



By James Anderson

FOSTER PARENTING IN DOUGLAS COUNTY IS A TEAM EFFORT

“Safety and security don’t just happen; they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear,” said Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela.



USED WITH PERMISSION: COALITION FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES – MILWAUKEE, WIS.

The Department of Health and Human Services in Douglas County works to live Mandela’s vision daily through its foster care program. The foster care program provides a temporary home to give families time to make necessary changes so children can safely live in their homes and communities.

In Douglas County, there were 96 children in out-of-home care during the April 2018 reporting period. Currently, there are 33 licensed foster care providers and the department is actively recruiting new foster parents. There are no specific demographic requirements to be a foster parent. Rather, the foster parent program is looking for caring adults 21 years of age or older who are willing to care for children during temporary placements by providing a safe and stable environment.

“We are looking for people who are willing to bring children into their heart and home, while supporting family reunification,” said Deputy Director/Children’s Services Manager Doreen Wehmas. When asked about the most pressing current needs of the foster care program, she indicated that it is recruiting and licensing foster parents who are willing to take older children, as well as multiple children, to keep sibling groups intact. The needs of older children are unique in the foster care system.

For families, social workers and foster parents, it is important to function as a team and to see reunification with parents as a process, not an event. It’s our job collectively to stay focused on concurrent permanency planning, whereas safe reunification with parents is one of the primary goals throughout

The Douglas County Foster Care Team

The Douglas County foster care team is composed of three members: Doreen Wehmas, deputy director/children’s services manager, Brittany Johnson, foster care coordinator, and Laura Halvorsen Fregard, intake and assessment unit social worker and Kinship Care coordinator. To learn more about becoming a foster parent, call the Douglas County Department of Health & Human Services at (715) 395-1304 or visit www.douglascountywi.org/282/Foster-Care-Program.



From left: Laura Halvorsen Fregard, Doreen Wehmas, Brittany Johnson.

the case planning process. The process of children being placed in out-of-home care is a time of change and adjustment, while building on the strengths of families that are facing some difficult challenges. Foster parents play a huge role in providing support to parents during this process of reunification by merely respecting the goal of reunification and realizing this can be difficult at times. Foster parents work on building relationships with the biological parents, if possible, always speaking positively about the foster children's biological family and being strength based while celebrating positive steps toward potential reunification. Being a team player means realizing that foster parenting is one of the most rewarding experiences anyone can go through, as well as being part of a process that brings families safely together again.

“We are looking for people who are willing to bring children into their heart and home, while supporting family reunification”

– DEPUTY DIRECTOR/CHILDREN'S SERVICES MANAGER DOREEN WEHMAS

Once a child is placed in foster care, an ongoing Child Protection social worker develops a permanency plan for each foster child. The permanency plan is used to determine when the child can be reunified with his or her birth parent(s). When reunification is not possible, other permanency options are considered including relative care, guardianship or adoption.


Becoming a foster parent, and being a foster parent, is not always an easy path. A rigorous licensing process must be completed including mandated online training provided by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. Once licensed and a placement occurs, there are processes that can be both novel and challenging to new and experienced foster parents. These potential challenges include facilitating parental visitations, attending court hearings and addressing any health or developmental needs of children placed in a foster parent's care.

For adults interested in exploring becoming a foster parent, the process begins by contacting the Human Services Division. A social worker will work with applicants and guide them through the application steps. The process includes, but is not limited to: completion of a foster care application; home inspection; several in-home interviews with a department social worker; physical health examination; criminal background check that includes fingerprinting; proof of a valid driver's license and insured automobile; proof of adequate income to care for children in placements.

After the foster care license is issued, foster parents are required to complete in-person foundation training provided by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. This training provides an overview of opportunities and challenges foster parents may experience. The good news is that foster parents are not in this alone. The Human Services Division offers monthly meetings for foster parents to network and learn from each other.

Superior and communities throughout Douglas County also support foster children through community service programs. Superior

Middle School students in Amanda Lindquist's eighth-grade English classes collected donations to purchase “Sweet Cases” for children entering foster care in Douglas County. The duffle bags contain a teddy bear, a warm blanket, a hygiene kit and materials for coloring activities. The students decorate the outside of the bags and include handwritten letters to the unknown children who will receive the bags. The Douglas County Association for Home and Community Education (HCE) quilt project provides homemade quilts to children in foster care. Douglas County Department of Health and Human Services employees recently raised funds to support purchasing pillows for foster children. As out-of-home placements occur at all hours of the day or night, children are given these personal and comforting items (pillows, Sweet Cases and quilts) to take with them.

In addition, Promise 14:18 at Bayside Baptist Church in Superior is a resource that provides items needed for newly placed foster children. They email requests from foster parents to their email group of families that are willing to donate the items. “There has been a tremendous outpouring of support to help provide much-needed items for these families and foster kids, and it has been an honor for Promise 14:18 to help make this happen,” said Dave Lemaster, who heads up the ministry. 



James Anderson III is the community and economic development educator at UW-Extension.



Join Us in Madison for Superior Days

Superior Days has announced dates for the 34th Annual Superior Days event as well as other important dates and planning meetings. This citizen and business grassroots lobbying initiative is part of the UW-Extension Cooperative Extension. Visit www.SuperiorDays.com for more information.

- November 5 – Community planning meeting at WITC Superior and Ashland - noon to 1:30 p.m.
- November 14 – Community issues identification at WITC - 5 to 8 p.m.
- January 18 – Hotel room block reservations close at midnight
- January 21 – Community planning meeting at WITC Superior and Ashland - noon to 1:30 p.m.
- January 31 – Delegate issues training at Yellow Jacket Union, UW-Superior – 5 to 8 p.m.
- February 12 & 13 – 34th Annual Superior Days