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IMPORTANT KEY INFORMATION:

- ▶ Foster care is temporary, most children who enter foster care will return to their birth families.
- ▶ Foster parents are important partners with DFCS in ensuring children's well-being, care and development during their temporary foster care placement.

DFCS LEADERSHIP:

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FOSTER CARE IN GEORGIA

Providing Safe and Loving Homes for the Children in the Temporary Custody of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS)

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for assuring that children are safe from abuse and neglect. When DFCS determines it is not safe for a child to remain in the home of his or her caregiver, the child is placed in foster care. Foster care is intended to be a temporary home away from home while the agency works with the child's family to eliminate or minimize the safety issues that caused agency involvement.

DFCS' goal is to return children safely to their families as soon as possible, but only after the safety issues have been resolved.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE?

There are approximately 7,700 children in foster care. These children come from a wide variety of backgrounds and situations. They are children of all ages and races. The children in most need of homes are children with special needs, including teenagers, siblings and children with physical, emotional and/or behavioral disabilities. DFCS looks for loving, safe and stable homes for the children who are brought into care.

WHAT ARE THE PERMANENCY PLAN OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE?

DFCS works to locate relatives to support the birth family in reunification efforts and/or who are willing to let the child stay with them while the birth family works with the agency on reunification. DFCS may need to notify the parents who are not living with the child and other relatives in order to accomplish this.

If relatives are not an option for placement, there are other options for permanency and are assessed on a case-by-case basis. They are considered based on the safety and best interests of the child. In the order of preference, the permanent outcomes for children in care are: (1) reunification; (2) adoption; (3) guardianship; (4) permanent placement with a fit and willing relative; or (5) another planned permanent living arrangement; e.g., long-term foster care or emancipation.

IF I'M INTERESTED IN BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT, WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Call 1-877-210-KIDS

The DHS/DFCS web site, www.adoptions.dhr.state.ga.us provides information on the approval requirements and process. Additional information can also be found at www.gapartnershipparents.org. Both sites provide answers to frequently asked questions concerning foster parenting, links to related sites, and highlight upcoming events for the foster care and adoption communities. From inquiry to approval, the process can take from three to ten months due to the certifications and evaluations required as well as the documentation needed to approve a foster home. A case manager from the local DFCS office will work with interested families to explain the process and inform them of what is needed.

WHAT TYPES OF FAMILY FOSTER HOMES ARE APPROVED?

The county department develops family foster homes for children and youth who have the capacity to participate in familial experiences within a family-like setting. These include the following:

- *Regular Foster Homes* – are non-relative foster home placement resources designed for the temporary placement of children and youth that can function within a family-like setting. The vast majority of family foster homes are “regular homes.”
- *Relative Foster Homes* – are just as the name implies. They are relative homes that have been developed and approved as foster homes for the placement of relative children. Relative placements, when appropriate, are the placements of choice for children and should be carefully explored by the county department, starting at the point at which custody is received.

WHAT SERVICES AND SUPPORTS DO FOSTER PARENTS AND FOSTER CHILDREN RECEIVE?

Foster parents do not receive a per diem for caring for the children in their homes. They are partially reimbursed for the expenses they incur while caring for children. The rate is pre-set based on the age and the needs of the child. The state provides an initial clothing allowance when children enter foster care as well as an annual clothing allowance. Counties have many different resources available to support families with foster children. Staff is available to answer any questions that prospective parents may have and many communities provide ongoing training or support groups.

Children in foster care receive therapeutic services as well as health and safety items, including car seats, booster seats and safety helmets. In addition to this, foster youth ages 14-25 are provided with services through the Independent Living Program (ILP). ILP provides funding and support to help youth successfully transition from foster care.