

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Relative caregivers provide stability for children and maintain family connections

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

BISMARCK, N.D. – There are times when parents are not able to care for their children, and when this happens, child welfare professionals turn first to close relatives who can step in to provide a stable home. These relative caregivers play an important role in supporting the well-being of children and help prevent children from having to enter or re-enter the foster care system.

“Children tend to do best when they live with people they know and trust,” said Dean Sturn, foster care administrator with the North Dakota Department of Human Services. “These children want normalcy and familiarity. Relatives offer that comfort and provide a connection to family.”

Relative caregivers, also known as kinship caregivers, can be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other close family members. Foster children can be placed in an unlicensed or licensed relative foster home.

“Foster care case managers work really hard to recruit family members and encourage relative placement first,” Sturn said. “It is so important for children to remain in the most home-like and least restrictive setting. Relative caregivers also are partners when it comes to case planning to meet the needs of children and supporting reunification, if that is a possibility.”

If foster care is necessary, a relative caregiver can choose to become a licensed foster parent and receive training and other support to help provide for a child. Some relative caregivers may also qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Kinship Care services, which help financially support children who are deprived of parental care.

Sometimes relatives are unavailable. So, there is an ongoing need for well-trained licensed foster families who are available to open their hearts and homes to care for children. There are over 950 licensed foster homes in North Dakota that care for about 1,600 children and youth in foster care.

According to department records, about 70 children qualified for TANF Kinship Care financial support last month. About 230 children live with unlicensed relative caregivers while additional foster children are placed in licensed relative foster homes.

Individuals interested in becoming a licensed foster care provider should visit www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/fostercare/ and complete the short online form. A department representative will follow up to answer any questions about how to become a foster care provider.

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

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