



Statement

Oct. 26, 2020

Foster Family Month

October 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of Foster Family Month in B.C. Last year, I attended the BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations' annual gathering, which was a special time for connecting with caregivers from around the province. I was able to listen to their individual experiences and stories and share information about how my Office can support them and the children they care for.

This year, due to COVID-19 restrictions, we are unable to celebrate the caring and dedicated foster caregivers with an in-person gathering, but it is particularly important to recognize them this year as they maintain these important roles during these ever-shifting times.

It takes an enormous amount of creativity and care to be a foster parent – especially during a global pandemic. I want to acknowledge what a challenging time this is for foster families, who are dealing with a range of COVID-related issues such as lack of community-based services and foster children's disconnection from their cultures and communities. Caregivers have had to teach important new lessons about personal hygiene and physical distancing, routines have been disrupted and difficult decisions have had to be carefully made.

The implications of these changes have been difficult. It has become crucial to encourage youth to take care of themselves and to find safe ways of connecting with their friends. We launched our #CovidandkidsBC Social Media campaign with these challenges in mind and we know that caregivers are working hard to support youth with socializing safely as well.

In our work here at RCY, we bear witness to some incredible caregivers. I want to share a quote from a couple who have fostered 50 children, who for various reasons have been unable to live with their birth families. They have a thoughtful way of walking alongside the youth they care for. Every child's needs are different, and this couple takes those individual needs into account and meets youth where they are at. A great example of this is their approach to supporting a three-year-old who refused physical comfort when she got hurt:

We had three other little kids for a while during that time. And so, when they hurt themselves, I would take them on my knee and I'd say [to the three-year-old], "When you get hurt, you can come and sit on my knee too, just like this. And I can give you a hug and it will help you feel better." So, we repeat, repeat, repeat [that message].

The patience and warmth exhibited here - and by many other foster caregivers, is much needed. I lift my hands to foster caregivers for doing this important 24/7 work. My Office is deeply committed to supporting them in this role. We are just an email (rcy@rcybc.ca) or a phone call away at 1-800-476-3933.

Jennifer Charlesworth
Representative for Children and Youth