



Fostering Together: Supporting Our Community's Children

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With nearly 10,000 children in Washington's foster care system, our state has a vital need for foster parents who are able to provide loving, supportive homes. Foster care is the temporary placement of children in a home outside their own where they are cared for until they can be reunited with their biological family. Fostering Together, a nonprofit program, is dedicated to ensuring that foster children in Western Washington have access to safe, nurturing homes.

In order to do so, Fostering Together provides support to foster families through every step of the process. Liaisons walk parents through licensing and provide ongoing support, connect families to resources, answer questions, and in doing so, empower foster families. Fostering Together strives to show the community that anyone can be a foster parent. There are many false misconceptions that someone needs to be married, straight or own a home in order to become a foster parent.



“We’re helping people realize that no one is looking for the ultimate, perfect person to be a foster parent. All it takes is a person who loves kids and family,” says Ashley Wambach, the Fostering Together liaison for Thurston and Lewis counties.

Ashley tells me that for anyone considering becoming a foster parent, the best first step is to attend a support group meeting for foster families to meet people involved with fostering. If an individual or family decides to pursue fostering, Fostering Together walks them through the steps to become licensed.

Potential foster parents in Washington have two options to get licensed: going directly through the state or utilizing a private agency. Private agencies are often able to provide more guidance in the licensing process, and offer resources such as support groups and additional training. After licensing, foster parents formally apply, undergoing a background check, a home visit and an interview.

Once licensed and approved, foster parents are able to start accepting foster children. At this stage, families are still able to access no-cost support from Fostering Together as needs arise. Fostering Together provides resources such as support groups, dispute resolution, and the FIRST program, as well as connecting foster families to external resources.

Ashley tells me that in foster care, the objective is always to return a child home to their parents when possible. Permanency is an overall goal, while the children are in foster care, the state is doing work with the parents to help them become healthy enough to reunite the family. Children in the foster care system often have visits with their parents and other family members.



Ashley presents at a recent Compelled to Care event. Photo courtesy: Ashley Wambach

There are many different types of foster care. Homes can choose to take in children of specific age groups or with particular needs. In instances where siblings enter the foster care system, keeping sibling groups together is always prioritized, creating a need for foster parents with the capacity to care for multiple children. All foster families have the ability to choose which kinds of foster care they feel most called and able to provide. "I think it's really important to know your own boundaries, to know what you're capable of," says Ashley.

Not only is Ashley our local liaison, but she also is a foster parent herself. Ashley and her husband are currently raising four children. "My husband and I, we felt this call to do something bigger than ourselves," she tells me. "We were in the little kid phase of life, we had a two-year-old and a baby, and we wanted to give back. We are a Christian family, and we didn't want to just be the Christians who go to church on Sundays. We wanted to live that out all week long." After seeing other people getting involved in foster care, they began considering it as an option. "I think exposure makes it look less taboo and scary," Ashley says.

At the time, Ashley and her husband were living in Puyallup, and were involved with Evergreen Christian Community in Olympia. When they became interested in foster care, they discovered that the church had a program that provided support for foster families, called Compelled to Care. Once a month, their family would drive to Olympia to sit with the foster parents who attended Compelled to Care events at the church, bringing donations and talking with families in order to witness first-hand experiences. "We felt we had a responsibility, a calling in life, to actually foster," says Ashley.

Upon making this decision and beginning the process of licensing, Ashley's family decided to buy a home in Olympia. This move brought them to be closer to Evergreen Christian Community, and also gave them the capacity to accommodate more children. After relocating, their family quickly became involved in the local foster community. Ashley began volunteering with Compelled to Care, throwing baby showers for new foster parents and organizing donation drives. As Compelled to Care grew, Ashley was asked to join the staff. Because she was already passionately involved with connecting people to foster care, becoming a liaison for Fostering Together was a logical next step.



Events for foster families help create community among people who are involved in foster care, and show them that they have support. Photo courtesy: Ashley Wambach

Ashley tells me that one of the most important ideas behind her work is that Fostering Together can help the community serve the foster community. People who aren't in a position to foster children are still able to support the foster community in an abundance of ways. "The biggest thing for foster parents is to know that they're seen and heard. Support can be as simple as a thank you card, something encouraging," says Ashley.

If you're in Thurston or Lewis counties and are interested in becoming involved with fostering in any capacity, or simply want to learn more about fostering, contact Ashley Wambach of Fostering Together at 425-426-1612 or at ashley-wambach@olivecrest.org