

**Information Packet for Clarke County, Winchester City and
Frederick County Departments of Social Services**



Program Coordinators

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<http://www.fcva.us/foster>

THANK YOU & WELCOME!

Many people recognize the need in their communities for responding to children who are abused or neglected. One of the ways that community families assist is by becoming a foster family; however, the majority of families do not feel capable of fostering. Your interest in learning about foster care and how you can help children at risk is significant. You have identified yourself as someone who puts his or her concern into action. On behalf of the children in the care of our agencies, thank you for your concern, for caring, and for coming forward.

On behalf of our foster families, adoptive families and agency staff, welcome to the process of potentially becoming a certified foster/adoptive parent!

PURPOSE OF THE PRIDE PACKET

PRIDE stands for Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education. This program is a resource for you and our agency. It provides the information needed to make an informed decision about whether this program is right for you, and whether you are right for the program. It will help you develop the special knowledge and skills important for fostering or adopting the children we serve, and it will help educate you about how to be the best foster parent you can be.

Now you're probably thinking: "Wait a minute, what's all this training and education business? I know a lot about children. I've raised my own children and grandchildren. I've taken care of neighbor's kids for years. Why do I need this program?" If you're asking this, you're asking an important question. You are right, many folks who come forward to adopt, and especially those interested in fostering, already have a wealth of experience with children. The difference lies in the fact that the children in the care of our agency have very special needs, and some have extraordinary needs.

Children who have experienced the tragedy of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, exposure to or involvement with drugs, are more challenging to care for. Often, they feel angry or upset because of sad and often tragic experiences they have endured. They need time to learn that adults can be trusted, that they are not going to be hurt anymore, and that there are acceptable ways to express their feelings.

Experienced foster and adoptive parents tell us that helping children learn that they are safe and can trust safe adults takes some special knowledge and skills. These experienced families asked for a training program and worked hard to help develop PRIDE. This program is meant to help you learn what our children need you to know. And if you already know this information, then maybe you can help others learn.

Also, the training will help us decide if the program is right for you, and if you are right for the program. Many folks want to help, but not everyone can develop the knowledge and skills important for effective fostering or adopting. Through our PRIDE training program and some individual meetings with you and your family, we'll figure this out together.

The purpose of this packet is to answer questions that many people have when they are interested in fostering or adopting, and to help families understand the process of becoming a foster/adoptive family.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT FAMILY FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

What is family foster care?

According to the National Commission on Family Foster Care, sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America and the National Foster Parent Association:

“Family foster care is an essential service for children and parents who must live apart while maintaining legal and, usually, affectionate ties. The value of family foster care is that it can respond to the unique, individual needs of infants, children, youths and their families through the strength of family living, and through family and community supports.”

"The goal of family foster care is to provide opportunities for healing, growth, and development leading to healthier infants, children, youths, and families, with safe nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime.”

What is adoption?

According to the Child Welfare League of America, in its National Adoption Standards, adoption is the means of transferring to a child and parents all the legal rights that they would have if that child had been born to those parents.

The value of adoption is that it provides children with the basic needs of every child: the legal status, social status, and commitment that come from having a family of your own in which to grow up.

The goal of adoption is to provide a child with a family that intends to offer a lifetime relationship.

Who are the children most likely to need foster families and adoptive families?

The population of children who are most likely to need foster families and adoptive families are similar: *brothers and sisters who want and need to be together; *children who are medically fragile; *children born exposed to alcohol and drugs; and *children of color of all ages. Also, foster families are needed for teenagers and for teen mothers and their babies.

Have all children who need foster families and adoptive families experienced trauma?

Yes. Simply the fact of being removed from their home is traumatic. They are frightened and confused by the separation from their parents. Some are angry, some are sad, and others feel they are being punished. Depending on the level of abuse/neglect, some children may be relieved, but feel guilty for having those feelings. Even babies can be irritable and fretful at first.

Children need foster and adoptive parents because of something done to them, not because of something they have done. They are not "bad" children; they come from tragic and sad situations. Their families are not “bad”; they are struggling and at risk.

Over time, feelings and behaviors resulting from trauma gradually lessen as the child comes to know and trust you and feel safe with you. Foster and adoptive parents feel joy in watching their children settle down and develop feelings of trust, safety, and confidence.

Foster parents enjoy helping teenagers catch up in school or teaching them grooming techniques. Foster parents also feel satisfaction when they help children reunite with their parents, their kin, or when they help a child become adopted, or help a young person move to independent young adult life.

What are the qualifications to be a foster parent?

Foster parents and adoptive parents can be married or single, with or without children already in their families. We are looking for individuals, couples, or families who can protect children and nurture them. Both foster and adoptive parents need to understand how children grow and develop, and how abuse and neglect affect that development. Additionally, foster parents need to be able to accept any race of child to foster. The department cannot discriminate against the children they serve.

Foster parents need to respect and work to understand that the children placed with them will have feelings about their birth families. The older the child, the more memories and attachments there will be.

Foster parents need to help children maintain contact with their birth families, not only because most children do return to their families, but also because it is important for their self-esteem and identity. Visits between children and their families are important. The agency will arrange these contacts and provide the necessary supervision. Sometimes, foster parents build good relationships with the parents of the children in their care and, in those cases, the visits may be in the foster family's home. In most cases, foster parents will bring the children to the agency for visits with their birth parents.

What does it cost to foster or to adopt, and how do the finances work?

Foster parenting is not a business, so you will not earn an income. The structured rates of regular foster care reimbursement vary by age of child. This stipend is provided monthly and assists foster families in covering the expenses that they will incur while the foster child is in their home. It is the agency's expectation that school supplies, clothing, food, extracurricular activities, private lessons, etc... will be paid for with this reimbursement. The department provides a yearly clothing allowance for the foster child and will cover the costs of day care at an approved day care facility if both foster parents are employed.

Foster parents receive a monthly check to help cover expenses for their foster child/children. The first check will not arrive until a month or so after the child enters your home, so foster parents need enough extra money in their budgets to support their own family and the new child or children until they receive the stipend.

People who receive public aid, or who are on small fixed incomes, generally find it difficult to foster. This is because our reimbursement system is "delayed". This means that you receive the payments after you have spent the money. This could cause hardships for some families.

Adoptive parents may be able to obtain an adoption subsidy. This means they can continue to receive financial support from the agency, even after the adoption is finalized. Adoption subsidy is negotiated at the time of the adoption placement and is based on the special needs of the child. Subsidy will be explained at the first family consultation.

How long does it take to become a foster parent?

Some believe that because there is a shortage of foster families, becoming a foster parent happens quickly. There are too many children who have experienced the tragedy of abuse and neglect, so we do need many competent foster families. However, it is important to move through this process with care to prevent further hurt or harm to the foster child. Therefore, the training/approval process will take approximately three - six months following the beginning of the PRIDE training classes.

How soon a child is placed with a foster family depends upon several factors. If the foster family is willing and able to foster or adopt older children, siblings, or children with medical conditions, they probably will experience placements more quickly.

Why do we need special training?

Fostering and adopting is not the same as parenting a child born to you. Over time, you will need to talk with that child about their birth family, or help the child manage feelings about being in foster care or being adopted. The training we provide, through the PRIDE program will help you help your children.

Often, families assume that children who have been abused will feel grateful to be with another family. However, most children truly care about their parents, siblings, and other kin and miss them terribly. Even though they may have been abused, there probably were some good family times, too. **One of the biggest challenges in fostering or adopting is to be sure that children never feel they must “choose” between families, and that one family is not “better” than another.** It takes patience, skill, and training to help children understand that birth families and foster families are different, and that birth families and adoptive families are different too. It's ok for children to care about ALL their families.

Do I have complete legal and financial responsibility for children placed within my home?

If you are a foster family, the agency has either custody or guardianship of the foster child and is legally responsible for the children. See the section about regarding how do finances work for more information about financial responsibility of foster families.

As you move through the process of being an adoptive family, the agency then has guardianship of the child until the adoption is finalized.

STEPS TO BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

Information Session and the PRIDE packet

You have already taken the important first step of contacting the agency and expressing your interest in foster care or adoption. At the information session you are provided with this PRIDE packet and the opportunity to learn more about our programs. If you decide that foster parenting may be right for you and your family, an agency staff person responsible for working with prospective foster and adoptive families will schedule an initial home visit with you. The worker can answer additional questions you may have about the information in this packet or about family foster care and adoption.

After the home visit, if you and the worker decide to proceed with the approval process, you will attend the PRIDE training for prospective foster and adoptive parents.

Because the agency is legally responsible for all the children we serve, it also has a legal obligation to approve the families who accept children for placement in their homes. All our families are dually approved for foster care and adoption.

State law provides approval standards for foster homes. The standards exist to help the agency protect and safeguard the wellbeing of children in its care. As you continue the process to prepare for approval and to assume the important role of foster parents or adoptive parents, the worker will discuss with you all approval requirements.

There are five basic standards required of every prospective foster and adoptive family. Families that cannot meet these standards cannot be approved. During the first visit in your home, the worker will need your help to determine if these basic requirements can be met.

The requirements are as follows:

1. Your residence (whether it is a house, apartment, condo, etc.) must have a safe place without structural or health hazards and have adequate bedroom space for the child.

The approval standards state the specific requirements. Feel free to consult the worker on any questions you may have about the suitability of your residence regarding the established standards. You do not have to live in a mansion or a fancy home in order to meet the requirements in the standards. The only way we know if your home meets the basic requirements is to see it. We ask that you accompany the worker through your entire home during the first meeting. We understand that the need to see your home may feel intrusive, but you need to be our partner in child protection. Additionally, you should be prepared that the child's worker will need to see their bedroom space every time they visit the child in your home.

2. A family must have sufficient income to meet its own needs.

The agency provides monthly financial assistance (a board rate) to support the needs of children in foster care. Many children placed with families for adoption also qualify for financial assistance in the form of adoption subsidies. You need not be wealthy to foster or adopt. Many foster families and adoptive families have modest incomes but can manage on their income alone. You need to be able to show the agency that your family is financially stable by providing paystubs, w-2's, and/or tax statements.

3. Criminal record check.

The agency will complete a Federal, State, and local criminal record check for every adult in the prospective foster or adoptive household. The agency also checks the Sexual Offender Registry. Having a criminal record does not automatically mean you cannot be licensed. The seriousness and nature of the offense and when it occurred will be considered. However, it is very important for you to share information about any possible problems with fingerprint clearance during the first meeting with the worker.

4. Background check. (Child Protective Services Registry)

The agency will complete a background check for all adults in the prospective foster or adoptive home to make sure that they have never been the subject of any abuse or neglect report involving a child.

5. Health

Medical reports including TB screens or tests are needed for all household members and you are expected to become certified in CPR and First Aid prior to approval. The agency will provide an opportunity for you to participate in this training. We are asking you to disclose very personal information to the agency and understand that you may feel some discomfort and anxiety discussing these matters. We appreciate your willingness to share such personal information with us and can assure you that everything you share with the worker is kept strictly confidential. Your interest in helping children, and the agency's responsibility in placing children with foster and adoptive families, means we need to work together as a team to achieve our mutual goals. An honest and open discussion between prospective foster and adoptive parent and the worker about these five basic licensing requirements is the beginning of a teamwork relationship that will benefit children.

When the foster family's residence and income meet the basic approval standards, arrangements are made for completing the background check and for participation in the Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE pre-service training.

Sometimes there are minor problems regarding the family's residence or financial situation. For example, smoke detectors may need to be purchased, or insufficient information is available to determine a family's financial situation during the first meeting. Then the worker and the prospective foster/adoptive families will discuss and decide together whether to proceed with fingerprinting, background checks and participation in the preservice training.

When it is clear that the residence, marital status, or financial situation of the prospective foster/adoptive parents will not meet the licensing standards, or there is concern regarding the results of the background or criminal records check, then the family development specialist will share this information. Our commitment to honest and open communication with prospective foster/adoptive families includes our responsibility to inform you when foster care or adoption is not possible because of your family's current circumstances.

PRE-SERVICE TRAINING SESSIONS

Our agency has a long history of providing services to troubled families and their children. We could not do so without the important contribution of foster families. The pre-service training is a way of preparing and supporting families for success in family foster care or adoption.

New Generation PRIDE is 27 hours of pre-service training which includes 15 hours of face to face class sessions and 12 hours of online trainings. Two trainers lead the classes; both have had experience in child welfare service. Our primary trainer has been teaching PRIDE since 2003. We know that 27 hours of training is a big commitment of your time, as is the commitment you are considering in becoming a foster or adoptive parent.

Many people talk about helping children, but you have done much more already by calling the agency to express your interest in becoming a foster or adoptive parent. Some of you are sure about whether foster care or adoption is right for your family situation. Some of you know only that you want to help children in some way. Everyone who attends orientation has some feelings and ideas about foster care and adoption. The pre-service training will give you all the information you need to make an informed decision

about whether foster care, adoption, or neither is the best choice for you BEFORE a child is placed in your home.

The agency also has a part in making the decision about whether family foster care or adoption is right for your family and situation. By attending the training, you and the workers have a common ground to talk about your feelings and ideas on foster care and adoption, and our agency's expectations and needs. The result is a mutual assessment of our willingness and ability to work together as a team for the benefit of children and families.

We've learned that successful foster parents have knowledge and skills in five basic areas we call *COMPENTENCY CATEGORIES*. These Competencies guide the practice of foster parents. They are as follows:

- 1. Protecting and Nurturing Children**
- 2. Meeting Children's Developmental Needs and Addressing Developmental Delays**
- 3. Supporting Relationships between Children and their Families**
- 4. Connecting Children to Safe, Nurturing Relationships Intended to Last a Lifetime**
- 5. Working as a Member of a Professional Team**

PROTECTING AND NUTURING CHILDREN:

Children placed with foster families and adoptive families need to live in a safe place that keeps them from harm, is friendly, and where the parents show they care. Some children who have not been safe or cared for may not accept or understand your efforts to do so at first. Others are hungry for attention. The pre-service training program will help you understand and appropriately respond to the child's feelings and reactions to separation.

MEETING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AND ADDRESSING DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS:

For most of us, growing up is a natural, predictable developmental process. For example, infants who have the opportunity and encouragement to walk at the right stage of their development will learn how to walk. Many children who need foster or adoptive families did not have the opportunity of encouragement to grow by learning how to complete tasks at the "right" time in their development. They may be "behind" in some ways or "ahead" in others, compared with children of the same age who had their developmental needs met. The pre-service training helps prospective foster or adoptive parents understand the reasons for these developmental delays and differences and provides suggestions for coping.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES:

Birth family relationships include brothers, sisters, and other relatives, as well as parents. Children do not arrive at the door of a foster family or adoptive family without bringing personal history with them. Even infants who have never been held by their parents have a prenatal, birth, or hospital history. The memories, experiences, and attachments children bring with them will vary, but they all come with the child. The training prepares you to understand the importance of a child's history and how to deal with it. In many cases, the foster family becomes a support and mentor to the birth families, which often includes

modeling positive parenting skill and being a sounding board for the birth families' questions or concerns about their children. This allows for a smooth and successful transition when the child returns home and assists the child with bridging healthy relationships.

CONNECTING CHILDREN TO SAFE NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS INTENDED TO LAST A LIFETIME:

The agency believes - and the law requires - that children are entitled to permanent, lifetime family relationships. The agency works with the parents to correct problems so children can return home. If this is not possible for a multitude of reasons, the agency looks for another permanent family for the children. The training explains the different roles of foster parents and adoptive parents in providing a permanent family for a child.

WORKING AS A MEMBER OF A PROFESSIONAL TEAM:

Whatever a child's circumstances, needs, or past experiences, the agency, foster parents and/or adoptive parents work together for the child's benefit. There are many troubled families and children who need help. The work that needs to be done is too much for any of us to do alone. The agency does not expect you to be perfect as parents or as people.

MUTAL ASSESSMENT AND MAKING AN INFORMED DECISION:

By the time you complete the training and assessment, you and the worker have met several times. At that point, one of the following decisions will be made by the agency and your family:

1. YES-YES

You and the agency agree that family foster care or adoption is the right choice for you and your family. If so, you will go on to decide with the worker the number, ages, and behaviors of the children you feel you can successfully accept into your family. You will become a licensed foster/adoptive family.

2. YES-NO; NO-YES

You decide that neither family foster care nor adoption is the right choice for you and your family. If so, the worker may be able to suggest some other ways you can help children in your community. In any case, we respect your decision and appreciate the thought and time you put into making it.

3. NO-YES; NO-NO

The agency decides that neither family foster nor adoption is the right choice for you and your family. If so, the worker will share any issues or concerns about your ability to become licensed as they arise. Be aware that this could happen during any stage of the process. For example, you could complete the entire training, and then an issue may arise during the assessment process. The agency has the final responsibility for the decision to license families because the agency is ultimately responsible for the children who live with foster and adoptive families.

FINANCIAL REIMBURSEMENT

The agency provides monthly financial support for children in foster care. The basic rate depends on the age of the child. This rate and/or adoption subsidy is not a salary and is tax free.

The agency's financial support is intended to reimburse families for the living expenses associated with caring for a child, to provide money for the child's clothing, and a personal allowance. For some families, the board rate is enough reimbursement for these items. For others, the financial support the agency provides must be supplemented with their personal funds.

There are other reasons why the worker will need to talk with you about your financial situation. Financial problems lead to family problems, which can affect how family members get along with each other. When money is short, tempers are sometimes short too. Financial difficulties cause stress, which can affect everyone in the household, including the children.

How you manage your financial resources is also important to us. For some families, "making ends meet" is a family effort, which has positive effects. The resourcefulness, creativity, and teamwork used to manage a family's finances can be a source of family strength.

Again, you do not have to be rich to be a foster or adoptive parent. Our concern is that you have sufficient income and are able to manage that income in order to meet your family's needs. We realize this is highly personal information to discuss with the worker. We very much appreciate your willingness to share this information with the agency and assure you it is kept strictly confidential.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

If you join our program, you will become part of a team who, every day, in a quiet way, makes a real difference in our communities. These are the foster and adoptive parents who work with at risk infants, children, young people and their families, and give them another chance at life.

"Adoption means having a family that waited for you and loves you" -8-year-old adoptee

"Please don't leave out happiness "being adopted" means to grandparents. It would be hard to imagine life without the three beautiful children that were added to our family. Every hope, every dream, every up, every down (yes there are ups and downs and fears, the same responsibilities of life with blood children); they are parts of our lives" -Grandparents of adoptee

"Fostering is not a lifetime commitment to a family, but a commitment to be a meaningful part of a family's life" "Snowflakes are small and fragile but look what they can do when they stick together." - Unknown

We hope these comments will inspire you to continue with the steps of becoming a foster family!

INITIAL HOME VISIT REQUEST

Please complete and return this form to: Katie Lo Monaco
katie.lomonaco@fcva.us or 107 N. Kent St, 3rd floor

Date: _____

Applicant 1:	Applicant 2:	
Last Name: _____	Last Name: _____	
First Name: _____	First Name: _____	
Cell Phone: _____	Cell Phone: _____	
Email: _____	Email: _____	
<u>Best</u> person and number to reach _____		
Home address: _____		
<i>Street</i>	<i>City, State</i>	<i>ZIP</i>
<u>NAMES OF OTHERS IN YOUR HOME:</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>RELATIONSHIP</u>

*Kinship Families ONLY-Current contact with child/children’s biological parents:

- No Contact Some Frequent

Identified barriers/challenges to becoming a foster parent to this child/these children:

Are you or have you ever been a certified foster/adoptive parent? YES NO

Best day and time to schedule your initial home visit?

Home Visit Scheduled by CFW on: _____