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Foster parenting offers flexibility for families interested in helping children and youth in need

Gov. Burgum proclaims May as Children's Foster Care Month

BISMARCK, N.D. – Opening a person's heart and home as a licensed foster parent does not always require providing 24-hour care and supervision on a daily basis. Short-term alternative options are available that offer foster families flexibility and the ability to still provide a safe, nurturing, and loving home for children and youth in need.

"Many people may be hesitant about becoming a foster parent because they think foster parenting is a full-time commitment in addition to their already busy schedules," said Dean Sturn, foster care administrator for the North Dakota Department of Human Services. "In reality, people can work with their licensing agency to determine how often they can provide care and they may specify the age group that best matches their household's strengths."

One short-term care option available to foster parents is providing emergency or shelter care on an on-call basis as their schedule allows. Another option is to only help care for current foster children whose primary foster parents may be taking a vacation or traveling for work.

Sturn said all foster parents are required to be licensed, including those who provide emergency, shelter and temporary short-term care.

The licensing process includes completing a FBI fingerprint-based background check and pre-service foster parent training offered at various locations statewide. After becoming a licensed foster parent, there is ongoing training, financial and medical support to meet the needs of each child in care, and access to a lending library of books, videos and other resources on foster care topics. In addition, foster parents may have local options to attend meetings and groups for mentoring as added support.

Both long-term and short-term foster parents need to meet licensing requirements. They must be at least 21 years old, be financially stable, have an approved background check, own or rent a home or rent an apartment, have adequate space for a child and successfully complete the licensing process.

Sturn said there are about 750 licensed family foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, and approved tribal foster homes that care for about 1,500 children and youth in foster care.

Individuals interested in becoming either a long-term or short-term licensed foster care provider to children and youth in their home should contact their local county social services office or a PATH office. More information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/fostercare/.

The Children's Foster Care Month proclamation can be viewed online at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/>.