

Lack of foster homes in county means kids placed elsewhere Parents needed

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 02 June 2011 19:32 -



to care for victims of abuse, neglect.

The placement of a young client into a foster home outside of Dawson County surprised local attorney Lisa Jorgenson.

Jorgenson, who works for Bacon & Vinton law firm, called Dee Walton of Lexington to see how to let people know about the shortage of foster homes in Dawson County.

Walton works with foster children through the Department of Health & Human Services.

As a result, the resource developer in the division of Children & Family Services hosted a community forum May 25 in Gothenburg.

“We’re really hurting for homes in Dawson County,” Walton told the seven people gathered, “which is bad for the kids because they are then taken out of their school and communities.



“School is usually the only stable thing in their lives.”

As of May 13, Walton said Dawson and Gosper counties had 41 children in foster care.

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Ten were in the eight licensed homes in the two-county area and eight in the homes of relatives.

Nine were in homes of people known to the child.

“So where are the rest of the children?” she asked. “Outside of Dawson and Gosper counties.”

When Walton started working for DHHS 25 years ago, there were 25 licensed foster care homes in Dawson and Gosper counties.

That number has dwindled to eight today partially, she said, because 80% to 95% of the children placed in foster care are adopted and the foster parents no longer accept foster kids.

Statewide there’s also a shortage of homes, she noted.

Foster care, Walton said, is all about children.

“They come into foster care because they aren’t safe at home,” she said. “They are being abused or neglected or in the legal juvenile system.”

Walton said parental use of alcohol and illicit drugs is the main reason children end up in foster care.

Children in foster care are victims and often develop behavioral problems because of skills they develop to survive.

“They may lie, steal, kick or hoard food because this is what they have had to do to survive,”

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she said.

Law enforcement officials are the only ones who can remove children from homes, Walton said.

They then call DHHS and once children are in custody, DHHS officials find a safe home with foster parents who “raise them like their own.”

The goal of DHHS, Walton said, is for eventual reunification with the child’s biological family.

Children placed in foster care can be adopted, placed under guardianship with the foster family or might be eligible for independent living if they are 16-19 years of age.

Foster parents must undergo 27 hours of training and an approval process which entails such things as background and reference checks, fingerprint identification and home inspections.

However Walton said some placements are of an emergency nature where the child stays overnight or for a couple of days until a licensed home can be located.

Foster parents currently receive a minimum of \$236 per month per child to buy food, clothing and other things.

Medical and dental care costs are covered by Medicaid.

Respite care is also available through a person who has been screened by DHHS officials which allows for breaks for foster parents.

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If a child is in foster care 15 out of 22 months, Walton said there must be a court hearing to see why the child has not returned home or isn't in a permanent living situation.

For more information about foster care, contact Walton at 800-778-1613, ext. 622 or

dee.walton@nebraskagov. or Ganitch at 1-877-257-0176 or sueganitch@gmail.com

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636