**Diversity Practice**

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Children in the foster care system face a lot of struggles daily. One of the many struggles that children in the foster care system face is being treated indifferently within the school system. These children in the system are already treated indifferently in general; however, it is a major problem within the school system. A United Methodist Foster Care Services (UMFS) worker had mentioned was that foster care children were being checked for bruises and other signs of neglect, while children who are not in the system have not been checked for signs of abuse or neglect. This makes a lot of the foster care children feel uncomfortable and being put in an awkward position. There is a stigma that a lot of children in the system are being abused by their foster parents. While it is an issue that does happen and is a valid concern, it is not as common as many people that are unfamiliar with the system would think. Another struggle that these children face, is that there a lot of children of color or people of color (POC) in the system, but a lot of white families that are fostering. What this means is, these children that are a lot of POC children being fostered by white families. While it is ideal that they are being fostered by any family, it is hard for POC children because they feel misunderstood, and the parents have a hard time relating to their kids. One good example of this is a white foster mother from UMFS took in a little girl that is black, and she is not as educated as she should be on black culture, so she has to do research on this, but she has a hard time understanding the struggles and the discrimination that the girl could be going through. The foster parent had mentioned she was having a hard time taking care of and styling the young girl’s hair, and that was an issue that she was struggling with because the younger girl felt like she was not adequately enough getting the care she needed.

Overall, children in the foster care system face a lot of discrimination, especially POC children. Another group of children in the system that faces discrimination are children apart of the LGBTQ+ community. There are children in the system that identify as nonbinary and use they/them pronouns, but their foster parents and sometimes even the workers that are assigned to the case that ignore those pronouns and use she/her or he/him anyways because it fits their narrative, and it is what is comfortable for them. In social work, workers are taught to be open minded and accepting towards other opinions, views, and political differences. Social workers are supposed to put their differences aside and keep their beliefs to themselves, because that is what they are taught, and it is talked about in the NASW code of ethics. So, in a case like that, the worker should try and push themselves to adapt and use those pronouns or at least be more accepting towards those different opinions and those beliefs because their comfortability is not as important as the comfortability of the child in the system.

A lot of people in general have this negative connotation that foster kids are troubled. This can deeply affect a child in the foster care system who is in the school system. Teachers will hold this assumption and take it out on the kids by always keeping their guard around them, making the children feel uneasy and uncomfortable. They also tend to be overly sympathetic towards the kids that come from the foster system. That may not seem like a horrible thing, but workers from UMFS have talked about having conversations with some of the youth and they would say how teachers treating them indifferently like that and having too much sympathy would make them feel awkward or uncomfortable. One of them had stated that they just want to feel like a normal kid and not be treated any differently. It is definitely a good thing that these teachers are understanding to these kids’ situations. The teachers need to have empathy and keep their minds open because of what the children could be going through. They need to be understanding that it can be severely overwhelming and stressful, causing them to have a hard time doing well in school whether it be socially or academically. While saying that, there needs to be a healthy balance in between being empathetic and understanding, but also being aware that the youth that are going through the system are normal kids, too.

A client from UMFS had talked to a worder and said that sometimes their teachers are really lenient with them when it comes to assignments, but it would only be with her and not any of the other students. She said that sometimes it was beneficial because she would be going through tough times; however, she also said that other students also have issues and difficult problems going on at home and they should be more open minded to them as well. This client continued to say that one of her teachers gave her an extension on a paper without her even asking and he had told this student about the extension in front of the other kids. The client stated that this made them feel uncomfortable because she could hear the other students talking about how it was unfair and that they were angry at her for getting special treatment. This reiterates the prior statement previously in the paper when discussing how children in the foster care system want to be treated like normal kids rather than getting special treatment, especially while in school. School environments are extremely vulnerable places to be for children, especially those youth that are going through difficult times or who are apart of minority groups. When discussing diversity practice, one thing to keep in mind is that while most children in the foster care system are treated somewhat differently or looked at in a different way because they are in the system, this happens to affect minority children in the system even more. It has to be considered that overall, minority groups are treated a lot differently in most aspects, so it makes sense that children in the foster care system who are apart of those minority groups would be treated indifferently.

As stated previously in this paper, one of the many other struggles that a lot of children in the foster care system face is often not fitting in well with their foster care families. The reason for this is being that there are a lot of white and/or heteronormative, which is the majority, families wanting to foster or adopt children who are minorities. It is not always about what they want either, it is also just because there are a lot of white and/or heteronormative families willing to foster; however, there are not as many families who are apart of minority groups that are able to foster children. Unfortunately, while this may not always be something that can be controlled or necessarily fixed, it causes a lot of those children who are apart of those minority groups to feel like they could fit in. There was one foster mother that a worker had worked with, and the foster parent had a discussion with that worker about how the client was in the LGBTQ+ community and she had stated that it made her uncomfortable solely because she did not know enough information about the community and sometimes, she would slip up and say the wrong things. After talking to the client herself about it, she stated that she felt out of place because nobody in the family really understood her or her social identity overall.

There are some ways that these problems can be addressed. As for the clients who do not feel as accepted into their families because of their social identities, it could be possible that an agency spreads awareness and talks about how they are accepting of all families who are considered a minority and emphasize their acceptance and knowledge on diversity, equity, and inclusion. This also somewhat applies to the issue with school systems in a way. It could be necessary that workers talk to the teachers and have meetings with them on expectations for how these kids in the system would like to be treated.