

# “More than Physical Safety: Cultivating Connection and Well-Being in MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™”

Elisabeth Tissell

MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ Program Manager  
The Mockingbird Society, Seattle, WA



# What experience have you had in child welfare?



- As a social work professional
- As a legal practitioner
- As a law enforcement officer
- As a lived expert (formerly in care)
- As a foster or kinship caregiver
- As a biological parent with child(ren) in care
- Other

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Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?

When can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?

What factors impact the success or failure of a new change?

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- Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to think?
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**“HOW DO WE KEEP KIDS  
ALIVE & SAFE?”**

# OUR CURRENT ANSWERS

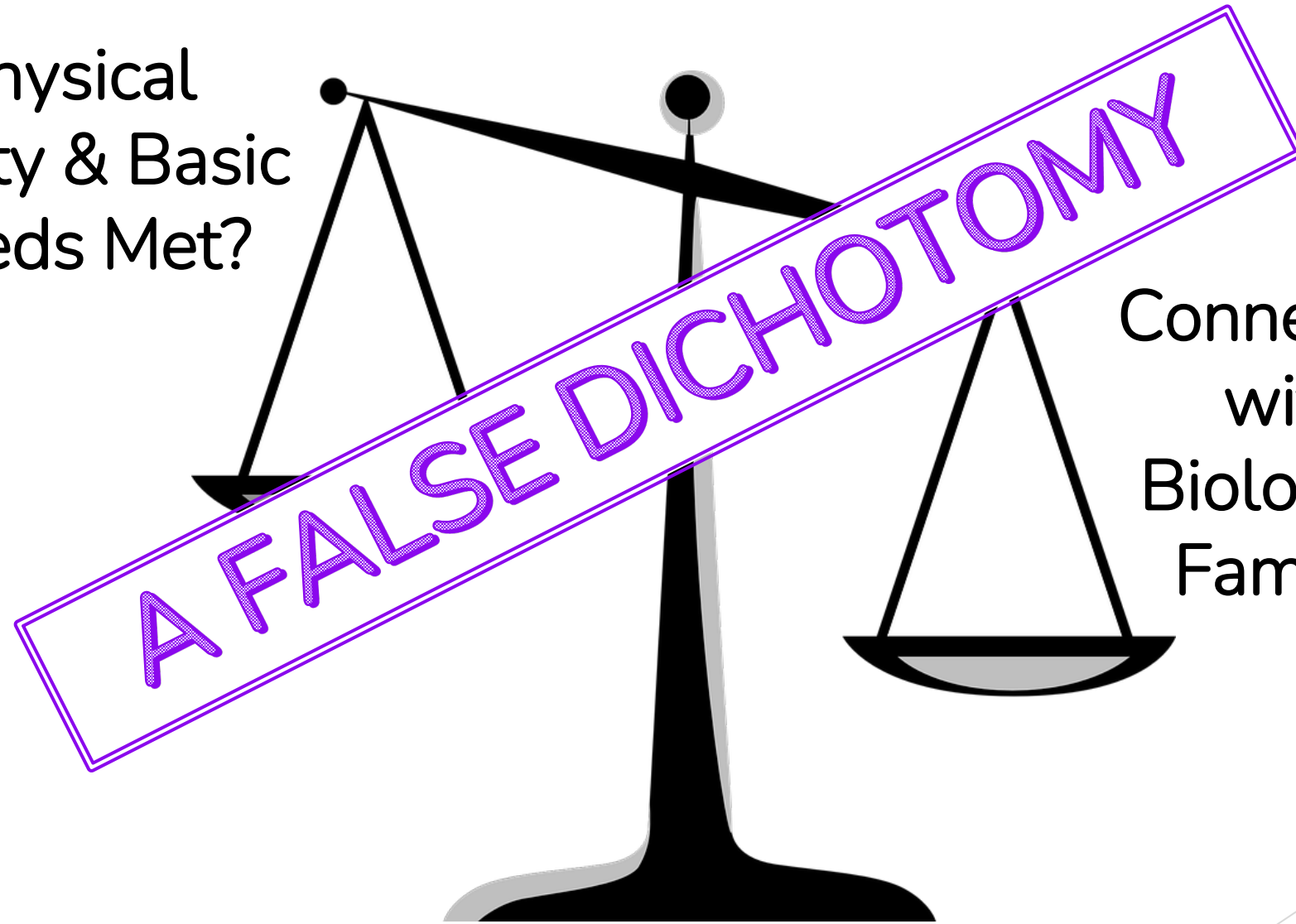
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- ▶ **Families First Prevention Act (2018)<sup>1</sup>**
  - ▶ Pre-emptively stabilize at-risk children and families
  - ▶ Prioritize kin placement
  - ▶ Improve support and compensation for kin caregivers
  - ▶ Phase out congregate care homes
- ▶ **Keeping Families Together Act (HB 1227 / SB6109) in WA State (2021)<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Lindell, K. U., Sorenson, C. K., & Mangold, S. V. (2020). The Family First Prevention Services Act: A New Era of Child Welfare Reform. *Public health reports (Washington, D.C. : 1974)*, 135(2), 282–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354919900892>

<sup>2</sup>Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families. (n.d.). *HB1227 and SB 6109*. Retrieved from [HB 1227 and SB 6109 | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#)

Physical  
Safety & Basic  
Needs Met?



Connection  
with  
Biological  
Family?

# OUR CURRENT OUTCOMES

## Placement Instability

- ▶ More than 1 in 4 placements breakdown
  - ▶ For adolescents, it is more than 1 in 3<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Eltink, E.M.A., Waaijenberg, A., Broers, M., van Anrooij, M., van Rooij, F.B., Stams, G.J.J.M., & Assink, M. (April 2025). The prevalence of placement breakdown in foster care: A meta-analysis. Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 171, 108203.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108203>.

<https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=82930&picture=house-clipart> -

# OUR CURRENT OUTCOMES

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## Separation from Siblings

- ▶ “53-80% of children with siblings are separated from one or more siblings while in care”<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Casey Family Programs. (2020, September 16). *How are child protection agencies promoting and supporting joint sibling placements and adoptions?*  
<https://www.casey.org/joint-sibling-placements/> - :-:text=While%20current%20and%20reliable%20national,their%20siblings%20while%20in%20care.  
<https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/200000/velka/children-holding-hands-silhouette.jpg> -

# OUR CURRENT OUTCOMES

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## High Caseworker Turnover

- ▶ 20-40% annual rate vs “optimal” rate  $\leq 12\%$ <sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Casey Family Programs. (2023, August 29). *How does turnover in the child welfare workforce impact children and families?*  
<https://www.casey.org/turnover-costs-and-retention-strategies/>  
<https://svgsilh.com/png-1024/1697987.png> -

# LEADING CAUSES OF INSTABILITY

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- ▶ Systems and/or policies **(25%)**
- ▶ Personal stressors/events/issues with foster families **(38%)**
- ▶ Behavioral challenges with young people in care **(33%)**
- ▶ Issues with biological family **(2%)**<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Koh, E., Rolock, N., Cross, T.P., & Eblen-Manning, J. (February 2014). What explains instability in foster care? Comparison of a matched sample of children with stable and unstable placements. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 37, 36-45.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2013.12.007>.

<sup>2</sup>James, S. (2004). Why Do Foster Care Placements Disrupt? An Investigation of Reasons for Placement Change in Foster Care. *Social Service Review*, 78(4), 601–627. <https://doi-org.seattleu.idm.oclc.org/10.1086/424546>.

<sup>3</sup>Vreeland, A. Ebert, J.S., Kuhn, T.M., Gracey, K.A., Shaffer, A.M., Watson, K.H., Gruhn, M.A., Henry, L., Dickey, L., Siciliano, R.E., Anderson, A. & Compas, B.E. (2019, November 22). *Predictors of placement disruptions in foster care*. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 99 (2020).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104283>

# CHILD WELFARE IN OUR LARGER CONTEXT

## ▶ National youth mental health crisis –

- ▶ 40% of high school students “experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness”
- ▶ Greater prevalence amongst female, American Indian and Alaskan Native, and LGBTQ+ students <sup>1, 2, 3</sup>



## ▶ National epidemic of loneliness –

- ▶ 21% of American adults are “frequently or almost always lonely”
- ▶ Nearly 1 in 3 adults ages 30-44 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, August 6). YRBS data summary & trends report. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrebs/dstr/index.html>

<sup>2</sup>Annie E. Casey Foundation (2025, November 2). Child welfare and foster care statistics. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics>

<sup>3</sup>Children’s Rights. (January 2023). LGBTQ+ youth in foster care. <https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/crsite/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CR-LGBTQ-Youth-in-Foster-Care-2023-Fact-Sheet.pdf>


<sup>4</sup>Batanova, M., Weissbourd, R., & McIntyre, J. (October 2024). Loneliness in America: Just the tip of the iceberg? Harvard Graduate School of Education. Making Caring Common Project.

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b7c56e255b02c683659fe43/t/67001295042a0f327c6e6fab/1728058005340/Loneliness\\_+Brief+Report+2024\\_October\\_FINAL.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b7c56e255b02c683659fe43/t/67001295042a0f327c6e6fab/1728058005340/Loneliness_+Brief+Report+2024_October_FINAL.pdf)

<https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=288622&picture=social-anxiety->

# SYMPTOMS OF CRISIS IN THE SYSTEM

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- ▶ Constant crisis management 
- ▶ Toxic stress
- ▶ Cynicism and a sense of overwhelm
- ▶ A scarcity mindset
- ▶ Physical and emotional weariness
- ▶ Shut-down

**“WHAT DO YOUTH,  
FAMILIES, AND  
PROFESSIONALS NEED TO  
THRIVE IN CHILD  
WELFARE?”**

# SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT

- ▶ Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?
- ▶ Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?”

Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?

→ Show responses

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CJC Presentation Ques...  

Select which slide to add

- What experience have you had in child welfare?  

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- Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?  

- What factors impact the success or failure of a new change?  


Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?

→ Show responses

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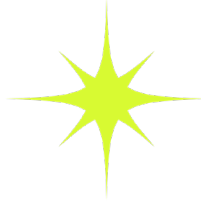
CJC Presentation Ques...

Select which slide to add

- What experience have you had in child welfare?
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  - As a legal professional
  - As a police officer
  - As a health care professional
  - As a teacher or educator
  - As a parent or caregiver
  - As a community leader
  - Other
- Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?
- Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?
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# THRIVING IN CHILD WELFARE REQUIRES...

▶ Quality caregivers (skilled, motivated, present)



▶ Safe and consistent environment

▶ Networks of community and peer support



▶ Stress management and emotional regulation

▶ Ability to build and sustain relationships

▶ Resilience <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Casey Family Programs. (2023, May 12). *What impacts placement stability?* <https://www.casey.org/placement-stability-impacts/>

<sup>2</sup>Oosterman, M., Schuengel, C., Slot, N.W., Bullens, R.A.R., & Doreleijers, T.A.H. (January 2007). Disruptions in foster care: A review and meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*. Volume 29, Issue 1, 53-76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2006.07.003>.

<sup>3</sup>Casey Family Programs. (2023, May 12). *How can we improve placement stability for children in foster care?* <https://www.casey.org/strategies-improve-placement-stability/>

<sup>4</sup>Children's Bureau. (March 2020). *Protective factors – Approaches in Child Welfare*. Child Welfare Information Gateway, Office of the Administration for Children & Families. Retrieved from [https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/protective-factors-approaches-child-welfare.pdf?VersionId=cY9xM3iFiZS42hr\\_w\\_bGcrU.cGtpOaTe-](https://cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/protective-factors-approaches-child-welfare.pdf?VersionId=cY9xM3iFiZS42hr_w_bGcrU.cGtpOaTe-)

# A COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTION

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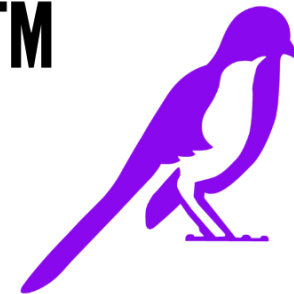
**Local, small communities** of foster and kinship families – aka, “Constellations”

Emulating an **extended family network**, full of all the positive qualities and resources found in naturally thriving families

**Centered around experienced, local Hub Homes** who build community and provide trusted, immediate support, respite, and mentorship

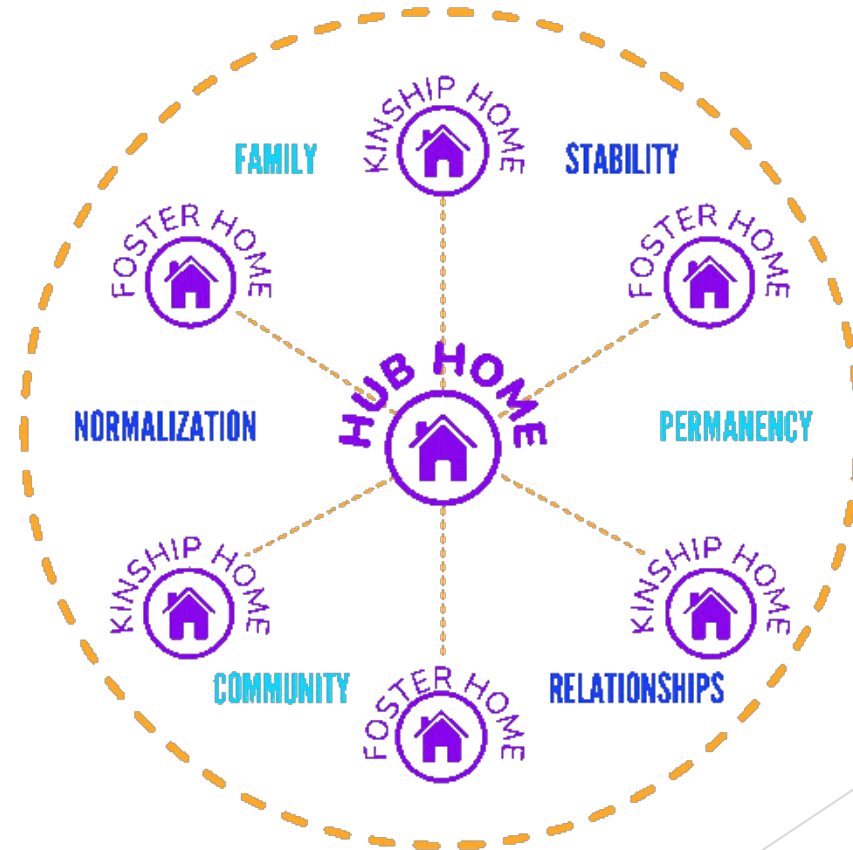
*“Transforming foster care by putting relationships first.”*

**MOCKINGBIRD  
FAMILY™**



# MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ CONSTELLATIONS

- ▶ Centralized system of support
- ▶ Cohort of 6 to 10 Families supporting 6 to 18 youth
- ▶ Geographic proximity to the Hub
- ▶ Supportive network of children, families, child protection agencies and other community stakeholders



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah9NjPNmO\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah9NjPNmO_I)

# THE HUB HOME - THE CENTER OF SUPPORT








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- ▶ Hosts monthly Constellation gatherings and periodic social activities & events
- ▶ Provides coaching/peer mentoring & coordinates training opportunities for families
- ▶ Two open beds designated for planned and crisis respite
- ▶ Ensures safety of the children and youth in care
- ▶ Creates a stable, caring community that is culturally sensitive and engages in culturally relevant care



# AN EXTENDED FAMILY NETWORK

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-  **Respite Care** readily available and provided by a trusted caregiver
-  **Relationship Building** between adults, youth in care, and peers
-  **Normalizing** childhood experiences in family settings
-  **Safety & Stability** for children and youth in care
-  **Peer Mentoring** support, and shared learning experiences
-  **Relevant, Child-Specific Trainings** for caregivers
-  **Connections** to siblings / biological family, supported by Hub

# 8 CORE PRINCIPLES

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 **Unconditional Care**

 **Continuity of Care**

 **Normalization**

 **Community-based Care**

 **Active Child Protection**

 **Biological Family  
Viewed as Support**

 **Cultural Relevancy**

 **Caregiver Support**

# A SENSE OF BELONGING

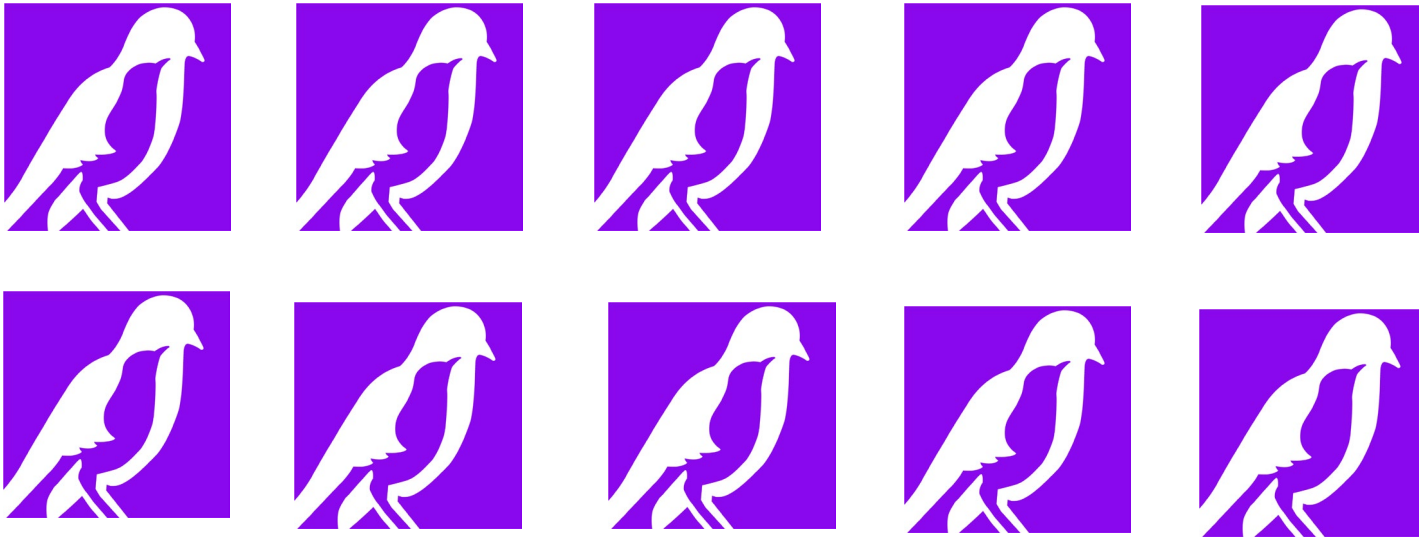
***“I can talk about my experiences as a foster child without having to [explain] why I don't live with my biological parents.”***

**(Dutch youth in care)<sup>1</sup>**

***“Ik kan praten over mijn ervaringen als pleegkind zonder dat ik hoef te vertellen waarom ik niet samenwoon met mijn biologische ouders.”***

# COMMUNITY MAKES A DIFFERENCE

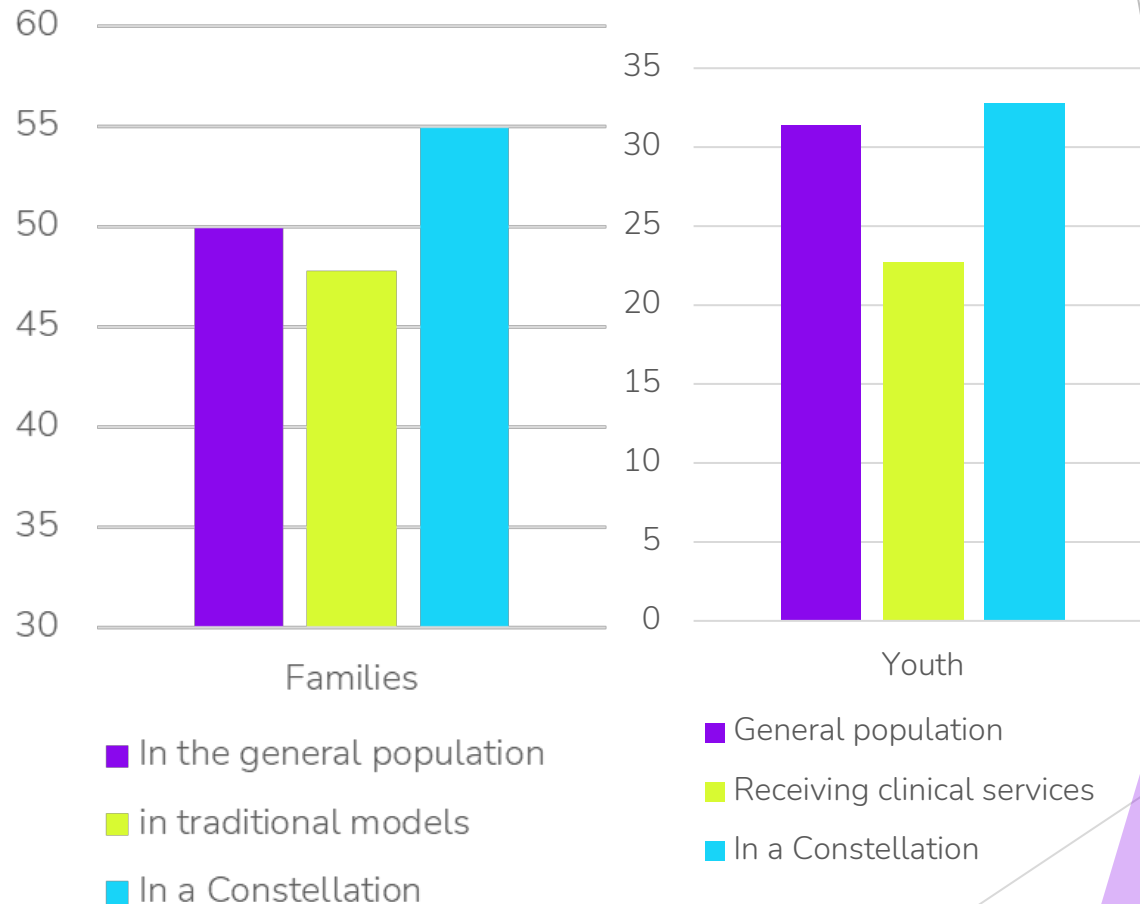
- ▶ **98% of “children and young people...said that they had an adult who they trusted, who helped them and who sticks by them no matter what.”<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup>Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D., & Trivedi, H. (September 2020). *Mockingbird programme – Evaluation report*. Department for Education, UK. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933119/Fostering\\_Network\\_Mockingbird.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf) - )

# COMMUNITY IMPROVES WELL-BEING

- ▶ Mockingbird families had **higher levels of well-being**<sup>1</sup> when compared to not only other foster families, but also the general UK population
- ▶ Youth in constellations had **similar levels of well-being**<sup>2</sup> to youth in the **general population**, and better than youth receiving clinical mental health services<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)

<sup>2</sup> Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) and Child Outcome Rating Scale

<sup>3</sup>Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D., & Trivedi, H. (September 2020). *Mockingbird programme – Evaluation report*. Department for Education, UK. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933119/Fostering\\_Network\\_Mockingbird.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf) - )

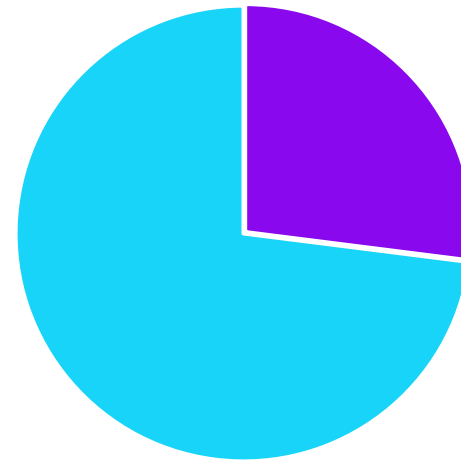
# COMMUNITY ALLEVIATES STRESS

- ▶ MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ youth and families **utilize respite at double or more the rate** of their peers.<sup>1, 2</sup>
- ▶ Respite, “sleepovers,” become normal, accessible, reliable = less stress.



**Only 28% of UK carers had utilized respite in the last 6 months**

vs.



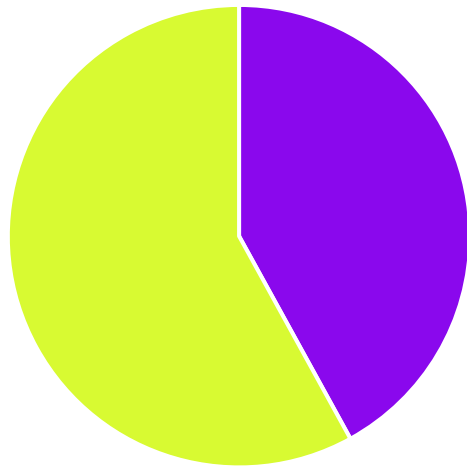
**73% of Mockingbird Family™ carers**

<sup>1</sup>McDermid, S., Baker, C., Lawson, D., & Holmes, L. (October 2016). *The evaluation of the Mockingbird Family Model – Final evaluation report*. Department for Education, UK. Retrieved from [https://mockingbirdsociety.org/images/UK\\_Eval\\_of\\_Mockingbird\\_Family.pdf](https://mockingbirdsociety.org/images/UK_Eval_of_Mockingbird_Family.pdf) -

<sup>2</sup>Northwest Institute for Children and Families. (2007, March 20). *Mockingbird Family Model Project Evaluation – Three Year Evaluation Report*. School of Social Work, University of Washington. Retrieved from [https://mockingbirdsociety.org/images/info/nwicf\\_2007-5\\_report.pdf](https://mockingbirdsociety.org/images/info/nwicf_2007-5_report.pdf) -

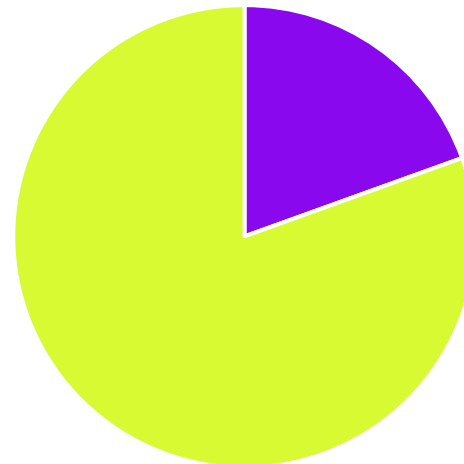
# COMMUNITY FOSTERS CONNECTION

- ▶ “More than 90% of carers rated the support from other carers and the Hub Home carers as **good or excellent.**”
- ▶ **80.5%** of MOCKINGBIRD carers in the UK reported that they were **usually or always treated as an equal** by their foster child’s social worker.<sup>1</sup>



**National Average (UK): 58%**

vs.

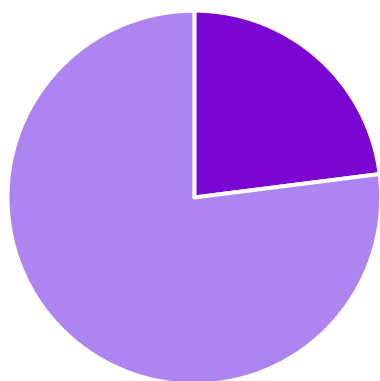


**MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™: 80.5%**

<sup>1</sup>Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D., & Trivedi, H. (September 2020). *Mockingbird programme – Evaluation report*. Department for Education, UK. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933119/Fostering\\_Network\\_Mockingbird.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf) - )

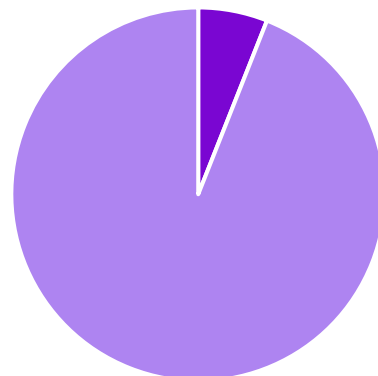
# COMMUNITY BUILDS RESILIENCE

- ▶ Families continue to foster -- **Only 6% of foster families discontinued fostering over 3 years** across 12 different sites in the UK.



**National Average (UK): 23%**

vs.



**MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™: 6%**

- ▶ After accounting for other statistical differences, Mockingbird households were found to be **“82% less likely to de-register [their license] than households who did not participate.”<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Ott, E., McGrath-Lone, L., Pinto, V., Sanders-Ellis, D., & Trivedi, H. (September 2020). *Mockingbird programme – Evaluation report*. Department for Education, UK. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/933119/Fostering\\_Network\\_Mockingbird.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933119/Fostering_Network_Mockingbird.pdf) - )

# A SENSE OF CONNECTION

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***“[Mockingbird Family] works because it is based on relationships, and [we] are getting the support that [we] need when [we] need it.”***

**(Australian caregiver)<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>McLaren, H., Patmisari, E., Jones, M., Skinner, C., & Mather, S. (2024). Piloting the Mockingbird Family™ in Australia: Experiences of foster carers and agency workers. *Child & Family Social Work*, 29(2), 411–421.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.13095>

# GLOBAL IMPACT

★ 358 Constellations and growing... ★



# CASE STUDY – WASHINGTON STATE



- ▶ Founded in South Seattle in 2004
- ▶ Legacy Constellations - Stability and retention outcomes
- ▶ Current expansion by the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)
  - ▶ 1 of 8 system improvements negotiated as part of the D.S. Settlement (2022)
  - ▶ **1 Constellation in each region, total of 16 Constellations by end of 2026**
  - ▶ Prioritizing youth with a history of placement instability and/or intensive support needs - e.g. Wraparound with Intensive Services (WISe) or Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS)<sup>1</sup>
  - ▶ Integration of kinship caregivers
  - ▶ Dedicated liaisons embedded within DCYF
  - ▶ Close collaboration with The Mockingbird Society

<sup>1</sup>Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (n.d.) *System improvements*. Retrieved from <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/practice-improvement/ds-settlement/system-improvements> -

# CASE STUDY – WASHINGTON STATE



**“WHAT DOES CHANGE LOOK  
LIKE, AND HOW CAN WE  
NAVIGATE IT?”**

# SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT

Think about a significant change you have experienced in your work, family, or community:

- ▶ How did you feel about the change initially?
- ▶ What part did you play (or not) in this change?
- ▶ What factors impacted the success or failure of this change?

What factors impact the success or failure of a new change?

→ Show responses

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Select which slide to add

- What experience have you had in child welfare?
  - As a social work professional
  - As a child psychologist
  - As a child development officer
  - As a therapist (Drama in use)
  - As a foster carer/parenting support
  - As a long-term foster carer with adopted children
  - Other
- Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?
- Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?
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# DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS (DOI) THEORY

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A sociological theory that “attempts to describe how novel products, practices, or ideas are adopted by members of a social system”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Watts Simonds, V., Rogers, K., & Rudd, R. E. (2016, August 1). *Diffusion of innovations*. Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diffusion-of-innovations> -

# 5 INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

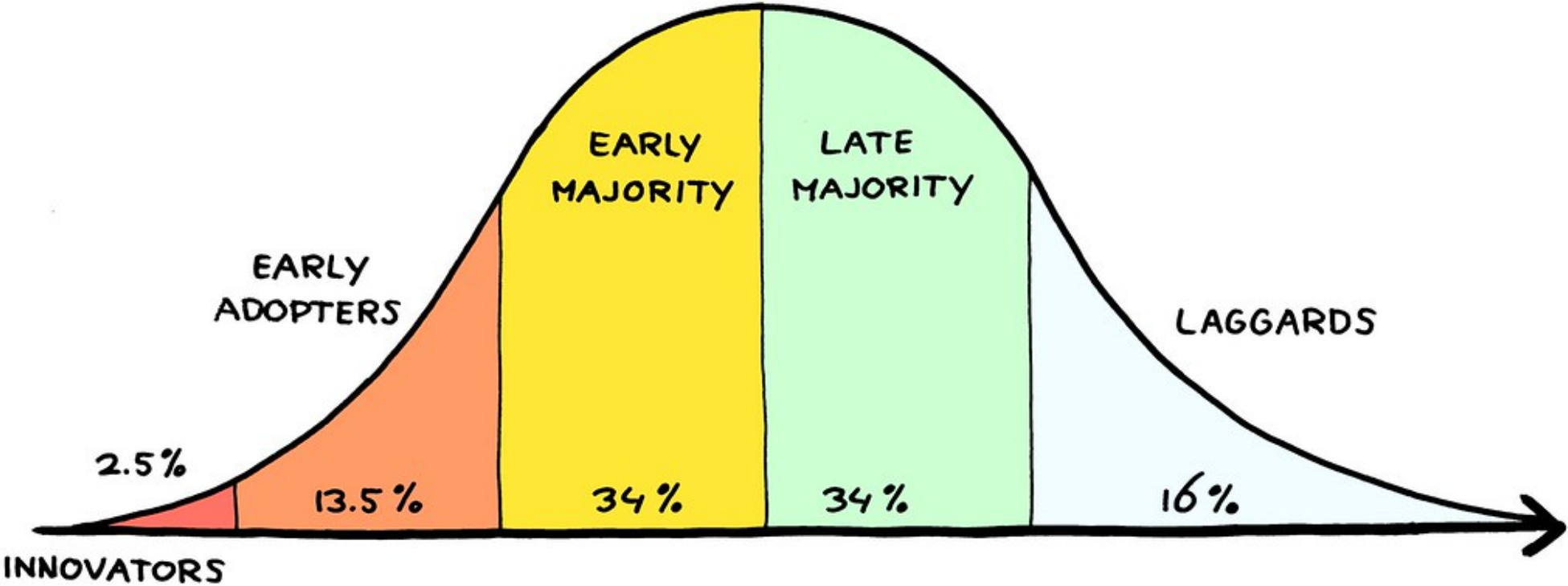
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1. **Relative Advantage** – “What’s in it for me?”
2. **Compatibility** – “Does this align with my values, needs, and experiences?”
3. **Complexity** – “Is it easy to explain and understand?”
4. **Trialability** – “Is it easy to test?”
5. **Observability** – “Can I see and experience its benefit(s)?”<sup>1, 2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Malouf, E., & Bahemia, H. (2023). *Diffusion of Innovations: A review*. In S. Papagiannidis (Ed), TheoryHub Book. Available at <https://open.ncl.ac.uk> / ISBN: 9781739604400. Retrieved from <https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/183997396/diffusion-of-innovations.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Watts Simonds, V., Rogers, K., & Rudd, R. E. (2016, August 1). *Diffusion of innovations*. Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diffusion-of-innovations> -

# RATE OF ADOPTION



# FRACTAL RESPONSIBILITY

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- ▶ **Social change strategy** developed by adrienne maree brown
  - ▶ We each have a part to play within our own spheres of influence to advance social change.
- ▶ **Examples within child welfare**
  - ▶ Curiosity and open-mindedness



# SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT

Recall why you first entered child welfare:

- ▶ How did you get here?
- ▶ Why do you stay?
- ▶ What is one takeaway (action, question, thought) that you will carry with you from today's conversation?

## What is your main takeaway from our conversation today?

Responses can be up to 200 characters and will appear here.

You can group responses if you get more than 10.

Turn on voting so people can flag their favorite responses.

→ Show responses

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Responses are hidden x



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Select which slide to add

What experience have you had in child welfare?



Beyond physical safety and basic needs, what do children, families, and professionals need to thrive?

Where can we find these things within our existing child welfare system?

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# CONCLUSION

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- ▶ Returning to our new question:
  - ▶ “What do youth, families, and professionals need to **thrive** in child welfare?”
- ▶ **MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™** is one promising way we can build our child welfare system to answer this question.
- ▶ **We each have a part to play** in making our new answers a collective reality.

# CONNECT WITH US!



Scan to connect with me about bringing MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ to your agency or state!



Scan to connect with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (WA) – MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ Team

# REFERENCES

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