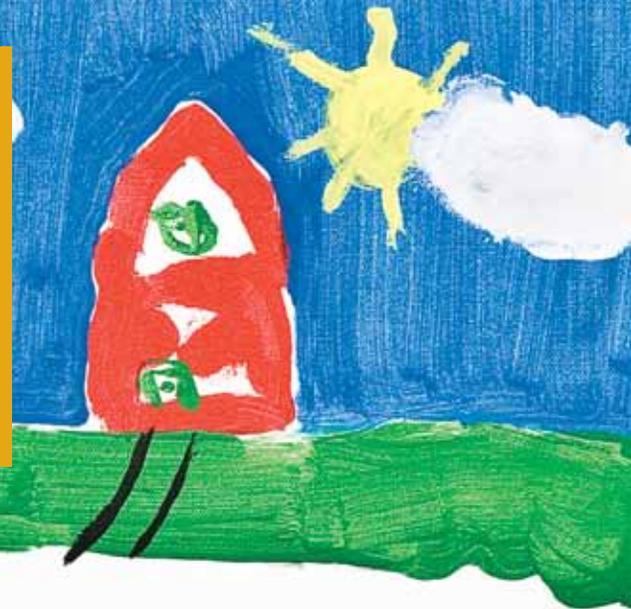




Become a Foster Parent

York Region
Children's Aid Society
Foster Care Services



There are many reasons a child may be separated from his or her own parents and need a family to care for them • While the York Region Children's Aid Society believes that it is best for children to stay with their own families, this is not always possible. When a family or extended family solution is not available, children come into care. • Foster parents are members of the community who can provide a stable and supportive home that encourages a child's growth and development. Foster parents are an important part of a larger team that includes York Region Children's Aid Society staff, community professionals and a child's biological family.

Who are foster parents?

Foster parents are people in York Region who provide safe, caring, stable homes that support the positive development of children.

Foster parents may be

- single adults, married couples, common-law couples and same sex partners
- families just beginning to raise their own children
- ‘empty-nesters’
- experienced parents or people who have never had children
- adults who have professional skills or special childcare training
- stay-at-home adults or those with one adult working outside the home

In a foster home, a child receives:

- physical care such as food, shelter and clothing
- emotional care, including love and inclusion in a family
- nurturing of both intellectual and emotional development
- positive role modeling
- guidance and supervision

Foster parents are asked to treat foster children in the same way as they treat their own children. Yet caring for someone else’s child is not the same as caring for one’s own. Many children in care have experienced traumatic separation and loss as well as other difficulties. Most have a greater than average need for attention and affection and may require more understanding and patience than the average child.

While a child is in foster care, it is the responsibility of our agency to plan for that child’s long term growth and development, ensuring that every child has lifelong connections to a family who can meet their needs.

Although foster parenting is intended to be temporary, sometimes foster parents consider providing a permanent home for a particular child in their care. Some foster parents apply to adopt. These decisions are always informed by the best interest of the child.

Who are the children?

Foster children come from many types of homes and backgrounds — from low income to wealthy. They could live next door, attend your place of worship or even play with your children.

Children entering foster care range in age from newborn to sixteen years old. Foster families select the age, gender and level of difficulty of the children they care for in their home. When brothers and sisters are admitted into care, it is our aim to keep them together.

The length of time a child remains with a foster family can vary from a few days to weeks, months or even years, depending on the circumstances. The goal is family reunification and, while in care, many children are very close to their families and visit them regularly.

At the end of their time in foster care, children may

- return home or be placed with relatives
- move onto adoption or,
- if they are teens, work towards independence

What will I know about a foster child?

Before a child is placed in your home, all available information about the child will be shared with you.

From time to time, not all information is available right away. Generally, you will learn the answers to these questions

1. Why is the child being placed?
2. What are the previous placement experiences of the child?
3. What is the plan for the child? What is the expected length of placement?
4. Does the child understand why he or she was moved or separated from parents?
5. Will the parents or extended family visit? Where? How often?
6. Are there brother or sisters?
7. Is the child in good health? What about allergies, immunizations and medications?
8. Are there religious, cultural or ethnic considerations?
9. What is the child's success at school?
10. Has the child any special behaviour challenges or unusual habits?
11. Could any of their behaviours pose a risk to other children?
12. What will make the child feel most at home, e.g. foods, favourite toys?

All foster parents are asked to sign an oath of confidentiality, meaning they cannot discuss the child's history with anyone outside the fostering team. If, after learning the child's background, you feel uncomfortable or unsure of accepting the placement, you should talk to your Foster Care Support Worker. Saying "no" is okay.

Levels of Foster Care

Children's needs range from straight forward to very complex. Foster parents with various levels of skill, experience and training meet these needs. We divide foster care into three levels with each level meeting a different set of needs. Most foster parents enter at the first or 'regular' level.

Regular

This level of fostering provides a foster child with all essential elements of family life on a daily basis. A child placed in this type of home can be readily integrated into the foster family. Their needs are met by following the family's routines. The foster parent would be implementing good parenting practices to deal with the child's issues.

Some behaviours may include: acting out, bedwetting, interrupted sleep patterns and possible disruptions while attending school. It is unlikely the child would be diagnosed with any mental health issues or need medication. These children may have challenging behaviours coming from their experience of being removed from their caregiver and placed in foster care.

Specialized

Some children require a 'specialized' level of care due to their developmental, emotional, medical or physical challenges. Foster parents would parent the child in a manner that encourages the child to function to their maximum potential.

Specialized foster homes would provide care to children who may have significant developmental delays, are not meeting milestones, visual or audio impairments, defiance, involvement of a resource teacher or infant developmental worker, school disruptions, diagnosed ADHD, ADD, or ODD, conduct disorders, frequent school suspensions, sexualized behaviours, requirement for supervision with peers, signs of attachment disorders, emotionally detached, chronic bedwetting/soiling, disruptive in foster home and in the community.

Treatment

Treatment foster homes provide care to children who usually require community-based treatment by professional staff. These children have extremely difficult developmental, emotional, medical and/or physical challenges. They require individual programs to assist them to overcome their experiences of neglect, abuse and trauma and move towards healthy development. Children in the 'treatment' level may have numerous medical needs.

Fostering opportunities

York Region Children's Aid Society continually searches for new homes in the York Region so we can meet the diverse needs of children entering foster care.

One example might be the capacity to maintain a child's ties with his or her culture. We are currently seeking families of diverse cultures and ethnicity.

In addition, we are looking for families that can care for

- Medically complex infants
- Adolescents
- Sibling groups

We are also looking for foster homes for children in the Richmond Hill area and southern area of York Region.

Is fostering for me?

It's important to understand yourself and your family when you consider applying to become a foster family. Before taking the next steps ask yourself these questions

1. Can I accept and care for a child who has come from a difficult background?
2. Can I help a child develop a sense of belonging in my home even though the stay may be temporary?
3. Can I love a child who, because of a fear of rejection, does not easily love back?
4. Am I secure in myself and my parenting skills?
5. Can I set clear limits and be both firm and understanding in disciplining foster children?
6. Do I view bed-wetting, lying, defiance and minor destructiveness as symptoms of a child in need?
7. Can I tolerate major failures and small successes?
8. Can I accept assistance and guidance from agency staff and community professionals even though I don't always agree?
9. Can I maintain a positive attitude towards a child's parents, even though many of the child's problems are the direct result of the parents' actions?
10. Can I love with all of my heart and then let go?

Basic requirements for foster parents

The York Region Children's Aid Society requires all foster families to

- have a positive family structure, with strong parenting abilities
- be understanding of children's needs
- be physically and emotionally capable of caring for children
- have financial stability
- undergo a criminal background check
- undergo a child protection record check
- provide references and a medical report
- be willing to learn and attend training, and work as a member of a professional team
- provide a non-smoking home that meets fire, safety and cleanliness standards
- provide transportation for foster children to and from activities
- have a general awareness of – and sensitivity to – cultural diversity, sexual orientation, religious differences and various backgrounds of children in care

The York Region Children's Aid Society considers non-working applicants and families with one working parent. Families must be available when we need to place a child in their home as well as for emergencies.

Foster parent approval process

The process to become a foster family takes approximately six months. It is an opportunity for all family members to participate in the decision.

Step 1: Find out whether fostering is right for you and your family.

If you are interested in fostering and would like to ask questions or learn more, please call us to learn more and decide if fostering is right for you and your family: 1-800-718-3850 ext. 2284.

Step 2: Participate in home visit to determine how fostering will fit your lifestyle.

The Foster Parent Recruiter will schedule a home visit to meet with you and provide more information about the Foster Care program. During this meeting, we can discuss how fostering will fit your family's values, routines, culture, and lifestyle. Part of this process involves police checks and child welfare checks for all adults (age 18+) living in the home.

Step 3: Attend PRIDE training

PRIDE stands for Parent Resources for Information Development and Education. This mandatory training consists of nine, three-hour classroom sessions and must be completed before you can begin fostering. Alternate caregivers and other adult children living at home may also be required to attend PRIDE training. During this time, your family also participates in a home study process called SAFE (Structured Analysis Family Evaluation), which includes several home visits and interviews with all family members.

Step 4: Confirm your decision to foster

Once PRIDE training and the home study are complete, your family and our agency will review and confirm if fostering is right for you and your family. If we mutually agree, then your family will sign a service agreement that outlines the expectations of both the foster parents and the agency. Then your family will be ready to begin fostering.

Foster Parent Support

Professional Support

Just as every child in care has an assigned Children's Service Worker; foster families have a Foster Care Support Worker assigned to them.

Foster Care Support Workers assist with

- supporting you and your family
- assisting with administrative tasks
- assisting with team work and professional partnerships
- providing feedback and supervision regarding fostering methods and skills
- identifying training needs and facilitating training opportunities
- providing guidance regarding Ministry standards and Agency policies and procedures
- bridging to agency and community resources

Each foster family also has access to the agency's 24-hour emergency After Hours service team.

Mutual Support

Networking between foster parents happens at monthly support group meetings, called "cluster meetings". These meetings provide excellent opportunities for foster parents to get to know each, share insights into the care and supervision of children, learn new skills, and organize relief and babysitting.

Financial Assistance

Foster parents receive a per diem rate for each day a child or youth resides in their home. These payments cover the cost of food, shelter and other general expenses associated with caring for a child. We also provide monthly allowances for clothing, recreation, school and spending money, depending on the age of the child. Children in foster care receive health and dental coverage through the agency.

Foster Parent Association

The Foster Parent Association (FPA) is made up of all foster families within York region. The FPA meets monthly to provide mutual support and also to identify and address concerns of the foster community. The FPA has committees to enhance the fostering experience. An example is the "Spirit Committee" which exists to facilitate positive social events for foster families.

The Foster Parent Association Executive is the elected leadership of the FPA. The Executive meets monthly with the Residential Services Managers of the agency to discuss and address the needs and issues experienced by foster families.

Training for approved foster homes

The York Region Children's Aid Society recognizes the benefit of providing foster parents with ongoing, quality training. In order to enhance knowledge and develop child-related skills, courses and workshops are offered on a regular basis. Foster parents are required to attend a least 25 credit hours of training each year. The training sessions are free to all approved foster parents; training calendars are distributed twice during the year.

The Foster Care Team has also established a resource library that is available to foster families.

Frequently asked fostering questions

The following questions and answers may help you further understand what fostering is all about.

Q: *Can children share bedrooms?*

A: Children of the same gender may share a room as long as there is enough personal space. Children must have their own beds.

Q: *Will the child go to the school in my neighbourhood?*

A: In most cases, yes. However, if a child needs to attend classes in his or her current school, the foster child's Children's Service Worker will make those arrangements.

Q: *Do I need to provide the furniture and equipment to care for foster children?*

A: Yes, foster homes are required to provide their own Canadian Standards Association (CSA)-approved furnishings and equipment such as beds, cribs, car seats, etc.

Q: *Will the foster child's family know where we live?*

A: In most cases, the child's family will not know the location of the foster family

Q: *Do I have to talk with the child's family?*

A: As a foster parent you may be required to communicate with or even meet the child's parents. You may need to attend 'planning conferences' for a child in your care, or help the parents with their parenting skills. Every situation is unique. You will learn how to cope with different situations through foster parent training and with the active support of your Foster Care Support Worker.

Q: *What about discipline?*

A: Foster children are just like any other children. They will require consistent support and guidance and this will include the need for discipline. All forms of physical discipline are against CAS policy.

Q: *Will foster children have a negative influence on my own family?*

A: Integrating foster children with your own children tends to be a common concern. Many foster children are fearful, angry, confused and have a sense of powerlessness because they were removed from their home. Their feelings may be reflected in their behaviour. If you are experiencing difficulty with your own children, foster parenting may not be appropriate at this time. Fostering as a family can be a wonderful, character building, life changing experience—but it will require a commitment from your whole family.

Q: *Can I adopt my foster child?*

A: Under the right circumstances and in the best interest of the child, foster parents may request that adoption be considered. Adoption is a child-centred process so the agency is very diligent in finding the very best "forever" home for each adoptable child.

Q: *What if I want to go on vacation?*

A: A few options are available. Under the right circumstances and with proper authorization, you may be able to take your foster child with you. However, if it is not possible to take the foster child on vacation with you or if you need some personal family time away from foster caring, relief arrangements can be made.

Q: *Can I take a foster child to my church?*

A: Yes, if there are no concerns from the child's family, it is a reasonable length of time and the child wants to go. If a child is of a different religion, you may be required to make arrangements for the child to practice their own faith.

Q: *Is there an age limit to being a foster parent?*

A: Foster parents need to be financially and emotionally stable, living independently and exhibit a level of maturity that enables good parenting. They need to be physically and emotionally capable of caring for children who may require a higher energy level of parenting skills.



For more information please contact:

www.FosteringAtYork.com

www.YorkCAS.org

fostering@YorkCAS.org

905.895.2318 1.800.718.3850

Kennedy Place
16915 Leslie Street
Newmarket, Ontario L3Y 9A1