Foster Care Being a Second Home for Abandoned Children: An Analysis on Cathy Glass's *Saving Danny.*

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of foster care as a secondary home for abandoned children and its significance in fulfilling the developmental needs of these youngsters. As biological parents seek support, recovery, and therapy, foster care offers a secure refuge for children and adolescents. Abuse and neglect often necessitate the removal of children and teenagers from their homes, making it imperative to find a secure environment for them. Foster care serves as a refuge for children and teenagers in need, even though it might be challenging to perceive it as a stable environment at first glance. The act of uprooting children from their homes may seem unsettling, but for those who have experienced abuse or neglect, foster care offers a stable and supportive home setting. Foster families provide essential elements like education, meals, shelter, and access to healthcare, which these children may have lacked before entering foster care. This, in turn, positively impacts their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Additionally, foster care can provide biological parents with an opportunity to focus on establishing a stable home environment where their children can eventually return. This research draws inspiration from Cathy Glass's "Saving Danny," a powerful narrative. Cathy Glass is a prolific author with a portfolio of 34 books, each of which offers valuable insights into the lives of children in foster care. Through the lens of Cathy's experiences as a foster carer, these stories shed light on the challenges these vulnerable children face and how a nurturing and loving environment can help them overcome these obstacles.

Keywords: Nurturing, Safety, Stability, Loving Environment. Reunification, Behavioural Challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Children who cannot safely reside with their own families may find themselves in foster care, where trained foster parents provide a caring and secure environment. The reasons behind children entering foster care are diverse, often stemming from concerns about the safety or suitability of their home life with their biological parents. These concerns may arise due to instances of physical or verbal abuse, neglect, parental incarceration, or challenges such as problematic alcohol or drug use, mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or other issues that hinder parents from adequately caring for their children. Foster care can vary in duration, ranging from temporary arrangements to long-term or even permanent placements. Some children require short-term foster care before returning to their families, moving into permanent homes, or living with extended family members. In cases where the Family Court deems it unsafe for children to reside with their parents, long-term foster care may be considered.

The primary objective of the foster care system is to protect children in such situations from potential harm caused by inadequate care from their biological parents, mitigate the direct effects of their challenging social environments, and offer crucial emotional support. As stated by Barber:

Assuming that foster care is a realistic option for the child, the next step in the assessment process needs to focus on the child's social, psychological, and educational needs while in care." (2004, p. 8) [1].

This shows how important it is to think about and care for the child's social, emotional, and educational needs while in foster care. The genesis of this system lies in the need to protect children when their biological parents are unable to do so. The act of relocating a child from their home and placing them with foster parents exemplifies this fundamental principle.

2. GUIDING FOSTER KIDS IN THEIR ADAPTATION TO FOSTER CARE

Children placed in foster homes often experience a wide range of emotions, as the situation can be bewildering, frightening, and distressing. These children may be left with the impression that there is no one dependable enough to help them alleviate their fears, given the overwhelming mix of thoughts and feelings they carry. Foster parents play a crucial role in understanding trauma: its nature, its impact on a child's behaviour, and how to respond effectively to provide the necessary care and assurance.

Children often grapple with the false belief that they are somehow responsible for being removed from their parent's care. As Blatt aptly points out, "It can be assumed that children who are taken away from their homes have had a difficult time"(2004, p.4) [2]. Some children may even blame themselves for seemingly trivial incidents, such as being questioned by a teacher or being separated from their parents and siblings due to a visible bruise while wearing a short-sleeved shirt in the middle of summer. They might link their inability to stay with their biological family to their most recent argument with a sibling. Regrettably, children often perceive their current situation as a personal failure.

During these difficult times, it's crucial for foster parents to recognize the likelihood that the child may be longing for their parents and to communicate that they are experiencing mixed emotions, such as feeling secure with the foster family while still desiring to be with their biological parents, is entirely normal. Assuring the child that you can empathize with and navigate their complexity fosters an environment where they feel at ease sharing their thoughts and emotions with you.

3. COORDINATING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILIES:

Research has shown that regular contact between foster children and their birth families can positively impact their behaviour and help them adjust to being in care. As noted by Glass

It was common practice for the parents of a child in care under section 20 to know the foster carer's address. However, if a child enters care under a court order, there may be circumstances where the carer's address is withheld from the parents. (2015, p. 129) [3].

Furthermore, fostering strong bonds and facilitating communication between birth and foster families can lead to regular visits, instill a sense of belonging in the children, and improve parenting techniques. In the context of a trusted relationship fostered and facilitated by a caseworker, birth and foster parents collaborate in parenting a child in foster care.

This collaboration typically begins with a phone call shortly after a child is placed in foster care. The foster parent initiates the call, introducing themselves and sharing information about their experience with fostering the household composition and daily routines. This initial conversation offers the foster parent an opportunity to learn more about the child, such as their favourite foods, calming strategies, and any specific medical requirements.

In-person meetings between birth parents and foster parents serve as a crucial step in exchanging information about the child and initiating the process of building a bond between them. These meetings often occur shortly after a child is placed with a foster family and are mediated by a caseworker. Clear policies should outline the sharing of details about the child, including medical and academic records, to ensure transparency and collaboration.

The more information the foster parent has about the child, the better equipped they are to establish a relationship with the birth parent that focuses on the child's needs and well-being.

4. BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES IN FOSTER CARE

Foster care provides children who can no longer be cared for by their parents with the chance to develop in a family-style setting. However, children placed in foster care often exhibit a range of behavioural problems. Identifying the root causes of these issues can be challenging, given the complex backgrounds of these children, including experiences of abuse and neglect. Attachment styles often form the basis for these behavioural problems.

Attachment between parents and children typically begins within the first month of a child's life. It involves a simple cycle: the child communicates their needs by crying, and the parent responds with care and attention. This mutual trust and care create a strong emotional bond and a sense of security for the child. However, some children in foster care do not experience this normal development, resulting in psychosocial challenges that may persist even after placement.

Externalizing issues, especially behavioural problems, are among the primary causes of placement failure. It is crucial to study the conditions and factors influencing foster children's behavioural growth over time to enhance behavioural development and reduce the risk of placement breakdown. Foster parent stress is likely to impact the behavioural development of foster children, making the connection between parental stress and child development a relevant consideration.

Forming new bonds with foster parents can be challenging for children entering the foster care system. They may not immediately understand or follow household rules. As caregivers, it's essential to kindly explain these rules to them and ensure that all family members, not just the foster children, adhere to them. If foster children perceive differential treatment within the family, they may feel insecure and act out towards other children or adults.

The foster care system was established to mitigate family and adverse environmental factors that could hinder a child's normal development. Unfortunately, substantial evidence suggests that foster children often experience significant emotional, behavioural, and social challenges. Therefore, it is essential for foster families to provide a nurturing environment where these children can learn new skills, adjust negative traits, and develop resilience-promoting characteristics.

Children in foster care, despite initial appearances, are not "bad" or "damaged." Instead, they are responding naturally to the traumatic events in their pasts. A comprehensive understanding of their history is crucial to understand their behaviours fully.

Foster parents often care for children who have had strained relationships with their biological parents due to inadequate parenting, abuse, or neglect. If a child had a positive relationship with their parents but could not live with them, placement in a foster family can sever the bond with their biological parents. Despite their training and preparedness, foster parents may find it challenging to alleviate the profound effects of this attachment disruption.

Every child entering foster care experiences a rupture in their attachment with their primary caregiver, making it challenging for them to establish significant relationships with potential foster or adoptive parents and trust them. Foster parents often encounter attachment-based behavioural challenges, particularly if the child has moved between multiple foster homes. On average, children change caregivers around seven times during their time in foster care, making it increasingly difficult for new caregivers to gain their trust.

Foster parents may struggle to understand why a child does not reciprocate their affection or exhibits dysregulated behaviours. Some children may even refuse physical contact or basic care. Such behaviour is often a

result of the child's inability to form new attachments due to a history of protection and fear of experiencing further loss.

Understanding is the key to addressing these concerns. For instance, if a foster child refuses to finish their meal, it may be due to past experiences of food scarcity. Starting with questions and reassurance of safety can help build trust with a traumatized child who has experienced a world of uncertainties.

5. CATHY GLASS'S *SAVING DANNY*: PORTRAYING THE IMPORTANCE OF A PARENTAL FIGURE IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

Cathy Glass, writing under a pen name, boasts over two decades of experience as a foster parent, during which she has provided care and support to more than 100 children from diverse backgrounds. Her contributions extend beyond the home, as she collaborates on the development of new fostering policies, procedures, and training courses for the social services in her community. Cathy, a mother of three adolescent children, has a deep passion for writing and occasionally supplements her role as a foster parent with freelance journalism and business writing. Her writings on health and social issues have graced the pages of publications like The Guardian, Evening Standard, Luton News, and Hemel Gazette, even before her remarkable success with "Damaged." Additionally, Cathy has had her literature published, with short stories and poems featured in various trade publications.

Cathy Glass's "Saving Danny" narrates the story of a young boy named Danny, whose parents could no longer cope with his challenging behaviour. As a result, Danny found himself placed in the care of Cathy. An only child, he grapples with learning difficulties and exhibits challenging behaviours like meltdowns, tantrums, and aggression. His parents, overwhelmed by his demands, turned to social services for help. Danny is an independent and somewhat resentful child, showing minimal verbal communication skills. His vocabulary boils down to a single word, "George," the name of his pet rabbit. Along with his learning difficulties, Danny is known for his inclination to create intricate patterns using various objects.

Upon his arrival in Cathy's care, she observed that Danny exhibited a measured, almost ritualistic approach to daily tasks, requiring precise instructions for everything. His difficulty in expressing himself led to frequent frustration, emphasizing the vital role of patience in managing his behaviour. Unfortunately, Danny's father, lacking this patience, often interpreted Danny's actions as intentional provocations, leading to arguments that emotionally affected Danny.

Even after an extended period in foster care, Danny's father remained hesitant about bringing him home. Cathy's nurturing affection has played a significant role in improving Danny's behaviour and well-being.

6.REUNIFICATION OF CHILDREN WITH THEIR BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

Following allegations of abuse, many children removed from their homes may eventually reunite with their biological families. However, it remains unclear which children and families will most likely face challenges during reunification. The success of reunification for children who have been removed from their homes often hinges on the availability of comprehensive support for both the children and their biological parents. These support services encompass addressing children's physical, mental, educational, and substance addiction needs, along with providing assistance to overwhelmed parents. Such assistance includes domestic violence services, counselling, and drug abuse treatment.

Reunification is the most common and preferred pathway out of the foster care system. Unfortunately, among those reunited, young children are particularly vulnerable to recurring abuse, possibly leading to their reentry into care. This exposes them to additional trauma and disrupts their primary nurturing bonds. A child's well-being is intricately linked to the stability and duration of their attachment bonds. According to the child welfare definition,

reunification inevitably disrupts a child's primary attachment. When attachment disruptions occur, reunified caregivers may encounter challenges managing their child's demanding behaviour. These challenges exacerbate the social and emotional development issues resulting from prior maltreatment.

Numerous risk factors for recurrence and reentry are beyond the control of the child welfare system, such as the child's age, race, and type of maltreatment. Other risk factors, like parental mental health, education, and financial stability, are difficult to change in the short term. The process of family reunification is emotionally charged, encompassing both positive and negative emotions. Parental guilt and remorse related to past abuse, coupled with the challenges of rebuilding relationships with children who may display discomfort and challenging behaviours, can overshadow the joy of reuniting as a family. As Balsells aptly points out:

When the family is ready for reunification, a period of preparation to return home is initiated. This stage involves increasing visits and preparing for the return by gradually increasing the time spent at home: one day, a weekend, or a school holiday. (2014, p.239) [4].

For reunification to be successful, the child's biological parents or caregivers must actively engage in the process and demonstrate their ability to provide a secure and stable home environment. It is essential for children returning to their parents' care to perceive them as reliable and trustworthy.

Child welfare organizations oversee the reunification process and provide services to empower families, helping them address the underlying issues that led to the child's removal. Some families may require immediate agency assistance during reunification, along with support from service providers such as caseworkers, therapists, counsellors, parent mentors, attorneys, educators, and medical professionals. Foster parents, who have provided a stable environment for the child, may also play a role in the reunification process. They can support the child's transition back to their birth family by sharing information about the child's preferences and routines.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the foster care system was established with a primary mission to protect children who are in peril, often due to circumstances involving their biological parents. As a society, it's crucial to recognize that parenting is not merely about showcasing children on social media or making them appear well-dressed. Children, in fact, require dedicated attention, which encompasses protection, love, education, and a secure home environment. Raising awareness about these fundamental needs could potentially contribute to a decrease in the number of children entering the foster care system.

Foster care is a versatile system that accommodates a wide range of individuals. Foster parents come from diverse backgrounds and bring varied life experiences to the table. This diversity reflects the flexibility of foster care, ensuring that it can work for different children in need. It offers a lifeline to children and teenagers who can no longer live with their parents.

As Sinclair highlights, "the likelihood of returning home for these children varies based on age and the circumstances surrounding their placement" (2005, p. 28) [5]. The foster care system provides various types of fostering adapted to the specific needs of each child or young person. Foster carers can offer a permanent home for the duration of their time in care, or they may step in during emergencies.

In essence, the foster care system embodies the commitment of individuals and society at large to the welfare and well-being of the most vulnerable among us – our children. It emphasizes the significance of shared accountability and empathy in guaranteeing that each child has a secure and supportive setting in which they can flourish and prosper.

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