

Fostering Futures NY

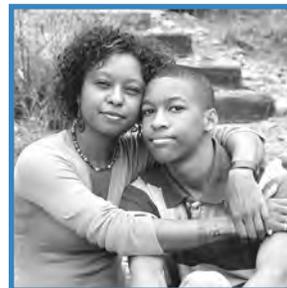
Supporting foster families in building better futures for children and youth

The challenge of foster parenting

Foster parenting is a difficult job. Many of the children and youth who are placed with foster families have experienced high levels of trauma in their young lives, often due to abuse and neglect. Many have developmental problems and some are medically fragile. Even strong, experienced foster parents say that sometimes it's more than they can handle on their own.

While foster care is intended to be temporary, in reality there is a cohort of foster children and youth for whom permanent homes are difficult to find. Those who have been in and out of a succession of foster homes lack the stability, normal developmental experiences, and caring connections they would have in a stable family setting.

Fostering Futures NY provides needed support for foster families and vital community connections for children and youth in foster care.



The power of an “extended family”

Fostering Futures NY (FFNY) recruits and trains small teams of **volunteers from the community** that offer natural and practical supports to foster families. Serving as an “extended family” for foster parents and children, the teams provide stability, enriching experiences, and vital community connections. Team members pitch in when foster parents ask for help, affirming the value of what foster parents do and encouraging them to keep on doing it.

Foster families are referred to the program by local Departments of Social Services or private agencies. In general, these foster families:

- have at least one year of experience as licensed caregivers
- are strong functioning
- have developed some specialization (sibling groups, teens, or children with behavioral/social/attachment issues or physical/developmental challenges)
- are open to accepting help from faith-based organizations

Team volunteers are evaluated, trained, and coached by the FFNY **Program Director**, an experienced child welfare professional. All volunteers undergo state and federal criminal background checks, including clearance by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and the Statewide Central Registry. They receive training in the basics of the child welfare system, confidentiality, and reporting abuse or maltreatment. They do **not**:

- serve in the capacity of social workers or therapists
- proselytize or promote religious beliefs
- attend Service Plan Review meetings, court, etc.
- formally monitor the foster home

The Program Director also works with agencies to determine which families will receive teams, educates foster families about the program, assesses their needs, and facilitates monthly meetings between the foster parents and volunteers. The director plays a key role in advising, monitoring, and troubleshooting to support trust building between team members and families.

The team acknowledges that foster parents are the experts in caring for the children in their home and take the lead from them in lending the assistance that foster parents need, such as:

- Emotional support
- Minor household maintenance and repairs
- Meal preparation
- Childcare, allowing a night out
- Transportation to appointments
- Homework help or tutoring for children
- Helping youth develop life skills such as budgeting, job hunting, cooking, etc.

The types of assistance are different for each family, based on the needs expressed by the foster parents.

Improved outcomes for foster families

Fostering Futures NY is designed to support foster parents and promote better outcomes for children and teens, such as:

- Lower stress levels for foster parents and families
- Reduced burnout and increased retention of high-quality foster parents
- Placement stability for children and youth
- New connections between foster families and resources in the community
- Increased contact with supportive individuals and groups
- Youth having access to knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to be successful in life
- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships between children in care and team members



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Growing in New York State

Fostering Futures NY is a program of Welfare Research, Inc. (WRI), a nonprofit agency and an experienced provider of technical assistance to human services agencies.

FFNY began as a pilot program in the Capital Region in July 2014 with support from the **Innovations in Foster Parent Recruitment** initiative of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. The initiative is funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau.

Over the past year, FFNY has developed key relationships with local Departments of Social Services, voluntary foster care agencies, and the community in the Capital Region. Volunteer teams have been formed and are being matched with local foster families referred by agencies.

During its startup period, FFNY was supported through grant funds. With the end of public funding, FFNY will seek support from private sources to sustain and expand this innovative program.

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