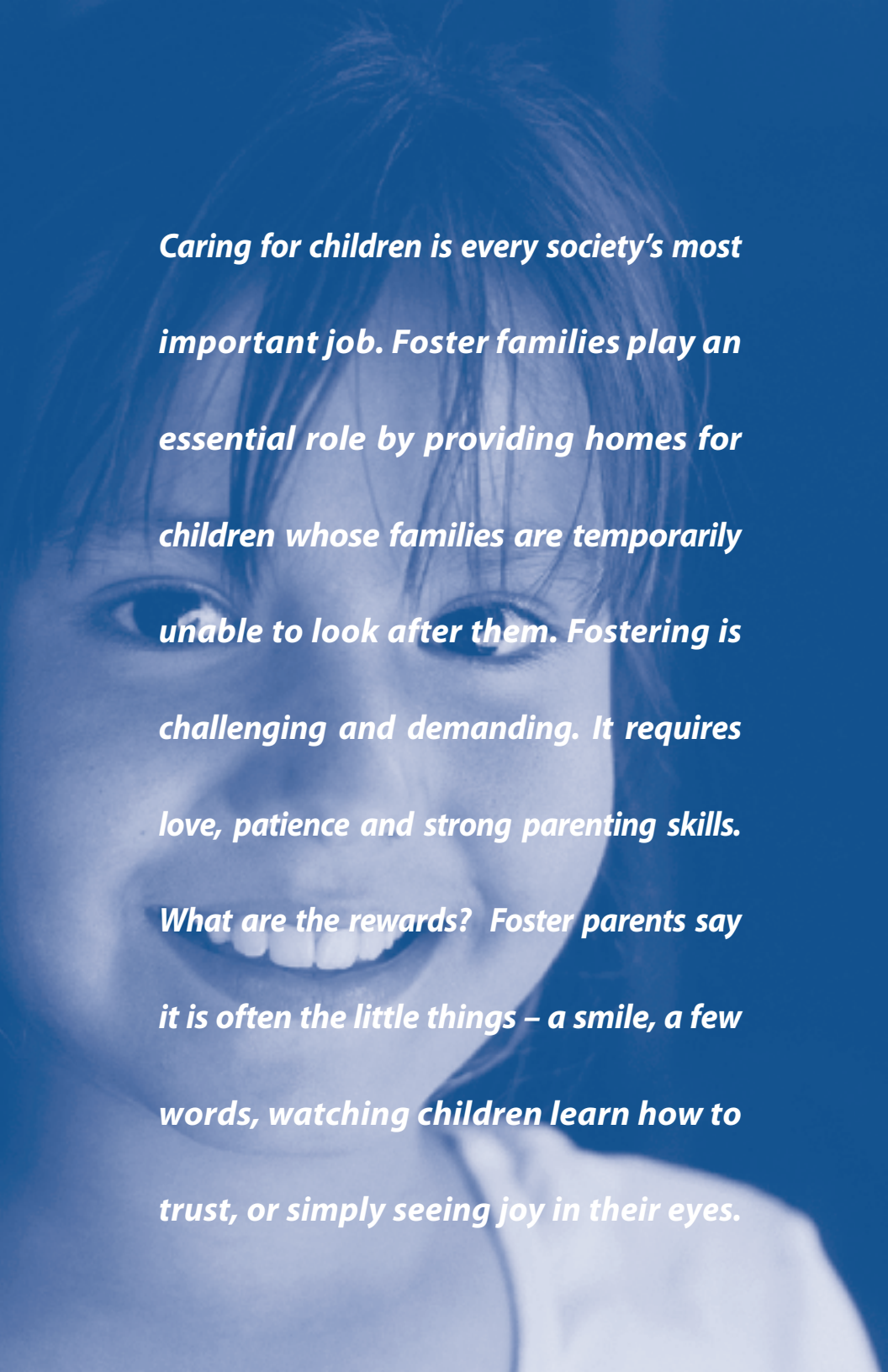


FOSTER PARENTING

Making a Difference in so Many Lives



Ministry of
Children and Family
Development



Caring for children is every society's most important job. Foster families play an essential role by providing homes for children whose families are temporarily unable to look after them. Fostering is challenging and demanding. It requires love, patience and strong parenting skills.

What are the rewards? Foster parents say it is often the little things – a smile, a few words, watching children learn how to trust, or simply seeing joy in their eyes.



WHAT IS FOSTERING?

Fostering is caring for children who cannot live with their families. The goal is for children to return home when their parents are able to care safely for them.

Fostering is a family opening their home and sharing their love, nurturing and caring with children who temporarily cannot live with their own families. It is a family helping others in their community, and has immense rewards for both family and foster children. It is about helping meet the needs of each individual child. Foster families help children maintain contact with their own family, community and culture.

DO ALL FOSTER PARENTS PROVIDE THE SAME KIND OF CARE?

No. Children's needs range from reasonably straightforward to very complex. A range of foster parents are needed with various levels of training, skills and experience.

Restricted foster parents care for children they know or who are related to their family.

Regular foster parents care for children of varying ages and needs who are usually not known or related to the foster family.

Specialized foster parents care for children with mental or physical disabilities, or emotional or behavioural problems. Specialized foster families are designated as Level 1, 2 or 3, depending on the foster parent's education, experience, knowledge, skills and abilities. Specialized foster parents are recognized as 'professional parents' and are compensated for their ability to respond to a child's individual needs.

Respite foster parents take children for short periods, so the children's parents or the children's foster parents can have a few days without the children.



HOW MUCH ARE FOSTER PARENTS PAID?

Foster care is not employment. Families choose to foster because of a concern for children and a desire to contribute something special to their community. There is a monthly maintenance payment to foster parents to cover the direct costs of caring for a child. However, foster parents are not expected to give up employment. There is also a service payment available for the three levels of specialized foster care. The service payment recognizes the primary foster parent's special parenting skill and extra time required to meet the needs of a child, but is not considered to be employment income.

Rates vary with the type of care provided. Your local ministry office or delegated Aboriginal child and family services agency can provide details. You will also find information on rates at the following website: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/monthly_rates.htm

HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER PARENT?

Anyone, 19 years or older, who wants to share their home with a child in need can apply. Single people, couples and families – with or without children – may all become foster parents.

It is not necessary to own your own home, and your financial situation need not be a barrier, but foster parents must have the maturity to carry out the day-to-day duties and responsibilities required to care for a child, and to meet the child's needs.

There are a number of delegated Aboriginal child and family service agencies in B.C. that have processes in place for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal foster parents. For further information, contact the delegated Aboriginal agency in your area. A list of agencies can be found at:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated



The approval process starts with receiving information from a worker at the ministry or delegated Aboriginal agency about becoming a foster parent. You will be asked to attend a pre-service orientation program that helps prepare you for the challenges of fostering.

A worker will visit you to talk about your health, personal history, interests, lifestyle, child care experiences and the type of child you feel can best be helped in your home. You will be asked to have a medical assessment completed by your physician.

You will also be asked for three references. One should be a relative. The other two can be friends, family members or professionals who know you and how you may relate to children in care. Your references will each be asked to fill out a form, and they may be interviewed.

You and anyone 18 years or older living in your home or who might supervise the children receiving care in your home will be required to undergo a criminal record check.

The ministry or delegated Aboriginal agency will start a homestudy assessment, during which a social worker will visit your home to complete a series of interviews. The information from these interviews will help both you and the agency determine if you, as a foster parent, are able to respond to a child's physical, emotional and cultural needs.

Once the approval process is completed successfully, you will be asked to sign an agreement outlining your responsibilities and those of the ministry or delegated Aboriginal agency. Newly approved foster parents must complete the 53 hour B.C. Foster Care Education Program within two years. The length of time you will wait for a child depends upon the age and type of child you want to foster, and the needs in your community.



WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES?

As a foster parent, you are part of a team that includes the child, the child's family, the child's worker, your resource worker, and other service providers involved with the child's care. Together you work to return the child to the child's family whenever possible. Your responsibilities include:

- > providing the child with a safe home and nourishing meals, appropriate clothing and accommodation (including a separate bed for each child, though not necessarily a separate room).
- > providing a warm, nurturing environment with guidance and supervision that responds to the child's individual needs and ethnic/cultural heritage.
- > providing a smoke-free environment to ensure your foster child or youth benefits from the freedom from second-hand smoke. The ministry's smoke-free policy means no smoking by anyone, including caregivers, in the foster home or the foster family vehicle.
- > working cooperatively with the child's family, Aboriginal community, worker, school and other professionals who are developing and carrying out the child's plan of care, and to make sure you inform them about any relevant developments that affect the child.
- > maintaining an Aboriginal child's connection to his/her Aboriginal culture to promote and preserve the child's unique identity as an Aboriginal person.
- > meeting regularly with your resource worker, and informing the worker about any changes in your home. Your worker will need to know if you are planning to move to another home for instance, or if a relative or another person will live with you.
- > ensuring regular contact between the child and the child's family, and cultural community, whenever appropriate. You and the child's team plan and arrange these contacts together.



HOW IS THE CHILD'S FAMILY INVOLVED?

As an important part of the child's planning team, the family is involved in decisions concerning the child's life and care. Where possible, children in care need ongoing contact with their families, extended families and community.

WHY DO CHILDREN COME INTO CARE?

There are many reasons. Some children are in care through voluntary agreements with parents or guardians who are experiencing difficulties.

They may ask for temporary help because of illness, marital problems, or parent/child conflicts. Or they may ask the ministry to provide specialized care for a child who has physical or mental difficulties, or emotional or behavioural problems that are beyond the family's capacity to address.

Others are placed in foster homes while awaiting adoption. And many children are in care because there are no other options available to protect them from abuse and neglect.

HOW LONG WILL A CHILD STAY WITH ME?

The stay will vary with the circumstances. Every effort is made to have children who are in care return to their families as soon as possible or, when this is not possible, to arrange for a more permanent living arrangement.

Sometimes children do not return home and are not adopted, particularly youth. In these cases, you may be asked to continue to foster a youth to independence. That is a significant responsibility and requires a special commitment.



DO I HAVE ANY CHOICE ABOUT WHOM I FOSTER?

Yes. You can specify the age and gender of a child who will ‘fit in’ best with your family. And you are always involved in deciding which child will live in your home.

Children also have a right to have their views respected. The ministry, delegated Aboriginal agencies and caregivers are obligated to respect the right of children to express their views. This includes decisions regarding their placement.

Wherever possible the child or youth’s worker will arrange a pre-placement visit so both you and the child or youth will have the opportunity to get to know each other. Sometimes though, there will be circumstances where that’s not possible.

As an Aboriginal foster parent or a foster parent in the multicultural community you can expect to care for children from your own culture, choose the age of the children you foster and whether to foster boys or girls.

WHAT IF I NEED SUPPORT SERVICES?

Fostering a child can be one of the most rewarding experiences in an individual’s life. It can also be demanding and present many challenges. As a foster parent, you are part of a team and there is support available if you need help.

You may be eligible for the services of a foster parent support worker, child care worker, infant development worker or some other support service, depending on the needs of a child.

In addition to the worker, you may be involved with a number of other professionals that can provide additional support to you.

You, along with your resource worker, the child’s worker and others who are involved with the child will decide upon which services are needed.



British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA)

The BCFFPA is a provincial organization run by foster parents. It supports foster families in their work as caregivers and advocates for quality service for children in care.

The BCFFPA has 45 local associations across British Columbia. They provide education and training, organize social activities for foster families, support them with 'buddy systems' and self-help groups, and work in partnership with ministry staff on provincial programs or projects.

The BCFFPA operates the Fosterline 1-800-663-9999. Information on the foster home program is available there, or on their website at www.bcfosterparents.ca

The Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents (FAFP)

The FAFP is a non-profit organization run by and for Aboriginal foster parents throughout British Columbia.

The FAFP works in partnership with the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations to support Aboriginal foster parents – and non-Aboriginal people caring for Aboriginal children – in ways that respect Aboriginal culture and traditions.

The FAFP has local and regional associations in some areas of the province to further support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster parents caring for Aboriginal children. More information can be found at www.fafp.ca

Foster Parent Support Line

This is a confidential service funded by the ministry and professionally staffed to provide assistance to foster parents after office hours. The line is open Monday to Friday, 4 p.m. to 12:45 a.m., and 8 a.m. to 12:45 a.m. on holidays and weekends. You can call the support line at 1 888 495-4440.



Regional Support Agencies

Each of the ministry's five regions has one or more contracts with regional foster parent support agencies to provide education and other supports to foster parents. Services vary from region to region. Information on what is available regionally can be obtained from your local ministry office, or delegated Aboriginal agency.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE ARE DISAGREEMENTS?

From time to time a foster parent and ministry worker may disagree about the needs of a child. To handle disagreements quickly and fairly each region has developed a protocol or procedure that must be followed.

In some regions, BCFFPA or volunteer foster parent support workers, are available to work with families to help resolve any difficulties that may arise. Delegated Aboriginal agencies also have processes in place to address disagreements.

FOSTERING SIBLING GROUPS

Every effort is made to place siblings in the same foster home. Keeping siblings together provides familiarity and stability. Foster families may be asked to look after two, three, or sometimes even more siblings.

What's different about fostering sibling groups?

When siblings are kept together, their feelings about separation from their parents may not be obvious. As a foster parent, you must be aware that siblings may be more comfortable sharing feelings with each other than with you. As a result it may be more difficult to get to know each child individually, or to assess each child's needs because of their relationship with each other.



Often, children will already have established specific roles and relationships with each other. For example, the oldest child may assume some of the parent role and carry more of the burden of separation than the other children. Younger children may let the older ones do their talking for them. It is important for you to remember that each child has specific needs. Try to get to know each one individually.

FOSTERING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Some foster parents choose to look after children with special needs. These are children who have been professionally assessed with challenging intellectual, physical and emotional difficulties. The degree of time, attention and care they require depends on the individual needs and strengths of the child.

What's different about fostering a child with special needs?

- > Children and youth with extra special needs often require extra help and support (for example, help with hygiene, dressing, and feeding themselves).
- > In addition, more time and energy may be spent with medical and other professionals in providing coordinated and specialized services to meet the child's needs.
- > Progress in the child's knowledge and skill base occurs in small but significant increments.

What does it take to foster a child with special needs?

There are many things to consider. Ask yourself:

- > Do I believe that people with extra special needs should be included in all aspects of family and community life?
- > Is each member of my family willing to share our home with a child with special needs? It is important to talk candidly about how everyone's life will be affected.



- > Do I have the time to be involved intensively with the child, their family, their Aboriginal community and a variety of community specialists?
- > Am I in good enough physical and mental health to cope with the added stress of a child with extra special needs?
- > Can I accept the fact that the child's developmental gains may be very limited?

What support services are available to help me care for a child with special needs?

You will have ongoing support from your resource worker and the child's worker, and you can be referred to community supports such as:

- > Medical practitioners (doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, physiotherapists, speech pathologists)
- > Mental health services (behavioural support, psychiatric assessments), and
- > School district special services (counselling, psychiatric testing, tutoring)

The following ministry-funded services may be available in your community:

- > Homemakers
- > Relief care
- > Child and youth care workers
- > Supported (special needs) child care, and
- > Infant development consultants

For more information on support services please contact the Ministry of Children and Family Development in your community or visit: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs

You may also contact the delegated Aboriginal agency in your area. A list of agencies can be found at: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated

The Infant Development Program provides services for children up to three years old whose development is delayed by a mental or physical disability. A consultant can help you plan activities that encourage the child to develop physical, social, and intellectual skills.



FOSTERING YOUTH

Adolescence can be a difficult time and fostering youth presents its own special challenges.

There are different reasons why youth come into care. In some cases, the parents have problems that make it impossible for them provide care. Other times, youth – for any number of reasons – may be at risk. Youth who come into care may have behavioural, emotional, drug/alcohol problems or possibly have had trouble with the law.

With the help of foster parents, youth may return to their own families, communities, or gain the skills to live independently.

What's different about fostering youth?

- > Foster parents need to be flexible and patient in explaining their values and views of the world.
- > Youth need an 'anchor' and an appropriate amount of independence as they develop their unique identities, and life and decision making skills.
- > Youth have had time to establish their own way of doing things. Foster parents need to recognize this and be willing to allow for a give-and-take relationship.
- > Youth may want adult support and guidance in making decisions, problem-solving, and building self-confidence and positive relationships.
- > Youth may need help in talking about and understanding things or feelings they find complicated or confusing.
- > Some youth find relationships with their families improve after they are separated. Others are upset by the separation and may need help in communicating and getting along with their parents and siblings.
- > Youth must be involved in developing their plan of care. You may need to help them do that and to understand the process.



What support services are available?

You will have ongoing support from your resource worker and the youth's worker. They may suggest local parent support services or workshops put on by your local foster parent association or local foster parent support agency.

Your community may provide the following services for youth in care:

- > Peer, alcohol and drug counselling
- > Psychological and mental health services
- > Family mediation services
- > School district special services such as counselling, psychiatric testing and tutoring, and/or
- > Employment training

FOSTERING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

When Aboriginal children have to be away from their families, it's important for them to live with an Aboriginal foster family – ideally, a family from the same nation as the child. It helps them stay in touch with their culture and feel more at home.

We know from experience that children who grow up connected to their culture do better as adults.

If an Aboriginal child is placed in a non-Aboriginal foster home, foster parents will need to maintain the child's connection to his or her Aboriginal culture. This will help promote and preserve the child's unique identity as an Aboriginal person.

Who can become an Aboriginal foster parent?

Any Aboriginal person, 19 or older, who wants to share their home and life with a child in need can apply to be an Aboriginal foster parent. You don't have to be married, be a parent, or own your own home, and your financial situation need not be a barrier.



Why is it so important to have Aboriginal foster families?

Living with an Aboriginal family will help children get help they need learning about their history and practice their culture. That's why the ministry's goal is to place Aboriginal children with Aboriginal foster families. For more information on fostering an Aboriginal child, contact your local Ministry of Children and Family Development or delegated Aboriginal child and family services office, or visit the following websites.

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/regions/regional_offices.htm

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated

FOSTERING IN THE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

Children who grow up connected to their culture do better as adults. The ministry is committed to supporting the cultural heritage and values of children and maintaining links to their cultural community. Children find it easier if their foster family shares their culture. Even little things like listening to the same music or playing the same traditional games help children feel at home.

Why is it so important to have foster families from diverse cultures?

We know from experience that children do best with foster families from their own culture, just as they do best with families in their own communities. Children placed in homes with the same or similar culture will be able to communicate better, learn about their history and practise their culture and religion. The ministry's goal is to place children within their own cultural community.

COULD I EVER ADOPT A CHILD PLACED IN MY HOME?

If adoption becomes the plan for the child, you will be advised and consulted. If you are interested in adopting a child placed in your home, you may be considered along with other homes approved by the ministry. The strength of your relationship with the child is one of many factors that would be considered. The placement decision is based upon the needs of the child, including his/her ethnic/cultural heritage.



WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Ministry of Children and Family Development
www.gov.bc.ca/mcf

A Ministry for Children and Family Development office
See the blue pages in the local telephone directory; or call
Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867

British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA)
Fosterline: 1 800 663-9999
www.bcfosterparents.ca

The Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents
3455 Kaslo Street, Vancouver, B.C. V3M 3H4
Ph: 604 291-7091
www.fafp.ca

Foster Parent Support Line
Monday to Friday, 4 p.m. to 12:45 a.m.
Holidays and weekends 8 a.m. to 12:45 a.m.
Ph: 1 888 495-4440.

Regional Support Agencies
see the local/regional telephone directory, ask the local ministry office,
or visit www.fosterbc.ca

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