

Caritas Warns Of Critical Need For Foster Parents During Foster Care Awareness Month

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BELLVILLE - As part of Foster Care Awareness Month in May, Caritas Family Solutions is spreading awareness around the need for more people to consider becoming foster parents. As the second-largest provider of foster care services in the state, Caritas serves more than 1,700 foster children on a monthly basis.

“The need for foster parents is a national crisis,” said Caritas Family Solutions CEO Gary Huelsmann. “The pandemic has caused an increase in mental health issues, drug

issues, opioids in particular, and other stresses on families. This has only exacerbated the need for organizations like ours. Our goal is to help strengthen and reunify families and to find children safe homes when that's not possible."

Caritas Family Solutions provides training and licensing for people wanting to become foster parents and supports them throughout that process. The agency also recently implemented a foster parent mentor program to offer people practical advice from other foster parents. Resources such as family counseling as well as access to a Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) training program are also available to help foster parents understand how to respond to the needs of children dealing with trauma.

"It's important for people to understand that right now, we are seeing children spend unnecessary time stuck in hospital psychiatric wards or emergency shelters, simply because they don't have a foster home to go to," said Caritas Associate Director of Child Welfare Mark Becker. "Being a foster parent can seem intimidating, especially knowing that child may not be with you long. However, it's an opportunity to build a positive difference or memory in that child's life that they will carry with them forever and they'll remember you."

Becker said they are especially in need of people willing to open their homes to multiple foster children together, so that siblings don't have to be separated. They also have a special need for foster parents willing to foster older children and serve as a mentor. For more information about how to become a foster parent or to learn more about Caritas employment opportunities, go to www.caritasfamilysolutions.org.

Founded in 1947, Caritas Family Solutions is a nonprofit social service agency whose mission is to strengthen the social and emotional well-being of individuals and families in order to create healthy relationships, loving homes, and strong communities. Services include adoption, pregnancy care for women who are homeless, foster care, counseling, residential treatment for children healing from abuse and/or neglect, independent living for adults with developmental disabilities (CILA), and assisted living and employment assistance for low-income seniors. Caritas serves more than 5,000 individuals annually across Southern Illinois from offices located in Belleville, Carterville, Mount Vernon, Olney, Glen Carbon, and Effingham. For additional information, visit www.caritasfamilysolutions.org.