

## **What Is Foster Care?**

Foster care is a protective service offered to families who can no longer safely remain together. It provides temporary, alternative care for children in an agency-certified home for a planned period of time while the LCCS staff helps the birth family work out its problems. Sometimes this takes a few days, sometimes months. The goal is safe reunification of children with their birth families.

When a child cannot live safely at home, LCCS first looks to a relative to provide care. If an appropriate relative is not available, the child is placed into foster care.

The pain of separation can be great. Foster parents help children bear that pain. They also become advocates for the child – at school, with physicians, and with the child’s caseworker. Most importantly, foster parents provide care in a loving, healthy, family setting.

Children belong in families, and thus our goal is that every child remains in a family environment. Most children are placed into a FAMILY (basic) foster home; however, some children have more serious needs that require specialized care. These children live in a TREATMENT foster home. Teenagers who will become of legal age while in the care of LCCS live in GIFT (Gaining Independence For Teens) foster homes. EMERGENCY foster homes are used when a child must be placed after hours. These foster parents provide initial care until the agency can identify a long-term placement.

Only 3-4 percent of the children on the LCCS caseload are in a non-family setting. These children have extreme needs and live in group homes or institutions.