

Alliance CaRES

**QUARTERLY
REPORT 2022**

Q4

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TEAM

The CaRES program team is thrilled to have completed our fourth quarter (December 2021 through February 2022) of running a program that makes a difference to caregivers across the state. By offering genuine and robust support opportunities, we impact caregiver satisfaction and retention, and improve outcomes for children in care. We see our small steps leading to big changes and we are grateful to all the partners, stakeholders, and team members who are helping guide and inform our work. We are building this program to be responsive to the needs of Washington's caregivers and are always ready to adjust our program to better serve our stakeholders. We look forward to our next quarter and we hope you do too!

Alliance CaRES Program

Vision Statement

We believe caregivers thrive
when connected to
each other,
practical resources, and
the broader community.

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SUMMARY

When the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence was formed nearly a decade ago, providing training and education to caregivers in support of positive outcomes for families was central to its mission. As the organization has grown, so has its capacity to support the caregiving community. The Alliance was selected to create the Caregiver Retention, Education and Support (CaRES) Program in partnership with DCYF. We launched the program on March 15, 2021.

The CaRES team walks alongside caregivers at all points of their journey, from inquiring about licensure, to achieving it, from the first time a child is placed in their home, and beyond. Even a seasoned caregiver needs help with a new situation. CaRES offers a variety of individual and group support as well as connections to the high-quality, skill-building training that the Alliance is known for.

This report is our chance to share updates on the fourth quarter of the CaRES program's scope and impact of the program including successes, challenges, recommendations, and details of our support to caregivers.

Much of the CaRES program's support is based on the engagement strategy developed with DCYF to provide outreach to caregivers and prospective caregivers at specific points.

We were able to expand our topic-based support group offerings based on the Communities of Practice model to include 18 facilitated discussion topics across a wide variety of subjects. We also created innovative special events, often with community partners, and continued developing our community-based support groups, trying a few iterations with some remote and some-in person options.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The CaRES Program is made up of six elements:

1) Support through the licensure process:

Prospective caregivers can find the licensure process confusing and intimidating. CaRES staff call all prospective kinship caregivers for individual support. CaRES staff also call all those who inquire about foster care who live within the top 25 highest removal ZIP codes. We also offer weekly virtual lunchtime sessions to answer frequent questions around paperwork and the licensing process, as well as "While You Wait" support groups for those who are preparing to welcome their first placed child.

2) Support at key points:

CaRES Mentors reach out to all caregivers at those moments when we know support is most needed, including at the time of licensure, at the time of first placement of a child into a home, and six months after licensure. These calls provide community resources, advice, and emotional support to build an ongoing connection.

3) Support during investigations:

Through the FIRST program, CaRES offers neutral, confidential support for caregivers with an allegation or licensing violation. We offer information about what to expect during the investigation process, and a listening ear during a challenging time.

Program Elements Continued

4) Different kinds of support groups:

CaRES offers online topic-based support groups for facilitated discussion, problem solving with other caregivers, and training credit. Community-based mentorship groups offer the opportunity for local supportive connections with other caregivers. Drop-In groups are online informal weekly ongoing groups that give caregivers the chance to connect as the need arises. We also offer special events, which vary.

5) Supportive resources and training:

We offer a wealth of resources through Facebook, Instagram, and the CaRES website. We also connect caregivers to free and extensive training and coaching opportunities through the Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence.

6) Anytime support:

While caregivers are doing the important work of supporting children and families, we are here to support the caregivers. CaRES is working to build even more availability to provide empathetic, experienced support. We measure this success in the calls that come from caregivers reaching out directly to Mentors for ongoing support, to get additional questions answered, and for advice. We are seeing these calls increase!

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Over **946** licensed caregivers, kinship caregivers, and caregivers with their first placement across the state received contacts this quarter from CaRES program staff as part of our engagement strategy. In addition, **618** more supportive contacts (individual emails and calls) were made in the quarter. As part of our prospective caregiver engagement strategy, over **187** prospective caregivers in high-removal zip codes and with kinship care inquiries received contacts this quarter, with an additional **147** prospective foster parent support contacts made.

993 welcome emails were sent this quarter by the CaRES team to prospective caregivers providing guidance and offering resources.



Si desea leer este mensaje en español [haga clic aquí](#).

Hello!

We're so happy to hear you're thinking about joining the community of caregivers across Washington. Foster parents can make all the difference in the lives of children and families in need of support by providing temporary or "for now" parenting. People like you are central to providing stability to the 5,500 children on average who enter care every year until they can safely return home.¹

Notable Achievements Continued

325 caregivers have participated in CaRES' topic-based support groups this quarter. CaRES now offers **18** different supportive facilitated discussion groups on a range of topics. These include book clubs, and focused topics to meet specific caregiver needs. Some examples are shown below. A complete list with descriptions is included later in the report.

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ADHD or Trauma?

ADHD:	Both:	Trauma:
hyperactivity hyper-focus impulsivity	Agitation Disorganization Easily distracted Poor self-esteem	Disassociation Angry Outbursts Nightmares

Learn more about ADHD at
Wellness Resource Wednesday
February 16th at 6:30 pm

zoom: 979 4221 7041

CaRES SFDG
Book Club

DANCING
with a porcupine
Parenting Wounded Children
without losing your self

Join us for three sessions
to discuss the joys and
challenges of fostering.

Registration is open now!

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NEW!

FOSTERING WHILE PARENTING SUPPORTING OUR BIOLOGICAL AND ADOPTED CHILDREN

A CaRES Supportive Facilitated Discussion Group
Launching March 15th at 5:30 pm

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Starting in September

New LGBTQIA+ Support groups

SUPPORTING AN LGBTQIA+
YOUTH IN CARE
&
NAVIGATING FOSTERING AS AN
LGBTQIA+ CAREGIVER

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GRIEF & LOSS IN YOUR FOSTERING JOURNEY

A SUPPORTIVE FACILITATED DISCUSSION GROUP

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[REGISTER HERE](#)

Fostering as Part of a Team

Strategies to co-parent
with DCYF, work with
the support team, and
build relationships with
the members.

[REGISTER
HERE](#)

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Notable Achievements Continued

In addition, **246** caregivers have participated in CaRES' other support groups (which are not for training credit) this quarter. These include community events (both in-person and remote), special events, and drop-in groups.



share your story and connect with other caregivers.

"It's so good to know I'm not alone!"

Drop-In Discussion
zoom 966 4600 6596

"I gained helpful information and felt encouraged hearing from other foster parents!"

Fostering Friday
Every week
12:00 - 1:00



Fostering as a Single Parent

Drop-in Discussion Group

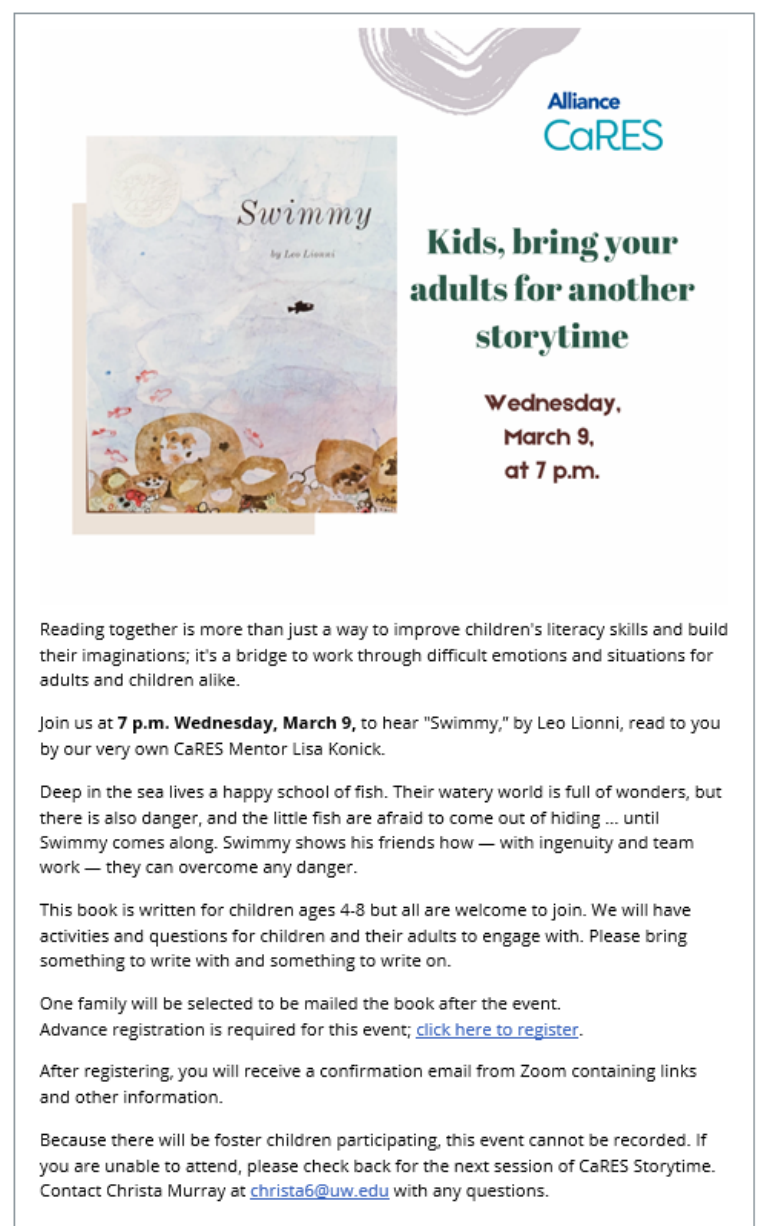
Join us the **THIRD Thursday** of each month

8 to 9 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting
washington.zoom.us/j/7549744679

Join other single caregivers to share:

- Successes
- Struggles
- Supports
- Resources
- Strategies
- Parenting Tips



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Swimmy
by Leo Lionni

Kids, bring your adults for another storytime

Wednesday, March 9, at 7 p.m.

Reading together is more than just a way to improve children's literacy skills and build their imaginations; it's a bridge to work through difficult emotions and situations for adults and children alike.

Join us at **7 p.m. Wednesday, March 9**, to hear "Swimmy," by Leo Lionni, read to you by our very own CaRES Mentor Lisa Konick.

Deep in the sea lives a happy school of fish. Their watery world is full of wonders, but there is also danger, and the little fish are afraid to come out of hiding ... until Swimmy comes along. Swimmy shows his friends how — with ingenuity and team work — they can overcome any danger.

This book is written for children ages 4-8 but all are welcome to join. We will have activities and questions for children and their adults to engage with. Please bring something to write with and something to write on.

One family will be selected to be mailed the book after the event. Advance registration is required for this event; [click here to register](#).

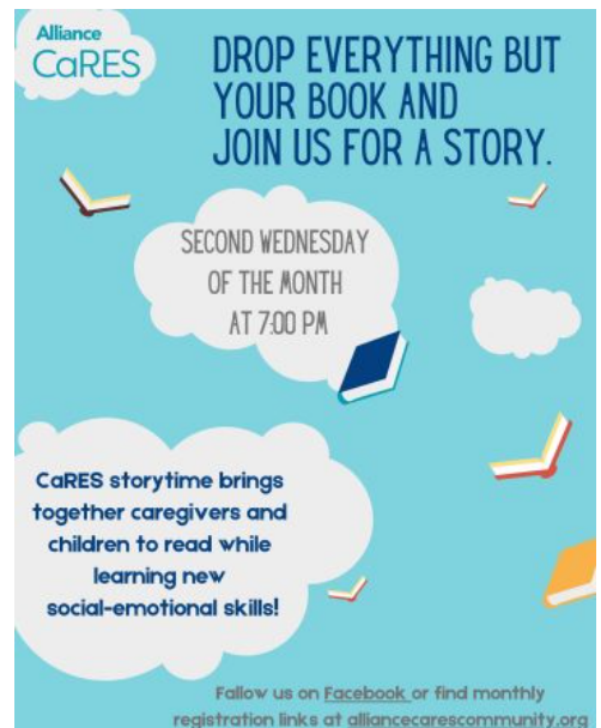
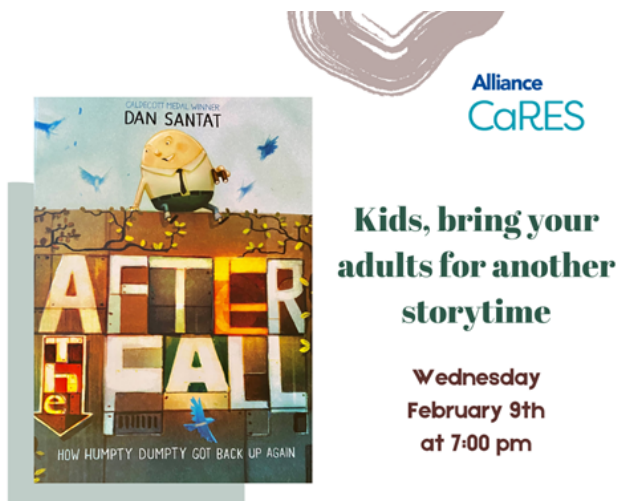
After registering, you will receive a confirmation email from Zoom containing links and other information.

Because there will be foster children participating, this event cannot be recorded. If you are unable to attend, please check back for the next session of CaRES Storytime. Contact Christa Murray at christa6@uw.edu with any questions.

Notable Achievements Continued

Book Clubs

The Book Club portion of the program continues to grow, now with four books: "Dancing With a Porcupine," "The Connected Child", "The Connected Parent", and "Trying Differently Rather Than Harder". These groups are consistently well attended and are now considered a flagship of our program.



Story Time

CaRES launched one of our favorite special events, Story Time, in the 3rd quarter. It was successful enough that we have offered it monthly. This quarter we had **98** participants in total. This live event features activities around a book read by a CaRES Mentor who facilitated conversation between children and their caregivers. The books chosen offer social-emotional learnings, and stories that hold additional benefits for children in care. The program is a great opportunity for caregivers to see in real-time the benefits of reading together to build attachment and help guide challenging conversations.

Notable Achievements Continued

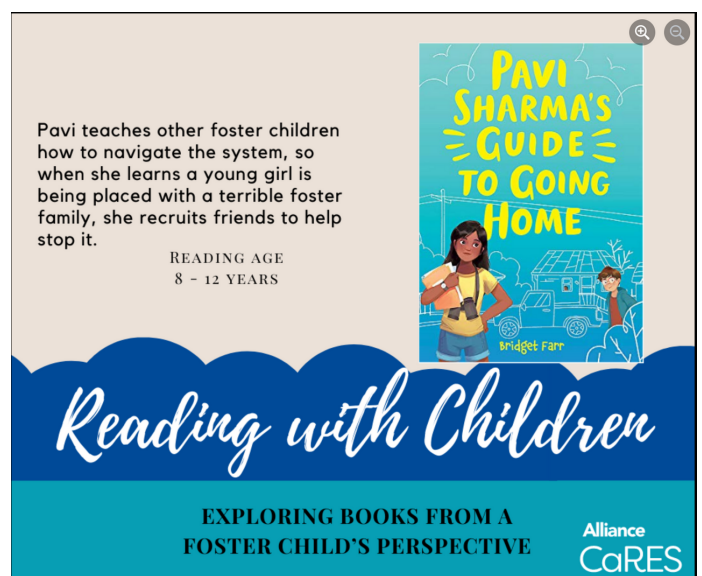
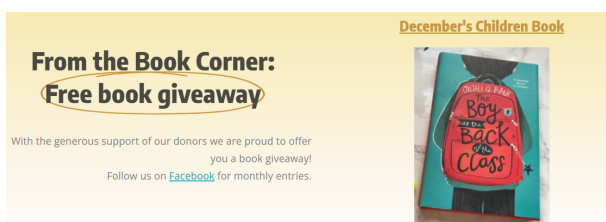
CaRES continued to build on its programs supporting literacy and healing trauma while deepening connections through reading together.

Book Corner

Engagement with the Book Corner has grown, with caregivers now fully embracing the call to action, including liking, commenting and tagging friends. The Book Corner also includes reviews of children's books on relevant topics for children in the dependency system so that caregivers can find books on various topics to share with the children in their care. One example is below.

Book Giveaways and a New Training

Opening up the opportunity to "win" a book that's either featured in our Book Corner or as the focus of a Book Club has been a big engagement and goodwill win. The giveaways engage two segments of our audience – caregivers as parents and caregivers interested in community and learning. This quarter we launched a new supportive facilitated discussion group that helps caregivers learn techniques for improving engagement with children when reading in order to build connection and attachment.



NOTEWORTHY CHALLENGES

Caregiver Dissatisfaction with DCYF

Across the state, we continue to see low caregiver morale and hear many reports of challenging communication between workers and caregivers. We have been reporting trends and specific incidents that need DCYF intervention to DCYF directly in order to facilitate resolutions.

In-person connection

Another challenge is that while we continue to receive requests for in-person connection opportunities for caregivers, those we have offered have often not been attended – even by the very people who requested them. We continue to experiment with various options for in-person support while functioning in a COVID-limited landscape. We do now have two in-person support groups that are active but the other locations where we have attempted in-person options have not been successful. Given the limitations for safety during COVID, we have continued to focus on outdoor options, which were on hold for the winter, and remote options, accessible to all across the state. However, in the coming year we are planning to increase our community level engagement and hope to include more in-person opportunities for special events as well as ongoing groups.

Noteworthy Challenges Continued

Social Media Engagement

Despite a robust social media presence, we are not finding much engagement among caregivers with our social media posts. Veteran caregivers report wanting access to unmoderated forums that existed under the previous contract but CaRES is unable to provide such opportunities responsibly without jeopardizing confidentiality requirements. This continues to generate disappointment from some veteran caregivers.

The FIRST Line

The CaRES team received 7 individual FIRST program calls this quarter, which led to 6 additional follow up calls to support caregivers undergoing an investigation this quarter. The FIRST Program has not been a well-utilized element of the program. While the caregivers who call do sometimes appreciate clarity on the investigation process, that need could be met through information provided at the time of an investigation by the department. Some callers are looking for advocacy help for disputing with DCYF. CaRES does not provide this service. We are beginning to question whether this element of the program should be reexamined, given the amount of resources going toward staffing it.

TRENDS

Prospective caregivers have reported high levels of satisfaction and relief in finding that CaRES can offer assistance in navigating the licensing process, which they report is confusing and daunting.

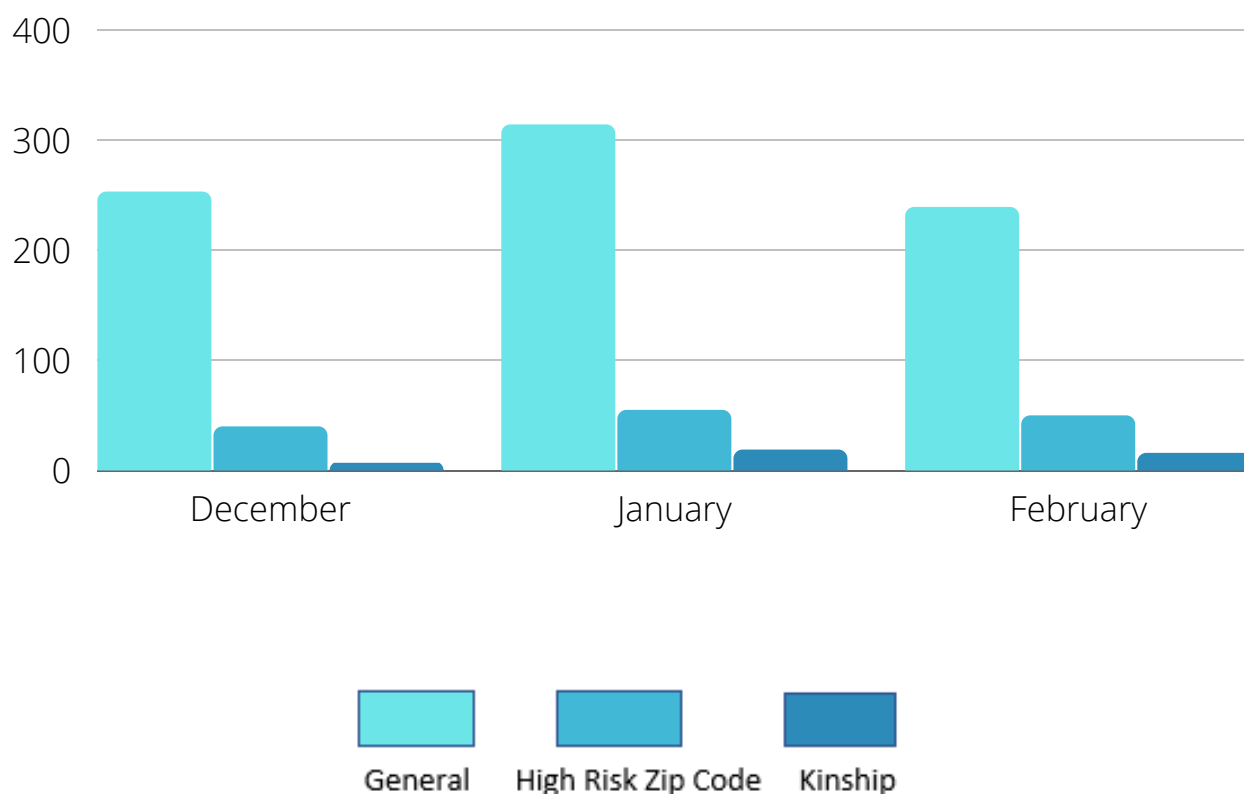
New caregivers are enthusiastic about the challenges and rewards of caregiving. They are eager to participate in topic-based support groups and have been providing very positive feedback about the program. We are seeing ever-increasing engagement with the Mentors as new caregivers build trusting relationships with their local Mentors.

Veteran caregivers are the most challenging for CaRES staff to reach. Those who do connect are reporting high levels of frustration with DCYF. Their distress is concerning and CaRES staff are having frequent conversations with caregivers who report planning to quit. The majority of complaints can be traced back to lack of effective communication between workers and caregivers. We are working to gain trust and provide useful support.

Kinship caregivers have been very responsive to the outreach from Amara. They are expressing gratitude at the connection to resources and local support, and especially relief at learning about non-needy TANF and other resources.

PROSPECTIVE CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

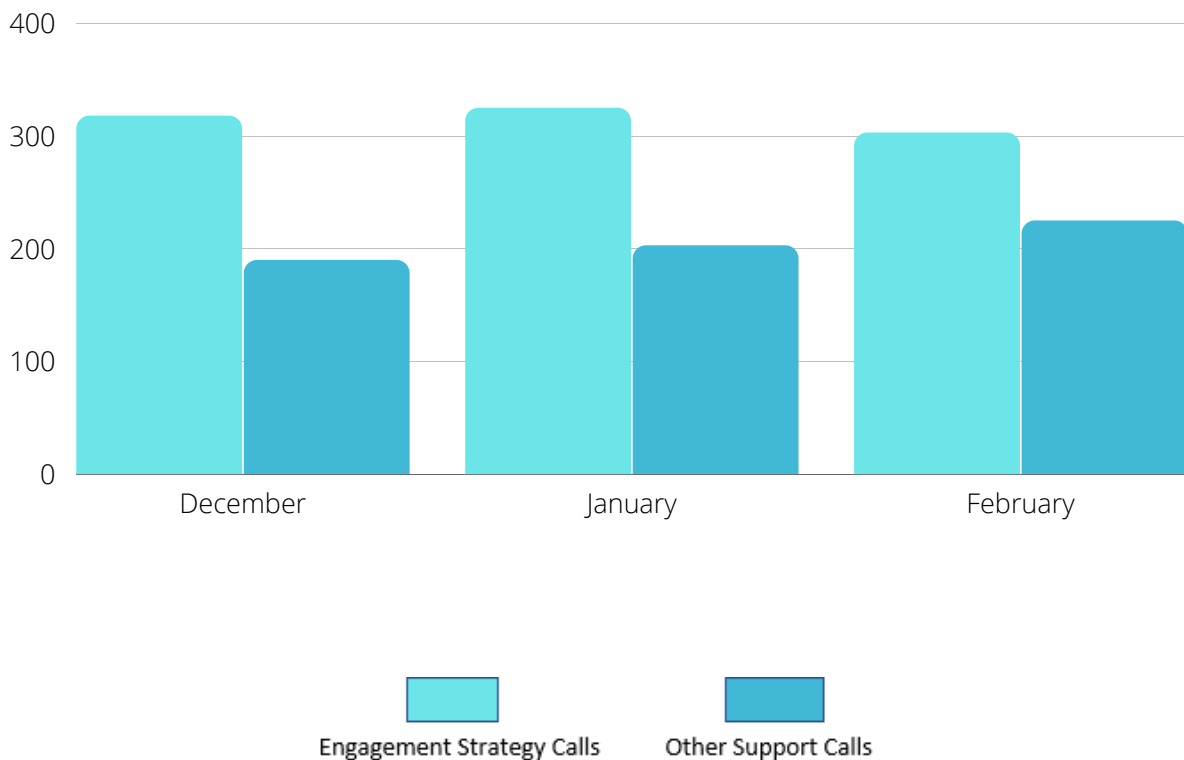
During the fourth quarter, a total of **993** prospective foster parents received a welcome email detailing next steps. Of those, **806** received a general welcome email, while **187** (145 from high removal ZIP code areas and 42 who identified as prospective kinship caregivers) received emails as well as a personal phone call in the fourth quarter. There were an additional **147** supportive contacts to prospective caregivers in the fourth quarter.



CURRENT CAREGIVER ENGAGEMENT

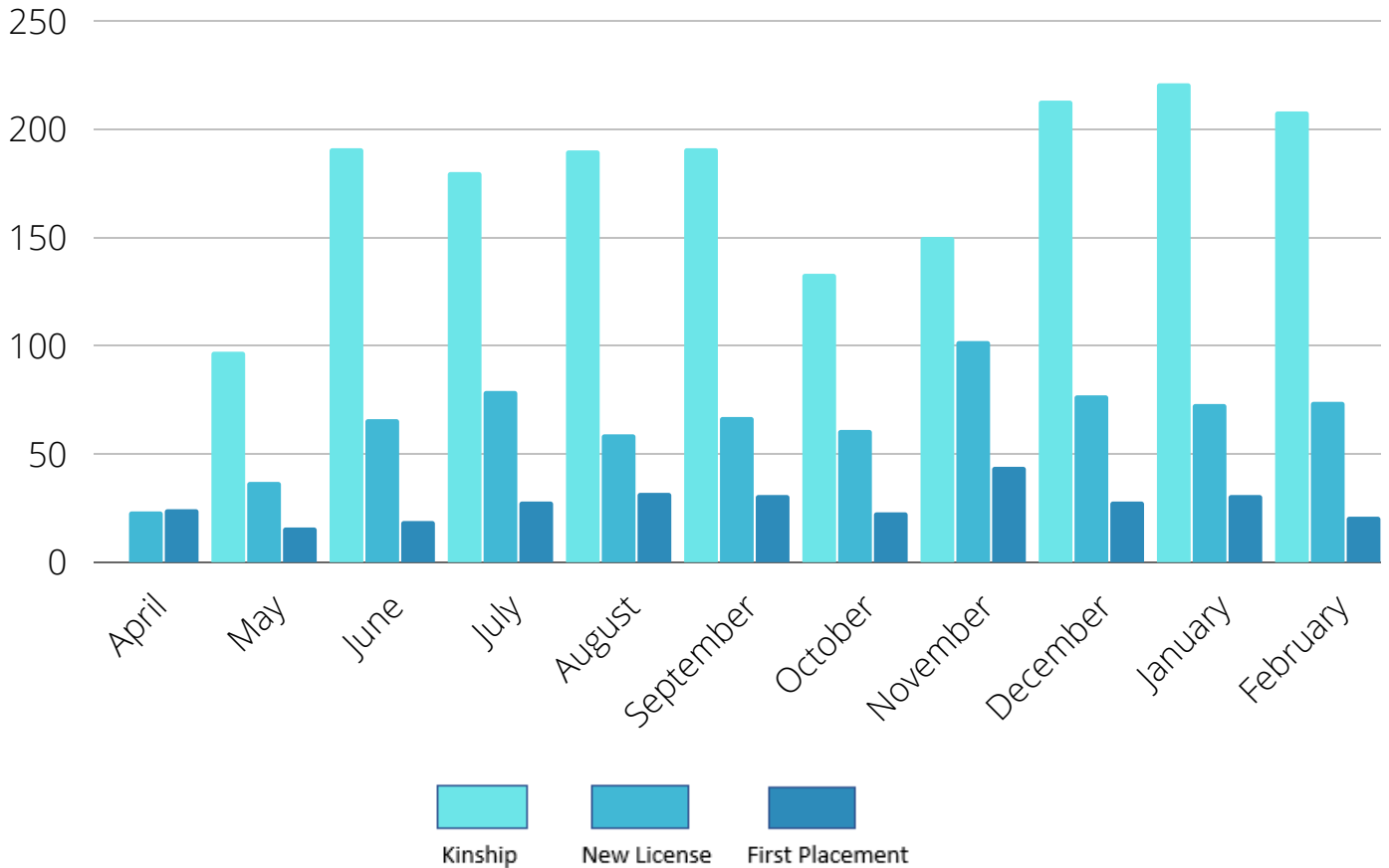
Over the last quarter, a total of **946** calls based on our caregiver engagement strategy occurred (to newly licensed caregivers, caregivers with their first placement, and kinship caregivers).

We think it is important to highlight that there have also been **618** additional contacts (individual emails, calls, and texts) to support current caregivers in the last quarter. These contacts show that we are successfully building ongoing relationships with caregivers so that they call back for more support when issues arise. These contacts are one way we measure our program's success.



Current Caregiver Engagement Continued

Over the last quarter, a total of **946** individuals received calls as they had a kinship placement, were newly licensed, or had a first placement. Of those calls, **68%** were to kinship caregivers, **24%** were to newly licensed caregivers, and **9%** were to caregivers with their first placement. Calls to caregivers with a first placement appear to have maintained a fairly steady pace this quarter. Kinship parent contacts rose again in December and are slightly higher this quarter than they had been in previous quarters.



Current Caregiver Engagement: Success Stories

Every month we report on examples of caregiver support by sharing comments, testimonials, notes from Mentor calls, or examples. Here are a few from this quarter to illustrate the impact of our Mentors' support.

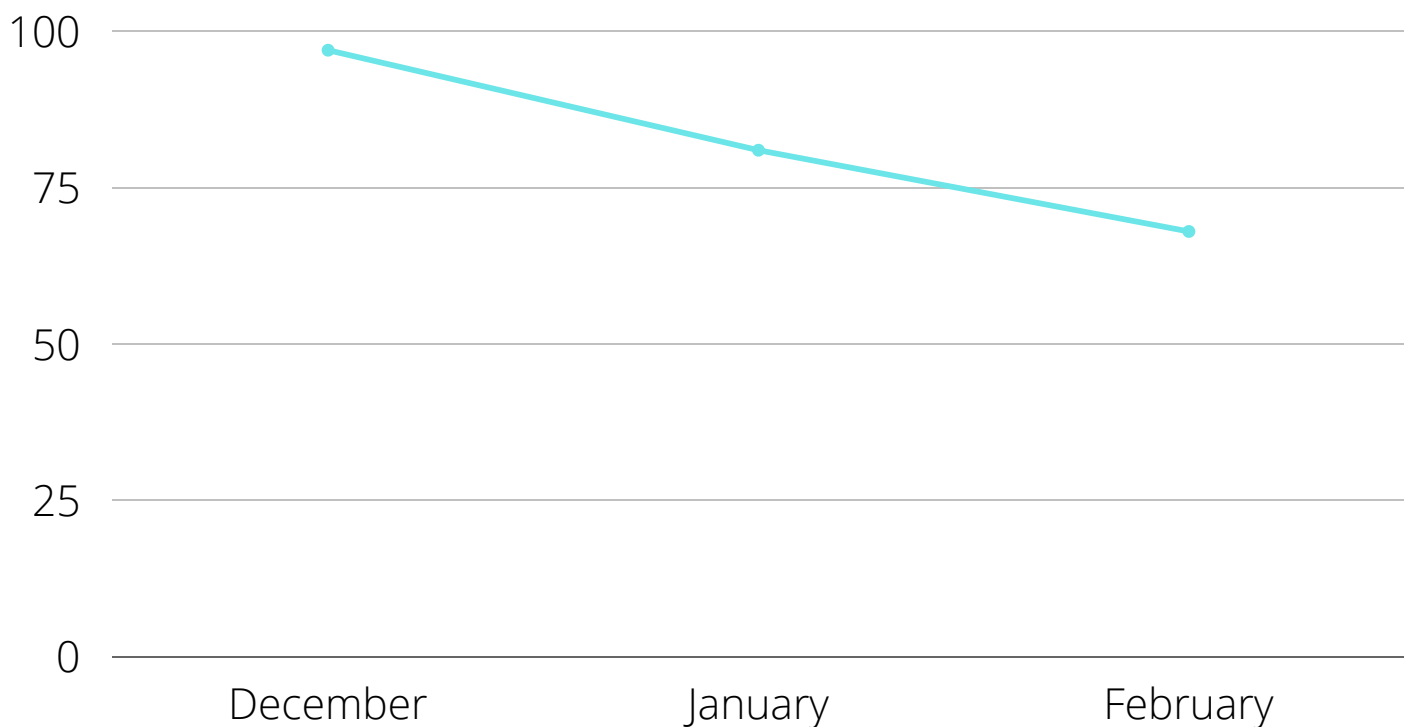
- A kinship caregiver shared: *"Thank you for your help. I was able to get the voucher yesterday as well as a car seat. The caseworker put in an order for a stroller that works with the car seat. And the other resource helped me with a used crib and new mattress. With the voucher for Fred Meyer, I was able to get outfits, a blanket, a floor mat for her to lay on and play, as well as a ball that bounces and plays music (It's supposed to encourage crawling.) This helps so much. I just moved days before baby came to our home. This is such a huge help with all the changes. Now I can stop stressing so much. As I don't have to worry about these things. Thank you again!! It's greatly appreciated"*
- The following are pulled from Mentors' notes describing successful calls: *"Spoke with J. on the telephone, she is a foster adopt parent and this little boy was placed with her a week ago. He tested positive for drugs at birth and the mother has had other children that do not live with her. J. is thrilled to have this placement, but in looking over the Newly Licensed call, I remember that she had concerns about attachment and how she would handle that if the child went back home or to another placement. We talked about grief and loss issues for foster parents and she seems to have good insight but knows that it will not be easy especially if this baby is with her for a long time. She said she will be calling back for support"*

Current Caregiver Engagement: Success Stories Continued

- Spoke to M. Family is needing additional help getting McKenney Vento transportation set up for school transportation. M and her husband have drastically altered their work schedules to drive kiddo to and from school but cannot continue to provide transportation. They also requested help finding out the contact info for the ongoing social worker to replace her previous worker who is out on maternity leave. M is working on setting up non needy TANF and looking for childcare options that will work for her family. Sent email to DCYF Social Worker Supervisor and Megan Ives requesting contact info for ongoing social worker and additional help with school transportation. Received information the following day to share with M.
- Based on a call back in November, D contacted me. She and her husband are struggling with behaviors of their 14-year-old niece with extensive trauma history, who has been placed with them for one month. They are trying to understand why first month went so well and now these behaviors are surfacing. We talked about how honeymoon followed by rejection is common with kids who have been through trauma. I shared a number of other ideas that have worked for me, reflective listening, how to reduce power struggles, etc. I also recommended that she talk to the SW about wraparound and respite care, because she said the impacts on her other kids (she has five other kids at home) have been profound. In addition, because her niece made the comment this weekend "I hope I don't wake up," I made a plan with her that she will call the intake line and email the social worker and her licensor today. At the end of our phone call she broke down in tears and expressed that she felt very relieved that these behaviors are not uncommon and that she's not doing anything wrong. She also expressed that "it's so good to have someone to talk to, and just rant to when I get to that point." We agreed that she would call me back again anytime she needs to, and if I don't hear from her I will check back via text in a week or so.

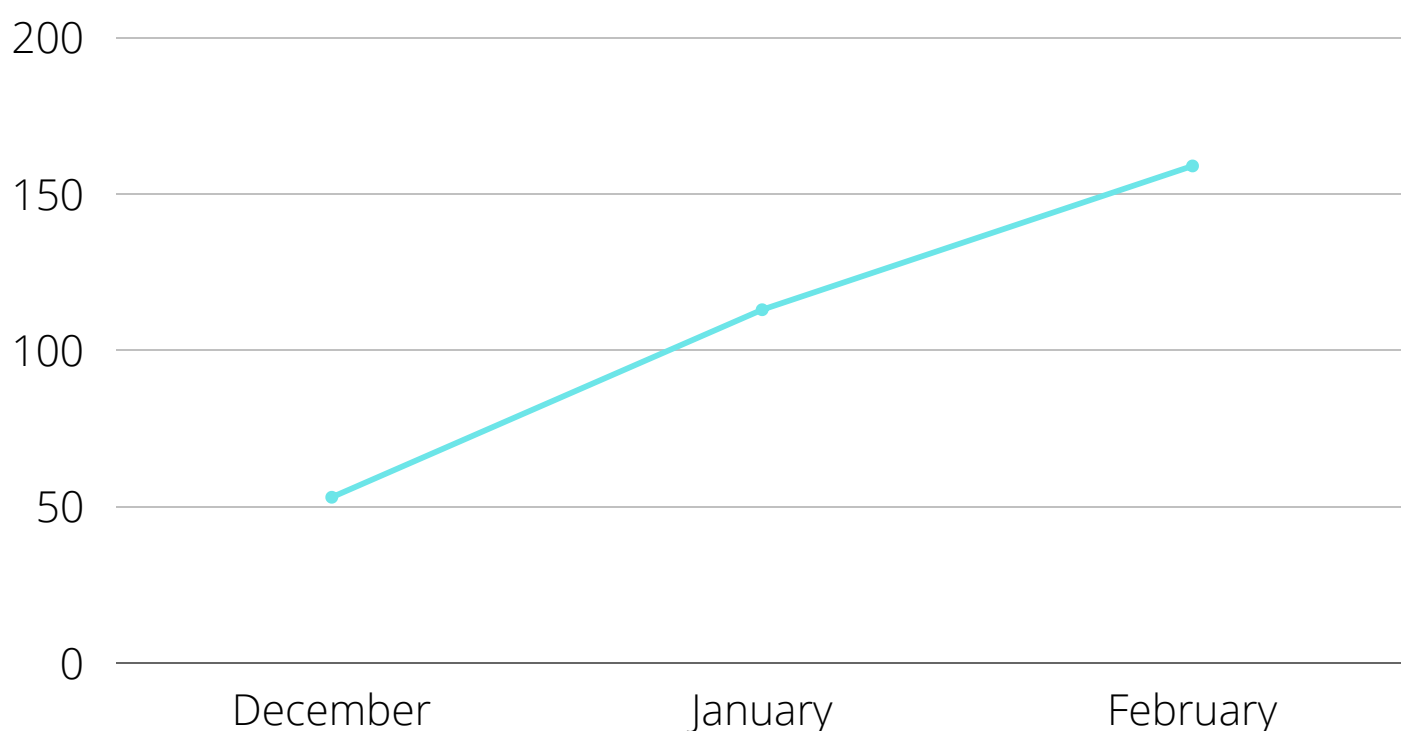
Current Caregiver Engagement: Community Mentorship Groups

Over the last quarter CaRES has offered **17** Community Mentorship Groups per month, including Drop-In Discussion Groups, In-person Support Groups, Online Support Groups, and the Story Time. This quarter, Community Groups were attended by a total of **246** people. Numbers have decreased from December to February, but total attendance increased this quarter as compared to the third quarter. Our Yakima in-person group did not meet in February because of local Covid numbers, which likely explains the slight dip. We continue to experiment with options in this category of support to see what caregivers will respond to.



Current Caregiver Engagement: Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups

Over the last quarter CaRES has, on average, offered **30** Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups (SFDGs) per month, covering a range of topics. In the last quarter support groups were attended by a total of **325** people. (As a reminder, these are not necessarily 325 unique participants as caregivers may take multiple sessions of a group or engage with multiple groups.) You will note a steady increase in attendance from December to February. We believe this is attributable to our new offerings, the texting pilot reminder program we started, and a natural dip in attendance around the December holidays.



SUPPORTIVE FACILITATED DISCUSSION GROUP OFFERINGS

Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups include:

SELF-CARE

“Who Is Taking Care of the Caregiver?”: This group will engage in conversations around how to make sure you see how valuable your contribution is, as well as also how demanding it can be. You can talk about challenges you’re facing when thinking about self-care, because real life does sometimes make it hard to prioritize. You’ll work toward developing an action plan that takes into account your unique circumstances and proactively addresses things that might derail your self-supporting activities.

“Boundaries As Self-Care”: This group is an extension of the supportive facilitated discussion group “Who Is Taking Care of the Caregiver?” In this group, you will engage in conversations around how to make sure you see how setting and keeping healthy boundaries allows you to continue doing the valuable work you do while protecting your important relationships. You can talk about challenges you’re facing when thinking about boundaries, because real life sometimes makes it hard to say no or hold to your priorities. You’ll work toward developing an action plan that proactively addresses things that might make it hard to maintain your identified healthy boundaries.

“Grief and Loss in Your Foster Care Journey”: As a caregiver for a child in the foster care system, grief and loss are an inherent part of your journey. You may be grieving a placement that isn’t going as expected or hoped. Even as you celebrate a child’s return home or to an adoptive placement, your family may be experiencing the loss of the child. We will talk about the realities of grief and loss, and share strategies for walking through the grieving process. You will engage in discussions about how to experience loss and yet continue to provide a loving environment for children placed with you in the future.

CONSIDERING ADOPTION

“Foster-to-Adopt Journey”: As a prospective adoptive foster parent, your journey from placement to adoptions is different from other adoption experiences. The goal of concurrent planning leads to unique challenges and beautiful opportunities. During the three sessions, you will consider some of the challenges of the foster-to-adopt process and develop strategies to help you fulfil your role in the adoption triad.

SFDG Offerings Continued

BOOK CLUBS

"The Connected Child": The CaRES team will be leading a group through reading and discussion of "The Connected Child," by Karyn Purvis. "The Connected Child" lays out the foundational principles for Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), a therapeutic model that trains caregivers to provide effective support and treatment for at-risk children. Discussion at the five weekly book club meetings will dive into what TBRI is, and discussion will include a look at new strategies for building connection and managing behaviors.

"The Connected Parent": "The Connected Parent" by Karyn Purvis and Lisa Qualls is the focus of this book club. Discussion will review TBRI principles and dive into practical parenting applications and real life strategies for understanding attachment, teaching respect, understanding sensory needs, adapting strategies for teens, and taking care of yourself.

"Dancing with a Porcupine": The CaRES team leads you through a reading and discussion of "Dancing with a Porcupine" by Jennie Owens. This book shares the compelling story of the author's struggle to save her own life while caring for three children she and her husband adopted from foster care. In three sessions across six weeks, you will discuss themes including: self-care; trauma-informed care; expectations and hurt feelings; compassion fatigue; and balancing real life with the outside pressure to look like you are doing it all well.

"Trying Differently Rather Than Harder: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders": The CaRES team leads you through a reading and discussion of "Trying Differently Rather Than Harder: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders" by Diane Malbin. This book is a readable, narrative discussion of the neurobehavioral approach to working with children and youth with FASD. The book focuses on understanding behaviors differently through case studies and examples of how FASD impacts everyday life. During four sessions, you will be discussing themes including: adaptations, common challenges, cognitive changes and strategies to address them, working with memory disruptions, and talking about FASD in a supportive informative manner.

SFDG Offerings Continued

PARENTING

"Littlest Lives and Their Big Needs – Parenting 0 to 2": The earliest years are among the most critical to a child's long-term development. Children under 2 who are in foster care often require supports and approaches that are not so typical for their peers. You will talk through their needs, develop strategies to address those needs, and identify the resources available to help you support the littlest lives in care. You will also be able to build community with other caregivers of kids under 2 to share resources, experiences and problem-solving strategies.

"Parenting Teens": This facilitated discussion group is a continuation of the seven-part "Parenting Teens" webinar. This group will continue to explore strategies for parenting teens with a history of trauma, developing healthy and supportive relationships with your teen, nurturing their identity, and understanding their challenging behaviors. You'll work with other parents of teens to develop an action plan that takes into account your and your teen's unique circumstances and proactively addresses the challenges you face.

"Supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth in Foster Care": Understanding your child's identity is critical to providing them the care and support they need to navigate the development years. Children with an LGBTQIA+ identity may need additional support as they navigate social and cultural factors. In this supportive facilitated discussion group, you will have an opportunity to talk through LGBTQIA+ terminology and identify concrete tools you can use to support a child's LGBTQIA+ identity. During the sessions, you can ask questions about support resources, share ways you have supported a child in your care, and hear how other caregivers have navigated situations related to a child's LGBTQIA+ identity.

"Parenting in the Digital Age": Ready access to smart phones, tables, and computers has created a whole new world of challenges for caregivers. Youth do not need to leave their bedrooms be introduced to risky situations. During this supportive discussion group, you will talk with fellow caregivers about the challenges of parenting in the digital age, learn some warning signs of when a child's internet usage has become unsafe, and practice having a conversation about internet safety with your pre-teen or teen. We will also discuss basic internet programs, apps, geo tracking data, dangers in sharing pictures, videos, and personal information online.

SFDG Offerings Continued

"Using Storytime for Connection and Support": Reading with your children can do much more than support their academic growth! During this supportive facilitated discussion caregivers will discuss strategies they can use before, during, and after reading to build social-emotional learning with the children in their care. Caregivers will also collaborate to identify techniques they can use to increase attachment with their child through reading and story time. Whether it is picture books, a chapter book or a series, reading with the children in your home can lead to deeper attachment and improved social-emotional skills! Participants will also receive a pdf resource with book lists for various age ranges and topics.

"Caring for Drug Impacted Infants and Children": In this group, we will share experiences, resources, and best practices for caring for infants and children who have been exposed to chemicals in utero. We will discuss signs of withdrawal; what works best in caring for an impacted infant including therapeutic handling techniques and share parenting experiences. We will also discuss issues, behaviors, interventions, effective parenting techniques, and resources for the children in your care.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

"Wellness Resource Wednesday": Dive into health topics with local experts to best support children in care. We're excited to announce an amazing new group focused on building your awareness of wellness resources that can support you and the children in your care. Wellness Resource Wednesdays is a free drop-in group meeting 6:30-8 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month. There's no need to register, just join us for whichever meetings fit your schedule! In partnership with UW Harborview and Coordinated Care, these sessions will offer opportunities to learn directly from expert doctors and connect with caregivers sharing your experiences. The meetings will start with a 45-minute presentation by Harborview doctors and conclude with 45 minutes of Q&A around services of CaRES, Coordinated Care and Harborview. The medical topics were selected based on common areas foster parents would like more support around, and training credit will be available. On alternating months, sessions will be a chance to simply share perspectives and resources around navigating health systems as a caregiver. We'll meet in the same Zoom room every month.

SFDG Offerings Continued

"Fostering as Part of a Team": As a caregiver for a child in the foster care system, you are part of a parenting team. The courts, the social worker, CASA, GAL, medical team, therapists and the child's biological family all have a role to play. Knowing what your role is and how to partner with the other members of the child's team improves the child's care, your experience as a foster parent, and the long-term outcomes of the placement. During this group, we will talk about who the members of the team are and their roles, and identify ways to promote positive relationships with them. This will include a look at how to support family time and partnership with the biological/first family, and understanding the role of DCYF staff and how to positively partner for success.

"Navigating Fostering as an LGBTQIA+ Caregiver": As an LGBTQIA+ caregiver have you felt that your Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) impacts your fostering journey? In this supportive facilitated discussion group, you will get a chance to talk with other LGBTQIA+ kinship and foster caregivers about their experiences and share your own. As a group, you will talk about useful tools and techniques for navigating common issues and use these to develop strategies specifically for your family. This single session facilitated discussion is specifically for kinship and foster caregivers who identify as LGBTQIA+ caring for children with any SOGIE.

"While You Wait, Fostering Considerations": You've thought long and hard about what it means for you to be a foster parent. While you wait for your license or first placement to arrive, this facilitated discussion will help you consider some of the needs in the fostering community and how you are suited to meet them. You'll work toward developing parameters for accepting your first placements to promote a good fit for both you and child(ren) in your care.

Current Caregiver Engagement: Testimonials from Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups

The response from attendees has been extremely positive.

Attendees were asked, "What aspects of the support group were the most useful for you?" Comments included:

- *Hearing others' experiences*
- *Talking over what was helpful to individual families and learning from each other*
- *Being able to ask questions and get practical answers*
- *Getting tools from others*
- *In the beginning we spoke about changes in our home when welcoming a child from a different culture and it was helpful to talk about different ways to care for the child and how to ask for help from people that have experience.*
- *Discussion, stories, research, and facilitator*
- *Real-world examples and resources that could be immediately implemented*
- *Links to tips and more info, videos, activities to make you think about the material*
- *Learning from other foster-to-adopt parents*
- *Facilitator was good at engaging with questions.*
- *Discussing together what was read, hearing how others interpret the info and putting it into practice. Getting additional ideas, trying it out, talking about experiences.*
- *Hearing other peoples successes and experiences*
- *Non judgmental environment [and] smart facilitators*
- *Connecting with other parents and putting new tools that I could use right away.*

Current Caregiver Engagement: Testimonials from Supportive Facilitated Discussion Groups Continued

Attendees this quarter were also asked what feedback they have about the delivery of the support group, and comments included:

- *Great facilitators. Able to be honest.*
- *In-person is best, but glad that it was available as an online option.*
- *Facilitator made it easy to feel comfortable sharing and was engaging without being demanding or pushy. Had the perfect combination of activities, videos, and facilitated discussions to keep the training interesting and fun. I will definitely look for more trainings...because I enjoyed [their] approach so much. It also means a lot to me to have LGBTQ+ representation which [facilitator] was able to speak to.*
- *Wonderful facilitator. I appreciate how [they] shared [their] experiences as well.*
- *The facilitator was excellent*
- *Like zoom because it works well with schedule and can meet others in other areas.*
- *It was actually very good, better than I expected a remote meeting to be, and folks were very engaged.*
- *Really appreciate [facilitator's] approach to answering questions and sharing from [their] experience.*
- *I thought it was great for the size and format.*
- *This is a great way to learn new info, digest it, and incorporate it into skills.*
- *Great info in a relaxed environment with accountability to attend and participate.*
- *It was easy to join in and be a part of.*
- *A grief and loss group might not sound uplifting, but in fact I felt so much relief just to sit with other foster parents and know that I am not alone. Grief and loss can be so isolating, but during our two evenings together I felt like we were really able to lighten one another's loads. The facilitator did an amazing job of being our guide on that journey."*

LOOKING AHEAD

In our second year, the CaRES program will continue to expand and grow. Elements we look forward to introducing in the next quarter include:

- Launching new support group topics requested by caregivers
- Increasing representation of diverse voices and cultures among our offerings in order to provide more effective support for all caregivers
- Continuing to publicize CaRES so that all caregivers and DCYF staff are aware of the program
- Building and expanding upon the successes of the program, including adding another full time position and more Mentors.

