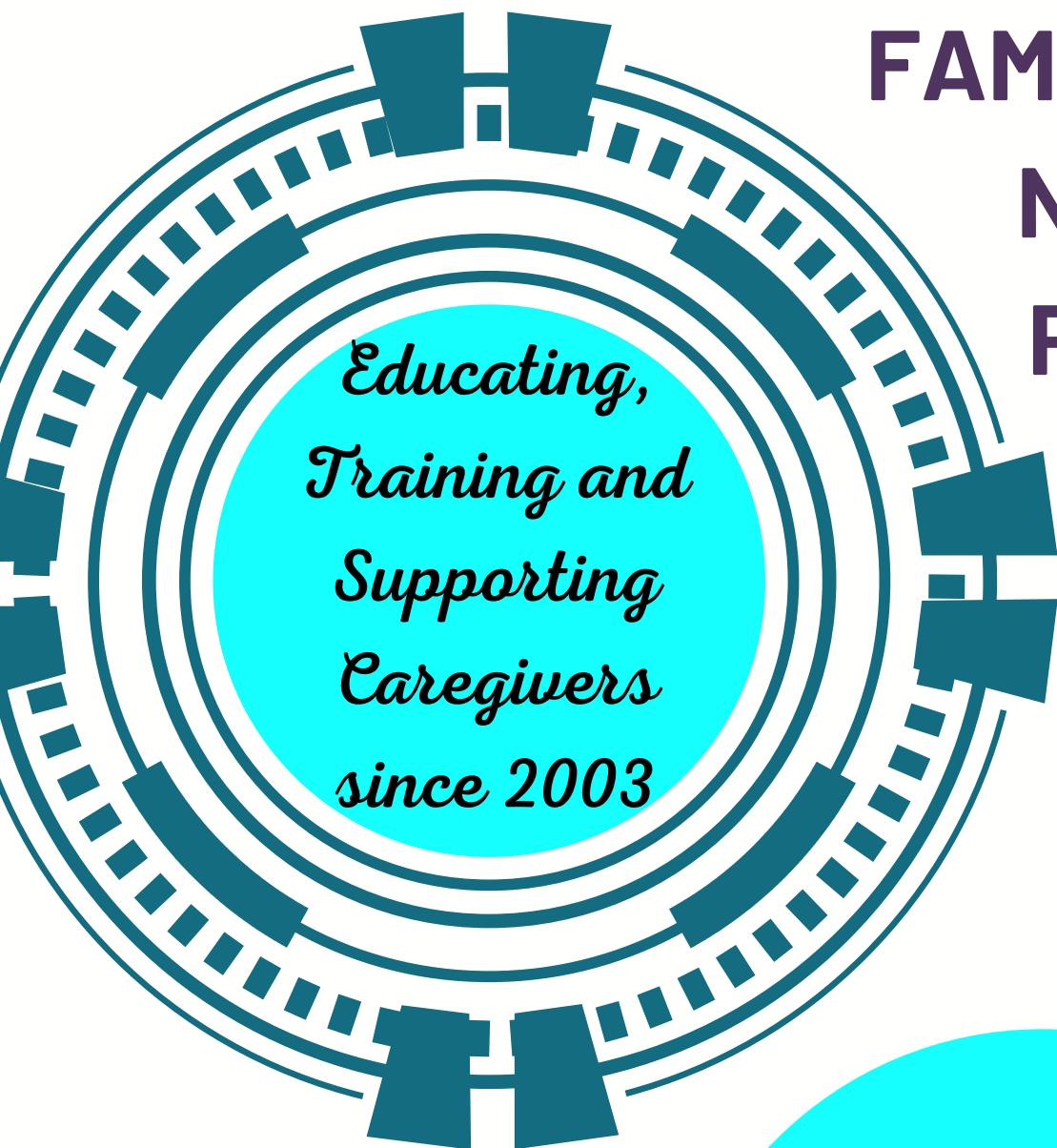


SUPPORT TO FAMILY CARE NETWORK PROGRAM



*Educating,
Training and
Supporting
Caregivers
since 2003*



**ANNUAL
REPORT**
A snapshot of
2023

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful to live, work and play on the traditional and unceded territories of many indigenous nations in BC's interior. We also recognize the Metis and Inuit people who are our friends and neighbours. It is our hope to become much better guests on this land in the future than we have been in the past.

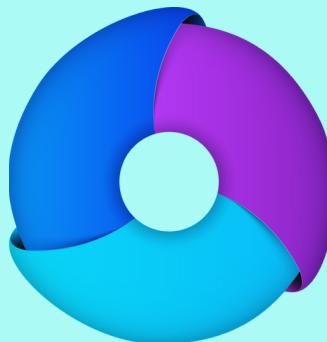
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YEAR AT A GLANCE

PROVINCIAL SUPPORT AGENCIES CAREGIVER LEARNING NETWORK

Representatives from **3** caregiver support agencies formed **1** Network to respond to the need for caregivers to engage in provincially accessible, virtual learning opportunities. The PSACLN will work with representatives from all caregiver support agencies across the province to develop accessible, virtual learning opportunities for Foster Caregivers, Kinship Care Providers and Contracted Agency Caregivers.



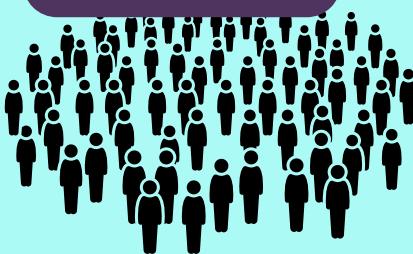
Interior Community Services (STFC)

Foster Parent Support Services Society

Okanagan Foster Parents Association

We had contact with
over 5,000 caregivers and
over 1,900 social workers
and community members
during 2023 (not unique numbers).

CONTACTS



200
people visited
over 2,100
website pages

TRAINING



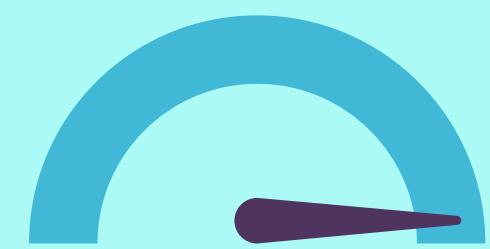
*this does not include makeup sessions

YOUTH IN CARE NETWORK



89 YOUTH
Attended
21 EVENTS

2023 GOALS



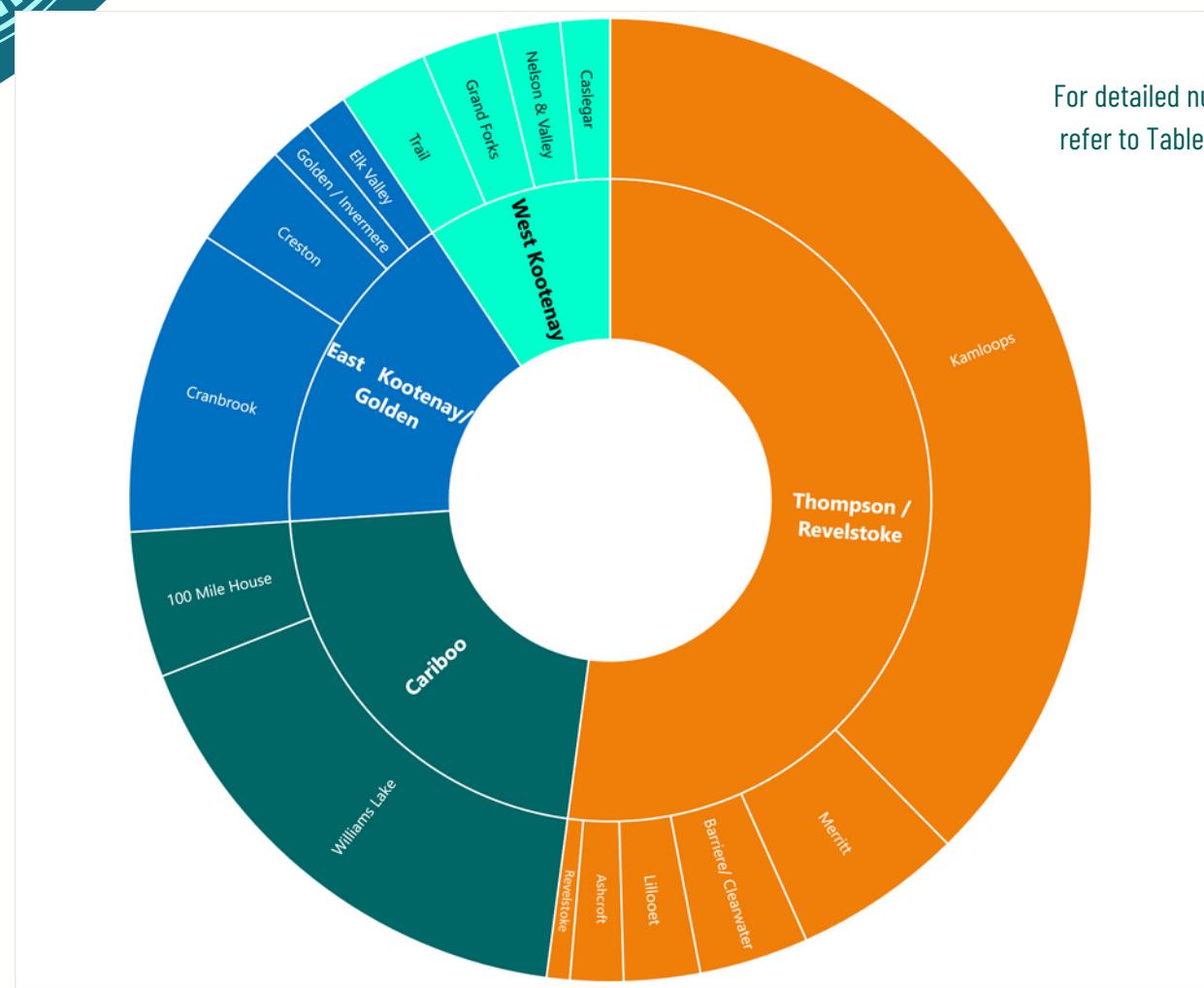
2023 goals met:

7 at 100%

1 at 99.5%

1 at 97%

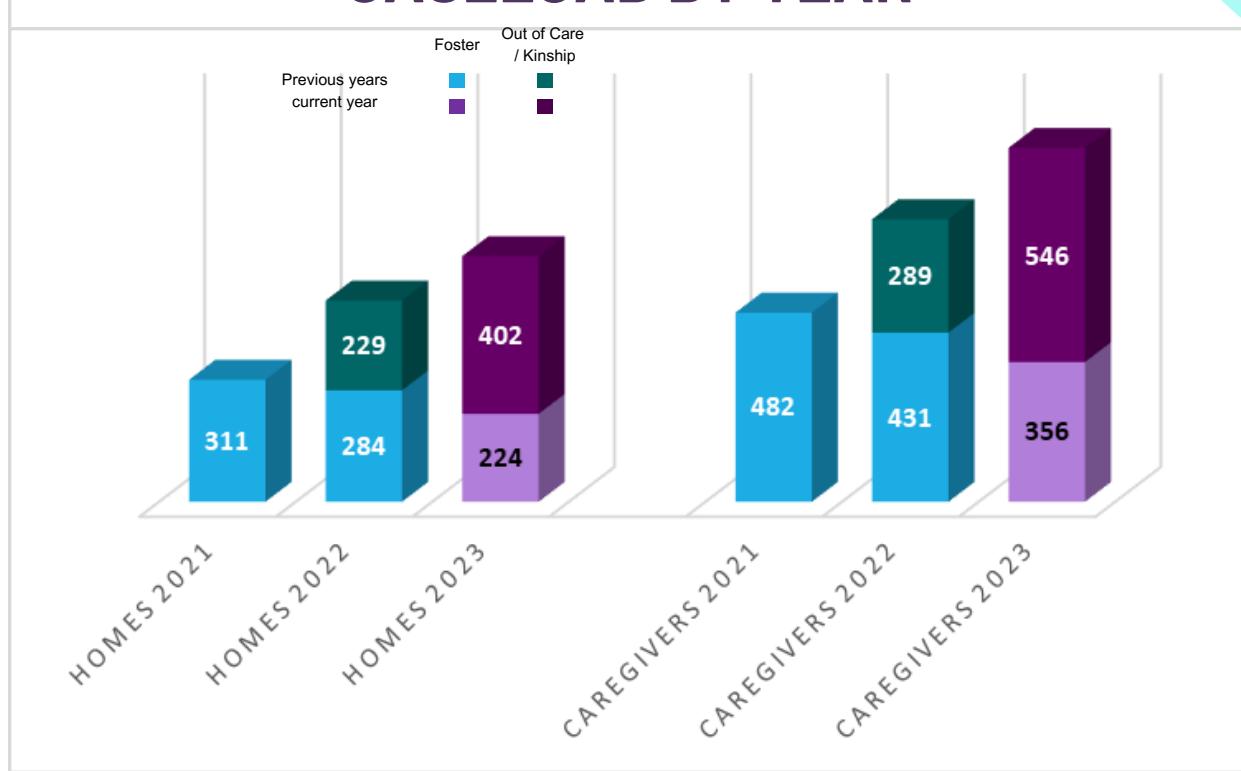
SERVICE ACCESS INFORMATION



For detailed numbers, please refer to Table 1 (Appendix A)

COMMUNITY	# OF FOSTER PARENTS	# OF OUT OF CARE / KINSHIP CAREGIVERS	TOTAL # OF CAREGIVERS
Thompson/ Revelstoke	191	277	468
Cariboo	67	129	196
EK/ Golden	65	85	150
WK	33	55	88
TOTAL	356	546	902

CASELOAD BY YEAR



PROGRAM COORDINATOR UPDATE

2023 saw a lot of growth and change in our team. One of our Network Facilitators, Marna Forsyth, moved from the Cariboo to Saskatchewan and was able to stay on as a virtual support as we dealt with various leaves including medical and compassion leaves. New staff, Tabitha Fournier, was hired by June and although she has only been with the program for 6 months, she is making valuable connections with the caregivers in her area, hosting new monthly events and as the year closed creating partnerships to bring a Youth in Care Network local to the Cariboo.

Midway through the year, another of our Network Facilitators found her calling to return to caregiving – “it’s where my heart is”. In September we welcomed Ashley Gibson, our newest Network Facilitator covering the East Kootenay areas. In her short tenure with our program has reached out to her caregivers and started planning new monthly events in both Cranbrook and Creston and by the end of the first quarter of 2024 is hoping to have approval for a youth in care network for the East Kootenay areas.

Jane Wesko (ARC Programs LTD), Renata Bonthoux, and Marna Forsyth, as long term staff, continue to ensure the program, training and supports run smoothly. My immense gratitude to them for helping ensure that all of the areas are covered and for stepping into many roles that involved other areas besides their own.

On a personal note, I had a medical leave in the last quarter of the year and my staff team did an amazing job while I was away which allowed me to heal without having to worry, as folks were in such good hands.

With 2024 being the 21st year of our program (and my tenure with the agency) we are honored and privileged to walk alongside the caregivers, social workers and the many community professionals that we work with.

Kari Bepple
Program Coordinator

PROGRAM INFORMATION

The Support to Family Care Network program (STFC) provides education, training and support services to Foster Parents throughout the Interior / East Kootenay region of British Columbia. Our service delivery area covers the Thompson, Cariboo, Revelstoke, East and West Kootenay areas. The two tables (from previous page) are reflective of Ministry for Children and Family Development homes as well as caregivers from Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSA) or First Nations bands.

In 2023, there was again a decrease in the number of Ministry Foster homes and Foster Parents served, which can be explained by a number of different factors:

1. The direction of MCFD for Out of Care / Kinship homes rather than Foster Care homes.
2. Aging population of Foster Parents – natural attrition.
3. Some Foster Parents are opting out for the following reasons:
 - a. higher needs of those coming into care make it challenging for Foster Parents to take on the care for the amount of remuneration and along with the increase costs of living they are experiencing; Foster Parents are having trouble making ends meet.
 - b. re-thinking their Fostering career after a protocol – which have increased in severity and length.
4. Some Foster Parents have chosen to transfer their resource file to the ICFSAs.
5. Another issue is that the application process takes so long to complete that we are not getting many new homes - and recruitment is down due to not as many applying and then not all are completing the PRIDE Pre-service training.
6. We don't have as many Foster Parents currently recruiting new caregivers. Some of this may be that they are unaware of the need, because of the above issues and / or feeling disrespected and not part of the team. We have heard from numerous caregivers who have stated that these are the last children that will be in their home.

One of our consistent themes throughout 2023 was working with current Foster Parents who had conflicts with MCFD / ICFSAs due to protocol / quality of care / resolution of issues as well as those caregivers that felt disrespected / not part of the team / lack of communication due to short-staffed offices and changing staff in different positions.

STFC staff worked tirelessly on retaining caregivers in this position as some were ready to quit, go to the media and / or contact Minister Dean directly. Our goal is always to come to a win-win solution and in the high majority of these cases we were able to obtain a positive outcome for all involved.

Nevertheless, the number of out of care / kinship homes again increased significantly this year. We are connecting with many more homes due to:

1. Caregivers attending training and getting connected with Network Facilitators (relationship is key with this demographic!) Once connected with our staff, the initial meeting (in-person, Zoom or over the phone) was often 2-3 hours in length. Once connected we see these caregivers engaging with our program in a variety of ways.
2. Caregivers phoning our Network Facilitators with questions and inquiries around resources, ideas, support and referrals to other community organizations.
3. Resource Social Workers connecting us to caregivers . Once RSW understand what support we can offer along with the competency of our Network Facilitators, we are tending to get more requests for support.

We worked diligently with the Resource and Out of Care Social Workers to share our brochures (including our Out of Care / Kinship brochures), and our website (including our dedicated Out of Care / Kinship website page). Additionally, we informed social workers and caregivers (where we had contact information) about our twice monthly drop-ins, training (including Out of Care / Kinship specific training) and our support services that we offer.

CAREGIVER SUPPORT

Foster Homes

According to the BC Foster Parent Association (BCFPA), there are approximately 1,600 Foster homes in BC. This does not include most of the Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSA). Foster home statistics as of November 30, 2022 showed 1,686 total Foster homes in BC. According to the BCFPA, this number has been steadily declining since Out of Care / Kinship placements have been the focus.

Our stats indicate that from December, 2018 to November, 2023 the number of Foster homes have dropped by 673 which averages close to 135 homes per year.

As in previous years, supports continue to increase in length and complexity. The supports range from protocol and quality of care supports to resolution of issues to ongoing support in communication with agencies. We have several ongoing supports that have been lasting years in length.

When Network Facilitators are calling caregivers they are finding that often they will end up talking to caregivers for over an hour or two. Often when problems arise, our team then gets permission to follow up with MCFD or ICFSA to assist with communication and getting to a win-win solution. We frequently connect caregivers with resources, community referrals and think outside the box to find solutions. Our team has great diversity in resource, education and personal / professional experience, which allows for great brainstorming sessions around generalities of situations.

Out of Care /Kinship Homes

In late 2021, we started supporting Out of Care / Kinship homes in the East and West Kootenay areas. Midway through 2022, we began supporting Out of Care / Kinship homes in the Thompson, Cariboo and Revelstoke contract areas. Our current key struggle is getting connected with these homes as we typically are not given the resource lists for the Out of Care / Kinship homes due to FOIPPA. We have had considerable success this year in connecting with many more Out of Care / Kinship homes. Once connected, we find that caregivers willingly attend events and are grateful for the support. These supports range from simple phone calls to long complicated supports during court proceedings. (We do not provide legal advice, but rather are there to listen, give resources and connect with other agencies.)

We are hopeful that any future Out of Care / Kinship homes will continue to be asked for their consent to share contact information directly with us at the time of signing their contracts. This has and will allow our team to connect quicker with caregivers and explain what we do and why our program is important.

We are excited to have our Foundational Training ready to go for any care homes that are interested in taking it. We have offered the Circle of Security Parenting reflection program a couple of times throughout the year and caregivers have found the group "encouraging and supportive". Our "Support Report" is a newsletter which goes out to Out of Care Caregivers twice a month. This newsletter highlights our Out of Care virtual Drop-ins (also twice a month), relevant training along with resources that are of particular interest to Out of Care / Kinship homes.

OVERALL SUPPORT

Our main goals throughout our program continue to be:

- ✓ offering Foster Parents and Out of Care / Kinship caregivers relevant and timely training opportunities (both in-person and virtual) while being sensitive and responsive to the needs of each community,
- ✓ creating mentoring / networking opportunities, especially for new Foster Parents as well as seasoned caregivers and
- ✓ connecting Out of Care / Kinship homes through drop-ins, training opportunities and one-to-one support.
- ✓ provide timely communication through our website, newsletters (Weekly Communiqué for Foster Parents and bi-monthly Support Report for Out of Care / Kinship caregivers), drop-ins and direct contact (via phone, text, virtual and in-person)
- ✓ once we are given a caregiver's contact, we connect with them within 30 days; typically, it is much quicker than that (depending on the caregiver's schedule). Thus, it is important for us to receive regularly updated lists from Resources to ensure caregivers are on our radar as soon as possible.

In the 21 years of our program, we have found that caregivers who engage in training and networking opportunities (especially as new caregivers), take regular self-care breaks, as well as accessing supports when necessary, are less likely to burn out, I have a protocol or quality of care review of their home (in cases of Foster Parents) and / or leave the sector.

CONNECTIONS

We had interactions with

OVER 5,000
caregivers and
over 1,900

social workers and community members

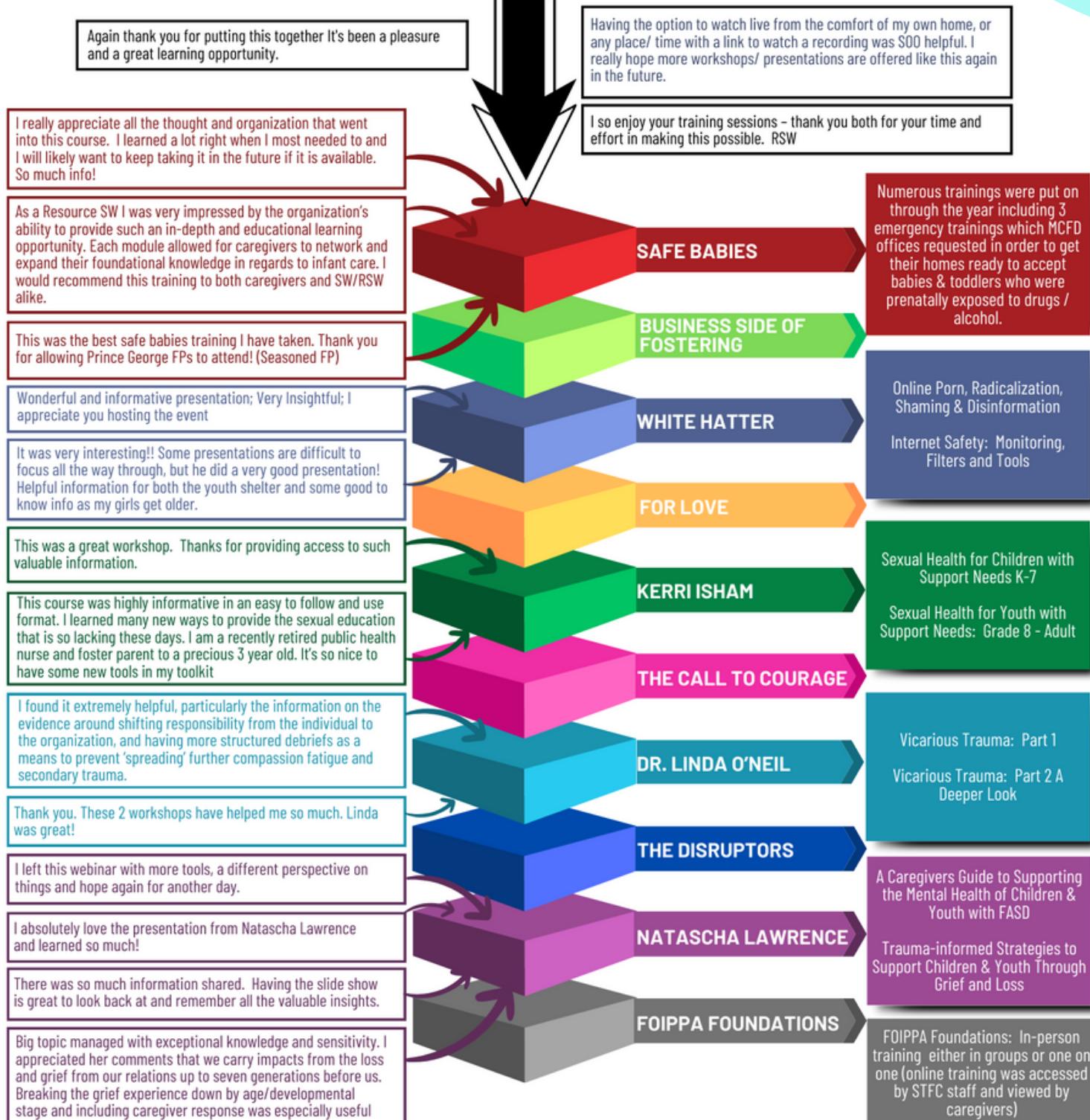
during 2023 (not unique numbers).



We know that connection is key - staff worked a total of **6,499 direct hours (which is 64% of total hours worked)** by educating, training and supporting caregivers throughout the Interior / East Kootenay area.

TRAINING

OVER 150 HOURS

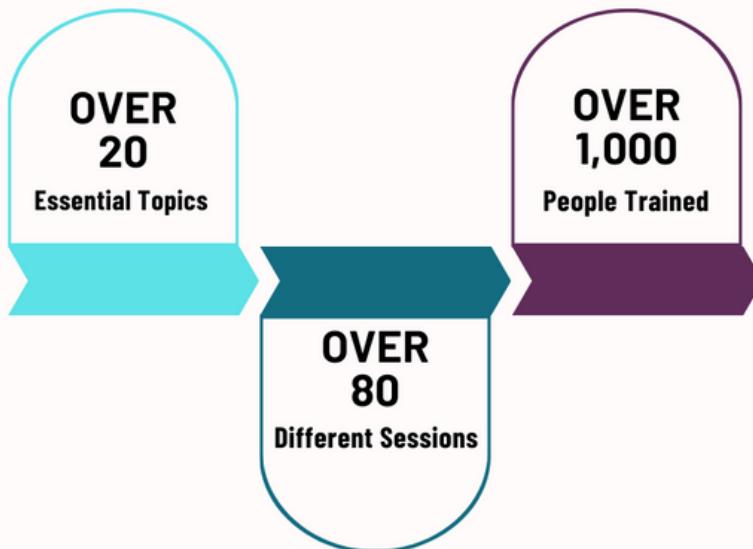


Quotes from caregivers, social workers and community professionals

TRAINING

Continued

We believe training is a big component of keeping babies, children and teens in a stable placement. By offering face to face, Zoom webinars, in-person trainers (where possible), video resources and articles on our website, as well as books to sign out, we are meeting the unique needs of the Foster Parents and Out of Care / Kinship providers we serve. Once again in 2023, we found there were caregivers that would come out to the virtual trainings that we never would see in person.



Virtual training has been a great asset to our program. We continue to have feedback from Foster Parents in all our areas that they want to ensure that virtual training will still be a key component of our program moving forward. For folks that care for some of the most vulnerable and challenging children, youth and babies in our province, the ability to multi-task while being able to screen training from the comfort of their home is a must. The ability to connect caregivers with others from different areas (but still within our service delivery area) has been an unplanned bonus. STFC staff have been supporting and covering in other parts of our SDA and have gotten to know caregivers outside of their working area. Caregivers are comfortable to speak with other members of the team as they have been interacting off and on throughout the year.

As a result of the efforts of STFC's staff team, we had a lot of training attended by Foster Parents, social workers, community professionals, Out of Care / Kinship caregivers and bio parents. Training took place during morning, afternoon and evening offerings as some of our caregivers work outside the home. Caregivers really appreciated the week long replays where they are able to watch the trainings when it is convenient for them.

The 150+ hours of training scheduled is not reflective of make-up sessions or area specific training.

RECRUITMENT NEEDS

Recruitment needs continue to vary in each community - teen homes, Safe Babies, CYSN (children and youth with support needs) and homes that can accommodate sibling groups, are still in high demand. We continued on-going support to the various MCFD and ICFSA offices who need help around recruitment. Word of mouth from our current Foster Parents continues to be the most successful in recruiting new Foster Parents and Relief homes. In specific areas, the length of time it takes for applicants to become Foster Parents seems to be a deterrent. A happy Foster Parent is by far the best recruitment tool (over radio, social media, tv, bus ads and print ads).

This coming spring (2024), our STFC team is working together with the Associate Executive Director of Service, Nadine Ryan, and Directors of Operations, Amanda Armstrong-Smith (Kamloops) and Tamara Lawrence (Salmon Arm), along with Okanagan Foster Parent Association Coordinator, Heather Lessard, to start a recruitment campaign committee.

Due to the unique needs of each area, we are committed to helping out with recruitment, as and when required.

YOUTH IN CARE

The staff team in Kamloops and the West Kootenays both have very active YICN locals. This has been a result of the hard work from our Network Facilitators, who came to the program with many years of experience working in youth driven programs.

Their ingenuity and positivity to reach out and connect with youth, listen to their needs, and take suggestions and move them along into fun events for the youth, has fostered great success in our locals. Events have varied widely with events including: Virtual Reality, Swimming, Supper and movie nights, Fun Factor – Laser Tag, Gyro Park Bocce Ball and Pizza, Kayaking, Bowling and Pizza, Minigolf, and more. Both of our YICN locals continue to be two of the strongest YICN local active in British Columbia. To see the friendships that develop as well as the support and acceptance they have for one another is a very fulfilling part of our job we are honored to be a part of.



I was new and
they accepted
me for me.

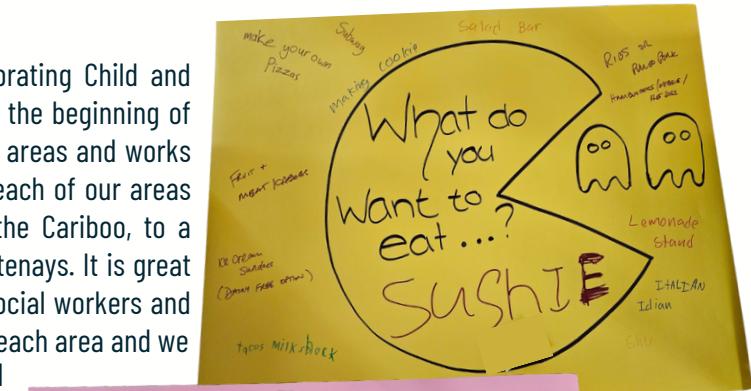
One long time young
adult said "thanks for
making this (Christmas)
party so much fun!"

2024, we are hoping to start Youth In Care locals in both the Cariboo and the EK. The West Kootenays STFC is in initial conversation with the Foundry (run through K'tunaxa) about starting up a YICN in Cranbrook. The Foundry is set to open its doors in the spring of 2024 and the YICN could be set up shortly after. The Foundry is very interested in the idea

and we are all on board with the development of a youth based program offering fun events and specific training opportunities to youth in the region. There is little youth activities and networks in Cranbrook and the need for an opportunity such as a YICN is obvious. The Cariboo locals are a bit further along. They have already had their first initial meetings and have space set up at the Foundry in Williams Lake along with a community organization in 100

headquarters which have suggested that we should be able to have our local up and running by April of 2024. The hope is to give the youth an opportunity they may not have otherwise.

Another part of what we do around supporting youth is celebrating Child and Youth in Care week (the week during the latter part of May and the beginning of June). Our team ensures that activities are happening in all our areas and works with MCFD and the ICFSAs to ensure a successful outcome. As each of our areas vary, so do the events: from a Bowling and Pizza events in the Cariboo, to a Carnival in Kamloops to Pizza and Games in the Park in the Kootenays. It is great to see children and youth being celebrated by our staff team, social workers and Foster Parents. Our family events continue to be enjoyed across each area and we are seeing increases in numbers of families and children and youth who attend. Additionally, many of our areas include family events that are often well-attended. These events vary from craft days, to trampoline jumping events, to bowling and to swimming.





CHALLENGES AND COLLABORATION

The steady decline in the number of Foster homes, along with the ability to recruit new relief homes for our current Foster Parents were two of the biggest struggles in 2023. The main struggle with providing Out of Care / Kinship caregiver support is receiving their contact information to connect them to our program (due to their right to privacy). Yet, we have seen great improvements in this area during 2023.

Another challenge that was met head on by our team and is a testimony to their commitment to the program was that STFC needed to hire two Network Facilitators in two areas. Additionally, we have staff that have been off for extended time due to compassion leave, leave of absence and two medical leaves. Since March 2020, STFC staff have been facilitating many virtual trainings and meetings and as a result, have gotten to know caregivers outside of their own areas which has aided them in covering other areas. Caregivers are comfortable to speak with other members of the team and this has been an added benefit not only for times when staff are off but also when a caregiver is needing extra support or information / resources on specific topics such as mental health, addictions, etc. Our staff team has come together with mentorship and sharing of new ideas which has resulted in a stronger team bond and the new staff feeling welcomed and supported.

Another big challenge is around supports. Our program is finding that supports are longer, more complex and are often very intense. There have been several long and intensive supports including protocols, quality of care reviews and resolution of issues. Our team has also found that phone calls and in-person meetings are longer, and caregivers are needing more resources for the children and youth in their home – that often come with very high support needs. Additionally, staff are finding that the number of caregivers attending drop-ins vary and often times, when the group is smaller the conversations are more in-depth, and they tend to stay longer.

Bill C-92 came into legislation on January 1, 2020, co-developed by the Government of Canada with Indigenous people, provinces and territories – to reduce the number of Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Metis) children and youth coming into care and to improve child and family service. Our program continues to support a number of Foster families who are non-indigenous caring for, or who were in the process of adopting Indigenous children, prior to this Bill coming into legislation. This continues to be very difficult and crucial work to support the families, children, youth and Indigenous communities, and Foster families who are very invested in the lives of the children they care for.

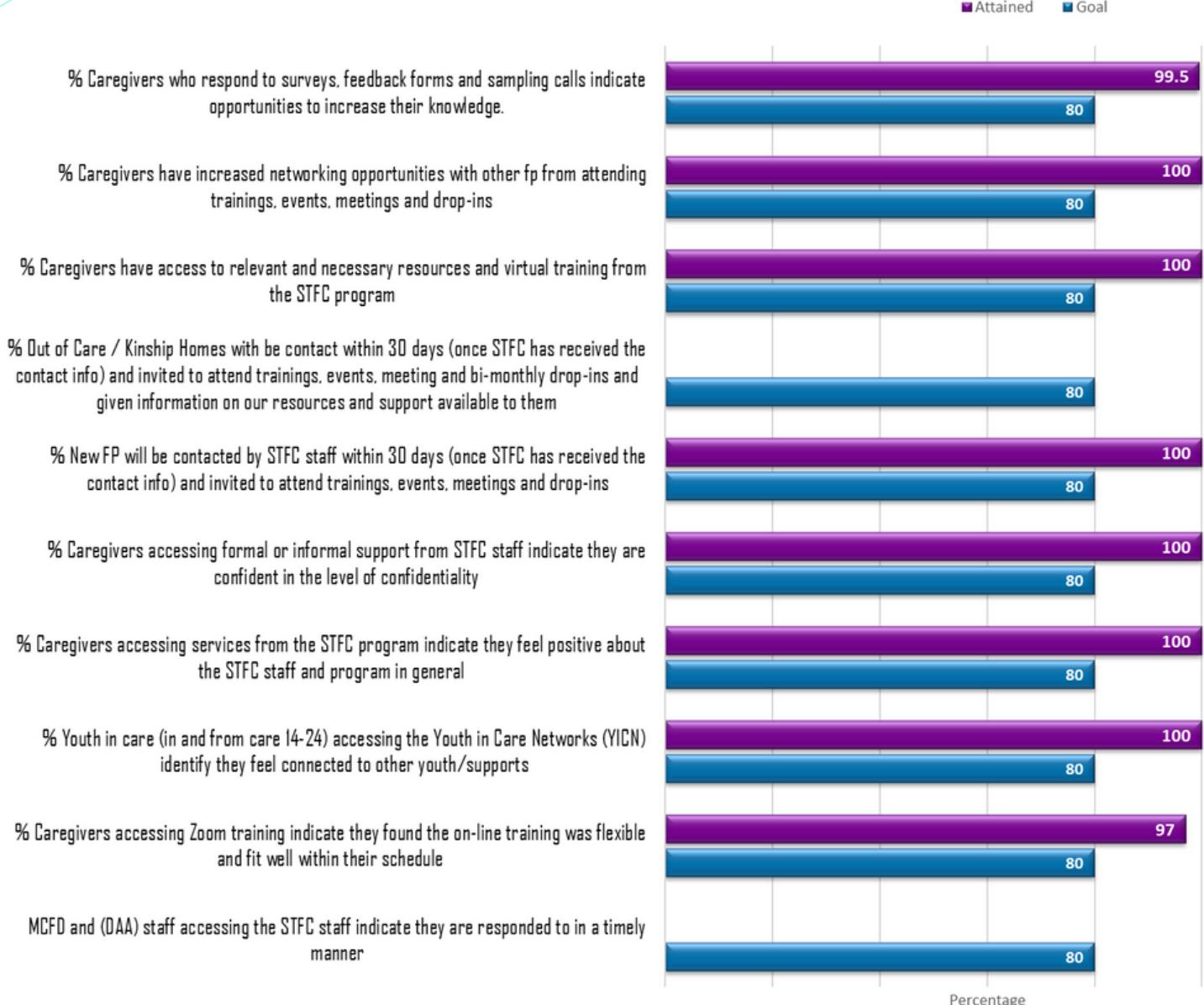
Collaboration

We continue to work in collaboration with provincial support agencies - B.C. Foster Parent Association (BCFPA), Indigenous Perspectives Society (IPS), as well as other support agencies around the province that we are often collaborating with for trainings to extend our funding and to reach more caregivers, social workers and bio families like Foster Parent Support Services Society (FPSSS) (Vancouver Island) and Okanagan Foster Parent Association (OFPA) who covers the remainder of the Interior / East Kootenay Region. The STFC Program Coordinator sits on a committee with other contracted support agencies from around the province, the BCFPA and IPS as well as the Provincial Director of Residential Resources (MCFD). We work together to ensure we are meeting the needs of the Foster Parents and Out of Care / Kinship caregivers we serve, collaborating where possible to provide trainings and events, as well as joint staff meetings at least once a year with OFPA to share ideas and support staff in their learnings and areas of growth. This relationship has prospered over the last 21 years and continues to be an asset to our working relationships as we continue to grow our programs.

Additionally, the Provincial Support Agencies Caregiver Learning Network (PSACLN) began taking shape in the last part of 2023. Representatives from 3 caregiver support agencies (Foster Parent Support Services Society, Interior Community Services and Okanagan Foster Parents Association) formed a Network to respond to the need for caregivers (kinship caregiver, foster caregivers and contracted agency staff caregivers) to engage in provincially accessible virtual learning opportunities.

The PSACLN will work with representatives from all caregiver support agencies across the province to develop accessible virtual learning opportunities for Foster Caregivers, Kinship Care Providers and Contracted Agency Caregivers. The goal of this network is to enhance caregiver knowledge, skills and abilities, and to foster a healthy caregiving network that supports the retention of all caregivers.

2023 GOALS



Family Craft Day in the Cariboo

2024 GOALS

Caregivers have opportunities to increase their knowledge from attending trainings:

- Goal - 80% of caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate opportunities to increase their knowledge.

Caregivers have increased networking opportunities with other caregivers from attending trainings, events, meetings and drop-ins:

- Goal - 80% of caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they are connected well with other caregivers.

Caregivers have access to relevant and timely resources and training from the STFC program:

- 80% of caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they find the resources and training relevant from the STFC program.

New Foster Parents will be contacted by STFC staff within 30 days (once STFC has received the contact info) and invited to attend trainings, events, meetings and drop-ins:

- Goal - 80% of new Foster Parents who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they had opportunities to connect with other Foster Parents and STFC staff.

Out of Care / Kinship Homes will be contacted by STFC staff within 30 days (once STFC has received the contact info) and invited to attend trainings, events, meetings and bi-monthly drop-ins and given information on our resources, newsletters, website and support available to them:

- Goal - 80% of new Out of Care / Kinship caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they were invited to attend trainings, events, meetings and bi-monthly drop-ins and given information on our resources, newsletters, website and support available to them.

Caregivers accessing formal or informal support from STFC staff indicate they are confident in the level of support received:

- Goal - 80% of caregivers who respond, who use STFC staff for formal or informal support indicate they are confident in the level of support received.

All Caregivers (that staff have contact information for) in all areas of our SDA are called on a regular (monthly) basis:

- Goal - 80% of caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they have heard from the Support to Family Care Network Facilitators or Program Coordinator on a regular basis.

Youth in care (in and from care 14-24) accessing local Youth in Care Networks (YICN) identify they feel connected to other youth / supports:

- 80% of youth in care who respond to feedback forms and Facebook polls indicate they feel connected with other youth / supports.

Caregivers and community professionals accessing Zoom training indicate they found the on-line training was flexible and fit well within their schedule:

- Goal - 80% of caregivers who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they found the Zoom on-line training was flexible and fit well within their schedule.

Foster Parents leaving Fostering, once STFC staff are made aware, will be contacted and acknowledged within 30 days, as well as being offered an exit interview from their Network Facilitator:

- Goal - 80% of Foster Parents leaving Fostering will be contacted within 30 days (once STFC staff have been notified), to be acknowledged and offered an exit interview from program staff.

MCFD and Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSA) staff experience effective and timely responses from STFC staff:

- 80% of MCFD and ICFSA staff who respond to surveys, feedback forms and sampling calls indicate they are experiencing effective and timely responses from STFC staff.

STFC TEAM

Kari Bepple
Program Coordinator



www.icsfp.info

Renata Bonthoux
Thompson / Shuswap
Network Facilitator



Krista Sherwood
Thompson / Shuswap
Network Facilitator



Marna Forsyth
(virtual support)



Jane Wesko
(through ARC Programs)
WK Network Facilitator



Tabitha Fournier
Cariboo Network
Facilitator



Ashley Gibson
EK Network Facilitator



*It's not the word
before parent that
defines, but rather the
love and dedication in
the parent's heart.*

Unknown

