

Make a Difference, Become a Foster Parent!

Do you love children and truly want to help them?

Can you love a child despite his or her behavioral problems?

Is your lifestyle a good role model for a foster child?

Right now, we are experiencing a shortage of foster homes in Brown County, especially the Sleepy Eye/Springfield area. There are 14 foster homes in the New Ulm area and just 3 in Sleepy Eye. There is only one foster home in Springfield and they only remain licensed to take children in an emergency because there are no other homes in the area. Brown County places about 70 children in foster care each year. We need numerous homes with different qualities to be able to keep these children in their communities and be able to make the best match possible between the foster family and the children. Please continue reading to find out more about foster care.

Foster parenting involves providing a safe, nurturing environment to a child until his/her parents can resume the responsibility of caring for their children. Sometimes, parents are not able to complete the steps to be reunited with their children and in that case, foster parents may be asked to make a life long commitment to the child. This commitment involves helping a child through a very difficult period of their life by providing a lot of love and guidance.

As a foster parent, you have the choice of the age and gender of the child that you would like to care for. There are also different types of care you can provide. Emergency care is when you have very short notice of a placement. You might receive a call in the middle of the night to take in a child. This type of placement is short term, usually until the agency finds a more permanent home for the child. Interim care is caring for a child anywhere from a couple of weeks to 1-2 years. Permanent care is when a child can not return home and will be in foster care until their 18 birthday or when they graduate from care. This type of care is a serious commitment to that child to care for them through the rest of their growing up years. Restricted care is when you are only providing care to one specific child and are ineligible to care for any others. Respite care is offering sporadic care for a child to give other foster parents or natural parents a break. You can choose to provide care as often as you want to as many children as you want. There is not a permanent placement at your home with this type of care.

Foster parents should be realistic with their expectations. You probably will not be able to change the world but you will be able to offer love and support to a child that needs it. You need to be able to see success in small steps rather than in leaps and bounds. Foster parents also need to be flexible since every foster child is different. Each child has his or her own needs and baggage that they bring to the home. What may work for one child, may not work for another. Parents need to be creative and willing to ask questions. A good sense of humor

is also very valuable. Taking things too seriously will only lead to early burnout. There also needs to be a willingness to work with others because each child usually comes with a placing worker, a guardian ad litem, a therapist, their natural family, and the list goes on and on. Everyone needs to work together to help support this child.

Children are in placement for a variety of reasons. Some children are placed in foster homes due to their own behaviors and mental health concerns. Others are there because their parents are unable to care for them the way that they should be cared for. Either way, these children have had to grow up too fast and have a lot of issues to deal with. Foster parents need to be there to listen and support these children. Be aware that you can make a difference just by asking a child how his/her day was. It's just one more way to show you care.

If you are interested in more information on how to become a foster parent, you can contact Brown County Family Services at 1-800-450-8246. There is an application process which includes an inspection of your home, background checks on everyone in the home over the age of 13, a home study, and other miscellaneous paperwork. There are also orientations held twice a year. This is an excellent opportunity to make a difference in your community.