

KEEP Letter
To whom it may concern at DHS regarding KEEP Group

Hello, My name is Dawn Smith Melton, my husband Jack Melton and I have been relative foster parents for more than 8 years, and last year became a resource for a girl who has no relation to us, but who is also native american involved with ICWA.

That being said, you might imagine that we have had to take several hours of foundations classes along with reading books and watching movies, IEPs, counseling, and many more classes to build required training hours. While every bit of this has helped us to find new and interesting ways to interact with the children and their constantly changing challenges and needs, we've next to run out of options without having to re-take classes and re-watch movies, we're a bit older and haven't figured out how to access the learning library, or online classes. I'm doing good to figure out how to apply for payment these days, everything changes constantly and us families have to either figure it out for ourselves, or get lost in the shuffle

Being invited to attend KEEP group couldn't have come at a better time. We had just finished up with recertification and JR called to offer a group that would meet 26 or so of the required 30 hours it takes for recertification. I knew we had to try it.

KEEP is one of the first groups to offer childcare along with a meal. Considering this is an area we have suffered with the entire time we've been raising these kids (respite care) we jumped at the opportunity to be involved. Relieved we wouldn't have to put care providers through the 3 different systems for fingerprintings and background checks, that KEEP did all of that up front was a huge relief.

What I really enjoy about this group is it's structure. We all get a chance to talk about our ideas and things that we think work or don't work for our families, then we hear from KEEP what their ideas and different ways to find solutions to things that we've found difficult or challenging. Their ideas seem to help keep everyone communicating clearly and consistently. Not simply the children, but what the expectations adults have as well.

I have really enjoyed interacting with the group. Having multiple ideas and feedback has been like meeting family I didn't know I had. I am happy to learn and to share and grow with the other members. I am also happy that one of our facilitators has had the opportunity to move into a career opportunity that he will continue to help youth and make even more positive changes to better the futures of many.

I would recommend opening up KEEP groups to many foster families, even if they are not native american because these ideas and support would be a benefit to many wheter they are involved in, or even outside of the foster care system. I would also like to thank Jr., Matt (who left KEEP to accept an amazing role helping children inside the school system) and Nola who stepped in to take Matt's place. I appreciate

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so much that they travel, co-lead groups, provide meals, and also provide trusted childcare as we have a safe and supportive environment to learn and share new skills to help the kids we've taken in to be healthy, happy and successful members of society.

Thank You Very Much For Opening This Group to Us.
I hope you will consider making it an ongoing future
resource!

Sincerely,
Dawn M. Smith Melton