

# Be a Hero

Provide a safe  
home for  
children by  
becoming a  
foster parent



# Before You Apply: Some Things to Think About

## Children need you!

Thousands of Michigan children need temporary homes where they can feel safe, secure and loved. Some are victims of abuse or neglect. Some have been abandoned by their birth families. Whatever the reason, it's not the child's fault!



To be a successful foster parent you must love children and want to help them. You must also meet the state requirements for licensing and go through initial and ongoing training. You must be willing to cooperate with birth parents who are working toward reunification with their children.

## Will you qualify?

Lutheran Social Services has its own requirements for foster parents in addition to the requirements of the State of Michigan. Our foster parents must meet the following criteria:

### Age

Foster parents must be at least 21 years old.

### Marital Status

Foster parents can be married or single, stay-at-home or working. They must have adequate child care arrangements. Foster children must be supervised by an adult caregiver approved by the licensing agency (Lutheran Social Services of Michigan).

### Income

Your income must be enough to cover the needs of your own family. We will ask you to provide proof of income. You should not regard the payments from the state for foster care as a supplement to your income. These payments are partial reimbursement for the child's expenses. These include food, clothing, shelter, transportation and recreation.

### Housing

You do not need to own a house; apartments and mobile homes are acceptable. Your home must have at least 40 square feet of space per child for sleeping as well as adequate play space. The home must be



free of safety hazards. There must be at least one smoke detector on each floor and at least one carbon monoxide detector.

### **Telephone**

The home must have a working telephone at all times.

### **Transportation**

You must have reliable transportation. This can be a family car; access to a friend's, relative's or neighbor's car; or access to a bus system or taxi cabs. The foster parents must meet the child's transportation needs. These include travel to family visits; school; and medical, dental and counseling appointments.

### **Police and Central Registry Checks**

You and any adult children or other adults who are regularly in your home must sign a release to permit checks of local and state police records and the Department of Human Services Central Registry. You will be fingerprinted. You will not necessarily be disqualified if you have been convicted of a crime. However, this will be considered carefully before we make a licensing recommendation. You will be disqualified if there is a record of substantiated child abuse or neglect complaints against you.

### **Medical**

Every member of the household who is 12 or older must submit a medical report that includes a TB test or chest X-ray. Children under 12 years old do not require a TB test. All household members need to have a medical exam completed.

# Is your family ready?

Before you apply to become a foster parent, think about how this decision will affect your family.

- What does foster care mean to each member of your family? Have a family talk. Encourage family members to be honest about their feelings, fears and questions.
- Does everyone in the family agree with the idea? If there are disagreements, are there solutions to them?
- Can everyone in the family accept opening your home, which is what happens with foster care? You will have a child living with your family. You will also have ongoing caseworker supervision of your home during the child's placement.
- Do your own children understand that they will be sharing their home, possessions and parents?



- What picture forms in your mind when you think about children in care and their families? What kind of relationship would you like to have with the child's birth family?
- Most children in foster care have special needs. Some have medical problems that require special care. Some have behavioral or emotional needs because of abuse or neglect. The hurt the child has been through can affect everyone else in the family.
- The first goal of foster care is for children to be reunited with their family of origin. When this is not possible, our goal is to find the children a permanent home. In some cases, the foster parents have established such a strong bond with their foster child that they choose to pursue adoption. Thousands of children are adopted out of the foster care program by their foster parents every year in Michigan.



*"When I was a child, my parents took in foster children and adopted my brother through foster care. I love spending time with kids - I run a daycare - and would love to share my home and my heart with foster children!"*

**Melody, Belleville**

Have you thought about what will happen when the child leaves your home? Can your family put your own sense of loss aside and help a child make the transition back to his or her family of origin or to a relative? Can you be a support if a child moves to an adoptive family?





# The licensing process

## How do I get licensed?

Attend an informational meeting at our office or in your home. This will help you learn more about what it means to be a foster parent. You will meet some of the professional staff at Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. You can ask any questions you have. At this meeting you will receive more detailed information about the role of the foster parent and the licensing process. Attending this informational meeting does not mean you have to move forward with the licensing process. However, you do have to attend this meeting in order to be licensed.



## What do I need to turn in after the informational session?

### Application

After each applicant in your household attends an informational meeting, you may request an application. You must complete the application within 30 days of receiving it. In a two-caregiver household, both caregivers must sign the application.

### Records check

Each adult in the home must sign a release allowing us to check state and local police records and the Department of Human Services Central Registry. These checks give us information about each adult in the household with regard to conviction of crimes, involvement in substantiated abuse or neglect of another person, and placement on court-supervised parole or probation. Each applicant will also be required to be fingerprinted.



## What happens next?

### Home study

We will visit your home and talk with all members of the household. As part of the licensing process, our staff will need to ask about your marital and family history, your education, your employment history and your feelings about parenting and foster care. They will gather this information through interviews with you and your family members. Our goal is to ensure that each home licensed by Lutheran Social Services meets all safety requirements for children in foster care. The home study process is usually completed within 90 days of application.

### References

You will be asked to provide the names of three unrelated individuals who can write letters of reference for you. These people should be aware of your parenting skills. They should be able to endorse your wish to be foster parents. They need to have known each applicant for at least three years.



*"My husband and I had a desire to either adopt or foster. We really had no idea what we were getting into, but were willing to try. It has been such a learning experience for us both. We have gained great insight into the word 'parenting'! We have grown as parents to our foster children as well as our own. We've had tremendous challenges at times, yet without a doubt it has been worth it to see the positive influence we've had on the children we have fostered. It has also been good for our natural children to see how fortunate they really are to have loving, caring parents and what a difference that can make in a child's life."*

**Dean & Theresa, Howell**

## How will I be trained?

During the home study process, the licensing worker will teach you and your family about fostering. The licensing worker will be a resource to you throughout the process.

### PRIDE training:

To explain the unique responsibilities of foster parents, the state requires all Michigan foster parents to attend an 18-hour PRIDE training (Parent's Resource for Information Development and Education). You can complete this during the home study process; *you must complete PRIDE training before a child can be placed in your home*. During your first six months as a licensed foster parent, you will be required to take an additional nine hours of PRIDE training.

After their two years, all foster parents are required to complete at least six hours of training per year. Note: training is just one of several factors that will be considered in the licensing decision.





# The foster parent's role

You already have roles as a family member, as a citizen and as a member of the community. As a foster parent, you will have many more roles. We want to look at four roles that are important in fostering:

- **Your role with the child**
- **Your role with the licensing organization**
- **Your role with the child's birth parents**
- **Your role with other foster parents**

## Your role with the foster child

Your activities in relation to your foster child are a familiar part of parenting – providing love, food, clothing, shelter, protection, medical and dental care, education, and spiritual guidance. All of those activities help meet the child's basic needs and nurture the child's growth and development.

Doing all these things as a foster parent is more difficult than parenting your own children. Before coming to you, your foster child has been somewhere else, with other people, and has had a different – perhaps painful – life experience. You have not been a part of making him who he is now. You may feel some frustration if the child's life experiences, behaviors and ways of coping with situations are different from what you have come to expect from children of that age. It is



"My wife and I started fostering to care for relatives of ours. We are nearing the completion of the adoption process and have also started working with two other foster children who aren't related to us. We are glad to be able to help other children in need by giving them a loving and stable home where they can grow in their sibling relationship."

**Roy & Georgia, Brooklyn**



important to understand that change takes time. A child's behaviors will not change quickly simply because the child is living with your family. Changes are gradual, and happen with love, patience and support.

### **Your role with the licensing organization (Lutheran Social Services of Michigan)**

As a foster parent, you are a partner with other members of the foster care team. These include the licensing organization, its staff and other community resources. Your role with Lutheran Social Services is to keep us informed about anything that affects the foster child in your care. This includes the child's situation, behavior, progress and needs; any changes in your home or family situation; the child's relationship with the birth family; any questions, concerns or problems you have about the foster child and the child's care; and anything else that is related to your functioning as a foster parent. Your caseworker will be your main point of contact with us.

Lutheran Social Services' role in foster care is to ensure that the child receives quality care so that the child can move quickly out of foster care and into a permanent living situation. We provide or arrange for needed services for the child and report to the Family Court, Department of Human Services (DHS) or Community Mental Health (CMH), depending upon the child's legal status. We are accountable for the child's well-being.



As a foster parent, you may need to work with Lutheran Adoption Service if the child in your home is available for adoption. This is the case when you are planning to adopt the child as well as when the child is leaving to be adopted by another family. The adoption worker will help everyone concerned to prepare the child and family for the change from temporary foster care to permanent adoption.

### **Your role with the child's birth parents**

Your role with the birth parents of your foster child is one of the most important roles you have as a foster parent. Your direct contact with the birth parents will vary from case to case, but the significance of your role never changes.

The birth family is very important to the foster child. You can help support, build and maintain ties between your foster child and the birth family. The birth family is always part of the child's thoughts and feelings. The birth family defines, in large measure, the child's self-identity. No matter what you feel about the birth parents, your attitudes and your actions must respect them and what they mean to the child.

You can help the birth parents in their efforts to have their children returned to them. As a foster parent you can teach them, by example and sometimes directly, such things as appropriate child care and discipline, effective interpersonal and family relationships, and homemaking skills.

### **Your role with other foster parents**

Your relationship and interactions with other foster parents can be helpful and rewarding. Other foster parents know, as no one else can, what it feels like to take responsibility for someone else's children. You can build ongoing relationships with other foster parents through support groups, training activities and organization events.



# Unaccompanied minors program

Lutheran Social Services is one of a very few organizations in Michigan licensed to provide foster care to youth who arrive here from other countries without an adult.

We usually call this our “refugee foster care” program, because most of these young people are refugees from war-torn countries. They were separated from their parents because of unrest in their home countries. Most spend several years in a refugee camp before they are granted refugee status and brought to the United States. They are placed with a foster family until they reach age 21.

Other children in the program are undocumented immigrants, who fled dangerous or abusive situations in their home countries and made their way to the United States. Some were brought here by unscrupulous adults who intended to exploit them. They are placed in foster care until their immigration status can be settled. Some are granted asylum and permitted to remain in the United States.

## Unique challenges

Being foster parents in this program has unique challenges. The young people in this program have endured traumatic events in their home countries. They often speak very little English when they arrive. They come from cultures very different from ours. They need



to adapt not only to a new family but to a new educational system, new foods and often a very different climate.

Foster parents help these youth adjust to the American way of life and help them learn to function independently while also encouraging them to maintain their own culture. Lutheran Social Services provides counseling, cultural training and interpreters as needed to help the youth and their foster families.

Foster parents in this program must be licensed through the State of Michigan like all other foster parents. Licensing is handled by our Lansing office. They work with foster parents throughout the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, so don't be discouraged if you do not live in the Lansing area.

If you think you may be interested in becoming foster parents to refugee youth or other unaccompanied minors, call our Lansing office at (800) 896-9850.



"I started fostering children 24 years ago, simply for the love of children. I knew I could give a child a safe place to stay until they can reunite with their family; to give a lifeline in their time of need; to develop a relationship that would hopefully last a lifetime. I pray that one day they will look back and say that I made a difference in their lives and they will go on to be productive adults, go to college and get a good job."

**Janice, Ypsilanti**



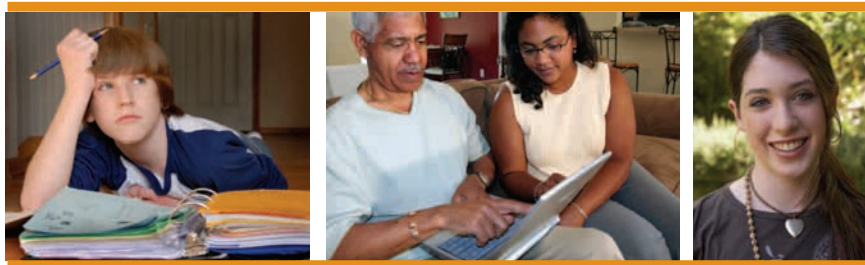


# Supervised independent living: host families needed

Today, when children reach the age of 19 without being adopted or reunited with their families, they “age out” of foster care and can no longer live in foster homes.

With little or no family support and no financial support from the state, these youth are at high risk of homelessness, substance abuse, unplanned pregnancy and criminal activity.

To help reduce these risks, Michigan established the Supervised Independent Living program for youth aged 16 to 19. The program helps them learn the skills they will need to be successful adults when they leave foster care. Youth are supervised by caseworkers. They receive individual and group life skills training, educational and vocational referrals and support and housing placement and supervision. They receive a monthly stipend from the state that they use to pay for rent, food, clothing, transportation and other expenses, learning how to budget and make wise choices.



If you are unable to take on all the responsibilities of foster parenting, consider becoming a host parent to a teenager in Supervised Independent Living. You will provide a room, and usually board, in your home for a teenager in return for an agreed-upon monthly rent. You will serve as a role model, mentor and informal educator for this young person.

Host parents do not need to be licensed as foster parents and they have no legal or financial responsibilities for the child. You will not receive any payment except the agreed-upon rent from the youth.

If you are interested in being a host parent for a youth leaving foster care, please let us know.

"Our goal as foster parents is to help children and their families reunite as a family unit. We offered love, stability, education and lots of activities. To watch a child's eyes light up when you hug him and hear the laughter that rings through the house are the most rewarding things to us. You don't have to be young to love and care for foster children – we are 56 and 69! The classes that Lutheran Social Services offers helped us tremendously in working with these special children."

**Stanley and Asondra, Romulus**

## The bottom line

You don't need super powers to be a hero to a child or youth in foster care. Thousands of Michigan children need a safe and secure place to sleep at night. If you love children and are patient and flexible, you can change a child's life.

We hope you will take the next step by requesting and completing an application to become a foster parent. If you have any questions or want more information, please contact us.



## Become a Foster Parent

If you love kids, have lots of patience and flexibility, and want to make a difference in a child's life, become a foster parent. You can be single or married, live in a house or an apartment, and have children of your own at home or not. We provide training and support.



[www.LutheranFosterCare.org](http://www.LutheranFosterCare.org)

### REGIONAL OFFICES

|                          |                |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Southeast Michigan ..... | (877) 464-3264 |
| Ann Arbor .....          | (877) 971-5776 |
| Flint/Saginaw .....      | (866) 357-5776 |
| Grand Rapids .....       | (800) 886-5776 |
| Jackson .....            | (800) 765-0541 |
| Kalamazoo .....          | (800) 809-5776 |
| Lansing .....            | (800) 896-9850 |