

## **Foster Parents Are The Unsung Heroes Of Kids**

There are nearly half a million children and youths in foster care in the United States. There are nearly 1,000 children and youths in foster care in Wichita.

These children typically enter foster care through no fault of their own and are reliant upon other adults in our community to help care for them. Most often, those adults are foster parents.

Foster parents come from many different backgrounds and walks of life. They are single, divorced, widowed or married. They come from all ethnic backgrounds. They may be 21 years of age, 71 years of age or anywhere in between. It takes many different individuals in our community to meet the need for foster children.

We have more than 300 foster families in Sedgwick County. These are individuals who have heard a calling that many of us can't even imagine. However, if it weren't for these selfless individuals, the many foster children needing loving homes likely would be living in residential facilities and other institutions.

We know that children thrive best in home settings. And when children cannot be with their own parents, and another relative is not an option, the next best choice is a foster home.

We see many children flourish in foster homes. We have seen foster parents go the extra mile to assure the difference between success and failure for a foster child. We have seen foster parents who have served hundreds of children and have been foster

parents for many, many years. They may have one child in their home, or they may have a large sibling group.

Though our hope for all children in foster care is that they return home to their own parents, we know that doesn't always happen and some children will be adopted. Many times, foster parents adopt children they already have been taking care of during their time in foster care.

Though the child welfare system certainly is not perfect, I do know that foster parents are certainly one of the most essential components to this complicated and difficult system.

May is National Foster Care Month, and I cannot fully express the appreciation and gratitude that are felt for the many foster parents in our community, our state and our nation. They truly are unsung heroes to many of the most vulnerable children in our society.

Yet there always is need for more foster parents. We have specific needs for foster homes for children with special needs (such as developmental disability or mental health issues), teenagers and sibling groups. If you or someone you know has a desire to provide a caring, nurturing, safe home to a child in need and is interested in learning more about fostering, I encourage you to make contact with a child-placing agency or attend one of the informational meetings at Youthville, offered every Thursday evening. It might change your life in ways you never could imagine and truly make a difference in the life of a child.

Written By: Shelley Duncan

Does heroism require extreme acts of courage or bravery?  
Why or why not?

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Give an example of someone you know who is an unsung hero. Explain why you consider him/her to be a hero.

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Brainstorm some ways that you can make this hero feel appreciated: