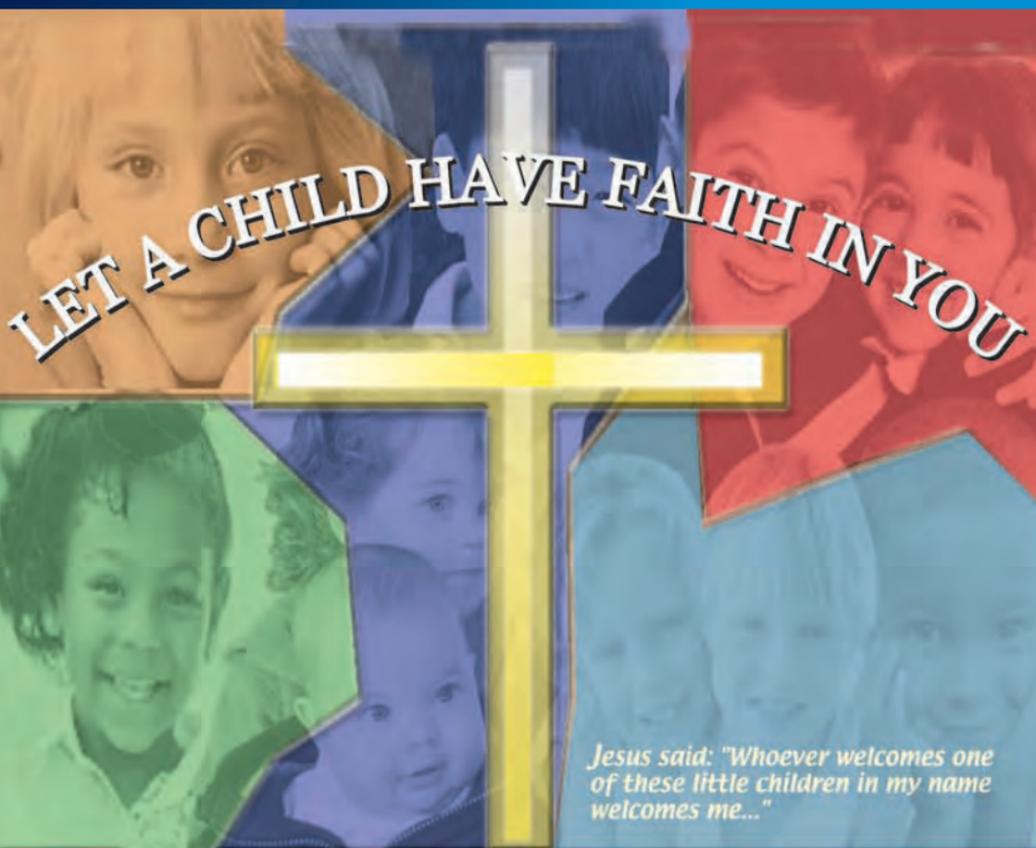


INTRODUCTION TO FOSTER CAREGIVING

Answers
to some frequently asked questions
about foster parenting



Philosophy of Care

Every child has a right to a family—preferably their birth family. Families provide life-long support and care which is integral to the formation and development of a child’s emerging identity. Our goal is to assist families in caring for their children at home. However, when this is not possible, foster care provides the temporary care needed while maintaining the importance of birth families. Foster care can support during a critical time in a child’s life.

What Is Foster Care?

Foster care provides temporary care in a safe, nurturing, family environment for children and youth who can no longer be with their family. Care is provided until a permanent plan can be developed which will facilitate the child’s return home or placement with kin, or eventual adoption. Children and youth living with foster families have an opportunity to heal, grow and develop. The length of time spent in care can vary from a few days, months or years, depending on the circumstances. Foster care services are provided by Children’s Aid Societies which are mandated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.



Who Are the Children Needing Foster Care Services from the Catholic Children's Aid Society?

Foster children come from a variety of backgrounds and can range from newborns to teenagers (0-16 years of age). Most are from Catholic families. Some are voluntarily placed in care, while others are required to be in care by Court Order. Most return home within the year, while others may remain in foster care until they are 18 or 21.

Why Do Children Come Into Care?

Most children are placed in care because they may have experienced:

- physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- serious neglect, parental inability to meet their basic needs
- parent-child conflict and behaviour problems
- parental mental health issues
- exposure to or involvement with drugs

The children are often frightened and confused by the separation from their parent(s). Some are angry, or sad. Others think they are being punished. Over time, these feelings gradually lessen as the children come to know and trust you. Once they feel safe and secure in their new environment, they are able to learn appropriate life skills in meeting their own challenges.

Who Are Foster Caregivers?

The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS) has approximately 180 fostering families who reflect the community's diversity in language, race, culture, family constellation and economic circumstance. We ask all of our caregivers to help our children with spiritual well-being and to support our children in a life that is consistent with the Roman Catholic faith and values.

Caregivers can be married or single, with or without children. Some are experienced parents with older children. Others are fostering while still raising their own children. Some have professional child care skills or training in social work, psychology, education, nursing or similar fields. Some may be at home or working. All share a genuine interest in the well-being of children and a desire to contribute to their community.

Caregivers provide temporary family life in their own homes to children in the care of CCAS. They act as role models, teachers, and nurturers, and serve as a support to the child's family as well. As part of a team, caregivers work with staff, children and parents to establish the best plan for the child. The initial plan is usually to reunite a child with his/her family. Where this is not possible, the plan may include adoption, or long-term foster care.

What We Look For In Our Foster Caregivers

Here are some of the **competency categories** we consider when assessing potential foster caregivers:

1. Protecting and Nurturing Children

Children placed with foster families need a safe and nurturing environment where parents demonstrate care, respect and acceptance. Some children who have not been kept safe or cared for may not accept or understand your efforts at first. Others may demand more attention. Understanding children's feelings and reactions to separation from their families and the ability to help them deal with these feelings is important.

2. Meeting Children's Developmental Needs and Understanding Developmental Delays

For most of us, growing up is a natural, predictable developmental process. Often, foster children who have not had the opportunity or encouragement to grow by learning may exhibit development delays. Understanding the reasons for these differences, helping children cope, and believing in their ability to develop to their full potential, are essential in helping children meet their developmental milestones.



3. Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Birth Families

Maintaining birth family, kin and community relationships is essential to a child's sense of well-being and belonging. Even infants who have never been held by their birth parents have a prenatal, birth and hospital history. The memories, experiences and attachments children bring with them will vary. Foster parents play an important role in helping a child understand his/her history and maintaining continued relationships with their birth family in a safe environment.

4. Connecting Children to a Lifetime of Safe and Nurturing Relationships in the Community

All children are entitled to a lifetime significant relationships. When children must be separated from their community on a temporary or permanent basis, the role of foster parents in connecting children to lifetime relationships is very important.

5. Reinforcing a Child's Heritage and Cultural Identity

Acknowledging and reinforcing a child's heritage, cultural identity and spiritual well-being are important aspects of providing nurturing care for children.

6. Participating as a Member of a Professional Team

CCAS works together with foster parents and community partners to provide positive outcomes for children. Foster parents are part of and supported by a team of professionals.



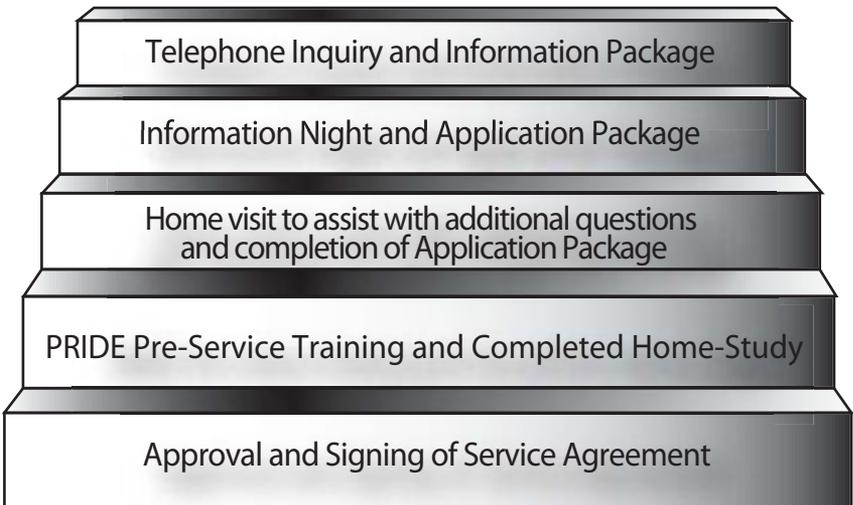
How Will Fostering Impact My Family?

Fostering will most likely be a challenge for all family members. Some biological children will have difficulty sharing their parents. Supporting a foster child's adjustment to life within a new family requires patience and acceptance on the part of each family member. Fostering can be a way to strengthen family ties, working together to build a caring and supportive home for a child or youth in need. Fostering can be an enriching family experience, especially when children are reunited with their birth families or when you assist their transition to adoption, or help a youth move towards independent living.

How Long Does It Take to Become a Foster Caregiver?

The entire process (see chart below) usually takes about three to six months. Once potential foster caregivers attend a mandatory information session and complete the application package, CCAS assesses families using a provincially standardized tool called: Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE). How soon a child is placed with you depends on a number of factors. For example, if you are willing and able to foster older children, brothers and sisters, or younger children with medical problems, you will probably have a child placed with you more quickly. However, finding the right fit for your family is more important than the speed of the process.

Steps To Becoming A Foster Caregiver



Home-Study Assessment

Once the prospective foster family meets the approval criteria, they can begin Parent Resource for Information Development Education (PRIDE) pre-service training and a SAFE home-study assessment. This process allows us to assess the family's strengths and needs according to **PRIDE competencies** and how these areas relate to fostering. The process will also help families assess their own needs and capacity, and their willingness to become foster parents.

PRIDE Pre-Service Training Sessions

PRIDE Pre-Service training is a 27-hour program usually delivered in nine, three-hour sessions. The topics addressed in the session are relevant to all applicants: placement planning, the significance of continuity in a child's life, connections to the child's birth family and community and, how children attach and experience loss.

Mutual Assessment and Making an Informed Decision

Once you have completed the PRIDE Pre-Service training program and SAFE Home-Study Assessment, two outcomes are possible:

1. Foster care is the right decision for you and your family. Your application will be approved to foster and we will work with you to develop the appropriate criteria required for the number, ages, gender and behaviours of the children we place in your care.
2. Foster care is not the best choice for you and your family at this time. Helpful feedback will be provided to the family and the CCAS worker may be able to suggest other ways you can help children or families in your community, such as volunteering.

How CCAS Supports You

Each foster home receives support from a CCAS worker, training, and access to a range of therapeutic supports and services that a child may require. CCAS also provides daily non-taxable reimbursements (a per diem) to help cover the cost of the child's food, clothing and personal allowance. In addition, caregivers receive coverage for other essentials such as the child's dental care, medical needs, recreation, as well as a mileage and relief allowance.

Making a Difference!

Everyday, often in a quiet way, Foster Families make important contributions to our communities. We thank you for your willingness to consider making a difference in the life of a child through fostering.



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