

Potential foster parents want to keep families together, survey says

December 15 2016, by Kimberly Hale

A new University of California, Davis, survey finds that one of the strongest motivations for potential foster parents is the chance to help keep families together. It also identifies those Californians who are most and least willing to foster children and why. These findings are reported in a new policy brief released by the UC Davis Center for Poverty Research from a survey of 466 California adults.

"I didn't expect so many respondents to identify helping foster youths' birth [parents](#) as a key benefit of fostering. It was encouraging to see California adults express an interest in supporting these parents rather than rushing to blame them for failing their kids," said Jacob Hibel, an associate professor of sociology at UC Davis, who conducted the survey.

The most likely foster parents

The survey targeted Californians over the age of 25. About 22 percent of respondents reported that they were at least somewhat likely to foster a child or teen. African Americans and Latinos were more than twice as likely as non-Latino whites to report a willingness to foster youth. Those between 25-34 as well as parents already caring for their own children—especially step parents caring for a partner's child—were also most willing to foster.

When asked to consider the potential benefits of fostering, survey respondents were up to 10 times more likely to select responses that

focus on benefits to foster youth and their biological parents than for any financial, social or emotional benefits for themselves. The perceived benefits that were most strongly associated with a willingness to foster were "helps biological parent(s) get the services they need to better care for their children," and "sets a good example for [foster parents](#)' biological children."

The most common potential barriers identified were the potential financial strain and the challenge of caring for foster youth and then having to "give them up." However, some of these concerns actually predicted a future willingness to foster. Respondents reporting concerns about not having enough information about becoming a foster parent or worries about giving up a foster child were 70 percent more likely to report a willingness to foster compared to those expressing other concerns.

Making a difference in children's lives

These findings are particularly valuable for California foster care agencies under new state rules starting in January. California's Continuum of Care Reform Act, effective on Jan. 1, aims to reduce the number of children placed in group homes and the time they spend there. It also expands support for foster children and teens and the families who care for them.

California's foster care system provides care for more [foster youth](#) than any other state. According to kidsdata.org, over 62,000 California children and teens were in foster care in 2014. More than 3,700 of those lived in group homes.

Hibel said that children who suffer the types of maltreatment that lead to foster placement are more likely to have lived in poverty with their birth families and to experience low employment and earnings as adults.

Further, the long-term instability experienced by youth who cycle through multiple [foster care](#) placements has damaging effects on their psychological and mental well-being.

"When [children](#) are taken out of their homes it's really traumatic," said Ashley de Alba, a junior researcher at UC Davis who conducted the survey with Hibel and recent UC Davis alumna Shubangi Srivastava. "Placing them in foster families helps them stay in school and to stay in touch socially so they are able to live their childhood."

More information: Policy brief: [poverty.ucdavis.edu/policy-bri ... th-and-birth-parents](https://poverty.ucdavis.edu/policy-brief-2016-12-potential-foster-parents-families-survey.html)

Provided by UC Davis

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