VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS STILL SUPPORT FOSTER/ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Supporting our foster families is so important; child welfare agencies can't function without these families who fill such challenging roles caring for wonderful children who have experienced great disruption and trauma.

The Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF) is finding ways to get that job of supporting foster and adoptive families done despite the pandemic changing almost everything about how we work and live. Since early April, CAFAF liaisons are conducting support groups via Zoom, which provides the platform for conducting remote meetings. Participants are able to see and talk with each other.

Margaret Doherty, the CAFAF executive director, said a dozen area office liaisons from across the state already have conducted virtual support group with families. She has participated in several of them to observe and to thank the families for the care they provide.

"It's working," she said. "We are really able to connect, and the families are really supporting each other." For example, families on one of the calls shared where hard-to-find household items could be found in local stores, Ms. Doherty said.

Ironically, the remote technology makes the support groups more intimate as the families are sharing more of their lives with one another.

"The kids are coming on screen and saying 'hi,'" Ms. Doherty said. "Or a kid comes in and jumps on grandma's lap. One foster mom stated how grateful she was to have someone 'outside' to talk to since she's been cooped up in her home."

Ms. Doherty said there are still good reasons to conduct support groups in person - after the pandemic subsides -- but that she envisions the time when groups are done both ways.

"It's convenient, and everybody who has attended so far says they like it," Ms. Doherty said. "One woman said her kids like it because they have to go to school remotely, so they like that she has to also."