
children in need Need for more foster parents on the rise

Posted by wexwimpy - 2008/05/10 20:07

Need for more foster parents on the rise Number of Vigo County children in need of services more than triples since 2000 By Sue Loughlin/Tribune-Star March 19, 2004 Vigo County resident Rae Haraway and her husband have been foster parents to 72 children over the past 10 years. They've adopted two of those children and are in the process of adopting a third. They are trained and licensed to take care of children who have been legally removed from their homes for reasons that often include abusive or otherwise dangerous family situations. The community's methamphetamine problem has created a dramatic surge in the need for foster care placement for young children whose adult caregivers are addicted or in jail. The Haraways have seven children in their home, including one who is adopted. They work with the Vigo County Office of Family and Children to provide a temporary home for the foster children. We do this because these children are our future, Haraway said. They need to know there is an alternative to living on the streets or being victimized by abuse, she said. The Haraways are among 35 foster parents in Vigo County, but there is a dire need for more, says Suzy Cole, a county child welfare supervisor. We desperately need foster parents. We have had so many children come in over the last three to four years due to the meth problem, Cole said Thursday. Our homes are filled and we need some new foster parents. The number of new CHINS (Child in Need of Services) petitions in Vigo County has more than tripled since 2000, when the number was 52. By 2003, the number was 165. A CHINS petition means that a court must remove children from their own homes because of abuse or neglect. Children removed from homes because of meth must receive foster care for longer periods, Cole said. It is very, very difficult to get them back into their biological homes because parents may be addicted or in jail, she said. Currently, 127 children receive foster care, but Vigo County has had to turn to four other counties to meet the need, she said. The need for more foster parents exists statewide, and a campaign to recruit them is under way. On Thursday, representatives of Vigo and Owen Offices of Family and Children as well as the Indiana Foster Care and Adoption Association talked about the campaign, called Foster Parenting: Good Work! Those who want to become foster parents must be screened, trained and licensed, and length of training generally takes one to three months. A criminal background check is required. The state provides the training, which is free and done locally, Cole said. Foster parents also receive a per diem to pay for a child's expenses. About 70 percent of children placed in foster care eventually go back to their own homes or to a relative's home, she said. It's a very difficult job, but just like parenting, it's one of the most rewarding jobs a person can do, said Pam Connelly, director of the Owen County Office of Family and Children. Cole noted that children from meth homes tend to be very young, typically ranging from newborns to age 6. In the past, children needing foster-parent care have tended to be a little older, she said. Chris Morrison, IFCAA executive director, said the goal is to recruit new foster parents continually to meet the needs of children from varied backgrounds. Foster parents can serve many valuable roles in addition to providing a temporary home for children in need, she said. They can serve as mentors, especially for teens and pre-teens, and they can provide respite care for other foster parents. They also can serve as educational surrogate parents, in which they advocate for education-related services for special-needs children; foster parents must receive additional training for this role. Reba Luken knows firsthand how meaningful it can be to become a foster parent. She served in that role for about seven years and worked with 11 children; she adopted four children. Now, she works for Friends of Families, a foster parent support organization. It's very satisfying, to impact the life of a child, Luken said. They learn something from being in your household. She tries to show them things can be gained through good, honest, hard work and being a part of a family. The main requirement, she said, is a love of children <http://www.tribstar.com/articles/2004/03/19/news/news02.txt> Defend your civil liberties! Get information at <http://www.aclu.org>, become a member at <http://www.aclu.org/join> and get active at <http://www.aclu.org/action>.

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