

Orillia foster parents share why they open their home as local need rises



[Gisele Winton Sarvis](#)

about 19 hours ago



Louise and Keith, of Orillia, have been providing foster care for 17 years and say it's extremely rewarding work. | Gisele Winton Sarvis/OrilliaMatters

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Foster parents are needed more than ever to support children in the child welfare system until they can return to their families or be adopted.

"We have no capacity to say 'No' if there is a child in need. We have no capacity to turn people away," said Erin Young, service manager for foster and outside paid resource placements for Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions, (both formerly the Children's Aid Society).

"The need for foster homes across the Orillia and Barrie areas is widespread."

But while the number of children coming into protective services continues to climb, the number of families offering foster care has declined in recent years.

"We have seen a steep decline province wide in the number of families who are approaching Children's Aid Societies to become foster parents," said Young. "A few years ago we would have had between 70 to 80 foster homes. Right now we have in the low 50s."

Young said it's partially due to the child welfare system having "a bit of an image problem." Due to privacy being central to their work, they cannot promote themselves in the way that a charity in need of funding can do.

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Louise and Keith, of Orillia, have been providing foster care for babies in their home for the past 17 years and say it's exceptionally rewarding work. In order to protect the children's privacy, *OrilliaMatters* is only using their first names, as is policy with Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions.

"Children in the welfare system are forgotten children in our communities," said Louise.

Because their identities must be protected, they are not in the news or on social media and typically have no one to advocate for them, Louise said.

"So you never hear about the child welfare system and what's it's like to be a child in the child welfare system."

In addition, while the child welfare system is provincially funded, "it's chronically underfunded," said Keith.

Foster parents are paid \$85 a day for a child in their care and that does cover their expenses, said Louise, who is caring for her 16th foster child currently.

"But you don't do foster care for the money," said Louise.

"It's a way to get huge fulfillment in your life and to provide a child with loving care that we need and we all deserve. The rewards of seeing a child you care for smile and having fun is payment in itself."

Louise who grew up as a biological child in a family that fostered children learned compassion for others and was drawn to carry that on. Keith, who is a developmental service worker, has always supported her work.

"When we had our four children, we felt a strong calling that it was our time to dive in. We are Christians and when we thought we would do this work, we prayed.

Words from the *Holy Bible's Book of Matthew* convinced them: "*For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me.*"

"That's foster care," said Louise.

"People always tell me they could never let a strange child into their home," she said. "If you just knew the rewards and the blessings that come with. There is a lot of rewards that come with caring and loving another person. You are missing all that by closing a door without even trying."

People always tell them they couldn't foster because it would be too difficult to let the children or youth go.

"You know in our heart that that they are just yours for a season and you remind yourself of that," she said.

Also, during the time of fostering, there is visitation with the biological family or the adoptive family and when it comes time for the child to move on, there is a two to three week transition period for everyone to get to know one another.

"In all that time as well, you are getting to know these people and their story. So many people who have adopted from us have had fertility issues and it's been years and years of heart ache for them

and their dream is finally coming true in front of your eyes and it is a beautiful, beautiful thing to watch. That makes a child going easier," she said.

Louise is also always asked about advice for someone considering fostering.

Louise recommends that foster families choose children who are younger or older than their own children. She also recommends foster families take a break in between children.

"You need time to mourn the loss of that child you've just taken care of, rest and transition back to excitement. I don't think we would have lasted 17 years, if we didn't take a month in between," she said.

Keith added that foster parents are part of a team with multiple social workers who support them.

"Sometimes the child welfare system gets a bad rap but in our 17 years, the social workers we have worked with have been wonderful people who tried their hardest to do a hard job and want what's best for the children," Louise said.

Young said they recruit families of all ethnicities, cultures and family styles and people don't need a health care background to foster.

"Just a desire to learn and work with a resource worker and the desire to care for children," Young said.

The child welfare system has changed in the last few years.

"We really focus on foster care's short-term emergency based care," she said and "Our numbers of repatriating children into their family systems and kinship is higher and ever growing."

By law, they are mandated to provide a permanent place for each child within a two-year time frame, either with their parent, legal guardian, within their family system or adoption.

Anyone interested in learning more about fostering can go on the [Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions](#) website. There is an online application that can be completed that will be sent to the recruitment resource worker.

The assessment and training process takes about nine months to a year to become an open foster home. Then people can determine what age of child or youth they would like to take into their home.

Some of the children are developmentally delayed but most of them are children with a complexity of needs. Autism is common and children's mental health diagnoses such as anxiety and

depression and childhood trauma, said Young.

Some foster parents do weekends only to give parents of children with complex needs a rest.

"So we want as many people compelled to do this work with us as we can find," Young said.

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S

[Sussan](#)

Verified 26 minutes ago

It makes no sense to me why they can't promote/advertised for new foster homes because they deal with minors. They just in fact did that with this story. Their individual stories can even be told anonymously and from past situations not necessarily a current situation. I'm grateful to the current families who help.

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