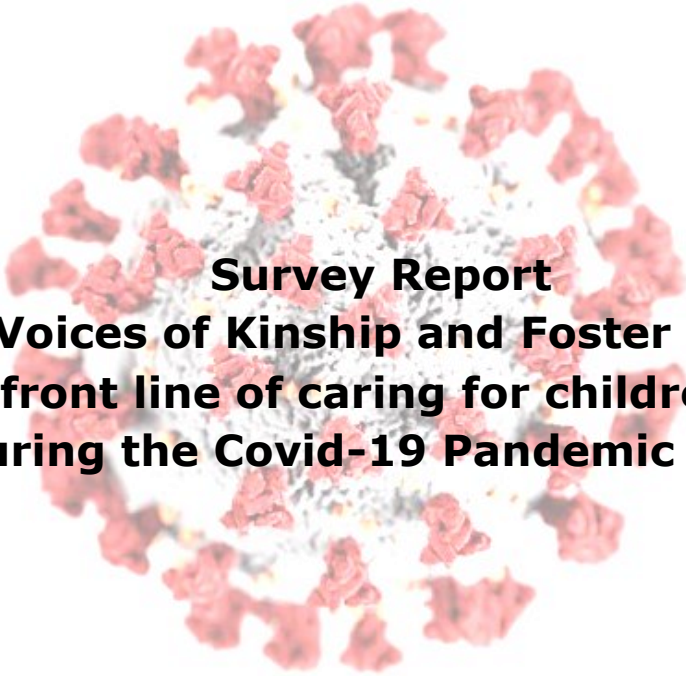




The Kinship & Foster Family
Network of Manitoba

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

Providing Kinship and Foster Care during a Pandemic What Can We Learn?



**Survey Report
The Voices of Kinship and Foster Parents
at the front line of caring for children in care
during the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020**

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**Report on the Voices of
KFFNM Kinship and Foster Parents Surveys
During the Covid-19 Pandemic 2020**

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Notes:

Survey was provided to kinship and foster parents through an anonymous survey.

Comments within responses were separated into groups of similar nature.

Some responses contained elements from more than one group and were separated into appropriate groups.

Percentage of comments reflects total comments to survey questions, after grouping.

Survey Rationale

In January of 2020, the ominous presence of a new deadly virus named The Novel Corona Virus or Covid 19 became a major issue worldwide. This virus brought with it serious life changing concerns including, high death rates, major transmission issues and requirements for people to take extreme precautions to stay safe and avoid becoming ill. In the beginning, Manitoba did not record any cases of Covid 19, however, The Provincial Government immediately began to actively take steps to prepare for and respond to this virus. Part of the strategy included providing Manitobans with regular updates and bulletins which contained specific and very helpful details to keep the public aware and informed. Information included the numbers of individuals who tested positive for the virus, details regarding the symptoms associated with the virus, social distancing and self-isolation requirements, personal hygiene such as hand washing and disinfecting of surfaces and limits to gathering in large numbers. On March 12, 2020 three cases of the virus were confirmed in Manitoba and the Province began advising students and teachers to stay at home if they were ill and for large gatherings to be reduced. On March 20, the Province declared a state of emergency for Manitoba. March 23, 2020, the Province suspended schools until after spring break, April 10, 2020. On March 31, 2020, schools were closed indefinitely and children were expected to be home schooled by parents, this included kinship and foster parents. The nature of the Covid 19 virus demanded stringent, consistent, and accountable responses not only from Provincial and Federal leaders and systems, but especially individuals.

In Manitoba, kinship and foster parents are responsible for the care and support of the majority of the approximately 11,000 children in care. The Child and Family services system is overseen by The Department of Families, Four Authorities and Agencies which provide direct services. The direction and guidance to kinship and foster parents, about key aspects of the way they provide care and support to children, comes from the above noted Family Services system. A major aspect of the work of kinship and foster parents is to facilitate family visits and biological family restoration. In response to the Covid situation, the system initially identified face to face family visits as "essential" and expected kinship and foster parents to continue this important contact with the biological family. At the same time, all Manitobans were given direction to social distance and stay at home. This presented some conflict for caregivers. On April 6, 2020, the family services system provided definitive direction which "temporarily altered or suspended" family visits. This clarification was vital for all caregivers.

During the period from March 23, 2020 to April 20,2020 the kinship and foster Family Network of Manitoba distributed 4 surveys to kinship and foster parents to collect their feedback on how they were managing during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The survey responses from the first to the last survey on April 20, 2020, reflected the evolving changes in guidance and communication kinship and foster parents were receiving about key issues such as family visits, respite, support, and financial assistance. Another issue which impacted survey responses was the decisions and timing around school closure. By the last survey, kinship and foster parents' voices appear less uncertain, and more settled in a routine in response to clear guidance and communication.

This report provides the Child and Family services system with information which reflects the voices of kinship and foster parents regarding their initial experiences over a two-month period during the Covid 19 pandemic in Manitoba.

Survey Summary

Overall, responses indicate that children were being supported in a positive manner and that kinship and foster parents were using their best strategies to respond to their needs. Many creative ideas related to the way they were managing during the Covid 19 pandemic were shared. Responders presented as resourceful, creative, and positive in their responses to children's needs. Ultimately, kinship and foster parents saw this situation as an opportunity to gain an even better understanding of the children's academic, resources, and emotional needs both at home and in school. They recognized their own need for self-care as significant in responding to the needs of the children and families and spent more time engaging in physical activities with children.

In summary, the voices of kinship and foster parents from these surveys reaffirm that kinship and foster parents provide valuable work for children and their families in the CFS system. This work continues to be highlighted during the Covid 19 pandemic and its accompanying heavy demands. It is apparent that kinship and foster parents understand that they are expected to respond to difficult situations no matter what and they report a commitment to doing just that. Kinship and foster parents' response to the surveys demonstrate commitment to their work to facilitate safe care for children, to keep them connected to their families, while maintaining safety for the entire family unit, kinship/foster biological children extended family.

A Manitoba Foster parent shared this experience of providing care during the Covid 19 crisis.

Fostering through a storm - the Pandemic kind...

I can honestly say as a foster parent I never in my wildest dreams or nightmares thought I would be bravely managing five children's school, mental health, social and emotional development through a pandemic. Fostering always comes with challenges and great rewards but this out it on a different level.

In the beginning I wondered how was I going to balance their academics with mental health needs? What were the day's going to look like? How would I manage the lock downs with know where to go, no friends, parks or shopping? So many questions arose and one by one we worked through them.

Some take aways from this process has been to not let the expectations of others overwhelm me so that I could maintain emotional connections and not feel like quitting. Realizing the kids were fearful , anxious, and sad there basic needs needed to be highlighted that those were being met in and amongst the chaos outside our home. Weekly menu planning, daily structure, fun times, bed-times as usual all helped us cope.

We have had to learn how to let things go. We can't control what happens outside our doors but we sure can do something about our house, our time and Kindness became our cornerstone.

I have learned more of how my kiddos learn, how to teach them, work through insecurities and anxiety. I have learned how taking the time to celebrate their successes can greatly impact our day.

I have learned about me too, how I needed to change my strategies and remain open daily.

I wouldn't sign up for this willingly but we did however learn and grow. And it isn't over yet. One step, one day at a time and we will get through this together.

K

Survey Overview

Survey #1

At the point of the first survey, kinship and foster parents were dealing with uncertainties and challenges related to key aspects of their work. They shared that guidance from agencies was somewhat limited, not always clear, and sometimes inconsistent. For example, guidance around specifics for in-person family visits was unclear. Respite was a challenge as some agencies were beginning to reduce or cease providing respite. Although the rationale for this decision was understood by caregivers as safety related, it none the less was hard for them to manage as School was temporarily closed, and children were home full time until April 10, 2020. In addition, some kinship and foster parents had lost their jobs and identified anxiety about potential financial difficulties. Tasks such as grocery shopping and previous routines, were presenting as more onerous as families had to cope with increased prices, lines, and longer wait times to complete their shopping.

Survey #2

By the date of survey #2, responses indicated many of the face to face visits were reportedly postponed while some agencies still expected them to occur. Kinship and foster parents stated concern about the discrepancy between following provincial guidelines for social distancing while continuing face to face family visits. Some parents felt they had no way of knowing how and if biological families involved with family visits were social distancing or if they were exposed to the virus. Drivers involved in facilitating visits were transporting children to more than one home which meant the children were being exposed to several contacts. The responses suggested stressful times for kinship and foster parents and challenges about how to keep everyone safe including the foster children, the biological family and the kinship and foster parents and their family. Children were missing peers and their family and had several uncertainties about the virus.

Direction from the Deputy Minister dated March 27, 2020 indicated: “Agencies are responsible for deciding whether family visits proceed and what changes are needed as a result of COVID-19 (e.g. change in location, reducing number of drivers or other supports involved in facilitating the visit, and alternative means of in person contact such as phone, Skype, FaceTime etc.)”.

Survey #3

On the same date that the survey was delivered, the Province provided clear written guidance that family visits were to be temporarily altered or suspended. At this time, children were out of school for three weeks and the province had announced that schools were closed indefinitely. Homeschooling by kinship and foster parents began in earnest.

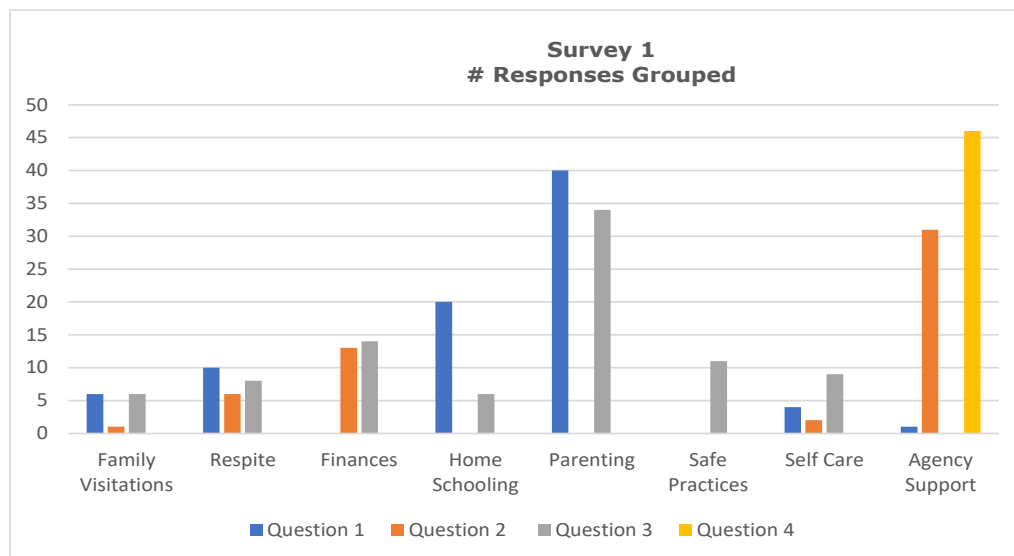
April 6, 2020. the Province provided clear written guidance that family visits were to be temporarily altered or suspended. At this time, children were out of school for three weeks, the province had announced that schools were closed indefinitely, and homeschooling began in earnest.

The number of responses to this survey, 37, was the lowest for all surveys and less than half of the highest number of responses which was 76. In reviewing the cause for this drastic reduction, the Network discovered that surveys 1, 2 and 4 were Boosted on facebook which resulted in a higher number of responses. Survey #3 was inadvertently not boosted, resulting in less foster/kinship parents being reached.

Survey #4

At the time of this survey, K/F parents were responsible for homeschooling children for approximately 5 weeks with no clear end date, guidance for family visits was much clearer and most face to face visits were postponed indefinitely. The Province continued to provide Manitobans with critical daily briefings and updates on Covid 19 which K/F parents found very useful.

Survey #1
Sent: March 23, 2020
62 Respondents
4 Survey Questions



Question #1 **What are the top 3 challenges or concerns you are experiencing as a foster or kinship home during the Covid-19 crisis?**

Parenting (31% of comments)

Identified concerns for food availability in the stores, the dynamics of shopping for food and needing to have more food with everyone being at home all the time. Also, ensuring children are kept safe, kept busy and the needs for one to one guidance or support were being met.

“No school / daycare and the boys don’t understand why, Struggling to keep the kids busy, and entertained throughout the days”

“lack of routine, a little more difficult giving each child their dedicated one on one time.”

“Getting out to get essentials, indoor activities for FASD children,”

Home schooling (17% of comments)

Identified concerns about being able to homeschool multiple children at varying academic levels, abilities, children falling behind in their schoolwork and keeping them focused on schoolwork without outside breaks or opportunity to see their peers. Additionally, needing assistance to adequately meet the homeschooling needs.

“the days are very busy due to trying to keep up with school work”

“Home schooling 4 children who have difficulties.”

“Making sure they don’t fall too far behind in school.”

Respite (8% of comments)

Identified concerns with managing children at home 24/7 without a break, needing respite to continue to work, and respite providers being unable to cash their cheques.

“respite are still waiting for their cheques and banks could be closing in branch services so respite will not be able to cash their cheque. without going through the ATMs and having their cheques held.”

“Can we use respite to help us how we need help”

Family visits (4% of comments)

Identified uncertainty about if and how they will continue. Identified some children being worried about not seeing family, and being concerned about the intricacies of keeping everyone safe while still following social distancing guidelines.

“(my agency) is still mandating our foster children go for in person birth family visits and the extra stress that is adding as we are advocating for our foster babies and our family's safety.”

“Kids still needing to go to family visits, therapy, face to face with workers.”

“Family visit should be cancelled”

Safe Practices (4% of comments)

Identified difficulty keeping all children and adults in the home safe especially if children continued to go for in-person family visits. Some responses identified having individuals who were health compromised and at higher risk.

“How do we keep the children safe”

“Keeping the kids healthy and if they get sick what are the protocols?”

Self Care (4% of comments)

Identified personal challenges and strengths in facing the situation.

“There are no real challenges other than what is expected. We are all dealing well. All healthy and happy to be together.”

Agency Support (1 comment)

“The agency has not discussed anything with our child”

Question #2 What additional supports could help to manage the challenges?

Agency Supports (57% of comments)

Identified the need for agencies to provide kinship and foster parents with timely, accurate, up to date and consistent information through regular communication. Additionally, government updates were identified as very useful.

“more updates/reassurance from our regional office”

“Agency support systems, more communications”

“I don't need any support at this time but that could change.”

“We don't need any supports at this time”

Financial (26% of comments)

Identified the need for additional funds to assist with extra unanticipated costs such as: equipment for home schooling, food, crafts, and activities, supplies and other resources. Additionally, responses shared uncertainty about what they needed, and others indicated no need for any extra supports at the time.

“Extra funding for the things we need to stock up on and for extra support people”

“We are being given extra funds for activities and supplies to help facilitate keeping children busy which was unexpected but will be helpful”

Respite (11% of comments)

Identified the need for actual respite or approval to use respite funds in a different way during the crisis was referenced.

“Being allowed to use respite for alternative things like take out meals, gas to go for drives, etc would be helpful.”

“respite but that is probably impossible”

Self-Care (4% of comments)

Identified necessary strengths required to work through challenges.

“With work I don't have an option, I already assist my grandson with his homework and I do go to other grocery stores. I have been able to manage during these difficult times.”

“We are sharing between households.”

Family Visits (1 comment)

“It would be a huge help if (my agency) would actually hear us and suspend birth visits during this time and it would be helpful not to feel like we are fighting for the safety of our family all on our own.”

Question #3 What steps have you taken in your home to help manage during these challenging times that we can share with others?

Parenting (52% of comments)

Most responses focused on their parenting approaches and steps. The majority included their ideas around setting up and keeping routines, schedules and daily plans. Responses identified strategies which ensure children participate in developing plans, being consistent but not rigid, setting times for family times with calls or videos, participating in activities with the children, setting aside time for physical or safe outdoor activities, keeping children busy, having fun, engaging children in food preparation and other skill building activities.

“routine schedule, limiting screen time, no personal contact with others outside the home. Keeping in touch with family”

“Nothing really. Just keep routines as normal as possible. Regular bedtimes and meal times. Limit screen time and have family activities.”

“I have picked up some extra activities for the kids - art projects, sticker books, games, etc. Trying to maintain some schedule. Including the kids in more of the cooking, laundry, etc.”

“Being consistent and getting the kids out for physical activity at outdoor rink, going for walks or jogs and giving everyone their space”

Safe Practices (17% of comments)

Comments included: isolation, social distancing, extreme hand washing, disinfecting surfaces regularly, going for drives instead of in person visits and going for walks while observing physical distance expectations.

“Isolation no extra people in our home.”

“We are enforcing strict sanitizing procedures, and have put a sign on our front door saying we have a high risk child living here and put our phone number on it so they can call to meet me at the door if they need assistance”

“We are staying home, and when we need to go out children stay home, getting the children involved with baking and cooking, doing lots of arts and crafts, family game nights, family movie nights”

“Taking walks outside while trying to maintain physical distancing which is not too difficult where we live.”

Question #3
(continued)

What steps have you taken in your home to help manage during these challenging times that we can share with others?

Self-Care (14% of comments)

Kinship and foster parents indicated self care as an important concern. They suggested staying calm, getting rest, talking to family and friends, making sure there is fun and laughter, taking a break, being physically active and recognizing the need to be "gentle on yourselves because it is a steep learning curve."

"I am trying not to stress about things beyond my control."

"Pulled up my big girl pants and keep moving forward because what else are we suppose to do"

"Keep the mood up and play with the kids. Exercise and let the kids have input. Bed time is extended a bit during the week."

Family visits (9% of comments)

Identified using skype, facetime, video and phone calls for family visits. Some stated they installed apps on equipment to facilitate contact.

"Youth using face time to connect with biological family and friends"

"facetimeing with family and friends that dont live in our home"

Homeschooling (9% of comments)

Identified strategies to work with schools and support children in their home.

"Downloading reading apps from the school, playing in the backyard when weather permits, lots of crafts"

"We are following our school's recommended schedule, this includes time outdoors for fresh air and for exercise."

Question #4

Do you feel you have received the information you need to adequately manage in your role as a care giver during the Covid-19 crisis? If no, please tell us what information you need, and how to best communicate that information to you.

Agency Support (46 total comments)

Supports Identified (78% of comments)

A large percentage of responses shared very positive feedback on the communication from agencies, felt the agencies were helpful, and that identified that their agency had provided enough information. Some of K/F parents also added responses which described how they felt about the type of support they received.

"I do feel informed between government updates and agency updates. Social media or email is typically the best method for me."

"At this point I feel like I do have the information,"

"Yes we are fine with all the information we received from the agency but... I do miss the trainings ."

"So far my workers have been pretty good. Keep checking to see our needs."

"We're good and stable. We would be happy to take an infant should the need arise. and have the supplies to do so. I think someone needs to centralize the available foster homes. Although we have 4 right now we are happy to help with a baby. There should be a centralized list of homes - it's going to get crazier."

Concerns Identified (22% of comments)

Identified poor or no communication from the agency regarding how to keep children safe, what are the expectations of K/F parents if a child was sick with the virus, what agencies are open and available. It appeared that some agencies were not responding to calls. Information coming from different social workers within an agency did not appear coordinated, and different agencies and authorities had different rules and expectations which made it complicated to manage. This was especially true in situations where homes cared for children from more than one agency or authority.

"Information received from government has been excellent - contact from agency has been zero, no information received from agency"

"No. What do we do with defiant kids. It could kill us."

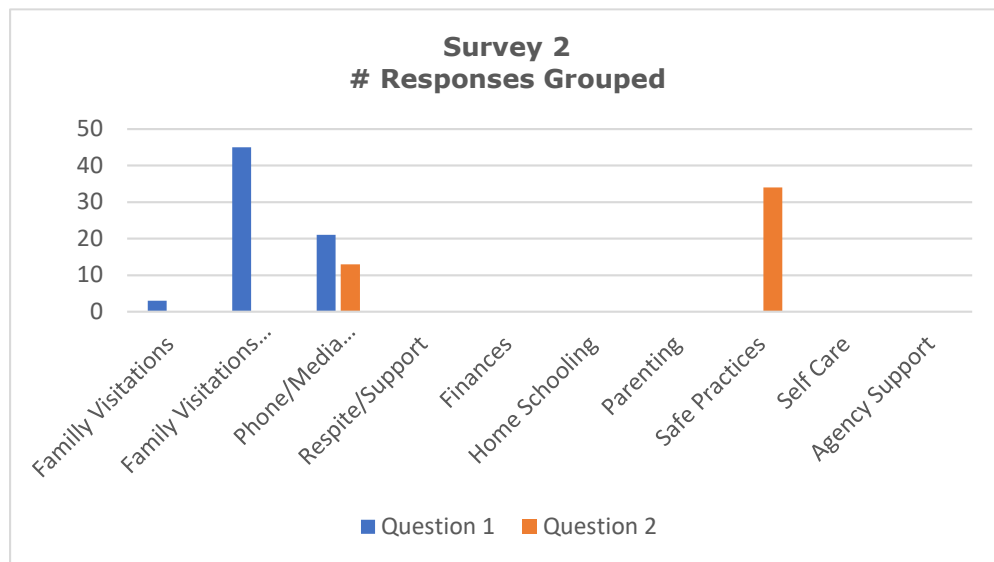
"I don't feel my agency has given me any direction."

"No. Not well coordinated info from agency. Each worker trying to manage the best they can"

"What happens if a child in our care is sick and tests positive for virus and has to be hospitalized? Do I leave them there obviously the agency is informed."

"Having lots of info exchange from non mandated agency. None from guardian agency"

Survey #2
Sent: March 30, 2020
62 Respondents
2 Survey Questions



Question #1 How are family visits being managed for your home?

Family Visits Cancelled (76% of comments)

Identified face to face family visits were cancelled or suspended.

Family Visits (2 comments)

Identified face to face family visits were continuing and this was concerning.

“Ongoing as normal”

“PLEASE STOP VISITS! I understand that seeing parents is very important however we are all doing our part to stay home and this is one area that Foster Parents need help to be able to do so. Everyone is social distancing differently and we have no control on how others decide to do it. In my case my Little ones Mom is going out a lot, how do I know? She tells me.”

Phone/Media Family Visits (24% of comments)

Identified being able to manage facilitating family visits through phone calls, skype, face time and other social media platforms.

Additionally, texts and pictures were also a way that they kept biological family connected.

“We have been doing FaceTime visits.”

“Phone calls from bio parents”

“I have been communicating with the case worker about visits which are not happening at this time. I have been encouraging visits through social media and telephone”

Question #2 What could help you feel safe and comfortable if family visits are continuing?

Would Not Feel Safe (54% of comments)

Identified they would not feel safe with face to face family visits at this time.

“For the safety of our family as well as the child’s families, I think visits should continue to be stopped until we can get this virus under control.”

Nothing - I am making every effort to keep everyone in my home safe and a visit would totally compromise everyone”

Visits with Social Media (21% of comments)

Identified supporting family visits through social media or phone contact.

“FaceTime is working well for us. Reunification isn’t in our cards so I think FaceTime is good enough at this point. Kids like it and they get to talk more often this way.”

“Only do FaceTime visits”

“Only online. Making sure all homes are using virtual visit.”

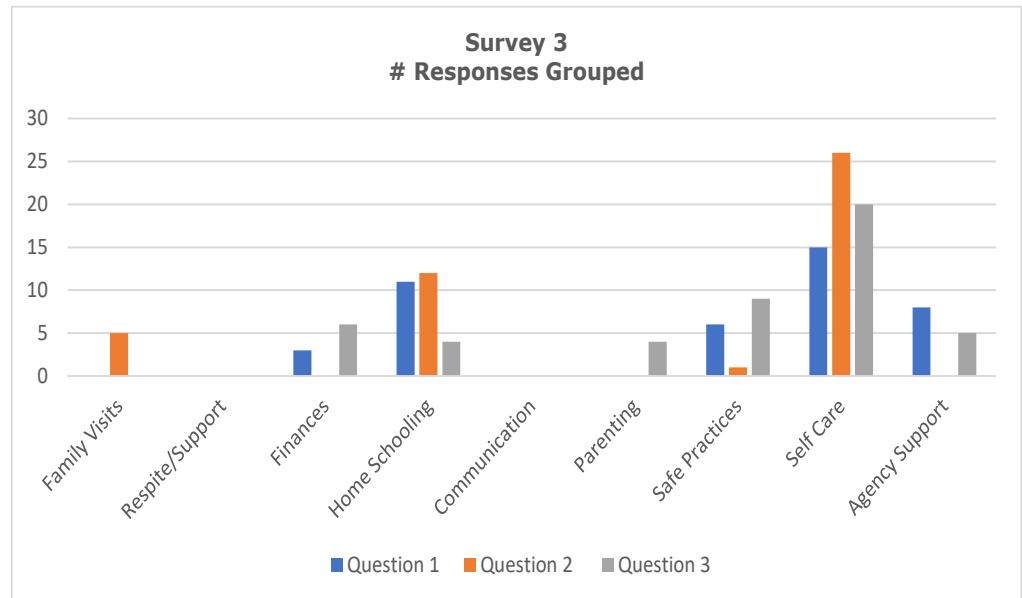
Safe Practices (25% of comments)

Comments included: Each person in contact with the child should follow proper best practice safety precautions such as hand washing, social distancing, disinfecting, having visits in a clean environment, foster and kinship parents to share their safety routines with bio families, wearing gloves, masks and social distancing during visits, ensuring those who have travelled follow the quarantine rules and visiting outdoors.

“using precautionary methods. No touching while visiting and staying a certain distance. Wear gloves and masks. I think it is better to set up video visits at this time to be safe.”

“Knowing that each person in contact with my child is taking precautions to help reduce the chance of my child becoming ill”

Survey #3
Sent: April 6, 2020
37 Responders



Question #1

Given the evolving Covid -19 containment measures, and uncertain timelines associated with these measures what are your current concerns?

Self Care (35% of comments)

Identified concerns about children staying healthy and not becoming ill from the virus. Children who have health complications being put at risk for becoming ill with the virus, and perhaps missing important appointments. Staying well themselves so that they could be available to look after the children. Four responses indicated that they had no concerns and were managing well.

“kids getting sick”

“Stores Running out of essentials like food and bathroom supplies without being able to replenish”

“I am concerned for the medical placements I have in my foster homes. I want them to remain safe because the majority of them have underlying symptoms.”

Agency Supports (19% of comments)

The need for respite to provide breaks when expected to care for the children on a 24-hour basis and provide home schooling without supports. Asked if funding available for respite and supports could be used and managed differently. Questioned if the work they do for children was valued and noted that they were always being asked to do more with no added income assistance.

“How do I get respite? Will the government allow us to do alternative respite?”

“That the agency will take away respite and support. This is the time when we need a break more then ever as we are now also expected to be teachers. Let us use the support hours as a take out option.”

“That I will once again be doing more work for the same pay. The expectations continue to rise but no one considers us to be valued “

Safety Practices (14% of comments)

Identified concerns about keeping everyone safe. Additional worries included bringing the virus into the home as some partners still worked and not everyone was following self isolation and social distancing instructions which made others unsafe.

“People that are not following social distancing.”

“Shopping for our family is my main concern. Clothing, Food, etc”

“My main concern is people not following the self isolation direction given...we are staying home and allowing no visitors however I see people coming and going from other residents.”

Homeschooling (11% of comments)

Identified concerns that children may not get a fair education, they may regress or fall behind in their academics and not having the needed skills to home school the children. Additionally, not having enough computer equipment to facilitate the needs of all children and having poor internet connections.

“Delays academically”

“ability to home school”

“Accessing remote learning opportunities in an area with poor internet connection and only one computer to share with 6 kids”

Finances (7% of comments)

Identified concerns with their financial health and sustainability.

“Not to mention financial strength”

“Economic sustainability”

“financial”

Question #2 What concerns have the children in your home expressed?

Self Care (60% of comments)

Identified concerns that they could themselves get sick. Some children were said to have no concerns, were happy and coping well.

“Not verbally expressed but has bad dreams and nightmares Angers easily”

“The lack of socialization has become a big problem for my one foster child. Being unable to play with other children is taking an effect”

“Fear of someone giving them the virus. Fear of falling behind in school academics.”

“missing friends.”

Safe Practices (1 comment)

“My children have decided NOT TO COME OVER. So I DO NOT get to see them or my grandchildren. But it is apparently essential for kids in care.”

Home School (27% of comments)

Identified children shared concerns missing school, friends and teachers and not being able to play and socialize with friends. Additionally, some were upset that they would miss out on graduation and farewell events.

“whether or not there will be a graduation ceremony this summer, or will it of to be next year”

“They miss their friends and school”

“No access to a computer to do school work. Not seeing friends.”

Family Visits (11% of comments)

Identified concerns about their family's safety, well-being and missing their family visits.

“They are worried about parents well being and their safety.”

“Missing their normal visits with their family and friends.”

Question #3 What are your current greatest needs related to the Covid-19 situation?

Self Care (52% of comments)

Identified a need for social interaction with family and friends, finding time for self care amidst all the care demands, getting a break to recharge and just finding a way to manage with being at home all the time and ensuring childrens' safety.

“My biggest need is to find some time for self care while in the mist of school work, meltdowns, household duties and trying to keep kids busy with fun activities.”

“We have been able to meet all our needs to date.”

“Making sure we have food and keeping in contact with friends and family by phone.”

“Sanity! Ok, in all seriousness, being able to have "me time" for self care & recharge.”

Agency Support (13% of comments)

Identified concerns with safe respite, help with managing behaviours, needing ideas for keeping children busy and having fun. Additionally, finding ways to manage through the challenges keeping the children's needs uppermost.

“No respite or other outside help How do we all stay safe:

“Hmmm, good question. Not really sure. I am still feeling supported by my agencies and other resources that are in place so, at this moment, can't really think of anything”

Financial (15% of comments)

Identified concerns about being able to pay bills amidst some job loss, higher food costs, technology needs for homeschooling, and crafts to keep children busy were mentioned.

“Financial support for foster families-at minimum an increase equal to the Federal Government's increased Child Tax Allowance”

“imperative that all foster parents continue to receive maintenance in order to provide the best quality of care.”

“Increase in \$ for groceries which have increased exponentially”

Parenting (10% of comments)

Identified concerns with adjusting to isolation and new normal.

“Our one toddler won't sleep. We need him to adjust to the change and get sleep”

“Entertaining the children, schoolwork and keeping up with the housework is a bit of a challenge. We are still working out a pure and perfect routine.”

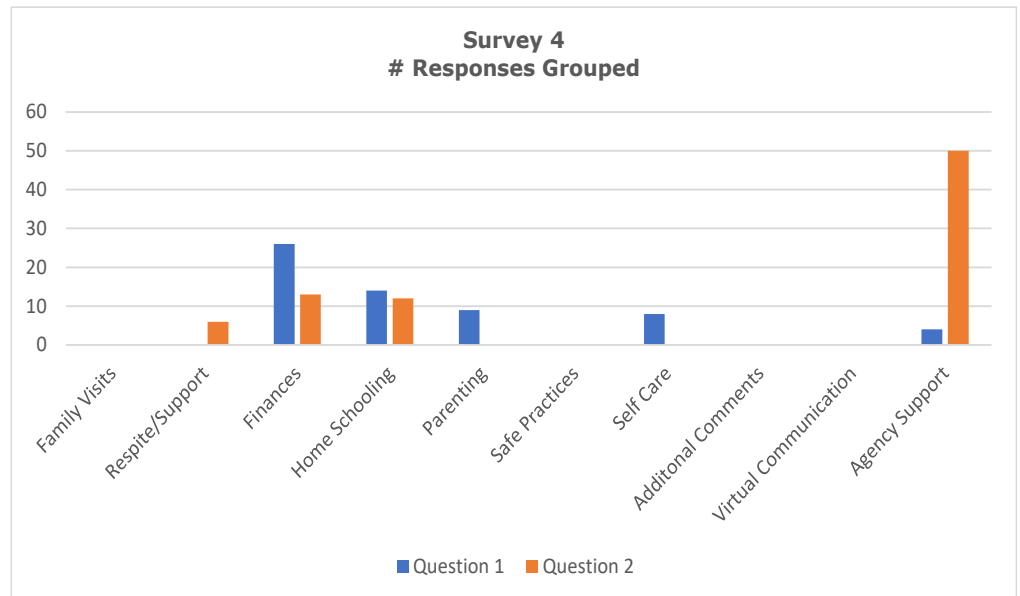
Home School (10% of comments)

Identified concerns with increased role required to meet school needs and equipment needs.

“My child needs a computer to be able to continue with some school work. I feel CFS will be getting more money from the child tax credit they should put it forward towards the children.”

“How my FASD child will ever catch up in school. And will she get the support she needs moving into highschool next year. Been fighting for them since she was 2.”

Survey #4
Sent: April 20, 2020
67 Responders
2 Questions



Question #1 **What additional financial or other pressures are you facing as a Kinship/ Foster parent due to Covid 19?**

Finances (43% of comments)

Identified concerns with higher grocery, utility bills, lost employment, costs for school, and craft supplies. Additionally, some stated they were managing well and not experiencing any financial pressures.

“No extra outside income for 1 adult. Extra cost of formula etc because I can't shop the sales. Grocery bill is higher.”

“I am unable to work due to no school and no daycare.”
“financial extras for the additional items. for example the kids therapist expects us to have a private conversations with the use of a headset. So I've had to go out and purchase headsets for each kid. And then the kids current tablets don't work with the platforms the schools are requiring to use.”

“Paying people to do my grocery shopping. Ordering more food in than usual, due to not overwhelming the people shopping for me. I just get the basics”

Parenting (15% of comments)

Identified concerns with being full time teachers, at the same time, juggling all of the different roles on a 24/7 basis without a break.

“The biggest pressure for me is having everyone home 24/7 and not being able to take breaks and get out and visit others. Also just juggling home, school, meals, shopping etc.

“Hubby is in sales, not going so well, homeschooling, never signed up for that! No breaks, no compensation for no breaks, or being a school teacher.”

“24/7 at home especially when your use to going to work. Children become more needy.”

“Without respite, keeping up with the laundry, while doable, is a huge time sink.”

Homeschooling (23% of comments)

Identified being unsure and stressed that they were not fully prepared or capable of being teachers. Additionally, identified concerns with lack of resources.

“Trying to get electronic equipment working properly to access school work. Trying to make sure you have all you need in a timely manner.”

“Definitely increase pressure to make sure school work is done as well as zoom calls with family and school. Holds a lot of change for all of us in the house.”

+I have 3 children that are doing projects for home schooling; I believe that our agency should be offering families with Chromebook for schooling and it shouldn't come out of the kids activity money but the one time increase to their child tax credit money that the agency receives for the children in care.”

Agency Support (6% of comments)

Identified workers not checking in with them or responding to e-mails, and phone calls.

“our worker doesn't check in to see how we are doing, she normally doesn't respond to emails either.”

“Workers should be providing a bi-weekly or Monthly check in (Not just...if we are sick to contact them) if they are classified as Essential workers and at the office; there is technology for a check ins.”

Self Care (6% of comments)

Identified concerns with increased challenges to providing kinship or foster care.

“Doing extra work at home with no break and anticipation of cuts in the future. Having lived through Foster Parenting under Gary Filmon”

“The extreme isolation...and reluctance to use respite. To protect us and them”

“The kids are going stir crazy. No one visits and we can't go anywhere.”

Question #2

Has your agency provided any additional support during Covid-19? If so please list what they have provided and what has been most helpful.

Agency Support (72% of comments)

Identified concerns (70%) with lack of agency support during Covid 19. Additionally, (30%) identified extra supports were received from the agency.

“No support. from the agency.”

“Our licensing agency has provided no additional helps.”

“With the kids home all day I don't have time to dedicate to keeping up with the paperwork and emails required. Yet they keep calling and asking if we had a chance to do any of it.”

“No. None at all.”

No. None at all. I asked for more respite so I can keep the kids home instead of putting them in daycare and subjecting them to this maybe and that was rejected. I'm an essential worker and missed a months of work due to waiting for daycare spot.

“To tell you the truth we have not heard from our worker since the beginning of March.”

“Social workers have kept in touch with us and let us know if we need anything to let them know.”

“They continue to email and offer if we need we can call.”

“They have sent ways of coping, free online sites.”

“They have emailed us lists upon lists of online respirces. None of which I have time to look at. Jienstly from multiple agencies we are recriving 100's of emails a day. With the kids home all day I don't have time to dedicate to keeping up with the paperwork and emails required. Yet they keep calling and asking if we had a chance to do any of it.”

“The agency is awesome. All the same support remains in place. Kids zoom with workers. In home support is there and reach out to us. I have absolutely no issues with the agency. In fact I commend them for all their support.”

Respite (9% of comments)

Identified concerns about lack of respite being provided.

“just found out that they have decided not to take away respite but instead have given us licence to use it creatively. Yay!”

“My managing agency offered more respite. Until respite freeze was put in place. So they tried to help until their hands were tied”

“We get no respite because once they turn 14 or are turning 14 within the year, no funding for much needed respite.”

“They have taken all respite support away for the safety of the kids. They are expecting us to do all the extras all alone.”

“We were given additional respite for three weeks and that was very helpful. That has ended and will not be renewed.”

Financial (19% of comments)

Identified concerns and appreciation for funding being provided.

“Just direct deposit of pay”

“\$100 per child for toiletries in march”

“They have sent a small amount of extra money for activities etc for the kids.”

“\$200 extra for entertainment was a big help”

“We are receiving an extra \$100 per month, and our child will be receiving a computer to do their online schoolwork.”

“I would like for the agencies to provide additional support (ie: laptop or tablets for the children who are home schooling); however, we have not had any support.”

“One agency has provided funds for new computer and license for online learning program, another agency has offered nothing except pressure to go over and above during an already stressful time”

Recommendations

Kinship and Foster care has evolved and kinship and foster parents are recognizing the importance of biological family reconciliation. They have a desire to work side by side with a child's biological parents to restore their family.

In order to do their best work, kinship and foster parents require open communication and information with the Child and Family services system. They need to be a part of the "Team" surrounding the children and families, to be involved in planning, and contribute to decisions. Kinship and foster parents want to be properly trained to professionally do their work to support children and families and to be valued for the work they do.

The Kinship and Foster Family Network recommends the following planning steps be considered in the event of a crisis reoccurrence which requires similar extraordinary measures.

1. RESPITE

- a. Maintain already approved respite.
- b. Assess if respite is required in situations where it is not currently approved.
- c. Provide approval to use respite in creative ways as established collaboratively between kinship and foster parents and the mandated agency.
- d. Establish care provider documentation standards for the use of respite during a crisis.

2. SAFETY

- a. The Family services system, through consultation with care providers, implement protocols and timelines for family visits as previously distributed on April 6, 2020.
- b. Establish agency guidelines and resources to support virtual family visitations during extraordinary circumstances.
- c. The Family services system, through consultation with care providers, establish provisions for appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and disinfecting supplies to be made available based on an established criteria.

3. FINANCIAL

- a. The Family services system, through consultation with care providers, establish protocols to offset additional financial costs to caregivers considering: higher food costs, higher utility costs, additional resource supplies.

4. HOME SCHOOLING

- a. The Department of Families, through consultation with care providers, to establish protocols between the Departments of Education and Families to respond to all homeschooling needs and supports.

5. COMMUNICATION

- a. The Family services system, establish protocols for weekly check-ins between the mandated agency and kinship and foster parents during such exceptional times of crisis.

The Kinship and Foster Family Network of Manitoba believes addressing these recommendations will support kinship and foster parents to best meet their responsibilities to the professional team. This includes providing clear communication about how they parent, recognizing and noting skills, strengths and challenges of children, providing consistent clear documentation, demonstrating an ability to work with and include biological family in the family restoration process.



Kinship & Foster Family Network of Manitoba

Mission Statement

To encourage, promote, assist, and educate foster and kinship homes to enhance the quality of life for children in care.

The Kinship and Foster Family Network of Manitoba is committed to participating in the important on-going skill development of kinship and foster parents through the facilitation of kinship and foster parent skill development training.

Introduction to Foster Care
Levels 1 & 2 Skill Development Series
Focused Forums
Information Sessions
Peer Support Program

To learn more about the services we provide check our web site:

Website: kffnm.ca



The Kinship & Foster Family
Network of Manitoba

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

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