

Foster Care in Georgia

Foster care is a state program that provides temporary substitute for children whose families cannot provide a safe and nurturing environment for them. It is one of the many programs administered by the Georgia Department of Human Resources' Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

Children in Foster Care

Children come into the custody of DFCS for many reason. However, only a parent, guardian, or juvenile court has the authority to place a child in DFCS custody. Children in custody are placed either in family foster care, child-caring institutions or hospitals, group homes, placed with relatives or in the non-abusing parents' home until the court decides legal custody, foster care with relatives, or placed in adoptive homes.

Help is available in intensive, intermediate, or therapeutic settings for children who need treatment for serious emotional problems.

Some children stay in foster care throughout their teen years, The Independent Living program, is a transition program that prepares teens ages 16-21 for independence and adulthood. Services include financial assistance for college and technical school, help in finding a job, and life skills such as housekeeping and budgeting.

DFCS case managers with foster care program:

- Work with birth families on meeting goals outlined in case plans for reunification;
- Select and place children in suitable homes or other placement options;
- Support foster parents in their role as agency partners in providing care for children;

- Work with other community agencies to meet the ongoing needs of children;
- Keep the court informed about the status of cases.

Foster Parents

Foster parents are recruited primarily by county DFCS staff. They look for foster parents who are in good physical and mental health, with homes that meet the minimum standards set forth and approved by the Department of Human Resources.

Foster parents provide only temporary care for children, but if a foster child becomes available for adoption, foster parents often adopt the child. Infact, foster parents account for more than 80 % of DFCS adoptions.

Prospective foster parents must complete 30 hours of pre-service training (GPS/MAPP). Physical exams, drug screens, and criminal record checks are required. Homes also must meet other safety requirements. Foster parents complete 15 hours of parent development training and re-evaluation every year.

The number of children placed in a home varies from one to six (including the parents' own children), and is predetermined by the parent and the DFCS agency. Foster parents are reimbursed for a child's care at a rate of \$12.00 per day, but the rate is higher for children needing medical care or higher level of supervision. Medical treatment and clothing are covered by the agency.

A toll-free foster parent support and intake line (1-888-310-8260) is available for foster parents and others wanting information about Georgia's foster care program.

Directions in the foster care program

- The First Placement, Best Placement initiative has seven statewide demonstration sites where counties

work with a team of professional to better identify the strengths and the needs of the families and children. DFCS can then place children in the setting that best meets their particular needs, decreasing the number of times children change placements.

- Family conference brings relatives, friends, foster parents and professional together to help the family develop and provide a protection and care plan for their children. This gives families more say in their children's care.
- Most of the children in foster care are reunited with their families. But for some children, reunification may not be the best option. New legislation makes it possible for children who are unlikely to return to their birth family to be placed in a permanent home more quickly. Now, a permanency plan must be submitted within 12 months after a child come into care. Options may include reunification, placement with other relatives or guardian, adoption or another permanent living alternative. Currently, children remain in the foster care for an average of one year and seven months.