

What is QPI?

The Quality Parenting Initiative is an approach to strengthening foster care, by refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system.

When parents can't care for their children, the foster or relative family must be able to provide the loving, committed, skilled care that the child needs, while working effectively with the system to achieve the best possible permanency option for that child. Both the caregiver's parenting skills and the system's policies and practices should be based on child development research, information and tools.

Fulfilling this commitment is challenging, in part, because systems have been primarily focused on finding placements or beds, rather than the most suitable family for these children who are temporarily away from home. This attitude is reflected in the differences between standards for adoptive parents, which focus on the family's strength and weakness, and foster parents, which focus on the safety of the physical home. This influences the public image of adoptive parents, seen as loving and altruistic, as opposed to foster families, who are often seen as financially motivated and uncaring. The foster care "brand" is tainted and deters families from participating rather than encouraging them.

QPI is an effort to rebrand foster care, not simply by changing a logo or an advertisement, but by changing the expectations of and support for foster parents and other caregivers. The key elements of the process are defining the expectations of caregivers, clearly articulating these expectations (the brand statement), and then aligning the system so that those goals can become a reality. When these changes are accomplished, the new brand becomes the basis for developing communication materials and designing integrated recruitment, training and retention systems.

When QPI is successful, caregivers have a voice, not only in issues that affect the children they are caring for, but also in the way the system treats children and families. Caregivers, agency staff and birth parents work as a team to support children and youth. Caregivers receive the support and training they need to work with children and families and know what is expected as well as what to expect. Systems are then able to select and retain enough excellent caregivers to meet the needs of each child for a home and family.

Communities participating in QPI have formed a network that shares information and ideas about how to improve parenting, recruit and retain excellent families. They develop policies and practices that are based on current child research to support skilled loving parenting.

www.gpi4kids.org
www.ylc.org

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