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217

File Number
10192

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Title: A fostering, or family sharing scheme, with a difference

Original source: -

Resource type: Written

Publication Date: 01/08/91

Publisher info: Star Victorian Action on Intellectual Disability

Abstract

This article by a family support agency (STAR) in Victoria says that it is not hard to find enthusiastic people who will provide a foster home and family for a range of people with disabilities. It lists the way to go about finding such families, beginning with training staff and a public meeting. **Keywords:** Families, Accommodation

A FOSTERING, OR FAMILY SHARING SCHEME, WITH A DIFFERENCE

Paper 1: Preparation

Contrary to common belief, it is not hard to find enthusiastic people who will provide a foster home and family for people with a range of disabilities.

1. Find some enthusiastic staff imbued with the concepts of Social Role Valorisation and Normalisation in daily life. These people will help in planning and conducting a training course for potential fostering people. This should start at once so that there is minimum delay in getting the program going after the Public Meeting.
2. Set a date for a Public Meeting.
3. Advertise Public Meeting in local (free) newspapers; through notices going home in school-children's lunch boxes (auspiced by Parents Club of the school); by notices on the notice-boards of local supermarkets; in school newsletters after discussion with principals; in local church papers courtesy of the clergyman/woman, or whoever. Any other low-key places you can think of such as libraries and community houses.

* Note that the people most likely to be reading most of these notices will be women, particularly mothers.

4. The notice invites people to attend the Public Meeting if they are interested in hearing about the possibilities of a rewarding career in their own homes. It should have some headings such as:
 - want to help someone with a disability?
 - want to start a new career using your natural skills and life experiences?
 - ever considered how much you have contributed to the lives of your family, friends, neighbours?
 - want to continue to use and extend your accumulated talents?

These four questions are the sort that attract attention and interest and at the same time indicate that the meeting and the career has to do with disability affecting a person's life.

5. At the Public Meeting a general outline of what is planned is given. This will include some of the challenging situations that might be met, as well as the supports that would be freely available. The challenging situations presented should not be the "what if" ones of the worst

scenario but the much more common ones everyone meets and deals with in family life at some stage or another. People listening should be able to relate their own experiences to what they are hearing.

6. The meeting should be told that there will be a short orientation/training course of 5 or 6 half-days. These can be offered during office hours and repeated if necessary during evenings.
7. At the close of the meeting people interested in taking part in the training course are invited to register their interest on the forms provided. This does not commit them to taking further part in the program but gives them some more insights/information/opportunity for discussions with leaders of the course.
8. People are told that those who decide to take part in the program will receive a salary that appropriately covers board and lodging, plus a training fee. They are also told that once one member of their family (usually the mother) and the agency have signed the contract those with whom the contract is made will be put on the staff roll and considered professionals. All other staff no matter what their training become their colleagues.
9. After the meeting all who have registered interest are sent a letter (preferably the day following the meeting) with further information about times/places etc for the training course.

- Star Victorian Action on Intellectual Disability, August 1991.