

# Licensing - Episode 13 Transcript

Cat 2:13

This is Kat, and I'm here with Jack and today we have a special guest, read, who is a licensing director.

Jack 2:19

So read, let me ask you a very serious question. What is your favorite drink at Starbucks. Oh, I'm

Red 2:28

so glad you asked that, Jack, sitting here with a venti Caramel Macchiato in front of me. The only thing missing is the extra shot of espresso.

Cat 2:40

which maybe you needed and it smells so good. I'm gonna try one. It smells so good. I don't usually drink any coffee at all.

Jack 2:46

Res, Can you tell me what your current position is and what that entails.

Red 2:53

Sure. So, for the past three years I have been a part of an agency that oversees the licensed foster homes.

Cat 3:02

So this is a really big job and you affect a lot of people in the area, adults and children.

Red 3:09

Yes, thank you and sometimes you don't think of it like that and sometimes it just feels like, trying to get people through some of the worst times, whether it be a situation with getting a kid to the doctor or not having the right paperwork so I appreciate hearing that because sometimes it just feels like you're in a whirlwind of chaos all day long.

Cat 3:30

I'm sure it does so, I understand that you oversee licensing which includes initial licensing of a home rights licensing and placement is that everything?

Red 3:40

My main arena is the licensing department, we work so closely with the placement department, because for us in licensing one of our major jobs is to know our families and know their strengths know what the needs they have maybe when it comes to children so part of that is being able to work with other departments placement directly to make sure that we're doing the best that we can for both the children and our families who take in those kiddos.

Cat 4:07

Okay. Can you explain the difference and the functions of those departments.

Red 4:12

So, we have an initializing department, which means that any home that potentially wants to become a foster parent will start in that arena, they'll start with the initial licensing specialist as they move through the process of getting license going through classes having home visits all the different inspections and certificates of completion, you have to hand in.

Once you obtain your foster care license you then rotate over to a relicensing specialist so then that's kind of like your case manager if you look at the big picture within child welfare we know our children have case managers attached to them so that licensing specialist is like your case manager, so they're there to get you whatever you need to help guide hook you up to the right people, if there's something that we can assist with,

But it's so much more because we oftentimes are those emotional containers for foster parents because, you know, and I and I have to say our foster parents are really our heroes because they walk into this not knowing much about, you know, maybe the history of a child and you're dealing with the fallouts. The tantrums, the triggers that you don't even know about.

So, for us in licensing to it's a really great opportunity to be able to be that sounding board or just a place to vent and maybe just validate that someone is not crazy. I think some of us probably all consider ourselves crazy, a little bit or another. In this fields just it's so important for all the way from upper leadership to, you know the specialists that are boots on the ground running to be able to make those connections and offer support in your real life experience with your licensing specialist,

Jack 5:57

they're like, they're like your person, as a foster mom, all of these people that are all these partners that are involved, including yourself, are there for the kids and they're for the biological parents, nobody out there is really going to be advocating for the foster mom, except for licensing,

I have been so beyond blessed to have like the two best licensing people. I feel like with both of them that I could go to them and just like that and say, and so fresh, and not have them judge me and be like, think that I'm like a bad person or a bad mom or like, you know, that you know that I don't have a good attitude or whatever that they understand like what we're going through, you know, anytime I've had a situation where I needed a case manager to do something or I needed something from whatever partner for these kids, and they can't do it. My licensing person is always, like, you can't get it done, I'll get it done for you,

Jack 6:49

that's like, it's, I mean it's really an advocate for a foster parent more than like making sure you're following the rules like yeah, they come to my house they make sure that I didn't leave soap out. But it's like the dog foods put away but you know and we were talking in another episode about, you know, how licensing like it's not about the rules, it's about keeping kids safe.

And even if there's a rule and you think it's stupid, there's probably something stupid that somebody did that made that rule happen and when we get those emails from our licensing and you're like yeah, what, like, who did this. So, you know, I, I really don't see them as like they're here to make sure, like, I don't step out of line like they're here to help me they're here to like support my family to support my kids, you know my first licensing specialist met me at the hospital at like, almost midnight, one night because my kid wouldn't stop throwing up and sat there with me and brought me Starbucks like, you know she did not need to do that.

Cat 7:55

Totally. That is like a valuable, like especially welfare when

Jack 8:00

And with everybody's so overworked, that this woman would like take time out of her personal life to come and sit at the house she didn't have to do that

Cat 8:06

And I feel like most of the complaints I get from people that I work with, and child welfare, it's because they have no resources or because they have no power, and there is someone who's giving you power, like you can't do something, let me help you.

Red 8:19

Yeah, and that's, that's it and it's really hard to be in licensing because we are there to ensure compliance with our foster homes and Department of Children and Families, but in the same token, we are there to just be a support and a guide, we don't ultimately control which way a

case is going to go and you know as much as we can advocate and pulled together meeting, sometimes it doesn't go the way that maybe we would all want it to go and so it's it's it's a fine line because sometimes we wish we could do so much more, but just to be there and walk alongside somebody during one of these difficult times is just, you know more than gratifying for us. Yeah,

Jack 9:04

yeah, I mean, I'm, you know, a big fan of licensing

Cat 9:08

I mean that really like, that's the definition of a good relationship is just holding space for each other and that's sounds like it's a lot of what licensing is doing.

Red 9:15

Absolutely, and I like that word you use holding space because that is it. That is 100% Exactly what we do for you know not only our families but stepping in for other you know specialists families I mean there's a lot of on call duties that go into licensing and so you know we may have a staff that goes out to a home that they're not assigned to because they're there to support and that and that's really, you know, the big thing, whether it's 10 o'clock at night, four o'clock in the morning, you will always find somebody with licensing to be there as a support. And the other thing I would say is in child welfare,

Jack 9:49

it's hard to get callbacks, you know from pretty much every other partner yeah licensing, if, if I text or call my licensing specialist, I really do not wait long. If at all.

Cat 10:02

So, that's amazing.

Jack 10:03

it's definitely huge on the support side. So, these different departments that you oversee, how do they collaborate and share information. So,

Red 10:14

We have a lot of meetings, a lot of meetings, a lot of coming together, I mean, the biggest thing within this field and I think sometimes it's really hard for people to see the bigger picture but how each of us affect one another.

So for example, placement, if they don't have all of the information about a child and they call a

foster family foster family accepts, and they weren't given all the information so now we kind of have a domino effect and even for licensing us coming out, we like to be out there whenever our families get children or if it's a new child and brand new family we want to be out there to support them and kind of our hands are tied as those pieces within the system break down so the the biggest aspect, I think, in collaboration is really that communication and the constant communication, maybe it's not just one meeting a day.

There are times where I've spoken to placement probably six or seven times, sometimes I wonder if they're like, you know, if they're probably sick of hearing from me at that point, but we all have each other's numbers on speed dial and that's really it's up to us to to model what partnership should look like with these departments, how

Jack 11:23

do you keep the cohesion between them.

Red 11:26

We do the best that we can I think when we're on the phone when we can sense, one of us are struggling, it doesn't matter whether it's from your own team or from another team but there's someone there to step in and try and point out some of the good things that are happening and maybe we didn't get that sibling group of six plays together but you know what we got three of them together in one home and we got three in another home together so you know we have limited resources if we had a home for every child I mean ideally that would be the best solution we could ever have.

As more people stepping up because it is kids within our own community. And I know not everybody can be a foster parent or wants to do that but there's something that everybody can do to support our families and to support our community because we're all here to really work to strengthen families and family units and family systems, whether that means a reunification or even, you know, trying to fit a new child into one of our foster families homes.

It can be hard. I mean, and especially for a child trying to fit into a home that they have no idea if you could imagine showing up to a brand new home when you've lived the last six years under a certain set of rules and now I have to take my shoes off when I come in the door. Yeah, I mean I can't even imagine and so that this little bit that we can do to talk to one another and to, to really facilitate communication is going to be the best step for everybody involved in this.

Cat 12:53

That sounds amazing. It sounds like you're running a great department. We're trying.

Red 12:58

it's never like that all the time we do have our moments and again that's where we have to come together because we are all we have, you know, we're privatized in Florida but you know there's not a lot of people shouting out you did a really good job, I know and I think for all of us that I have some sort of involvement are familiar with the child welfare system there's there's oftentimes a lot of finger pointing at the bad things that are happening and sometimes we forget about all the good, and we have to take the small pieces, whatever that may be you know finally locating long term placement for a kid we have to take those wins and so yeah, helping each other, acknowledge that and recognize that, you know, hey we did do something good yeah today.

Cat 13:39

Yeah, that's amazing. What was your first experience with foster care, how did you learn about foster care, did you know any foster kids growing out.

Red 13:48

I actually, it's so weird because I didn't pay much attention to it and you know, not until you get into something do you start to realize maybe some of those signs are patterns within your, your life so in high school, I definitely had one friend and I just it didn't make sense she didn't live that wasn't her real address she was staying with that you know and I never I didn't put two and two together and I guess maybe, you know in hindsight, knowing what I know now I probably could have asked more questions, they didn't.

And so, you know, kind of, once we graduated and like meeting her large amount of brothers and sisters, I'm like, This isn't like it did make sense. So, and that really was kind of a moment for me, and choosing which direction I was going so my mom was a nurse and that was what I wanted to do. I want and she was like, you don't want to do this.

Red 14:42

And so, you know, I, I've always kind of had a fear of needles and, you know, being her being a nurse and maybe practicing giving her a flu shot you're in there on it or like I couldn't take it. She's like you better find a new career, like what can I do that I'm still going to have an impact.

And so, I think, yeah, yeah, so I went into you know I decided this was the avenue now today, everything in a million years I end up in child welfare No, but through my different changes i i worked with pregnant and parenting teams that were actually diverted from their children being removed, that's kind of WoW, and that was through an agency out of state so that was wonderful.

It really gave me a lot of hope because there are people that want to change and so I think I saw that aspect where maybe not having much systematic knowledge or really knowing, you know, I think, as we all think sometimes when people aren't able to maybe care for the kids that we they want to we think there's a problem with them and what are they doing more and it's not always that there's unfortunately some other things that come into play, addictions, illnesses that are unseen mental health needs that, that we don't really pay much attention to her didn't have a reason to before

so for me that was really big and kind of getting my feet wet and I'll never forget the first, you know, I was in at a home visit and I, when I started this job, it was not really in a great part of town but they told me you know I walked in and I had that like cute little heels on for the first day and they're like oh no no no rad, you're not, this is not gonna work. And so I'm like, What do you mean, I had my first experience with that, in, in experiencing a teen who was pregnant and her daughter and a mother that had a severe drug addiction, and the impact that played so that kind of was a whole new thing for me

then I moved out of state and here. And so it was a it was a struggle trying to figure out where I wanted to be and then I actually 12 years ago I started in placement.

So I definitely can speak on behalf of that I know the struggles they experience I know how hard it is, you do you have to present a child that maybe doesn't have such a great history to a family that I mean the amount of times my, my hands would be shaken I got the cold sweats like I don't know what's gonna happen here but, you know, but that's the biggest thing is just being able to find the strengths of children and really look at a lot of our families and there's so many of our families that need those characteristics of the needs of children we have and it's it's so amazing to be able to take strings of parents and be able to pair that with needs of children and the progress that seen I mean that's the ideal goal, I would imagine that so fulfilling.

It is like you know there's days where I mean I think we all have that where you just you kind of, you sigh and you're like, Am I really doing good in this world and so they may, there may be one thing that happens or a call or hearing from a foster family that maybe is no longer licensed because that is what we do in licensing I mean, I remember when I was kind of more boots on the ground running,

going to a home and sitting down for a family meal with them and that's how we did three licensure visit and all their kids were around it just, I mean you know that you're it's like you're a part of the family and that's one of the amazing things about our jobs and licensing too is getting to know these families and the children and like just seeing, you know, children thrive,

not just foster children but even birth children who may be just you know we're not used to having no other kids around them all the time and just, you know, social skills that are getting better and just communication skills and just from being around other kids and so it's just it's amazing and I could keep going on forever.

Cat:

I mean my own kids who and I don't have any foster kids, they've they have learned things from being around Jack's kids foster kids and adoptive kids that I never could have taught them.

Red:

And that's, that's such a you know and I and I'll say this to a lot of our families. Earlier on I think it really just adds another perspective to your life and I don't want to say almost like a well roundedness but just really being real with the problems in the world or the problems in our own community and just the things the trauma that experiences that some kids go through that other kids don't, I mean yes just makes you think every day that you have what you have and you've thrown out layaway that you have.

Cat 19:23

Yeah, and you can't transplant that you can't do you have to experience it.

Jack 19:27

Yeah and I think that, You know, I definitely see a compassion in my kids that I know comes from being a foster family, the way that they are compassionate and nurturing to the kids that come into my house, blows me away and every time I see it I just want a ball like today, my four year old.

My, my, one of my new placements, who is to was upset about something and seeing how my four year old walked over to him and wrapped his arms around him. And actually, even my 11 year old who you know is an 11 year old boy, sometime in the past day, my 11 year old son actually physically carried my seven year old foster son to me holding him like a baby and said seven year old needs some sugar, and the seven year old just kind of melted on my lap and kiss my cheek, and I hugged him and I'm like, did you need some love it and he's like, yeah.

And so, you know, seeing the way that they recognize emotions and know that, you know, even though all of my kids in my house have been through trauma, you know all of my children are adopted and but they're so focused on other people's trauma, and the way that they love people just always blows me away and you know when you're having these times where you're like, oh, you know, maybe we need to stop maybe it's affecting my kids negatively and then you



just see what beautiful people they've become because they were foster brothers,

Red 21:08

you know, and you said something so important right there too because we in licensing Yes, about foster parents had certain job it's support educate and guide but I think so many times we forget about the kids that are in the home prior to foster kids coming in and how are they feeling how are they doing with all of this, and, and, you know, and because we do, we tend to think about adults a lot of times but the impact that it can have on your own children and children affected by kids transitioning out of the home without proper transitions that I mean, we think about what happens to foster kids without proper transitions, we have our own kids that are experiencing, you know, the same types of things and I think sometimes they're easily forgotten amongst all of the other things that pop up with the system so it's really important to make sure that we're always checking in, not just with our adult foster families but our children involved with those foster families and just as you said, I mean, you think about whether it's worth it. Sometimes it just those little hints of even what you've shared Jack has been so beneficial.

Jack 22:17

That's another thing is when we talk to people who want to be foster parents but they're holding off for something, you know, a lot of the things I hear is, I'm waiting for my kids to get older, or I'm worried about how to affect my kids and you know I try and encourage them and tell them that, you know, it can affect your kids in such a positive way. Yeah, you know,

Cat 22:36

well and I'm not I know I've told this story but like I'm not a foster parent but we have definitely spent a lot of time together. I mean my kids can definitely be extremely self centered, which is developmentally appropriate, but I know we were here, you know like 11 When you got a call once for a baby. And it was like so heartwarming to see my boys who really don't want to do anything but beyond their devices, like, come and they went through your baby stuff with your 11 year olds, and to find all your baby sister on a storage room.

and I you know I think my youngest ended up falling asleep with the girl that your three pack the girls, they all like huddled up, and then my boys, like, I think they all the three boys like got the stuff together. I don't see them do that. I like you know like, we just do stuff for our kids all the time which is wonderful.

That's how I wanted my life to be I didn't want my kids to suffer but the consequence of that is that they don't live a life of doing things for other people they live a life where they get served a lot, so it was really nice. And then we stayed up till like two in the morning and I think the only

one who made it was my 11 year old but he, he changed her diaper who fed her. I don't remember if we base her but like, it was nice. It was really nice to see like the empathy and the kindness and the, they were so excited

Red 23:57

Its amazing to see what kids have, You know bottled up at the side of them sometimes and when, you know, at the right moments, those pieces of maybe you've doubted how you've parented your child or whether they've picked up enough in those truly shine through in situations like this.

Jack 24:14

so let me ask you a question right, can you tell me about the formal education you completed.  
Sure,

Red 24:19

so I have a bachelor's degree. I majored in psychology I minored in sociology and anthropology with like a focus on Race and Ethnic Relations,

Cat 24:31

it was a good one.

Red 24:33

Well, and it's a funny story behind all of that because where I grew up was predominantly, you know, we were a Caucasian community and so I didn't live abroad for a little while and that was a huge eye opener for me sure it was to be the minority. Most times, you know, we're a majority and I hate to say it like that but it really opened up my eyes to a lot, and that was really one of the reasons why I focus solely on the race and ethnic relations and, you know, turns out it paid off, although I did take French and all through you know school and I moved down here and French is not as common as Spanish was so you know you can't win them all, but keep on going.

Cat 25:14

So you've shared a little bit about your career, but can you give us just like a little breakdown of what you've done can you

Red 25:18

get over absolutely so. So when I got out of school. I really, you know, I didn't have a desire to go back for a Master's because I wasn't sure if that's really what I wanted. I think we all get out of school sometimes and just sit and go what is next for me. And so I had that moment and I was a waitress and then I was doing some pregnancy and HIV counseling and that was super

rewarding but you know the struggles of seeing women not be able to have children or have children and maybe did not, you know, want to want to, you know, care for them full, full term. So that, that was really a struggle and that kind of is when I figured I wanted to go and help I wanted to help those that wanted to parent their children.

And so that's when I got into a case manager for pregnant and parenting teens and then eventually into child protection, and then I switch states and came down here and waited for a while, to, to figure out where I wanted to be but started in placement and just through my experience, I've been doing initials I've worked in the therapeutic foster care realm, I have worked in a different area I do also.

I'm a yoga instructor and teach thing in rowing so one of my two of my friends started a not for profit organization where we bring our passion and our love for yoga and all the benefits that brings us to at risk youth. So we bring a curriculum that we've developed into it's about a 12 week program so we will go into group homes, we'll go to DJ facilities.

So we just have really, you know, been trying to bring the benefits that we experienced from, you know, meditation from just the holding space to be resilient to finding our power in every situation so we're helping bring that to kids and kind of through all of that and then just continuing to be in this field and taking every training opportunity that I can to enhance skills and just relationship building.

I mean I feel like so many times it's like well, could you do the job. Yeah, I could but it's not even about checking boxes, it's about learning about people and interacting and seeing how you can best support them so although we like to think hey a bachelor's is when it takes to do this and it does on paper. There's so much more to it than just, you know, a degree.

Jack 27:53

well and speaking to that. Do you think that your formal education prepared you in any ways for, you know, your career, or do you think it was really just a means to get into the career yeah

Red 28:06

I think the, the latter of the options and I mean, I'll tell you, you know, philosophy, I'm not remembering anything I was required to take a flyer statistics I know yes that's important, but I don't, I mean and I guess it really depends on what kind of learner you are I knew for me I am hands on so you told me to read this book and then go do something.

I don't know that that's going to be the best way I learned but I would say everything I would attribute everything that I know I mean yes we go through training we do that, but I would say, I

mean concepts are there, but it's putting those concept concepts into real life practice and being able to relate it to what you're doing now,

I mean and this is gonna sound like this is gonna sound so silly because this is not, but I often think I love Law and Order SBU because often times it relates to what I do so for me it's like being able to pull something over and relate it to what I'm doing for real life is just, yeah, but I, I would say that I don't, I don't think that I would be here, or have the skills or the knowledge that I have from just a four year degree, again, I mean if it doesn't involve, you know 65 C 45 or Florida statute or chapter 39 Sometimes

Cat 29:22

I feel like I don't know what I mean, I certainly like I just met you, so I don't know but like, I love that you're so personally fulfilled, because, you know, I'm sure that it brings a lot of fulfillment to the culture of the people that you're working with,

Red 29:36

you know it's funny that you say that because we do, there's times where we go through and and you know and and I think being in this and doing it every day and living although I not caring for the kids directly, you know, we kind of are caring for our parents we're caring for those in the system because if I talk to a case manager and I hear them struggling I'm not just going to say okay well you need to do this like, figure it out, buddy, support each other.

Yeah, it doesn't matter, I mean I could be a case manager I could be a director I could be the executive director, and it doesn't matter the level like we only have each other and we know the retention is not great in this field, so anything that we can do to keep each other going I mean, I'm positive now but maybe a week ago, you caught me a week ago I probably wouldn't be but that's what we say to our parents, our foster parents is practicing self care, and that is a big top, a big thing for me and I mean, going through COVID And I think we all can say that, That definitely tested my ability,

I'm a very I'm a people person I want to be face to face and to not be able to do that and, and to be stuck I mean I think for anyone that does work in this field, you know it's not a 40 hour job and if you think it's gonna be a 40 hour job like you might want to find something else because we know that is not what happens. So, I would say that the self care piece is is what has allowed me to remain,

Jack 31:04

what is one word you think would people would use to describe licensing.

Red 31:10

Well, I'm going to tell you the word I hoped people would describe licensing where they think it I think if I were to just pick one word, it's so hard but I would think support. That to me is, is what it should be. If it's not, please call me. I want to know but.

Jack 31:29

Okay, so read how do you see the role of licensing in child welfare. Okay, so, um, well,

Red 31:39

I think I mentioned a little bit about how we are really a support for the foster parents. But, and I know you mentioned this jack and kind of talking about how you rely on your licensing I mean it could be from a placement form that shows you have custody of a child to getting a Medicaid number because you're at the doctor or to getting a social security number, so I guess for licensing, I,

I have to say we wear many different hats because most times you probably get that call from our licensing specialist about taking a child because we have seen a child that might fit really well in your family. So I would say we encompass a very large piece of the system I mean, if you have an issue with your board rate check, call us.

If you've got, you know, an issue about adoptions, call us. So, I feel like we do have the knowledge, maybe we can't do all of the tasks that everybody can do but I think we are probably the go to person, like if you're a foster parent and we get a call we will get you to where you need to go so a lot of times we're considered like a mediator sometimes there is going to be tension between case management relationships and caregiver relationships so we will be the buffer if you will, or try and be that mediator and pull a meeting together, how do we get everybody back on the same page, how do we bridge the lack of communication that is happening.

And we pride ourselves on doing that we respond quickly. That is one of the things that we do pride ourselves on, that's the one thing that we are here for is when nobody else maybe picks up the phone. Yeah we do.

Cat 33:25

You know what this reminds me of different watches like home shows where they're like rebuilding a home or like, like the home radio shows. Yeah, and they say the house has good bones. It sounds like licensing is good, like that I think I'm gonna start using that data well it sounds like you're licensing. Yeah, we do, we have good boats, it does sound like licensing does have to be like the integrity of the agency though,

Red 33:46

because you touch everything we do your yeah and that is a really great way to describe it, I mean especially when it comes to our foster parents. We will advocate. We will advocate till we are blue in the face when something does not go the right way. So I think it's really important that you have that support and that backup and that advocacy on your behalf because you are out, advocating for our children and what they need, so the least we can do is to kind of have your back on that piece too, but we are still going to be those people that will tell you that is not correct, but maybe not in the same way as it comes across maybe from a judge or a case manager. I think there's a lot of nurturing involved and building our relationships,

Jack 34:34

yeah I definitely feel like my experiences with my licensing specialists like they've been

Red 34:38

like part of the family, we do a good job of at least, being able to take those heavy times and put a little bit of lightness into that feel blessed in our role that we get to get that exposure with our families that do so much good in this community.

Jack 34:57

Do you know when the average time that a foster parent normally keeps the doors open for,

Red 35:01

oh I'm so glad you asked this so we have a lot of meetings and really looking at a lot of trends within the system and so I can tell you that in you know in the past few years, we really have been exploring the you know the length of time, I would say right now. The average would be anywhere between about five to seven years. We are seeing a higher trend though of shorter licensure time but I do have to say that I really do believe it's because of COVID. And just some of the impact having kids with you all the time. And, and whereas we might have been able to maintain some of those families, people have adopted and have moved on from the system, our closure reasons tend to be because of changes in household composition maybe a job change maybe a new addition to your family.

Maybe you adopted or maybe there's some behavioral things going on with one of your child, you know, moving out of the area just any type of change within that household that maybe does not facilitate a lifestyle for fostering anymore. The second the highest thing we see is adoption, which is always a great thing because, you know, well it's wonderful that we are able to locate forever families for children in the system.

That means that we also don't have that many beds left, so, but I am ever sad to see someone because you get into this and you know and if you have the ability to expand your family through the foster care system that is amazing and even if you don't, the amount of maybe not gratification immediately, but down the road and and the amount of times I hear our foster families getting a message from a kid who may be the ending didn't go so well, we're just, you know, hey, I really appreciate that one thing you did for me, whereas maybe as a foster family you didn't. You didn't think it was that big of a deal. So, yeah,

Jack 36:57

well that's actually encouraging because I didn't find this seven years, is actually a bit longer than I would have thought, you know, it's just lately, a bit like where are they

Red 37:07

in that and you're exactly right because it just to see now I'm not saying that I, that I'm super old are been around for 30 plus years but I will tell you, it just, things have changed and I mean I think it's very similar to kind of what we've seen in the change in workforce, even within the child welfare system.

You know there's a lot of people that had hung in there for so long and then just kind of were like you know what I think it's time but then you've got a lot of new people coming in and, you know, exiting pretty quickly which we kind of sometimes see with our foster families and you know we can prepare somebody as best we can but when you get into it, it's a whole different experience. So I think the ones that we see for a shorter time. Maybe struggle more with the gray of the system. A lot of times you want a black or a white answer, and we're never going to have that here. And so that's where for some folks, it's just it's too much chaos.

Cat 38:05

Do you think that there is a way or there could be a way to predict the longevity of a foster home or of a place but

Red 38:14

I do have kind of talked about, you know, getting into fostering versus maybe going the adoption route. I think through, getting to know our families, we know that the word gets out there that people want to adopt and that, you know, they get into the foster system to do that so I think we can see already a little bit of that and I'm not saying it's a terrible thing because we do know that it's a very common thing but that's mainly what our struggle is sometimes is balancing that knowing that reunification is always that first goal. So I think we can see through expectations or wants of families coming into the system or why they're coming in as to, to what that length of time it may look like, you know, because it's funny because it is the truth, that

those families that we get it and are like, I just want to foster I just want

narrator 39:08

to foster I

Cat 39:10

always end up with the kids that have

Red 39:11

the opportunity you know that maybe the relatives have fallen through any non relatives and that is the next option would be national foster families and they're like, well now you know the kids a part of my family of course I'm going to keep them and I think we know if, and I'll use this term resiliency. So, and that goes for not just our children but for our families. Can you bounce back after someone shows up a half an hour late to pick up a child or doesn't show up when they scheduled a home visit.

So I think we're always looking at that and then of course whether we as licensing RBF, like if we're an effective mechanism for that family can we support them, can we help them to sustain if you will or give them the resources that is going to help them extend their career and fostering if you will because sometimes when you're done you're done and and no matter what we do, it's just you know you need a break, and you need to take that time away so I think we can in a way project what that longevity would be for, not just a placement because I think we know when it comes to placement disruptions or placement stability there are some signs that you start to see and this small things diminishing pleasure and then kind of things just kind of nothing looks good anymore now the bad outweighs the good and then that straw gets placed on the back and breaks and then we're out looking so I think we really can.

But I think that we need to do a better job at listening for those red flags or those words that are going to help us explore certain area a little bit more like frustrations with the system, we know, I mean I think that probably is one of the number one reasons unsaid, that people get out because we do track that but I don't think I've ever had a family tell me that they're just leaving or closing their license because they don't like how the system runs, there is always another piece to that.

Red

But I can't say the system is pretty and we can do what we can,

Jack



but I mean what I always say is like the system's gonna be there whether I'm there or not yet but if I'm there. Maybe I can help.

Red

And you can't it's like that Sam dollar story or the starfish story where it's like, you can't get them all but maybe you can do, maybe you can help just one, again that's kind of the mindset that we have to take being here. If I could say what would fix this is we wouldn't even need a system we would need to have this because we would have everybody in the community stepping up and not having to wait until we get to pulling kids from home so, but I would say that communication is huge and probably the biggest piece is going to be common courtesy and kindness. I think we forget that we're all human, whether we agree or disagree on something we should as humans and as adults and as professionals, be able to agree to disagree and do what's best for the children and sometimes we lose sight of that.

Cat

Yeah, everybody has value no matter where they are.

Red

Yes, absolutely.

Jack

All right, um, something we definitely don't like to talk about a lot, but sometimes foster homes have to be closed. what is the criteria used when deciding to close a home.

Red

So there's a lot of factors, because we are always weighing good standing. So, we have our code which dictates kind of what the rules and regulations are for licensing. It can be extremely difficult to revoke a foster care license because as long as minimum standards are met, you know folks can get licensed but the, the situation then comes that it's up to that agency to decide whether they're going to place children or not so. Yeah, we like quality homes. And so what I would say about this is that when we see patterns when we see trends of things happening.

There's going to be a lot of changes in the system to that are going to probably I think help a little bit more in kind of making sure we are staying compliant but when we talk about homes closing for not voluntary reasons, it would be something that would be pretty serious. For that to happen. I mean, you know, I think we all know there's been, or, you know, there's been crimes committed, you know, things that have happened that involve criminal aspects that is kind of a no brainer.

You know children do get removed from their homes for reasons like that so we can't have folks in the system that, that are not to a standard that would be of quality so. But that being said we you know we have to be fair. We have to have mechanisms for that check and balance and really making sure that our own opinions aren't outweighing what is really the truth or what should be happening I think there's a lot of people that are passionate in the system and sometimes that can that can blur your lens. When we're looking at compliance. So we have a lot of checks and balances, there's a lot of quality reviews that occurred to really make sure that a decision to not place in a foster home,

Jack

I think I heard that a long time ago is that you don't take the license away but you just do not place anymore.

Red

Yeah, and so that's kind of the way that we look at it because, you know, and I'll give an example of somebody that has maybe a verified abuse report right, doesn't mean that you can't Foster. You could because that needs a minimum standard but that doesn't mean that you know a child policing agency would place children into that home so you're right it would take a lot, a lot of paperwork, pretty serious things to actually revoke a license so, most times you know, if we go to a quality assurance staffing or licensing review or a review because of some sort of pattern or questions about the home, and you know it's a committee making the decision and there's information gathered and we would say at this point we wouldn't place children but it would be up to that family to decide if they wanted to relinquish their license or if we would have to move forward in pursuing if we had enough to revoke somebody's license.

Cat

What realistic solutions do you think could be implemented to resolve some of the placement struggles, if you had unlimited resources

Red

oh goodness kind of goes back to what I said if we had the ability to have our neighbor step up or you know somebody in that child's life, that could step up immediately ideally it would be for that child to be able to go with his friend or his you know his aunt or the neighbor or somebody that, that he can trust or she can trust and be with that person versus having to cross all of that red tape and you know when ideally if, if, you know, the funds could be allocated to help people do that because I know sometimes it is difficult to care for other people's children without a little additional support financially but, I mean when, when people think about this board payment I mean anyone thinks that they're gonna make money it's funny because I, I love to break it down

for everybody, and most times you know our foster parents are spending way more than what they're getting I mean between daycare and diapers I mean diapers alone will put you out.

Jack

I think it's really important for everyone on all sides of the table to learn to like work with each other, as well as possible so that we can make it easier for each other and not harder. And also, so we can all encourage each other to keep the focus on the kids. What are some basic things that foster parents can do to work better with licensing and make your teams more efficient.

Red

Oh, I'm so glad this is a question because I will tell you communicate with us. So many times I feel like we have found something out or we've run a DMV check and find something and it's like that is the worst thing to have to call someone saying, Hey, you didn't tell us and. And so I think a lot of times most people fear that we're going to be upset that we're going to yell and it's not that I mean, I will tell you the biggest thing you can do is communicate to your licensing person because we are going to be those ones to to back you up and just support you, I mean I think we all know that abuse and neglect happens allegations come in calls come into the hotline and nine times out of 10 we know that's happening. And if we don't know that something's happened we cannot be prepared to protect you and your family. So even if you think it's a small thing. Tell us shoot us an email,

Jack

what do you want foster parents to know about licensing?

Red

We are your support we have your back. That is all. Please use us please call us if you don't know what you are doing or who to call, call us first, because I promise you we will we will get you to where you need to go or we will get an answer to whatever it is that you need even if we can't do it ourselves.

Jack

When I have spoken about you to other people the thing I say about you is that you're a problem solver, like if and actually it's not to say that my licensing specialist isn't a problem solver. She's amazing. But when there are things that nobody seems to be able to accomplish. When I have reached out to you in the past, it's like you just like, it's all of a sudden the solution is that easy and it's just done so that's pretty nice.

Red

That's really nice to hear. Thank you, because, because we don't often get that it's kind of like

hey, you're doing great, but we need this a little bit more so you know it's it's nice to take that but certainly we, we could not do what we do without, you know without, without our, our wonderful human foster parents.

Cat

What do you want the partners that you work with, to know about licensing and placement

Red

for, call us. We do have a lot of answers, saving you know when in doubt, you know, ask us say, We don't just know license who we don't just know please, that a lot of us have had so many different roles within the system Amy and heck, some of us have even been foster parents, so. So you know, I just, I feel like some people forget that we're here because there's a lot of times people get into court, they're like well I don't know I don't know the answer well can they do this well I don't call us. I mean I had a judge recently reached out to me, and I've never had that and she actually emailed me directly, it was like hey I have a couple questions and wow, I mean I kind of panic because we don't always have that role of being in front of the judge and I was like, it's your honor. In an email like is that what I do I don't know but I did and it just, it felt good because somebody was actually like sometimes we're kind of like those. I don't know we're kind of in the back scene of everything and our role is and maybe we're only seen in an x ray but we are seen, but we are we really are just, we want to do what we can to help those that are that are even directly, you know, caring for our children, it doesn't matter again if it's, you know, a birth parent or a foster parent or, you know I care a caregiver of any sort.

Cat

The great thing about all this is so much of like the like disgruntled attitude that I get from people it's just people not having any power.

Red

And I think that's it and I mean, it's almost like the kids in this system, they don't have any control, they don't have choices like. And so one aspect of their life they want to control they will like maybe they don't eat maybe that's the aspect and so there is a piece of that control and I feel like it happens to us too as much as we speak.

Cat

Yeah, because we have no control and if you want to make me go into 70 Watch me go 80 Yeah, and we don't admit that but it's true. That's what we do and we think about guys who do that and it's like, oh, There's just know, I mean that's just no control. Yeah, they didn't know they were gonna wake up and foster care and then they moved,

Red

it's almost like crisis mode all the time and even for foster families I mean that's kind of where we're all at and boy I wish we could all just have a big day off and have nothing happen like a mental health day for us but we are here, we're all here for the same reason and that's to make sure our kids are safe. You know they achieve permanency and we strengthen you know them as holes and that's that's all we can do and together we can achieve so much more than individually.

Jack

So one of the things that most of the people that have worked with you, always brag about you for and something that I always brag about you for is that you're very child focused, well I feel like this is how we should all be it's not always the case when we work with various partners, what is it that keeps you from being jaded burned out, what is it that keeps you from losing hope?

Red

So it took me a long time to get here so I think it's all about perspective, I want to lose focus I want to yell and scream every single day but I think I know that's not going to solve it. I think what I have learned about myself is I may be in that mode but the minute that somebody comes to me and is feeling the same way or struggling or stressed or can't find it, it's like, you go into an I don't even know like dark mode it's almost like it's all a blank you know like, I think it was what was an old school where they had that debate and all of a sudden he's like, and then it's like well what happened like that's kind of what it feels like is like I could be having the worst day but then I get a phone call and someone needs me and it's like you just flip the switch and you're there you're either going to sink or swim, and and that's the biggest thing and if you can't get your mind to focus in the right direction if you're not, you know, you're going to have broken your life jacket right off.

Cat

So the secondary trauma that we all experienced until both here is very real. I know sometimes we feel the trauma fatigue pushing into our minds and know it's time for a pedicure or something like that. What do you do to renew your mind, when that starts to happen,

Red

I mean I get there I get there often. So something as simple as going for a walk, or going to spend time with my dog because no matter if I'm crying or laughing like he's still gonna love me, you know it's like that one thing he'll always cast me I feed him I give him water like, you know, so just reminding yourself to do something that can get you out of that, it's finding that one thing that does make me feel good. I'm very big into meditation into yoga into making sure

that I take care of my body physically, mentally, whatever that looks like. So I have found that picking up, as I mentioned I you know I do teach yoga I teach spinning and rowing and so I've actually started to pick up a few more classes, although it should be for me and not for other people. That's just where I feel like it makes me feel better. I can be having such an awful day and it happens quite often that I get into class and it's like, we just sweat all of that out and any like negative stale energy anything that was holding me back from being able to be that person that I am needs to go and so for me that's mine but I can't say that people maybe it doesn't help to nap I mean I'm not gonna say some good food or candy now and that like gummy bears, doesn't help. We know that's a temporary fix, but it's really about having that self care balance and I'm not gonna say that I've always been good but I struggled with it and especially during COVID because you learn that there were no more boundaries like where I work is now where I sleep, and where I eat and for me I did and, and I think for anyone to sit here and say that they didn't have any effects of that would be lying. And everybody had an impact one way or another, you know, I know for my parents, let's say, having to deal with a virtual world was new for them. This isn't something that I mean, heck, I'm lucky I get text messages from my parents, you know, it's, um, so I will say I think coming out of this pandemic, the best thing that I could have learned for myself is how to take care of myself, or realizing when I needed the most.

Cat

Yeah I think that's really wise because that can be really hard.

Jack

Yeah, I identify, I remember the first time that I saw trauma fatigue for myself, and it was when, because you know back before courtrooms were virtual we would go to the court, and we would sit there and you know you would get a time for your court hearing for your kids, and I would go and you know there might be like 10 or 15 cases before your case is called, and I would listen to what was going on with the other cases and I would start crying. And I'm like okay, I know like I'm a pretty sensitive person, but I don't normally cry at court. And it was just like everything that happened to every kid just broke my heart. You know, we went and got a pedicure cat and I last week. It was our birthday, so happy belated birthday. So we do remember when we went in, like, I tried to get a Starbucks, the line was like an hour long I ended up going to a second Starbucks to get our Starbucks, and then I went to the place that we liked to go to get her pedicures. Clothes for no reason, but really I was upset about a situation with guardian ad litem, and when I, when I saw what I was texting you that I was getting on my way and I was really, I was like raging in my head about this guardian ad litem situation that I just think is like so frustrating. And, you know, we finally get there and I'm like, Are you asked me if I wanted something to eat and I'm like, I can't even eat right now I just don't feel good I'm so like stressed out and upset. I walked out of that pedicure like a totally different person

Cat

so I'm so glad you know I think that's not the topic of this podcast but I think that is what I mean. Well one of the, I mean valuing each other I think it's critical, and I think that one of the impacts of COVID is that we do take care of each other better like one of my friends today said, You seem stressy What's wrong, and I was like I see I like that I don't like that I know and I was like, I don't know how you could tell because all this was via text, but I am stressy. And I'll take care, I'll take care of myself. I went back to work. When my 11 year old was two months old and I started reading CVA J's. And I know that getting beds is so hard for kids, which is probably the hardest thing, then you don't really have a lot of control because you got to, you have to just get what you can. I would go to group homes, sometimes to write to CBHAs like you know, whatever a grade school child and I would see a newborn or a baby, sometimes, and I would just want to go. Hold the baby, you know, and it would be like a worker like a shift worker or whatever like you know it's kinda like bouncing the baby around you know like the baby would be like fussy or whatever and I would say like, Can I just like snuggle the baby and they'd be like taken. And I, you know, and then I would like I would be so like heartbroken like sweet Mr balls. Of course, not knowing the story, maybe they were played with siblings who knows like maybe all the siblings were there maybe that was, you know, who knows. But to me, that was always the yardstick for where placement was with, with, that's if I always felt like and I could be totally off base, but I always felt like if I saw a baby. Things must not be going well.,

Red

Yeah that's and you know you're not far off that is how we we now have rules about group homes and there are some laws that are coming into play that will actually be changing the way that we do this group home thing where it's not going to be shift careworkers anymore it's it's moving towards more of a foster family model that's more of a therapeutic, a geared home, so So, there is a lot changing for the good. I know that the last thing we want is kids in the most restrictive settings which are those facilities. Yeah, I mean, you're right we don't have enough. A lot of times we think about it like hey where can we work. Who can we stretch the long enough short is is you know with the increasing care coming in, we've seen such an increase, We don't have enough that there are not enough beds to house all of the children that need a safe, stable home and unfortunately that's where we see kids in group homes or kids bouncing because we just don't have enough of those foster family homes so now the goal is to, to increase our bed capacity by as much I mean, if you've never thought about it, think about it, you know, and don't wait, because you need things to fall in line to do this, kids don't wait for things to fall in line, the way you like you can always remove me from my parents until I get through my you know my day to day, like to bring cupcakes in school now, you know, and unfortunately abuse and neglect doesn't care what day or what time it is right, what class you are, it affects everybody.

Cat

And that's always what I share when people talk about how they're thinking about being a foster parent is, what would you just like take a newborn, you know, because there are like babies that are you know who can just use a home there are little guys,

Jack

I think, like, okay, so not everybody is meant to be a foster parent obviously, however, so many more people are meant to be foster parents. And we, you know, we let ourselves off the hook with all these reasons why we're not doing it right now, but I feel like, like if you could just like see it, it was like when I, when I, when I adopted my eldest son, we lived in Africa for like two months, completing the process. And I came home and I'm like, how do people not know that this is going on over there like that these kids are living in the street and they're walking up to the van, like, with their hand out like they're starving. These kids are living in, like I would go and volunteer in orphanages when I was there, and, like you would walk in and like there's just lines of cribs and these babies are like, I remember there were always like a couple sick babies and it's like they sounded like they were about to die, and there was nobody even in the room with them, and it's just like life is so different there than it is here, like, obviously, we have our own problems here that are different from they are there, it was like that it was like I wish I could just show people what I saw there I wish I could just show them the pictures of these like babies laying in bed, when I was there I just wanted to like somehow show people like look at what's going on, like there are these kids that are there that just like they just need food like these people don't have food. If there's no vegetables growing in their garden that day they go down to the city and they try and beg for food, and sometimes they get food for the kids and sometimes they don't, but, like, at most, they were eating a meal a day and like we just can't even, like my kids today after, like, your kids, nine, they had a pancakes. They had peach pancakes, they had, like, like snack after snack after snack, they had a peanut butter and jelly with bananas inside peaches on the side, chips, popcorn, and then they had like two more snacks, and then they had bacon cheeseburgers for dinner with broccoli,

Cat

if I ate like jacks kids...

Red

like a I'll be here tomorrow what time, is breakfast?

Jack

Ice Pops and then they were like, I'm starving and it's like,

Cat

oh my gosh yeah there's like no way, but it's those experiences that like, make you shift gears



because I would see kids in foster homes all the time and it's not what everybody thinks so people are like, how do you do it I'm like It's not every child is not beaten. It's not what you think, foster parents were supportive, but it was those babies and those group homes, that would make me like pause and say we need more foster parent. Is that is that is that I mean I think for everybody, it's not one thing that's like,

Red

I mean, and I'll tell you what I mean I still get when I walk through an office and I know that I see that birth parent there with bags like ready to see their hands like so emotional. It is tough, it's time to sit here and talk about it, I mean, it triggers emotions and that just means that we're human and that we do care and sometimes we care too much.

Jack

What do you think the community can do to prevent more kids coming into care in our counties?

Red

I feel like that word is gonna come up again support, check in on each other, what can I do to help you. Do you need to bring because oftentimes maybe that it's a generational thing, and maybe that family didn't, didn't have a good role model and they don't have the supports and and maybe just you being my neighbor and seeing like oh I'm I am kind of stressed, maybe you just need an hour away or maybe I can just watch your kiddos for you for maybe bring you dinner, just anything that we can do to support each other I think is gonna is gonna have such a big impact. I mean, I look at us as an agency when it comes to Christmas and it was scary this year with COVID because we do have a lot of events we have a lot of things that raise money for children for Christmas. And it's scary to think that we're not going to have that, but the amount like I'm getting goosebumps thinking about this but the amount of community stepped up and and filled those voids was unbelievable. And so I think that if we could all just focus on how to support each other and forget about what makes us different as humans, whether that be you know, a race and ethnicity. I think if we can all just get past that and just remember that kindness is first and foremost you know how to how to support each other and something so small I feel like if everyone could just step up and do one thing that we can see such a big difference.

Jack

So what are your goals to make change in our community?

Red

I am going to keep waking up every day and I'm going to show up, and I'm going to hold space, and I am going to continue to do the best that I can to help somebody get past a situation that

may not be ideal. That's me. I'm going to continue to support my staff. We're all doing this work, and I keep on trying to stay positive and reminding myself of who I am and what I'm here for because I think that's hard to keep that focus when you get so many discouraging things happen so for me that's, that's what I'm going to do, and maybe I can impact, one other person to do the same.

Jack

Well and I think between, you know, what you do with licensing and also the impact that you've had going into group homes and doing your programs like, I think that's pretty profound.

Cat

Thank you for joining us.

Red

Thank you for having me. It's so fun. This is really fun

Jack

so grateful that you drove all the way over here in the rain, and just really appreciate all of the things that you've shared with us and, you know, of course, and

Red

thank you to both of you for, for doing what you're doing and bringing awareness and and just I think this is one of the first steps in really trying to, to develop a system where we don't, we don't not have beds for children so they always say if that rule of three. Three hearing something, then hearing it again and then hearing it again so if this is something small or big, whatever that may be, I mean I'm just so thankful for the both of you and thank you for the opportunity to be here.

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