

Maryland DHS/Social Services & Maryland Resource Parent Association

Survey of Resource Parents: Summary of Findings
November 2020



BACKGROUND:

The objective of this survey was to gauge resource parent's participation in and sentiments towards the Maryland Resource Parent Association (MRPA) and local county resource parent associations. These organizations, with the help of the Maryland Department of Social Services (DSS), are intended to provide Resource, Kinship, Adoptive, and Guardianship parents with resources and services to help them in their roles, building authentic relationships between resource parents, DSS workers, and origin families. These organizations collaborated on a survey of resource parents throughout the state of Maryland to find out about their experiences with resource parent associations, what resources and supports they need and find most helpful, and their thoughts about partnering with families of origin and DSS.

"We are grandparents of our Resource child. Our worker has told us that there are no support groups for people in our situation. I have had to go online to find a group, which is national and not always relevant to our local area."

Authentic Partnerships with Resource Parents Survey

460 Resource Parents from all 24 Jurisdictions Responded

(Baltimore County=12%; Montgomery County=12%; Anne Arundel County=9%; Harford County=8%; Cecil County=7%)

67%

(n=459)

Knew about or were aware of MRPA

34%

(n=245)

Are involved or active member of MRPA

55%

(n=231)

MRPA meets their needs as resource parent

39%

(n=296)

Involved or active member of Local



50%

(n=252)

Local RPA meets their needs as

Top Benefits of Being Involved with MRPA (n=199) or Local RPA (n=226)



"A lot of family bonding between the Resource and bio kids from different families."

"MRPA funding to support local resource parent association."

"Local Monthly meetings, support groups and opportunities for CEUs."

"Not sure yet."

Top Challenges to Being Involved with MRPA (n=188) or Local RPA (n=207)

"As a new Resource Parent, I didn't know certain events and services even existed."

"Only time constraints. We are a two-parent family, we both work full time, and Resource children have lots of after school appointments and activities."

"Evening meetings."



What Additional Resources or Supports Do You Need as a Resource Parent that are not already available? (n=175)



"When a school aged child that I am willing to take has hours that conflict with my job, it affects my ability to accept children."

"Ways to connect outside Facebook."

"More flexibility in training times and topics." "It would be nice to have a professional page to receive support."

Resource Parents' Relationships with Families of Origin and DSS

74%

(n=279)

It's important to develop a positive relationship with birth parents to achieve permanency

59%

(n=279)

It's important to have regular communication with birth parents to achieve permanency



38%

(n=272)

Have a clear idea how to partner with birth families

31%

(n=274)

Are given accurate & specific case goals/ objectives related to youth in care & biological family



63%

(n=272)

Have the necessary tools & information to best care for children in their care

56%

(n=274)

Have mutually trusting relationships with DSS professionals that help them preserve and improve family relationships

How Can MRPA Best Support You as a Resource Parent? (n=85)

- ▶ Greater communication frequency and transparency
- ▶ Direct communication-not through DSS
- ▶ Liaison with DSS
- ▶ Centralized source for finding resources/services (childcare, transportation, trainings, links to products, emergency bags)
- ▶ Mental/behavioral health assistance for children/Trauma informed parenting training and support
- ▶ Being a larger presence in general, making parents aware of the associations and the resources they provide
- ▶ Educate new Resource Parents on what is available to them.
- ▶ Offer mentoring and training
- ▶ Offer contact info to other Resource Parents. Confidentiality is a barrier
- ▶ Evening trainings. Offer new content instead of recycling old trainings
- ▶ Follow through on good ideas.
- ▶ Advocacy for Resource Parent to have right to intervene.
- ▶ Advocacy for permanency within statute.
- ▶ Local meetings.
- ▶ Reach out early to Resource Parents
- ▶ Keep Resource Parents updated on legislative, policy or procedural changes.
- ▶ Fun things for family to do at low/no cost.
- ▶ Continue online and virtual trainings for Resource Parents
- ▶ Continue legislative advocacy.
- ▶ Include kinship providers.
- ▶ Keep meeting participants positive and not petty, negative, side talk.
- ▶ More cultural competence in operations
- ▶ Help with how to address the lack of partnership and trust with DSS.

Summary of Results

Maryland's Department of Human Services/Social Services Administration (DHS/SSA) is focused on building authentic partnerships with resource parents and strengthening teaming between resource parents, workers, and families of origin. A key partner in this effort is the Maryland Resource Parent Association (MRPA). MRPA's mission is to provide support to resource parents to become informed partners in child welfare. The MRPA Survey of Resource Parents was designed to inform this effort by asking resource parents about their experiences with either the MRPA or a local parent association, and what resources and supports they need and find most helpful. The survey also asked about resource parents' view of their relationships with families of origin and with DSS staff. Results of the survey have been used to develop effective strategies to address needs or issues that were identified.

Overall, results suggest the following:

- ▶ Most resource parents are not involved with either MRPA or a local parent association for a variety of reasons even though they were aware of the organizations.
- ▶ Only half of resource parents thought that MRPA and local associations met their needs. Still, resource parents largely agreed on the benefits of MRPA and local associations, including training, connection, support groups, and social events.
- ▶ Resource parents also agreed on challenges and barriers to being involved in MRPA or local associations, including being too busy, child-care, and job/work.
- ▶ Responses such as “not feeling relevant to such a large organization”, “meetings are too far away”, make the case for more local associations and community representation.
- ▶ Only a handful of resource parents drew attention to cultural issues (discriminatory experiences with local association, offensive/controversial ideas expressed by members, a lack of cultural competence in association operations impacts families with diverse children). MRPA and local associations may need additional focus on these issues.
- ▶ Responses for “Additional Resources Needed” are largely consistent with the stated benefits of both MRPA and local associations, suggesting that resource parents are looking for more of what is currently being offered, such as training, child-care, support groups, advocacy, mentoring, and communication with DSS.
- ▶ Resource parents believe it is important to partner with the birth parents but do not know how to do so and need more training and support from DSS.
- ▶ More than half felt they had the tools and information to care for the children in their care but need more specific information about case goals and objectives at placement and beyond, as well as historical information about the child and family of origin.
- ▶ Only half of resource parents felt they had a mutually trusting relationship with DSS professionals. Fear about confidentiality and retaliation if RPs disclose information.

Altogether, these data suggest that, while many resources parents are benefiting from MRPA and/or local associations, both organizations have gaps in areas of implementation, training, and communication. Additionally, resource parents could use more information on how to build relationships with birth parents, more case plan and historical information on the youth in care, and additional support in developing positive relationships and trust with DSS.

Strategies to Address Survey Results

A Resource Parent Engagement (RPE) Team was created to support building authentic partnerships with resource parents and strengthening teaming between resource parents, workers, and families of origin. The team is composed of resource parents, the Executive Director of the Maryland Resource Parent Association, Resource Homes and Permanency staff from the local DSS, the Resource Parent Ombuds, the DHS/SSA Program Manager and the Capacity Building Center for States (CBCS). Over the past year, the RPE Team focused on four key areas impacting resource parent engagement: recruitment, retention, caregiver resources and information, and communications between caseworker, resource parents, and the family of origin regarding family case plans.

Since last October 2019, some of the strategies developed and implemented are:

- ▶ Development of best practices and training for resource parents, families of origin, and DSS staff that explains the use of family teaming throughout all services with children, youth, and families. Family teaming means working together to identify family and community supports that use strengths and resources as well as protective factors for the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families.
- ▶ Developed a Resource Parent Policy and materials that promote partnerships between the family of origin and resource parents/relative caregivers, using strategies like Icebreakers, Comfort Calls, and different types of contact and communication.
- ▶ Developed a Consent to Release Contact Form for resource parents to allow MRPA to reach out to them and offer support and resources.
- ▶ Drafted an MRPA Brochure that will be distributed with the Policy and Consent Form and inform resource parents about the resources and supports that MRPA can offer.
- ▶ Created a How-to-Guide to help new associations, includes best practices in engaging and collaborating with local DSS.

Additionally, the RPE team is currently working on:

- ▶ Recruiting additional resource parents and families of origin to join the team and ensure their voice, opinions and lived experiences are heard.
- ▶ Developing trainings and webinars on the Resource Parent Policy, Comfort Calls, and Ice Breakers
- ▶ Scheduling trainings on the Teaming Practice Profiles for resource parents, families of origin and DSS staff.

The team is continuing its work to build local capacity for resource parent associations, strengthen MRPA's ability to advocate, communicate and support resource parents, and develop strategies for the recruitment of diverse resource parents' representative of the children that are served.