

**Provincial Story Writing Contest
Grade 2 - 3**

1st Place

**James Penney
Grade 3
Labrador Straits Academy
L'Anse au Loup, NL**

What traits/characteristics do you think might be good for foster parents to have and why?

I think foster parents should be caring, loving, giving, kind, nice and sometimes funny. I think that would be nice foster parents. I think the kids should have clean water and food. I think they should be able to have a good bed to sleep in, nice toys to play with, able to go to his friend's house, and go outdoors to play.

Foster parents should be helpful by helping you with your homework or taking you to hockey or karate. They should have all the meals you are supposed to have and give you a clean house.

They should read you bedtime stories and give you hugs and kisses too. Foster parents are great when your parents can't take care of you.

2nd Place

**Cole Lyver
Grade 3
Immaculate Heart of Mary School
Corner Brook, NL**

What traits/characteristics do you think might be good for foster parents to have and why?

I hope they are kind because it would make the children happy. I wish they would be loving because that would make you feel a part of their family.

They can be caring by reading bedtime stories, giving hugs and kisses. They need to make sure there's lots of food to eat. I know they should be nice because that makes you feel safe and happy.

They can be caring and nice by saying nice things about you. Also, they can comfort you when you are upset and scared.

If they are funny and playful, it gives the children joy and excitement.

Grade 4 - 6

1st Place

Rebecca Janes
Grade 5
Immaculate Heart of Mary School
Corner Brook, NL

What traits/characteristics do you think might be good for foster parents to have and why?

Would you be nervous if you were living with a foster family for a while? I would, but this is probably one of these things where you think it's going to be bad but it is the best thing ever. If I was in a foster family, I would want them to be nice, kind, loving and funny.

If I was in a foster family, I would want them to be loving and treat me like their own child and care for me as much as the other children. I would tell them what things I like to do and see if we had anything in common. I would also ask a lot of questions so I can find out everything about them. I would like to experience new things and take part in new adventures with the foster family. They could teach me new things and I could teach them something new too.

I would want my foster family to be nice to me. I would like it if they would ask me about my day when we are driving home from school. I would also like it if they would sit at the table together with me for supper as a family. We could talk about our goals and our plans for the future. We could also talk about my other family.

I would tell my foster family funny jokes and amusing things about me such as how I say 'happy birthday' to almost every person I pass by because I look forward to my own birthday. It's my favorite day of the year. I also would enjoy watching funny movies with my foster family and would like for them to share funny things that happened in their past with me.

My purpose is to explain ways that a foster family can help a child in need. A foster family can change a child's life by being there when a child needs it the most.

2nd Place

Hayley Flowers
Grade 5
Amos Comenius Memorial School
Hopedale, NL

What can I do to make a new student feel welcome at my school?

When I was in grade four, a new student joined our class. He was part of a foster family. I made sure that he felt welcomed to our school. I think that it is important to make children in care feel welcomed because they might be missing their families.

We wouldn't want a new child to feel left out. It is important that we introduced ourselves and the teachers of Amos Comenius Memorial School to him. He needed to feel like he had friends. He was such a nice and funny kid but he was shy at first. It must have been scary to come to a new school. We made sure he knew all of the places all around the school so he wouldn't get lost.

The first thing I did was I made sure that I shared with him. I did this so he wouldn't get upset. I also shared my school supplies, like pencils, erasers, and scissors with him. I made sure that he had everything he needed. This made him happy, even though he was sad about leaving his family.

We tried to include him in school activities and ask him to play with us so he didn't feel left out. I even asked him to sit with us so he wouldn't get lonely. Many children in care might feel the same way that he does.

Just from my own experience last year, I know how children in care might feel when coming to a different community. When he was sad, we were sad. We always should be helpful, caring, and kind to all children. We liked him. It was sad to see him go to another foster family. We miss him so much.

**Provincial Essay Contest
Grades 7 - 9**

1st Place

**Hae Na Luther
Grade 9
Stella Maris Academy
Trepassey, NL**

Does foster parenting make a difference? Why or why not?

Does foster parenting make a difference? I believe if you asked a number of different people that same question, you would get a lot of the same answers. To me, a foster home can be the start of a new chapter in a child's life. It is a stage when the child needs to feel protected and cared for. It can be a new beginning where a child is able to learn life skills and responsibilities. If you foster a child, you can share a new life with them. However, does foster parenting truly make a difference?

First of all, foster parenting makes a tremendous impact for the children in care. Children in foster care have to face many different dilemmas. Dealing with surroundings they are not familiar with, cared for by strangers, and coping with the uncertainty of whether they will ever be able to see their biological parents again. Another reason why I think foster parenting makes a big difference for the child is that they provide a stable and supportive home for the children who need a temporary place to live. Many people think children in care are different but, in reality, children in care are just like any other child. They all require love, comfort, security and stability. Most youth in care have unique needs because they've come from unique experiences.

Secondly, foster parenting not only has a big impact on the children or youth, but also for the parents who are willing to foster a child in care. Being a foster parent gives a person a great sense of fulfillment knowing that their caring efforts will make a difference in the life of a child. Foster parents are people who have a genuine desire to contribute to the wellbeing of children in their community. This is an opportunity for a child to receive assistance in a time of need and reassures the child, that someone cares, and that they are safe. Foster parents say "the biggest reward is the joy that comes with caring for a child. It's supporting the kids and being there to pick them up when they fall. It's the joy of working with them to achieve their goals, and to see them get there". Foster parents are loving and affectionate and aim to do the best for those in their care, treating them as if they were their own children.

Thirdly, foster parenting also has a tremendous impact on the community. It allows the family to seek help in their time of need. It provides stability for the children in care such as the child continuing their schooling and being surrounded by lifelong friends and

immediate family. Each placement can bring a new community or a different culture. Changing schools is a disruptive process for any child, but especially for these children because of the many losses they have already suffered like their biological families, their homes, and their friends. Communities play an important role in supporting and strengthening all families.

To conclude, I believe fostering is an act of bringing a child into your family and providing them with the right necessities of life and emotional support during a difficult time. Foster families are very special because they give their time and love over and over again to a child that certainly needs it. Foster parents are mentors, caregivers, role models, and support systems – everything a child needs to grow up to become a healthy and successful adult. It takes a special person to become a foster parent. Family is not defined by our genes. It is built and maintained through love.

2nd Place

Michael Budden
Grade 8
Stephenville Middle School
Stephenville, NL

What Does Diversity Mean to You? **How can schools/communities promote and celebrate diversity?**

It is important for schools and communities to promote and celebrate diversity. According to Marian-Webster online dictionary, diversity means “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements.” To me, diversity means everyone is accepted, individuals are unique, differences are okay; everyone is welcome. Diversity makes sure that all individuals are treated the same. Diversity ensures that nobody is better than anybody else and allows everyone to be an individual. It makes sure that nobody is left out, discriminated, judged, or treated better than anybody else. Diversity allows every child in foster-care, adoption, biological or step family to be treated with the same respect, love, care, kindness and protection. And not just kids but it goes the same for adults too. Schools can celebrate and promote diversity by having special days, programs and a motto to respect everyone.

I believe a motto is a statement about what a group believes in and is hoped to influence people to do good things. A school motto can support diversity by having everybody welcome and respected. Mottos are like a school’s law, and what schools believe in doing as a sign of respect. For example, our school motto is “respect for all”. This is a school law we are taught to follow. A motto influences most of us to do good things for each other and to work hard. Our school and community programs support

our motto of “respect for all,” by having everyone welcome regardless of religion, race, culture, color, sexual orientation or how much your family earns.

School programs are another terrific way to support diversity. In some schools they have a family support program where families get together, have a free lunch, and make friends with one another. This is a great way to support diversity by allowing different families to bond together and learn to respect each other. Schools also help out by having other programs such as the respect team, where of course they teach about how to respect self, others, learning and environment. School programs do not only teach the people that go to the events in the respect program, the program also teaches the kids and people that volunteer in the program good respect for others. One last thing school programs also do is getting kids that are autistic, or need help with certain things, the help they need. It shows that the schools and communities really care about everyone’s conditions and that they want to help. Some of these differences are celebrated on special days, like Autism Awareness.

Another way schools can support diversity is to have some special days for certain things, like for example: anti-bullying day. This is where some of the kids that volunteer, read slips of paper that they wrote about bullying, and students listen to the principal when he gives a speech about bullying. This is called Stand-Up Day and we all wear our pink t-shirts. The pink t-shirts stand for standing up to bullying. Schools also have other special days like Gay Awareness Day, or Pride Day. On Pride Day, we have an assembly about how people should not be afraid to say or act or admit to being a gay person, and to not be shy about being gay and about how it is okay to be gay. We also listen to the song True Colors. It states, “I want to see you be brave”. This supports diversity, being accepting of all. We wear our rainbow t-shirts that stand for Gay Awareness Day. These days really help because they make the teachers, grownups and kids feel more respected, not as shy and uncomfortable. They also sometimes make BULLIES stop bullying other kids that are gay.

In conclusion, celebrating diversity in schools and communities is important because it helps people to be kind to each other, as well as to look after each other and to help each other out. To me, this makes people feel welcome. Having a motto, event days, and programs are all examples of promoting and celebrating diversity. Schools and communities should do all they can to promote diversity and to be accepting. To wrap it all up, no matter how different from anybody else you are, we are all still equal to everybody else all around us.

Level 1 - 3

1st Place

Stephanie Budden
Stephenville High School
Level 1
Stephenville, NL

Does Foster Parenting make a difference? Why or why not?

Snap, the room flooded with light. The cameraman had just captured me at two and a half years of age in my very first family portrait. I was sitting in the middle surrounded by my parents, older sister and younger brother. This is the first memory I have of myself with my adoptive parents. The picture is still hung over an old piano in the house I live in today. I sometimes wonder, would I have even had a family portrait if I had not been adopted?

My story starts long before this family picture though. My biological mom, I have been told, was a very beautiful lady. Her skin was dark, like mine and we have the same big brown eyes. However, we are different in many ways, she had an addiction. She suffered with alcoholism and became very sick and tired. She soon realized that her condition did not put her in the position to raise a child, to raise me. So one night she walked down to the local Woman's Center and asked them to take care of me. Through this action I know that she is strong; I know that she loved me because she gave up the best thing in her life in hope that I would be happy and safe, and that I was. For a little over a year I lived with Pat, Rick and their daughter Terri. Terri became my best friend in the world. According to Pat we did everything together, our favorite activity was singing the "Barbie Song" over and over and over again. They treated me as their own. Every night before bed they would read me a picture book before tucking Terri and I into bed and showering us with goodnight kisses. I was happy, healthy and secure. This is why I say yes, foster parenting makes a difference.

I know that everyone is born into a different life and that some kids don't get tucked in at night because their guardian is out at the bar into the early hours of the morning. I know that that same kid gets up in the morning and makes her own breakfast because her guardian is too hungover to get out of bed and make it to the kitchen. I also know that little girl who had to take care of herself could have easily been me. It could have been me but it wasn't, it wasn't because of my foster family. They are the ones who went out of their way and reached out to help me. They made sure I was safe and secure.

Sometimes it's easy to wonder why. Why I was given the opportunity to a whole new life. I have so many things today such as a loving and safe environment that wouldn't have existed in the life I was born into. I was given opportunity against the odds; at least that's what I thought until yesterday. The more I think about the life I was given I realize it was not against the odds. There are multiple kids that are put into the foster care

system but still didn't have the opportunities I did; I realize now that my success wasn't by chance. It was because of the positive support I received from Pat, Rick and Terri. They taught me to be kind and brave in the early stages of my life. They are the reasoning behind the amazing opportunities I have experienced. They changed my life for the better. Their foster parenting didn't just make a difference, it made all difference.

When the day came that I was to be adopted, I didn't want to leave. My foster family was my safe haven. To me they were home. It hurt them to see me go but yet they were so happy I was adopted. That day they were kind and brave just as they thought me to be. I meant something to them and they will always mean something to me. What they mean to me I haven't fully figured out yet, I'm not even sure I can sum everything they are to me up in a word. I do know however that they are a part of me and always will be.

The supportive family I have today is a product of the care I was given by my outstanding foster family, I have choices and opportunities I wouldn't have had if they hadn't come into my life. I have every door open to me; I can go to university and be a Politian, Police Officer or Paramedic. I have the opportunity to become something and whether or not I choose to embrace these opportunities I will always remember I had the chance due to my foster family that made all the difference.

2nd Place

Nathan Corrigan
Level 1
Stella Maris Academy
Trepassey, NL

What does diversity mean to you? ***How can schools and communities promote and celebrate diversity?***

The world is a large collection of families of different configurations, beliefs, cultures and personal practices. One of the most important gifts we must give our children is to help them feel good about the unique qualities of their family. There are many different types of families in our changing world today. The most common includes Bi-racial, blended, multigenerational, multicultural, gay, lesbian and single parent families. Children's growing awareness of diverse family structures provides rich opportunities to help them celebrate family diversity and to engage them in conversation about who their family is, and why diversity is a good thing to have in society.

To me, diversity is something very amazing. Diversity is nature, art, culture, people, language and family. It means something more than just different people and different families. It sets us apart as individuals and as a whole. It gives us our own identity. If we were all clones in this world, identical to each other, it would be a very dull and

dreary place. We as people are all equal but not the same. Family diversity isn't just about the sex or age of the person in your family, it is who they are as people, all sharing one common factor; love. Living in, or with a diverse family gives a child a different perspective than that of a child who lives in what we would consider an "average" or "normal" family. They learn to be more accepting of others, and much more open-minded to the people who stand out in our society, and break the social norms that we have set.

"One day our descendants will think it was incredible that we paid so much attention to things like the amount of melanin in our skin or the shape of our eyes or our gender instead of the unique identities of each of us as complex human beings." (Franklin Thomas, N.A) Eventually change will come to how we all perceive others and how we can learn to not judge them so easily but, this will not occur unless we take action. In our world today we need to teach children to celebrate similarities as well as diversity. Imagine a home, classroom, or television program where comparison doesn't matter as much because everyone's uniqueness is treasured and valued, rather than shunned and kept a secret. If everyone in this world would just take a second inside themselves to re-evaluate their lives and their family, they'd realize how special they are. I feel that the stigma associated with children in care is, at times, very harsh. Sometimes being a child in care is seen as negative and children are often bullied as a result. Children in care are able to have such an amazing range of family structures, and are submersed in that family, their culture and uniqueness. No one should ever have to feel ashamed because of their family. We should all be proud and confident of who we are, where we come from, and we should never doubt our identities or the construct of our family.

I believe that communities and schools should reinforce the fact that everyone is different, special, unique, and diverse. The fact is, the world is seeing a larger number of diverse families every year. Sooner or later these families will be the norm of society. This statement should be presented more clearly and boldly to our youth, so that if this is their path, they do not feel restricted by the standards set by society. In my opinion posters, radio and video advertisements and word of mouth are the best ways to spread diversity and its acceptance from coast to coast. I also believe that groups like student council and the Gay Straight Alliance can have a great presence in school and communities and that they possess the power to inform many people and create a great difference in today's society. "We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community – and this nation." (Cesar Chavez, N.A.)

Stigma, discrimination and anti-diversity can wreak havoc upon one's mental health, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. It can also disrupt their equal participation in society. Beyond doing what is "right" or what the law states, we must open our hearts to children in care and these diverse families. We are all living in this world together, so learning more about diversity can open some amazing doors for others. Rather than judging, we must support each other to be the best family members, friends, and acquaintances to those we know and love. Society should teach our youth the values of diversity and inclusion. If we truly believe that families are society's building blocks,

then we must protect them and their many forms. I really wish people could be more accepting, while being less judgmental and hateful towards anything different and new in society. Change won't come to the world if we stand by and watch. If we want diversity to grow and become more prominent we must be the people to get the ball rolling and lead society down the right path.