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 [From Clinton County News]

Foster parents: Making positive impact on lives

By SUE LOUNDS
 Editor

ST. JOHNS — Foster parenting and adoption go hand-in-hand. But while adoption is forever, foster parenting is temporary. It is a short-term solution to an emergency situation.

"Foster parents are necessary as the 'place of haven' for foster children who are being removed from neglectful and abusive homes," said Juls Mueller-Hayes, Strong Families/Safe Children Foster Home recruiter for Eaton County.

Most people understand adoption means legally accepting a child into their home with all the responsibilities and benefits of natural parents. Foster parenting is a little different.

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Foster parents care for a children when their biological parents cannot. Children are placed in foster care while the problems that landed them there are worked out. The primary goal is always to reunite the family. Sometimes that isn't possible, and a new permanent home must be found, through adoption. Foster parents provide love, security and nurturing during the period.

"Foster families have replaced the institutional care that was used in the past because it has been shown to be better for the children to be part of a family," said Mueller-Hayes.

Children in the foster care system are from families that have experienced a crisis which

necessitated separation of the child from the parents. There are many reasons for the separations — including physical or sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment, physical or mental illness of a parent, death of

Faith & Values	the parents or the child's emotional or behavioral problems.
Family	
Food & Drink	Foster parents provide the basics of day-to-day life - food, clothing and shelter. They receive a monthly reimbursement to help cover living expenses.
Health & Fitness	
Home & Garden	"There is a stipend that is paid to offset the costs of childcare, but most foster parents now days say they use their own funds to supplement," said Mueller-Hayes. "The stipend is for food, clothes, allowance, school supplies, uniforms and expenses, everything. It does not approach the rate day care providers receive for children in their home part time."
Worship Directory	
ENTERTAINMENT	
Arts	
Boredom Busters	Foster parents work as part of a team that includes various service providers and, when possible, the natural parents, to provide the help the child and his family need in order to be reunited.
Comics	
Dining	Foster parents do not have to be homeowners or married. They do not have to give up their jobs to stay home full time. Payments for day care are available for foster parents who are working or continuing their education.
Escapes	
Events	
Movies	Mueller-Hayes says the need for more foster homes in mid Michigan is an on-going concern.
TV Listings	
Music	The DHS Child Welfare Philosophy states "The ideal place for children is in their own home with their own family. When we cannot ensure their safety in the family home, we must place siblings together whenever possible and place them in the most family-like and least restrictive setting required to meet their unique needs ... if that is not possible or appropriate, we must strive to place the child with a foster or adoptive family so the child can stay in his or her school and maintain relationships with friends and family."
People	
COMMUNITIES	
Bath	
Charlotte	To achieve that goal, many more foster care homes are needed.
Delta-Waverly	
DeWitt	"It has been shown that most families get into foster care because of their interest in and love for children," said Mueller-Hayes. "Sometimes families apply who are interested in adoption due to personal circumstances, and that is fine as long as they know the main goal of foster care is to return children to their home of origin."
East Lansing	
Eaton Rapids	
Grand Ledge	Foster parents need some special qualities and some training. Foster parents need to be good listeners, flexible, realistic, able to laugh and willing to work with others. They receive instruction in areas such as responsibilities as a foster parent; how foster parenting may affect your family; how to help foster children express emotions related to separation from their families; how to discipline in a positive way and how to care for kids with disabilities, medical problems or other special needs.
Haslett	
Holt	
Lansing	
Mason	
Okemos	"Foster parents make a big commitment before they even receive children to take training, to fill out extensive application questions about their background and motivations to foster," said Mueller-Hayes. "They turn in three non-related references and need to have a doctor's statement of health for every member of the family. They agree to a police clearance check for every member of the household."
Portland	
St. Johns	
Williamston	Mueller-Hayes said some families make modifications to their homes to make sure the home is safe for the ages of the children they are requesting.
CUSTOMER SERVICE	
Contact Us	Once the foster family is licensed and a child or children are placed in the home, additional training may be offered on handling specific problems such as temper tantrums, depression, bed-wetting and so on. "Many foster families find it helpful to be part of a support group or network to exchange ideas and resources for the special children they are raising," said Mueller-Hayes. Foster parenting is not easy, but it can be very rewarding.

"I have heard foster parents quote the quote — 'Fostering is the hardest job you'll ever love,' said Mueller-Hayes. "There is so much investment required on the part of foster parents, but to see the children improve is worth it."

If you are considering becoming a foster parent, contact Chloe Silm, Clinton County foster parent recruiter, for more information at (989) 224-5548. Families in Eaton County should contact Mueller-Hayes at (517) 543-5844 or Mueller-HayesJ@Michigan.gov She will send a no-cost information packet and notify them of future training opportunities.

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