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JUNE 2015

# Issue Brief

## Strong Parenting, Successful Youth: The Parent Training 10 States are Providing to Foster Families

### Helping Foster Kids Succeed

Dr. Patricia Chamberlain was one of four speakers at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Wisconsin Family Impact Seminar on *Helping Foster Kids Succeed: State Strategies for Saving Lives, Saving Money*. She is Science Director and Senior Researcher at the Oregon Social Learning Center. Her parenting programs have been recognized as a National Blueprint Model Program and are included in SAMSHA's List of Evidence-Based Programs. This issue brief summarizes her seminar presentation and chapter in the seminar briefing report.

Dr. Chamberlain's presentation video and briefing report chapter can be downloaded at [wisfamilyimpact.org/fis33](http://wisfamilyimpact.org/fis33).

*The Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars are an initiative of the UW-Madison Chancellor's Office and School of Human Ecology, with financial support from Phyllis M. Northway.*

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**When youth are placed in foster care, the challenge policymakers face is supporting these vulnerable kids without breaking the bank.** Training and supporting birth and foster parents is one evidence-based approach for increasing the stability of foster placements and for reducing foster kids' behavior problems in school and at home. Foster youth also learn how to be more responsible family members and friends.

**One of the strongest predictors of positive child and youth development is effective parenting.** Most foster parents, however, receive little training on how to handle difficult youth behaviors. This lack of skill in managing children's behavior is a primary reason foster parents stop providing care and children are bounced from placement to placement. Multiple placements are hard on kids and costly for taxpayers. Fortunately, several evidence-based programs can build the resilience of foster youth and turn around the lives of these vulnerable kids.

**The Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) program is effective for boys who were serious, repeat juvenile offenders.** The cornerstone of the program is the foster parent, who is carefully selected, intensely supported, and trained in parenting skills. Research shows that youth in the program spent fewer than half as many days in detention, two-thirds less time locked up in state training schools, and 60% fewer days in jail than youth in group care. MTFC is also cost effective. For every \$1 spent, taxpayers save more than \$17 in criminal justice and victim costs by the time youth are 25 years old. In an adapted program for girls referred from the juvenile justice system, foster girls similarly showed fewer arrests, as well as less drug use and (remarkably) fewer pregnancies.

**The KEEP program, a less-intensive program for all youth in foster care, reduces youth behavior problems and strengthens placement stability.** In KEEP, parents receive 16 weeks of training, supervision, and support that is less intensive than in MTFC. Parents learn how to set clear rules, track youth whereabouts, and monitor contact with peers. A rigorous evaluation showed a reduction in youth behavior problems, which led to an increased likelihood of safe and permanent placements—being returned to their birth parents, adopted, or placed with kin.

**KEEP Safe is a prevention program for reducing risky behaviors in girls as they make the transition from elementary to middle school.** Girls participate in a six-session, skill-building curriculum, and foster parents receive six training sessions tailored to the daily challenges they are facing. Compared to group care, girls participating in the program committed fewer delinquent acts, and used lower levels of tobacco and marijuana. They also experienced fewer placement changes compared to girls in regular foster care.

**KEEP and KEEP Safe show the value of a universal intervention that reaches all foster kids, not just those at highest risk.** One reason for training all foster parents is the number of lives they touch. For example, in the KEEP study, foster parents cared for an average of 2.4 children and previously had an average of 13.4 children under their care.

**States across the country are adopting these evidence-based programs.** MTFC has been implemented in California, Maine, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. KEEP has been implemented in California, Maryland, New York, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington, and KEEP Safe is operating in San Diego and Oregon. ●