similarities. Let’s briefly explore these commonalities and differences.

Foster Care: The job of foster caregiving has some very specific requirements. Foster caregivers provide temporary care for children whose families are experiencing a crisis. Most often, the goal of foster care is to reunify (or reunite) children with their families. The foster parent will be expected to work jointly with the agency to achieve this goal. For instance, the foster caregiver may be asked to transport the child for visits with the birth family, attend planning sessions with the child's family, or teach and mentor birth parents in parenting skills. These activities help strengthen families, and maintain the birth parent/child relationship, both of which support rapid reunification.
**Adoption:** Adoption is the creation of a permanent, emotional, and legal parental relationship between a child and person(s) to whom the child was not born. The adoptive parent has full, permanent responsibility for the child, and the relationship is legally identical to the relationship with a child born to the family. Adoption can only occur after a juvenile court judge has permanently terminated the rights of the child’s biological parents and given the agency custody and legal authority to place the child for adoption.

**Legal Risk Adoption:** Some caregivers may be interested in foster-to-adopt or “legal risk” adoption. This arrangement is relatively new in the field of child welfare. In some situations, the agency may seek placement for children who will likely become, but are not yet, legally free for adoption. There may be several reasons the agency believes permanent custody is likely. For example, the child may have been abandoned. The birth parents may have previously lost permanent custody of another child. Or, there may have been extreme sexual or physical abuse by the parent, indicating it is unlikely that the child will go home. If the child can be placed in a foster-to-adopt home, when permanent custody is granted, the child will not have to move again. This greatly reduces separation trauma.

However, in the vast majority of case situations, the agency will make sincere and reasonable efforts to strengthen the child’s own family and reunite the child with his or her family, prior to filing for permanent custody. The caregiver will often be asked to participate in this effort. This places caregivers in a potentially stressful situation, one which can be emotionally draining for them and their families. There is never a guarantee that the child will remain in the caregivers’ home, nor that they will proceed to adoption. However, the stability afforded a child in a foster-to-adopt home is the primary concern.

**Kinship Care:** Kinship care provides care and safety for children, as well as support for their families, within the context of extended family relationships. The goals of kinship care are similar to those of foster care. A child in kinship care could also come into permanent custody and become legally free for adoption. Hence, kinship providers also have the potential to become adoptive parents. Kinship care promotes continuity for the child, reduces stress associated with separation and placement, sustains cultural identity, and minimizes the number of changes to which a child must adjust.

These similarities and differences will be explored throughout the Preservice sessions.

**To promote team building among the foster parent, birth parent, adoptive parent, agency staff, and community resources**

Child welfare is a team effort. As is true of any team, each member has defined roles and responsibilities. If team members don’t understand their own and each others’ roles, the entire team is hampered. Preservice training promotes understanding by various team members of the roles and responsibilities of the other members. Without this empathetic understanding, services will not be well planned and coordinated. It is easy for persons
involved with the child to blame one another for resulting problems. Thus, children in care may be further damaged by ineffective service provision.

**To assure safety and improve the quality of care provided to children who live in foster, adoptive, or kinship homes**

Preservice training classes are designed to help improve the care received by children who are in foster, adoptive, or kinship homes by preparing caregivers to meet these children's special needs. Most caregivers and parents will need ongoing training to achieve this goal. Children also have an absolute right to safety and nurturance while in placement. To this end, it is necessary to perform such safeguards as family assessments, records checks, references, safety inspections, and finger printing of applicants. Preservice will help caregivers better understand these requirements and their rationale.

**To reduce the number of moves for children in foster care, kinship care, and adoption**

Children are generally placed in foster and adoptive homes because of prior abuse or neglect. Additionally, each time a child is moved from one home to another, the child can be further damaged. As a result, many children in care are angry, anxious, and depressed, and they may act out their feelings. Children who need foster or adoptive homes also have challenging behaviors that will be directed at the caregivers or new parents. Caregivers must be prepared to understand and deal with these behaviors in a constructive manner that also meets the child’s developmental and emotional needs. Research shows that in adoptive families, the behavior of the child usually does not determine the success of the placement. It is the preparation of the caregiver or parent to deal with the behavior, as well as supportive services to the caregiver, are the primary factors determining the success of the placement (Goodman, 1991). Thus, preparation and training are essential if we are to prevent placement disruption, and promote stability for children in care.

**To initiate and promote the establishment of a support system for parents and caregivers within the foster care, adoption, or kinship care system**

When applicants express their goals or dreams of becoming foster, adoptive, or kinship care providers, their extended family and friends do not always agree with or support this decision. Some applicants respond with indifference, believing they can manage without family support. However, caregiving can be very stressful. A dependable system of emotional support is vital for those involved.

Parents and caregivers should have regular contact with other foster and adoptive parents who share the same issues, questions, and concerns. Preservice sessions will offer trainees opportunities to meet others who have similar interests. Trainees should take
time to introduce themselves to others and discover if any of their fellow trainees live near their neighborhoods. This is their first opportunity to begin building a network of support for their new endeavor.

**To promote child advocacy and develop more advocates for children**

Individuals in this class can learn to be strong advocates for children, even if they ultimately decide not to become foster or adoptive parents. Children need advocates at every level. Trainees may decide to become active in their church to recruit foster and adoptive parents. They may decide to form an adoption support group in your local community. They may volunteer as family advocates or as Big Brothers or Big Sisters. They may consider providing respite care to other families raising children. Or they may decide to become foster or adoption speakers, providing educational services to local community groups such as Lions Clubs or Professional Women's Groups. All of these are valuable contributions to the field of child welfare.

**Section IV. 60 minutes**

**Video: Diary of a Metis Child**

*Use: Handout #2*

**Trainer Instructions:** The trainer should briefly introduce the video, *Diary of a Metis Child.* The trainer should explain that the setting of the film is in Canada, but the scenario could have also occurred anywhere in the United States. The trainer should inform participants that this is a powerful video and is likely to evoke strong feelings in the viewer. The trainer should let participants know that feelings and expressions of emotion are normal. The trainer should distribute Handout #2, *Diary of a Metis Child: Focus Questions.* Participants should be asked to focus on the questions listed in the handout as they view the film. The questions provide a focus during an otherwise emotional viewing process.

**Questions:**

- In what ways did Richard ask for help?
- In what ways did the foster families try to help Richard?
- How would you have helped Richard?

**Trainer Instructions:** When the film is over, the trainer should ask participants for their feelings and reactions. Responses will likely include:

“*I couldn't believe this was happening.*”
“Overwhelmed.”
“Sad.”
“Frustrated with the system or the foster families.”
“Anger.”

**Trainer Instructions:** The trainer should validate all the feelings expressed by participants. The trainer should then move into discussing the questions. Discussion will likely include the following:

In what ways did Richard ask for help?

- By writing the diary
- Acting-out behaviors
- Attempting suicide
- Participating in therapy
- Expressing his emotions
- Running away

In what ways did the foster families try to help Richard?

- Called the social worker about the board in the tree
- Tried to make things easier for him
- Wanted help with the bedwetting
- Wanted to get the siblings together to visit

How would you have helped Richard?

- Provide services to Richard’s family to prevent placement
- Facilitate visits, in the event of placement, with Richard’s siblings and birth parents

How would a kinship placement have improved Richard’s adjustment?

- Could have prevented family disruption
- Richard would not have been placed outside of his culture
- Kinship placements are often more stable, thereby reducing the number of moves for Richard

When should adoption enter into Richard’s plan? Would adoption have caused Richard’s problems to disappear?

- Adoption or another permanent placement in his extended family should have become the plan for Richard as soon as it was evident that he would not be able to return to his primary family
• No, adoption would not make the pain of losing his family and the effects of multiple moves just disappear.

Trainer Instructions: The trainer should bring closure to this activity by asking how Richard may have benefited if his caregiver had attended a foster, adoption, or kinship care training program. The trainer should attempt to relate participant responses to the goals of the Preservice Training Program. Examples are noted below.

• If Richard's foster family had this series of classes, they would have been better advocates. The foster mother may have insisted on help with his bedwetting and not simply stopped at requesting assistance.

• Richard would not have lived in homes with water in the basement and insufficient food because a more open system of fostering and adopting would have likely uncovered these rule violations.

• His foster parents would have known better how to handle behavior problems and where to get help, and therefore would have prevented disruption and the multiple moves that further harmed Richard. The foster parents could have gone to their support group for emotional support in problem solving.

• The foster parents would have insisted on visits between the children and advocated for a permanent plan for the child (most likely going back home).

Trainer Instructions: The trainer should close with a brief summary of the benefits of training for parents and caregivers, including reference to participant responses; that training makes the job of fostering, adopting, or providing kinship care easier; and that it ultimately improves the quality of care for the child.

Section V. 60 minutes

Nuts and Bolts: Specific Program Information

Trainer Instructions: The trainer should explain the commonalities and differences between foster care, adoption, and kinship care, and provide agency-specific information about:

• procedures
• children waiting for homes
• expectations for prospective parents
Below are three options for disseminating this information in ways that promote interest and further trainees’ understanding.

Options #1 and #2 are most appropriately used for smaller groups of participants, when the trainer wants the entire group to hear about all types of caregiving to understand completely the differences and commonalities. Option #3 is most appropriately used in very large training groups. This option allows the participants to ask program-specific questions, obtain information about their particular area of interest, and build relationships with agency staff in smaller groups of trainees with similar program interests.

Trainer Option #1: The trainer may “interview” specialists from the Foster Care and Adoption Departments in a talk show format, acting as a talk show host. After asking some questions of the panel of “guests,” the trainer can turn to the group and say, “Now we will turn to our audience for questions.” The trainer should pretend to hold a microphone (a toy mike can also be used) and move into the large group for their questions. Panelists should then answer questions from the group.

Trainer Option #2: The trainer may choose to set up a grid on a flip chart sheet with Freddy Foster, Alexander Adoption, and Kelly Kinship written across the top of the sheet. Selected issues should be written down the left side (see grid below for examples). The trainer should demonstrate how various issues are similar or dissimilar in foster care, adoption, and kinship care. This will help trainees understand the policies, rules, and parenting issues in the various programs. The trainer might explore four issues (permanency, money, sleeping arrangements, ear piercing) and ask the group for questions or additional issues to continue the discussion. If possible, discipline policy should probably be avoided in the discussion because it is complex and cannot be well handled in the allotted time. Participants should be told they will devote one entire training session to behavior management issues at a later time.
### Sample grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Freddy Foster</th>
<th>Alexander Adoption</th>
<th>Kelly Kinship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permanency</strong></td>
<td>Temporary care; child will most likely be returned to birth family</td>
<td>Child will remain in the adoptive family permanently; parents have the same rights and responsibilities as if the child were born to them</td>
<td>It depends: Child may be returned to birth parents, may be in long-term guardianship, or may be permanently adopted by kinship family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Money</strong></td>
<td>Foster care reimbursement = (Insert board rate paid by your agency)</td>
<td>Adoption subsidies)</td>
<td>It depends: could be licensed for foster care; could adopt with subsidy; Could obtain guardianship with TANF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bedroom space</strong></td>
<td>State regulations regarding number of children allowed per bedroom; no shared beds</td>
<td>Adoptive parent makes reasonable decision about sleeping arrangements</td>
<td>It depends: rules for foster care, adoption, or guardianship may apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ear piercing</strong></td>
<td>Birth parent makes decision</td>
<td>Adoptive parent makes decision</td>
<td>It depends on case plan, type of care, and relationships with extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trainer Option #3:** The trainer should explain that trainees will now form small groups to learn more about their specific area of interest. Agency staff or pre-arranged group leaders should lead the remaining portion of the session. Agency-specific information should be distributed at this time. The trainer should introduce each leader and briefly explain how participants should choose groups. Some general guidelines are listed below. Participants, however, may need assistance deciding which program to attend.
Instructions for Speakers or Sub-Group Leaders from the Agency for the Various Caregiving Programs:

Foster Caregiving Group

The foster care group should include foster-to-adopt participants, unless there are enough families interested in foster-to-adopt to form their own group. Participants who are not sure whether they are only interested in foster care, or would consider foster-to-adopt, should be encouraged to attend the foster-to-adopt group, since that is the broadest category.

An experienced foster caregiver may be helpful at this group session to answer questions. [Note: the trainer should invite a foster parent who had children reunified with the birth family as a speaker at this session. The foster parent/speaker may have adopted a child but should also be able to speak with authority about the process of returning a child to the birth family. The trainer may want to invite two foster families to speak, one family that adopted the children in their home, and one family where the children were returned home.]

Adoption Group

Individuals who are not interested in fostering under any circumstances, and are not defined as kinship caregivers by the child's family, should attend the adoption presentation.

The group leader or trainer of this group should clarify the types of children available for adoption. Families should be referred to appropriate agencies if they want to pursue adoption, but are not able to parent the types of children available through the child welfare agency.

The group leader or trainer should stress that the agency’s goal is to develop families for children in need of permanent families because they cannot be reunited with their own families. *The agency does not find children for families who want to adopt.*

Kinship Caregiving Group

Any individual in a kinship care arrangement should attend the kinship group, regardless of whether he or she is informally providing the service, becoming a licensed caregiver, or planning to adopt a child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainer Instructions: Each group should address, at a minimum, the following issues:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Preservice 901: Orientation
Ohio Child Welfare Training Program. 2008
Overview of the Program

The overview should provide participants with the following agency-specific information:

- How many homes or placement opportunities or needs are there in this program?
- What are the ages and characteristics of the children in this program?
- How long are participants likely to wait before a placement?

For the adoption group, the trainer or group facilitator may want to present a copy of the agency photolisting book for individuals to review. He or she should stress that this photolisting is not provided so participants can select the child they want to adopt, but rather to help them become familiar with the kinds of children who are waiting to be adopted.

Program Requirements

This section should provide participants with basic guidelines regarding participation in this program. The types of situations that will keep a family or individual out of this program should be reviewed at this time. Trainees with specific questions or concerns should be encouraged to talk to the trainer following the session or telephone the agency worker for clarification.

Paperwork Process

Participants should be given an overview of the total paperwork process from application to licensure or approval. Prospective kinship care providers will need to learn about several different processes, depending on whether the families select guardianship, licensed foster care, or kinship adoption. The agency should clarify that while paperwork is necessary, it is not the most important part of either Preservice or the home study, and agency staff will help prospective caregivers complete it, if needed. Applicants should not see paperwork as a barrier.

Family Assessment or Homestudy Process

Participants should be given an overview of the process of the family assessment, including the general number of interviews that will be conducted, realistic time frames for the initiation and completion of the study, the types of issues that are considered and discussed, and the importance of applicants viewing it as an educational and preparation process, rather than a test or interrogation.
**General Housekeeping Items and Agency Specific Information**

**Trainer Instructions:** Participants should be dismissed from their small groups with information about the Preservice training program, and agency brochures about the program of most interest to them as potential parents or caregivers.
Skill Set and Competencies

Skill Set: Basic understanding of foster care, adoption, and kinship care

- Aware of the primary goals of child welfare services. Aware of the types of services that can help abused and neglected children and their families.

- Aware of the differences between foster care, adoption, and kinship care. Aware of the purpose of each type of care in the child welfare system.

- Aware of why it is important for caregivers and adoptive parents to assess their ability to care for abused and neglected children.
Handout #1

Goals of Preservice Training

To promote awareness and self-selection based on realistic criteria, and to begin educating prospective parents and caregivers about what they can expect from the caregiving experience.

To promote an atmosphere for mutual assessment and exploration of each prospective parent’s values, strengths, and needs.

To create an awareness of the commonalities and differences between fostering, adopting, and providing kinship care.

To promote team building among the foster parent, birth parent, adoptive parent, agency staff, and community resources.

To assure safety and improve the quality of care provided to children who live in foster, adoptive, or kinship homes.

To reduce the number of moves for children in foster care, kinship care, and adoption.

To initiate and promote the establishment of a support system for parents and caregivers within the foster care, adoption, and kinship care system.

To promote child advocacy and develop more advocates for children.
Diary of A Metis Child

Focus Questions

In what ways did Richard ask for help?

In what ways did the foster families try to help Richard?

How would you have helped Richard?

Other observations or personal reactions you wish to note: