

check and a home study. Foster parents receive a government stipend to cover basic costs of care. Medical care costs for the foster child are covered.

Once a foster child arrives at your home, the real training begins and it's generally anything but straightforward and predictable. Children may arrive with only the clothes on their backs and a few personal belongings. They are scared in this unfamiliar place. Many come with a history of trauma and abuse.

Knowledge of the child's background may be equally scarce. "A child walks through the door as a puzzle, often without the puzzle pieces. You (as the foster parent) need to find the pieces and make sense of it," Ellen explains.

The presence of a foster parent's own children can help ease the transition for the newcomer. Every member of the family plays a role in welcoming the newest addition, whether through sharing toys or following the same routine (yes, we all brush our teeth before bed or we all eat oatmeal for breakfast).

However, prepare for some jealousy as well. Marilyn Colcord and her husband Mark in Pendleton have seen their share since starting their foster parent journey about

15 years ago. "Any time you bring someone into your home, it will have an impact," says Marilyn. "It's a threat to your other children automatically, even if they want it."

The pros have a way of balancing out the cons. Foster parents watch their children reach outside of their comfort zone to help someone else, learn empathy, and broaden their view of the world and their local community.

Ongoing training and talking to other foster parents help foster families learn and grow. Marilyn adds, "Recognize that not every child will be a good fit for your home. Be able to communicate the reasons with your caseworker (attitudes, behaviors, emotional issues) on why the situation is not the right fit for you."

The certification classes make one thing clear: you are not signing up to foster as a road to adoption. Don't get the idea that you are going to keep a child. It helps to develop a revolving door mentality, Ellen explains. "Kids come and go as they need to."

As a foster parent, you can advocate for the child and be the child's



often see the child missing her real parents, especially in the case of older children.

Fostering is not without heartache. Marilyn remembers her grief when a six-month-old she had cared for since birth left her home. A piece of her heart still belongs to this child. Marilyn and her family have created lasting bonds in some of her fostering situations. Long after the children leave her

home, they still remain part of the family, as evidenced by visits over the years and the handmade ornaments that adorn her Christmas tree.

voice. You can help make sure they do not fall through the cracks. But, ultimately, the end decision of their placement is out of your hands. Ellen speaks of the importance of recognizing that the system is not perfect. Learn to accept outcomes that you don't want. In her family's three years of foster parenting, Ellen has welcomed and said goodbye to eleven children. Her view speaks volumes: "I am doing this for the day-to-day, in-and-out care of the child, not the long term."

A child's gift of trust is the biggest reward for foster parenting. You have a front row seat to an amazing display of growth and resilience. Despite all that these children have been through, they have "an amazing tenacity to just overcome, to keep living, to keep having fun," Ellen reflects.

Ellen notes that once you get to know the intricate details and stories of your foster child's family, you find yourself rooting for the family and hoping they can make it work to be together again. Foster parents

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Want to learn more?

You can get more information online about becoming a foster parent at www.oregon.gov/DHS/Children/Fostercare or by calling:

- Child Welfare of Hermiston, 541-567-2253
- Child Welfare of Pendleton, 541-276-9349

613 N. Main St., Milton Freewater, OR • 541-938-5162
www.saagershoeshop.com
 Mon-Sat 8am-6pm, Sun 12 pm-4pm