

Have you thought about opening your heart and your home to a child in need? There are thousands of children in California who are waiting for someone to care. Someone they can call Mom or Dad . . . a forever family. Perhaps it is you and your family!

TLC Child and Family Services is licensed by the State of California Department of Social Services to provide foster and fost-adopt homes for foster children from birth to 18 years of age. Typically, our foster children come from northern California, predominantly Sonoma County. We have an excellent outcome record that successfully discharges most foster children placed in our care to their biological parents or to an adoptive home. TLC is a full-service adoption agency and we have helped many families adopt, averaging about 35-40 adoptions per year.

Our agency goals are dedicated to:

- Develop foster and adoptive homes capable of responding to the emotional and behavioral needs of neglected and abused children.
- Provide education, support and therapeutic services to those families.
- Create an individualized plan for each child placed with our foster and adoptive families that considers the child's physical, emotional, educational, social and spiritual needs.

We offer support to foster and fost-adopt families that includes:

- Generous payments
- Low adoption fees
- Ongoing social worker services
- Ongoing parent training seminars and support groups
- Financial assistance (AAP) for adopted children until age 18
- Adoption planning, placement, and assistance through the finalization process
- Resources for respite care
- Bi-weekly (or more frequently as needed) meetings with each child and family with TLC social workers
- Services in Spanish
- Post-adoption services

We can also provide adoption home studies to families pursuing domestic adoption and post-placement visits and reports.

For more information on becoming a foster care family, contact Rolf Van Leeuwen, MSW at (707) 823-7300, extension 220.

For more information on adoptions, contact Denise Miney, LCSW, at (707) 823-7300, extension 234.

At TLC Child and Family Services (TLC), we work with many different kinds of families...all are interested in the future of a child from birth to 18 years of age who may have special needs.

These children are generally placed through the Department of Social Services. The Adoption Program looks for children to be adopted from all over California. Care is taken to insure that the foster child's therapeutic treatment is carefully coordinated in a nurturing, stable, home environment. Many children have suffered from abandonment, neglect, and physical and/or sexual abuse. As a result, they may exhibit a variety of behaviors. Treatment plans are developed to assist children confront the trauma and emotional issues around family separation, future reunification, long-term placement or adoption.

Adoption and Foster Care Highlights

- Accept wide range of families
- **Great** support!
- Generous financial compensation
- Ongoing parent training
- Parent support groups
- Counties served: Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Marin, Solano, Lake

Becoming a Foster or Fost-Adopt Parent

Foster and fost-adopt parents are selected for their ability to provide a mature, healthy, nurturing and therapeutic environment. The process consists of completing the following tasks:

- Application packet
- Fingerprint and child abuse clearances
- Foster parent training for 18-22 hours
- Current physical exam and TB test
- DMV printouts and auto insurance verification
- Foster home safety checklist completed with social worker
- Letters of recommendation
- Adoption autobiography and foster parent questionnaire
- Home study (multiple interviews)
- First Aid, CPR, and Water Safety classes

Teamwork and Support

Foster care and fost-adopt parents are an integral part of the treatment team, which includes the county placement worker, TLC social worker, therapist, teacher, adoption social worker, and other resource individuals. Everyone works towards the placement of a child in a stable, caring environment.

At TLC Child and Family Services:

- Serious attention is given to matching the needs of both the child and the foster or foster-adopt family.
- Social worker caseloads are kept low to insure excellent working relationships between foster and adoptive families and placement workers, as well as to provide the support families may need.
- Twenty-four hour access to professional staff is available for crises.
- Weekly or bi-weekly social worker contacts are made to provide support to both the foster and foster-adopt parents and the foster child.

Home Study

Home visits are made to invite the prospective foster parent to get to know TLC and for TLC staff to interview the family and write the home study. Once this is done, an appropriate match can be made. We review various aspects of the family in making our determinations. Areas reviewed include:

- Family dynamics and communication skills
- Religious preferences
- Experience in parenting
- Family background and social history
- Home environment and safety features
- Physical/psychological health of prospective parents
- Infertility issues
- TLC policies and state requirements
- School, childcare, enrichment resources available to the foster child
- Relationship history
- Motivation and readiness for becoming foster or adoptive parents
- Significant others likely to have foster/adoptive child contact and who can provide support

Placement

While the process leading to foster child placement can be detailed and lengthy, it gives assurance that the foster and foster-adopt parent and foster child match is successful. When children are referred to our program, TLC reviews their backgrounds. We attempt to match the child with an eligible foster or foster-adopt family who can meet the needs of the child. Once an appropriate foster or foster-adopt family is found, the parents are contacted to discuss the potential placement. If the foster parents wish to proceed with this child, an initial visit is arranged for everyone to meet. Several additional visits are made to assure that the placement will be beneficial to all involved. Finally, if everyone agrees, the placement is made.

Recertification and Quarterly Reports

Foster and foster-adopt parents are evaluated for recertification on an annual basis. Constructive in format, this process is used to strengthen skills and ensure safety in the home.

TLC social workers also prepare quarterly reports on the foster child's overall progress in the home. Treatment team members review the child's progress every quarter and update the treatment plans. Foster parents give the team valuable information to address the child's needs.

Parent Training and Support Groups

Ongoing Parent Training

The training for foster and fost-adopt parents is a specialized, comprehensive ongoing educational process. Once a foster parent is certified with TLC, each foster parent must complete at least 12 hours of training every year. Educators include TLC staff, community experts and other professionals. In the process, parents learn from each other and benefit from sharing experiences. Examples of topics covered include:

- Effective Parenting Techniques
- Impact of Child Sexual and Physical Abuse
- Child Development and the Impact of Trauma
- Communication Skills
- Discipline
- Transracial Adoption
- Lifelong Adoption Issues
- Open Adoption
- Separation, Loss, and Transition
- Effects of Drug Exposure
- The Court Process
- The Birth Family
- Attachment Issues
- Life Books

Adoption and Foster Care Support Groups

The TLC Adoption and Foster Care Support Groups have been a safe place for foster care and adoptive families to come together and share the trials and tribulations of caring for foster children. The support groups offer a place for foster and adoptive parents to come and discuss critical issues and provide support to each other for the hard, yet rewarding work of caring for a foster child with special needs. Foster and adoptive parents have unique parenting experiences that can benefit other families going through this complicated process. Their knowledge and enthusiasm for their foster and adoption experience is invaluable.



The foster care and adoption support groups discuss an assortment of adoption-related issues. These topics may include:

- Child attachment
- Dealing with or without birth parents
- Advocating for educational resources
- Responses to questions posed from the “outside world”
- How to talk to a child about adoption
- Appropriate discipline techniques
- Medical intervention
- Ethnic diversity in the home and community
- Strategies to support children who feel “different”
- Types of parenting, and much more

Families laugh, cry, and share their lives with others. Through play, the children who come with their parents receive support and understanding from their peers. Our children learn that they are not alone nor are they different.

Adoption Assistance Program

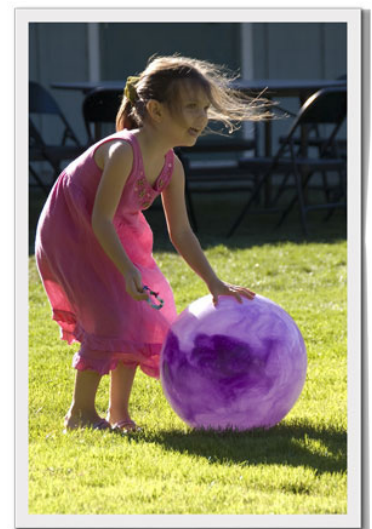
What is the Adoption Assistance Program?

The Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) provides financial and medical care assistance to families who adopt foster children who would otherwise remain in foster care. AAP continues until the child reaches the age of 18, or age 21 if the child has a mental or physical handicap that warrants continuation of benefits.

Who are these special needs children?

These children generally have barriers to adoption that may include:

- Age of three years or more
- Member of sibling group
- Ethnic background and language
- Mental, physical, medical or emotional handicap
- Adverse parental background (e.g., drug addiction, mental or physical disorders). This category generally applies to all foster children.



What kind of financial assistance is provided?

- Medical assistance (Medi-Cal)
- Monthly cash benefit to pay additional expenses of raising the child

Who approves financial assistance for adoption?

The public adoption agency determines the child's eligibility for AAP benefits. Generally, all foster children are eligible. The adoptive parents and the public adoption agency negotiate the amount. The county social service department sends the monthly check. The adoptive parents are not subject to an income eligibility test, though income and available resources are sometimes considered. The payment amount generally does not exceed what it would have cost to maintain the child in foster care. In a cooperative placement, both family and child agencies work together to assess the needs of the child and determine the amount of assistance.

When do AAP payments begin?

Adoption assistance payments may begin after the adoptive placement has been made and all required agreements have been signed.

What if the child has a disability that does not require assistance now but may require assistance in the future?

In this case it is important to sign a Deferred Payment Agreement before the adoption is finalized and specify those conditions for which AAP may be paid. This will allow for financial assistance in the future should the need arise.

Can the payment agreement be revised if the condition of the child or circumstances of the family change?

The payment can be adjusted at any time, particularly if a new need is identified. In fact, the case is reviewed at least every two years by the county agency that initially granted AAP. Any change in amount or duration of AAP benefits requires the approval of the adopting family and the county agency.

What if the child moves to another state?

Federal law requires the eligibility for AAP continue when the family moves. The original state continues to make the cash payment. In many instances the new state provides the medical assistance.

What kind of parents adopt these children?

Adoption social workers seek mature adults who have a stable family life, regular income, good health and willingness to accept the adopted child as their own. TLC looks for flexible, patient parents capable of dealing with changes in their expectations and lifestyle. Most importantly, adoptive parents should be able to value their special child for what he or she can accomplish and appreciate the child's unique qualities.

AAP enables the family to concentrate on providing a loving home environment with emotional support for a foster child without fear of being unable to meet the additional expenses involved with raising that child.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Foster Care?

Foster Care is the system created to protect children who are abused, neglected or abandoned or whose parents or primary caretakers are unable to fulfill their parenting obligations due to illness, emotional problems, or for a number of other reasons. In some cases the placement into foster care may have been voluntary.

What is the difference between a foster parent and adoptive parent?

An adoptive family has the same parental rights and obligations as a birth family. A foster family must defer many decisions about a child's welfare to a state or county social worker. Although a child may remain in a foster home for years, the state or county can (and has) removed foster children for a variety of reasons. An adopted child can only be removed for the same reasons as a birth child.

Who are special needs children?

The term "Special needs children" is used interchangeably with "foster children." Foster children are referred to TLC from county and state social service and adoption agencies throughout California. Being "special" refers to many categories of children including healthy children, children aged three or older, children of ethnic or minority groups that need families, children with brothers or sisters who should be placed together, and those with physical, mental, or emotional challenges or children who have been exposed to drugs. Most of these children have been removed from their birth families subsequent to abuse or neglect.



How do I/we become a foster or fost-adopt family?

First, fill out the enclosed application and return it to us. We will then schedule an individual orientation, explain the process and requirements in detail, and provide documentation to comply with state regulations. At each step along the way, TLC will support you with orientation, training and guidance to ensure your success.

What does it cost to become a foster or fost-adopt parent?

The California Department of Justice requires a modest fee for fingerprinting and Child Abuse Index clearances. TLC covers these costs for foster parents. Adoptive parents are asked to pay for these clearances, but can be reimbursed at the time of the adoption.

What financial support does TLC provide to foster parents?

Foster parents receive a monthly payment of \$760 per child. Medical and dental expenses are covered by Medi-Cal. Each child receives therapy as needed and there are scholarships available for special activities.

Families adopting a foster child are also eligible for a federal tax credit of up to \$13,170 (subject to income limits), even without qualifying expenses.

What are the advantages of being a foster or fost-adopt parent with TLC?

TLC helps you to be a successful parent by providing specialized, comprehensive, ongoing support and training. This includes individualized treatment planning for the child, 24-hour emergency access to our professional staff, weekly contact with a social worker and 12 hours of training each year by TLC staff and community experts. We have maintained an excellent outcome record with foster children placed in our care during the past 10 years. Most children have been successfully placed in stable, long-term foster or adoptive homes or reunited with their birth parents. This close working relationship between trained parents and our professional staff promotes the healing of children and the strengthening of families.

What are the requirements to be a TLC parent?

We regard our parents as part of a team of professionals providing the child with a safe, healthy and stable home environment. You may be single or married, straight or gay, have children or not, rent or own your home, or be of moderate income. Among other requirements, TLC parents need to show that they are healthy enough to care for children and that they can provide adequate bed space. Our most successful parents have flexibility, commitment, a non-judgmental attitude and a good sense of humor!



TLC does not discriminate in the evaluation of applicants seeking to adopt, or delay or deny placement of, or deny the opportunity to adopt a child on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, color, political affiliation, national origin, disability, marital status, gender, gender-identity, medical status, domestic partner status, actual or perceived sexual orientation, or ancestry.

Is fostering a child a precursor to adoption?

Fost-adopt programs were created to bridge the gap between a child's initial need for temporary care and the long-term need for a permanent home. A number of our families have adopted children who were initially placed with them as foster children. When parental reunification efforts failed, and no other relatives were available, the foster parents were asked if they wished to adopt the child in their care.

In fost-adopt programs, social workers place the child with specially-trained fost-adopt parents before the child's biological parents' parental rights have been permanently terminated. These fost-adopt parents make a commitment to adopt the child, if and when biological parental rights are terminated and the child is legally free to be adopted.

What does it cost to adopt?

TLC requires a \$500 fee from adoptive families, but this can be waived or reduced based on income guidelines. Expenses incurred during the application process—adoption fee, fingerprinting, medical exam, etc.—are reimbursable up to \$400. Foster children are eligible for the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) which provides a monthly stipend until their adoptive child turns 18. Adoptive parents are also eligible for a tax credit.

How does the Adoption Program work?

TLC provides adoption services for families wishing to build their family through the adoption of foster children. Families must be certified as foster or fost-adopt families. All of our children are initially placed as foster children and must be in your home a minimum of six months before the adoption can be finalized. When you have an approved adoption home study, your adoption social worker will begin the child search process. You can attend bi-monthly meetings at TLC to review the profiles of children referred for adoption, and to identify children in whom you are interested. Being matched with a child is a process that includes interviews and a plan to transition the child into your home.

Do I/we have any choice about who gets placed in our home?

Yes! At TLC we work as a team to ensure a good placement for everyone. TLC's families have a definite say in the type of child they are interested in, i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, and medical/emotional issues. Your family, the child and the social worker are all involved in the process.

What are the key features of fost-adopt programs (also known as foster-adopt and foster-to-adopt)?

- Placement with a fost-adopt family before the child's biological parents' parental rights have been terminated
- Efforts at family reunification may still be ongoing, biological parents may be appealing a decision to terminate their parental rights, or in some cases, parental rights have already been terminated
- Generally, children placed in fost-adopt programs are considered less likely than others to return to the birth family, but there is a continuum from low or no-risk, to higher risk
- You agree to adopt the child if/when the birth parents' parental rights are terminated
- You act as foster parents during this time.

The main reason for making such a placement is to spare the child another move when adoption is viewed as a likely outcome. One reason many families opt for this type of placement is that a high percentage of children placed in fost-adopt families are young. When hopeful adoptive parents take care to educate themselves about the program, ask the hard questions, and ask social workers for realistic evaluations of the legal risks involved, it can be an excellent option.

What are the risks of fost-adopt programs?

There are varying degrees of risk, which you and your family will need to explore with your TLC social worker. When a child is placed with a fost-adopt family, the child's permanency options are often being evaluated in two directions: adoption and family reunification. This is called "concurrent planning" and can be equally difficult for both the birth parents and the hopeful adoptive family. There is also a possibility of other birth family members expressing their interest in raising or adopting the child. In other cases, the child's permanency plan is moving more definitively in the direction of adoption, or may simply be a question of a pending court decision to terminate parental rights.



Care Reimbursement Rate

All foster and fost-adopt parents receive monthly reimbursement (prorated for partial months) for the board and care of their foster care children. This reimbursement is not considered income and it is not taxable. Therefore, the child is not listed as a dependent on your tax returns.

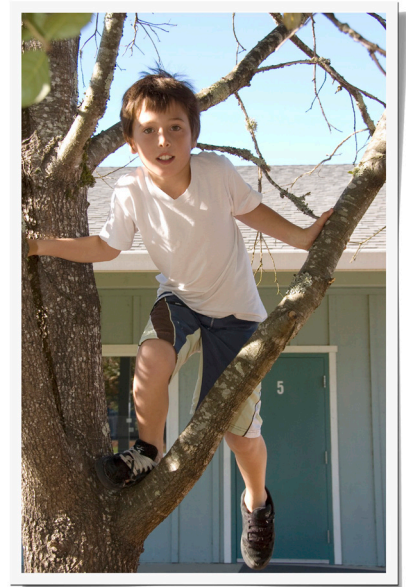
Families adopting a fost-adopt child are also eligible for a federal tax credit of up to \$13,170 (with some income limits), even without qualifying expenses.

Care Rate: \$760.00

Age: This is paid for infants through 17 years of age

It is suggested that the reimbursement be spent according to the following cost allocation chart.

Reimbursement Category	Amount
Room	\$ 180
Food	\$ 166
Personal and incidental	\$ 80
Education	\$ 40
Clothing	\$ 72
Transportation	\$ 77
Miscellaneous	\$ 55
Respite care/babysitting	\$ 90
Total	\$ 760



Foster Family Agency Regional Office in Mendocino County Children's Emergency Shelter Care Services

In 1994, TLC's Foster Family Agency (FFA) program expanded after a merger with the Mendocino Youth Project's foster family program. As a result, TLC opened a regional office in Mendocino County in Ukiah. This regional office currently supports our Mendocino and Lake County foster care and adoption services and the Mendocino Children's Emergency Shelter Care Services.

Emergency shelter care is defined as the 24-hour/day care of children, for a period of up to thirty days, who have been removed from parental custody because of allegations of abuse, neglect or abandonment. It also includes children who are dependents of the Juvenile Court under Welfare and Institutions Code Section 300 who need to be removed immediately from an existing foster home or group home placement.

TLC started its Children's Emergency Shelter Care Services in Mendocino County in 1999. The shelter provides 24-hour temporary emergency care to up to 14 children per day, aged birth to 18 years. All children referred are assessed as to emotional, behavioral, medical and academic status. TLC social workers evaluate each child's progress on a weekly basis. Aides are available to assist foster families with transportation and recreation for these children, as well as respite.

The shelter program provides children with 24-hour substitute therapeutic family care in private homes. These loving, warm, accepting and stable homes care for children who must be temporarily separated from their permanent home. The shelter program recruits families from diverse backgrounds in an attempt to match them with children from similar backgrounds. The program provides training and support for potential parents. There are special qualifications for these shelter homes. There must be one parent at home at all times and there should be no more than one biological child in the home. All other licensing requirements for foster parents apply.

Jacob Kessner, M.A., is the Program Director for the Children's Emergency Shelter Care Services. For more information regarding this program, call (707) 463-1100.

Jeff Killebrew, M.A., is the Regional Director for adoption and foster care services. For more information, please contact the regional office at (707) 463-1100.

