

## **FACTS ABOUT FOSTER PARENTING AND ADOPTION**

The Georgia Department of Human Services Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for assuring that children who cannot remain with their birth families be placed in safe and nurturing homes.

When DFCS determines that it is not safe for a child to remain in the home of their 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 issues that causes the agency to be involved. It is DFCS's goal to return children safely to their families once the issues that led to the child coming onto foster care have been resolved.

In some cases families never resolve the issues and children cannot be returned home. In these cases it is the agency's responsibility to assure permanency for the child. In many cases this means placing the child with a relative or an adoptive family.

At any given time in the state of Georgia there are approximately 9,000 children in foster care. Of the 9,000 children approximately, 1,700 have a goal of adoption. Many of this number are without an identified adoptive home.

### **WHAT IS FOSTER PARENTING?**

Foster parents are volunteers who provide for the care of children placed in the custody of DFCS. Foster parents work as a part of a team to assure that a child's physical, emotional, medical and psychological needs are met while they are in foster care. Although, it is not the goal to replace the child's parents, foster parents are asked to assume the responsibility of parenting the children placed in their home.

### **WHAT IS ADOPTION?**

Adoption, unlike foster care, is permanent; it is a social and legal process that creates a new family, giving adopted children the same rights and benefits as those who are born into a family. Adoption requires an unconditional commitment by parents to meet the physical, emotional, medical, psychological and social needs of their child.

### **WHO ARE THE CHILDREN?**

Most of the children in foster care have endured some form of abuse or neglect and because of that some may have medical, emotional and/or behavioral needs. Children in foster care come from all racial and ethnic groups, most are school aged, and have brothers or sisters they need to be placed with. There are also a high number of teenagers.

Most of the children needing adoptive homes are members of sibling groups needing to be placed together, are older, have a diagnosed physical, mental or emotional disability or are African American.

Information on children needing an adoptive family can be found by accessing the “**My Turn Now**” photo listing at [www.MyTurnNow.org](http://www.MyTurnNow.org)

## **THE REQUIRMENTS**

First, one must have the willingness and desire to open their heart and home to care for a child. The foster parent and adoption process requires DFCS to conduct as thorough an assessment on prospective foster and adoptive families as possible. Prospective foster and adoptive parents don't have to be rich, just able to meet their own basic needs. They can be single or married and may own or rent their home. In addition, they must meet the following requirements:

If single, at least 25 years of age and at least 10 years older than the child

If married, at least 10 years older than the child

Criminal records check

Home safety checks

Medical examination

References

Drug screen

Completion of orientation

Completion of pre-service training

Completion of a home evaluation

## **THE APPROVAL PROCESS**

### **Orientation, Training and Home Evaluation**

During orientation, details on the requirements are discussed. Families will also receive additional information on the foster care and adoption programs and the approval process.

The pre service training is called IMPACT an acronym for Initial Interest, Mutual Selection, Pre-Service Training, Assessment, Continuing Development and Teamwork, which signifies the process for becoming and remaining a foster or adoptive parent. During the IMPACT training families are provided information on numerous topics to assist them in understanding DFCS's role in working with birth families, the roles and responsibilities of foster and /or adoptive parents, and the impact of abuse and neglect on children and their families. The approval process also requires prospective foster and/or adoptive families to assess the impact foster parenting or adoption may have on them. The approval process is one of mutual decision making.

Home Evaluations are completed on all prospective foster and adoptive families. This evaluation includes documentation that the family meets all the above requirements. During this process the case manager will make at least two home visits to gather any additional information and to assess the home safety requirements.

## **FOSTER CARE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

Although, foster parents are not paid, there is a reimbursement per diem provided to assist in meeting the daily needs of a child placed in their home. The exact rate is based on the age and needs of a child. In addition, when a child first enters care, the state provides an initial clothing allowance to assist in meeting the immediate needs of the child. An additional yearly clothing allowance is also provided.

Day Care Services are provided to foster families who work outside of the home and adoptive families who qualify based on income.

Child related services such as psychological, psychiatric, and speech therapy, are services the agency will pay for depending the needs of the child. The agency can also provide health and safety items such as car seats, booster seats and safety helmets.

## **ADOPTION ASSISTANCE**

If you adopt a child in Georgia who meets the state's definition of special needs, the child qualifies for adoption assistance. Children falling into one of the following categories at the time of adoptive placement are considered to meet the state's definition of special needs:

- A child who has been in the care of a public or private agency or individual other than the legal or biological parent for more than 24 consecutive months.
- A child with a physical, mental or emotional disability, as validated by a licensed physician or psychologist.
- A child who is a member of a sibling group of two or more placed in the same home.

**Adoption Assistance offers financial as well as medical benefits to assist adoptive families in meeting the special needs of a child following the placement of the child in an adoptive home. There are four categories of adoption assistance.**

**1. Monthly assistance** is a monthly supplement to aid in meeting the needs of the child.

**2. Medicaid** is available for any child eligible for monthly adoption assistance and is to assist adoptive families in meeting the medical needs of the child.

**3. Special Services Adoption Assistance** covers a time limited or one-time special service that is not covered by Medicaid, monthly maintenance assistance or through community resources, (i.e., orthodontics, prosthetics or psychological counseling). Special services approval is dependent on the availability of funds.

**4. Non-Recurring Adoption Assistance** covers attorney fees, court costs and other one-time expenses directly related to the legal adoption of the child with special needs.

## **THE SUPPORT SERVICES**

There are numerous services DFCS case managers can refer foster and adoptive families to that will assist in meeting the needs of children placed in their homes. Whether you are fostering or adopting the following services may be available:

Respite Care

Parent Training\*

Crisis Intervention

Teen Support Groups

Information and referral

\*10 hours of on-going training is required annually for foster and adoptive families

Each region of the state also has a Regional Adoption Coordinator available to assist families with any questions, issues or concerns regarding adoption.

Contact 1-877-210-KIDS for the name and number of the Regional Adoption Coordinator for your area.

## **THE GEORGIA CENTER FOR ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT**

The Georgia Center for Foster Care and Adoption Resources and Support was created in 2001 to assist families in identifying local resources services. The Center employs Resource Advisors who assist families in identifying statewide resources. In addition, the center has a lending library and a support line available to families 9:00a.m. –5:30a.m Monday through Thursday; 9:00a.m. – 5:00p.m. on Fridays. For more information on these services please contact the Center at 1-866-A-PARENT or access them online at <http://www.gacrs.org>

## **ADOPTION REUNION REGISTRY**

Adoptees, birth parents or siblings who have been permanently separated through adoption often reach a time in their lives when they want more information due to reasons of medical, genetic, genealogical or personal need to know. The Georgia Department of Human Services operates an adoption reunion registry. The primary purpose of the reunion registry is to provide information and referral services regarding adoption searches. For more information regarding the registry call (404)657-3555.

## **HELPFUL FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION INTERNET SITES**

For additional information on foster care and adoption

<http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov>

Office of Regulatory Services – Information on Licensed Child Placement Agencies in Georgia:

<http://www.ors.dhr.georgia.gov/>

GALAA - Georgia Association of Licensed Adoption Agencies:

<http://www.galaa.org>