



Willamette
Family INC.

celebrating
50 years

Health, Wellness & Recovery Services

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April 30, 2019

Dear Senator Gelser
Senator Monnes Anderson
Senator Fagan
Senator Heard
Senator Knopp

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide input into the vitally important Child Welfare Solutions Hearing. I am quite disappointed that I cannot be there to talk personally to you, but I recently had surgery and am not able to be there. However, I am delighted to introduce Edith Baumgart who will present what we believe is essential information to the Committee. Edith has worked for Willamette Family Treatment Center for over 20 years, and is our Director for Children and Family Services. In that role, she works daily with families involved with child welfare in which parents are engaged in our highest level of substance use disorder (SUDS) treatment. These ladies are in residential treatment for a period of up to 90 days, and we work with DHS to offer a positive alternative to foster care removal in that we are licensed to offer co-residency for children under the age of 6 to live with their mother in our center. While we are not able to offer the same level of treatment and co-residency for fathers who are involved with DHS, we do offer a very unique and highly successful treatment housing option whereby dads and their children reside together in community based housing while the father participates in our Intensive Day Treatment Program.

THE CYCLE:

- *Imagine: yourself being moved without your consent from Eugene to Belgium, to Chile, to the Philippines...you would have to learn new languages, new customs, new environment, new rules, and simply how to just fit in.*

This is how a child feels who is repeatedly moved from foster home to foster home, and who--- in that process--loses not only his or her identify, her family, his neighborhood, h/her school....you are lost, alone, and you develop protective behaviors for survival: some of these behaviors result in aggression, emotional issues, school problems, social isolation and not knowing the "right way" to behave because nothing is familiar or remains the same. And because of your behaviors, your foster care placement disrupts and you experience more moves. The longer this cycle continues, the greater likelihood that at some point residential therapeutic treatment is needed. As you continue to "age-out", you may find yourself as a young adult with your own infant. As you never had consistent parenting as a model, there is a likelihood that your own child may enter the child welfare system and repeat this terrible cycle.

PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUDS):

Child Welfare statistics would tell you that about 60% of the children who experience this cycle have parents with alcohol or drug addiction; yet, if you talk to a child welfare worker they will tell you it's actually much higher. SUDS is often multi-generational and creates a twin cycle that destroys the lives of children and families, results in high costs of care and treatment for a child who increasingly displays disruptive or serious emotional behaviors. Without treatment, these families experience contacts with the legal, educational, and health systems that frequently result in a child being removed and placed into the limbo of foster care.



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The good news is that TREATMENT WORKS. And prevents the trauma a child experiences via removal from family, loss of identity and his environment/schools/ friends. It preserves the child's ability to form healthy and safe attachments which is essential for all relationships throughout life. The inability to form these attachments actually results in a handicapping lifelong impairment that can result in social consequences that increase system involvement, legal and incarceration costs, poor education, poverty, etc. It primes the child to turn to using substances to deal with the stresses of life.

WE CAN AND MUST DO BETTER!!

Willamette Family initiated a Family Reunification and Preservation Program in 2008. Since that time, 80% of the families/children with whom we work have either been reunited or foster care was prevented. The national target is 75%, thus our program has exceeded that standard. In our Lane County community, only 40% of the children in foster care were successfully reunified with their families meaning they entered the cycle identified above. This is not an indictment of the hard work of the child welfare workers, nor of foster parents or residential treatment providers. **It is in fact a statement that the investment came after the fact and that we can prevent this terrible cycle by supporting the treatment providers who offer the following:**

- Co-residency with their parent in residential treatment: this ensures 24/7 supervision/safety, no separation from the parent, support for the parent through the delivery of 24/7 support, treatment, skill building, counseling, mental health treatment, healthcare, and access to community resources: **right now these are being provided at a reimbursement rate of \$120 per day. This is not sustainable and results in staff turn over because we cannot pay a decent living wage. Support for HB 3095 will allow for a 35% increase in reimbursement rates and will allow us to continue these extraordinary services!**
- For the past 20+ years, Willamette Family has provided therapeutic onsite Child care at our State licensed Child Development Center. We achieved the highest rating of FIVE STARS from the State meaning that we meet/exceed all standards. It was established so that parents could devote their focus to treatment and overcoming addiction and not worry about their child care. It has been expanded to ALL parents accessing Willamette Family Services and has a strong partnership with Early Childhood Cares through the University of Oregon. This program assures that EVERY child attending the CDC receives a developmental screening and that any delays are followed by an intervention plan focused on assuring that the child is Ready for School. Because WF staff work with the University team, we learn how to coach parents to be able to implement their child's intervention plan and practice along with them. This improves parenting and attachment.
- Parent Education and Training: our residential programs offer onsite parent training (Circle of Security Education) and 1:1 coaching. We receive </\$100K per year to provide these services. **Funding is urgently needed to sustain these effective services and education.**
- Fathers have always received "second consideration" as the primary parent for children in the foster care system. I call them the "forgotten parent". Yet, the beauty of these relationships and the dedication of the dads who participate in our Intensive Day Treatment Dad's program cries out for expansion and replication. **Approval of the 1119 Waiver for expansion of beds and HB 395 will allow this program to sustain and expand.**

Now is the time to invest in these children and their families! The framework is in the House Ways and Means Committee and your support of this funding will be a critical step forward.



Since 2008, we conservatively estimate that the Willamette Family Reunification Project, we have “saved” the State over \$9M in foster care payments alone. We need to reinvest this into Treatment that breaks the cycle of addiction and keeps Families Together.

Thank you so very much for your hard work. Please feel free to contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

Susie Dey
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