Specialized Foster Care
It Takes a Family to Raise a Child
**We Are Their Hope. They Are Our Future.**

Children raised in patient and loving homes, grow up happier and contribute more to their communities.

There are children from your community who were separated from families who couldn’t take care of them. These children lost their homes, parents, siblings, friends and neighborhoods—everything they know.

No child should have to endure this struggle alone. We are their hope for a family, and they are our hope for a brighter world.

**Youth in Specialized Foster Care Are Our Most Vulnerable**

There is a population of foster children, ages 8 – 18, who are recovering from especially traumatic experiences. Without loving homes, the challenges and instability they have faced make it hard for them to function within a family, school or community.

However, we have seen these children thrive when they are placed with families who care for them.
Specialized Foster Parents Look Like You
The world seems to get smaller every day, and people connect in new ways all of the time. Families are redefined when people come forward to accept children—more love—into their lives.

The children in Specialized Foster Care come from many different backgrounds—and so do their foster parents. Regardless of ethnicity, spiritual belief, financial background, gender or sexual orientation—you can be a positive force in a child’s life.

Consider Specialized Foster Care
A foster parent gives a child a safe, secure and nurturing home—and hope for a better life. We all want better lives for foster children, but becoming a Specialized Foster Parent is not a simple decision. Children’s Home + Aid can help you understand Foster Parenting and make the decision that’s right for you.

For more information, go online to childrenshomeandaid.org or call Children’s Home + Aid at 1.877.282.4274.

Who We Are
Children’s Home + Aid is a leading social service agency responding to the changing needs of disadvantaged children and families in Illinois. For more than 130 years, we have been establishing best practices and shaping laws in child welfare, early childhood and juvenile justice. We are recognized for providing quality programs and services to children and families in need.
Children’s Home + Aid Partners with You
When you join the Children’s Home + Aid community, you gain a partner who understands what it takes for families to thrive. Our commitment to these children doesn’t end when they move into foster homes. We are committed to their healthy development. We continue to provide programs and resources— for the children and foster families— that are tailored to the specific needs of Specialized Foster Care.
**We Provide a Wide Range of Services**
We are a large and stable organization, and we are with you every step of the process. We know what parents need to succeed and our services support well-being for the child and foster family.

**Licensing and Training**
We will walk you through the process to become a licensed foster parent. We also will train you for the unique challenges of parenting a child in Specialized Foster Care.

**Meaningful Matches**
We will introduce you to a child who is compatible with your family, possibly from a similar background or neighborhood as you. You will visit weekly. When you and the child are ready, he or she will move home with you.

**Case Worker**
Our case worker will work with you and visit the child regularly.

**Mental Health Services**
Our services are specific to the child’s needs and may include psychiatric care and prescription drug monitoring.

**Education Advocacy**
We offer services to ensure the child has access to assistance at school. Our education advocacy also helps you navigate the special education system.

**Financial Support**
We provide monthly financial assistance to help cover the cost of the child’s food, clothing and personal allowance. The state pays for the child’s medical care. We provide services that coordinate and pay fees for the child’s recreational activities.

**Support Groups**
Your family and the child have access to our network of other foster families.

**The Excellence Academy**
Unique to Children’s Home + Aid, this model program serves high-risk youth on Chicago’s southside, and in the South and Northwest suburbs. Children receive a variety of education services, life skills training, counseling, violence prevention services and a mentor. We have had incredible success with typically under-performing children advancing to the next grade level.
Every Child is Overcoming a Different Challenge
Children in Specialized Foster Care have special needs that extend beyond common emotional or behavioral issues. Some have been in multiple foster homes or admitted to psychiatric hospitals.

Children’s Home + Aid meets their needs and prepares them to thrive in families.

Children’s Home + Aid Nurtures These Children
We operate a residential center that focuses on rehabilitating the youth in Specialized Foster Care. Most children live in the residential center for 12 – 18 months. They receive the services, resources and love that teaches them to cope with the challenges they’re facing.

- **Behavioral Interventions**
  Teach life skills

- **Therapeutic Services**
  Help children communicate and heal through creative expression

- **Psychiatric and Medical Services**
  Mend their mental and physical health

- **Educational Services**
  Provide classroom and individual instruction

- **Nutrition and Wellness Services**
  Teach proper nutrition and promote physical fitness

- **Transitional Services**
  Prepare children to rejoin families and communities
Children’s Home + Aid Specialized Foster Care

Family + Home = Love
Love Heals
I get so much joy from helping these kids. I think they deserve a second chance. They don’t want to be in this situation.”
**Listening to Understand**

Rita has been a Specialized Foster Parent for more than a decade. Many youth have lived in her home, which is busy with children, visitors and activity. She sings in the church choir and spends a lot of time cooking the kids’ favorite meals.

The love she feels for these children does not waver, and their love for her is obvious. Children who have come through her home, and are adults now, still come back to visit and share their lives with her.

“You need to let them open up to you and talk to you.” Rita knows that when the children act out, yell or fight, it’s not because they’re bad kids. It’s because they are going through something that they don’t know how to talk about. It’s important not to react to their words but to listen for what’s hurting them.

“It’s my job to figure out what’s the matter.” Over the years, Rita has helped children grow in ways physical, mental and emotional. The children don't simply tell her what’s wrong, so she starts troubleshooting.

She fostered a child who didn’t want to go to school. When she realized he couldn’t read or write his name, she made sure he had the education assistance he needed.

One of the boys didn’t want to take showers. Rita was able to uncover that he was afraid of the water. She worked with him to overcome his fear.

When another boy wouldn’t talk or eat, Rita took him to doctors and dentists. She learned he had a serious dental condition. After the dental procedure, he started talking and eating with the other children.

When her foster child got in a fight at school, she was able to get to the root of his anger. All of the other kids were seeing their families for the holidays. He was angry that he couldn’t see his.
“If it wasn’t for the Excellence Academy, some of these kids would go astray.” Rita says the Excellence Academy helps the kids stay on track. The staff talks with the kids and helps them with what they’re going through. They help with homework. They take them to baseball games, the beach and the park. They teach life skills, like good hygiene and cooking.

“You have to come to their level. Don’t holler at them. These kids have had hard times.” The children Rita has helped have different stories and challenges, but her methods remain the same. She doesn’t react emotionally to their behavior. She knows they respond when she tries to understand what they’re going through and respects what they’re feeling.

Rita keeps a pantry full of food and a punching bag in her basement. She will nurture them with home cooking and suggest they work out their anger on the punching bag.

When children join Rita’s family, they join a large community of neighbors, church and family members. But most importantly, they receive stability, love and understanding to grow on.
Love Heals
“All we’re looking for is that chance to love somebody. To be loved. To be happy. And to have someone to call family.”
Discovering Her Bright Future
Misunderstood and abandoned by her family, she wasn’t sure how her future was going to look. Stacy gained confidence and her ability to trust again because Children’s Home + Aid gave her the understanding and support she needed.

Stacy is a young adult now. She is in school, giving back to her community and discovering the person she was destined to become.

“Before I decided to become transgender, I thought I was just a gay guy. I was cross-dressing and my mother did not approve.” At the age of 12, Stacy’s life changed when she told her mother she was gay. Stacy was admitted into one psychiatric hospital after another. But she couldn’t change who she was. When it became unhealthy for Stacy to continue living with her mother, she came into the care of Children’s Home + Aid.

“If I could have been myself without being judged— I feel like I could have been the best person in the world.” Stacy felt abandoned by her biological family. Angry and confused, she felt she couldn’t trust anyone. These negative experiences affected how she perceived herself and her value in a family.

Living with foster parents did not immediately tear down the barriers Stacy built to protect herself. She was always worried about changing homes again.
“Children’s Home + Aid has been the one constant in my life. I know I always have people to talk to.” Stacy’s therapist was the first person she’s ever trusted. Her case worker helped her understand that she had to be true to herself. And the Excellence Academy helped her with school and other life challenges that came her way. She says that when everyone shared their stories and supported one another, they felt like family.

“I want to share my experiences with people. I want to let foster youth know that what they’re going through is okay.” Stacy is giving back to the foster community that nurtured her. She’s been to Washington DC and the state capital to work on the issues facing the foster care system. She is active in the LGBTQ community and activities that support troubled youth.

Stacy wants foster parents to know that kids in specialized foster care are just like any other kids. There are going to be good days and bad days. They all want the same thing—a family.
Love Heals
Trey is starting to see what’s coming next and he wants it. He’s focused on the future."
**Becoming Family**
The day Roy and Trey met at summer camp, neither could have imagined how much their lives would change in just five years. Their families and communities have grown and thrived—and it all began with a flashlight to brighten the night.

“I felt a connection with Trey.” When Roy volunteered at a summer camp for youth, he was asked to be the counselor for a boy who had just gone into a group home. That boy was Trey.

> “The first night he earned my trust because he gave me a flashlight. He told me if I was scared in the middle of the night, I could shine it towards him, and he would be there.”

Roy wanted to continue to be a part of Trey’s life, so Roy became Trey’s mentor. For six months, Roy picked up Trey every week. They went to baseball games, the park and out to eat. They had a special bond. Trey’s case worker asked Roy if he’d be willing to be Trey’s foster parent.

> “I’m going to make this commitment. He’s going to be my commitment.” About a year after they met, Trey moved from the Rice Child + Family Center to his new home with Roy. For them, the transition was easy because they had already built trust, consistency and routines. But after about six months, Trey began to act out and get into trouble.

> “The kid may be saying ‘I hate you.’ ‘I don’t need you.’ But underneath that tough skin, they really do need you. You need to be above all the yelling and acting out to understand that they really do need you.”

“All he wanted for his birthday was for all of his brothers and sisters to be together.”

Roy had been Trey’s foster parent for about two years, but Trey was always thinking about the brothers and sisters he left behind. Trey’s brothers and sisters started coming for sleepovers on weekends.
Roy’s friend, Trish, already had been a part of Trey’s life. So when Trey’s siblings visited, she became part of their lives too. Trey’s siblings started opening up about the challenges they were dealing with at home. It became obvious that they needed to live somewhere else. The children begged not to be split up. Roy and Trish made the decision to co-parent Trey and four of his siblings.

Trey
“I get to live with my siblings, and there’s all this love. I don’t feel like I need to be in the city as much anymore. Everything I need is here. It’s a huge blessing.”

“You give the kids a sense of unconditional love and even if they reject it, you have to understand you are having an effect.” Parenting the five kids has been a series of ups and downs. They work to find common ground with the children to guide them in a healthy direction. Roy and Trish understand that it’s not going to be easy for all of the children to choose a new path. They will continue to provide the love and support every child needs to grow.

Trey
“We have an understanding of what we want to do. He has a vision for me, and he is going to go through whatever he can to make sure I can do it.”
**Redefining Family**
These stories show how families grow, and communities expand with the love and support of Specialized Foster Parents and Children’s Home + Aid. Every story and every family is different, but the healing power of love and commitment is the same.

**What You Can Expect**
Children succeed when their foster parents provide a safe and nurturing environment that meets their developmental and emotional needs. Some of the requirements that are unique to Specialized Foster Care include:

- Plan for and participate in the child’s treatment plan; implement behavior modification strategies
- Meet with your case worker often; participate in team meetings; receive ongoing education
- Arrange and provide transportation for school, therapy, medical, dental and vision exams; family visits; recreation
- Maintain records including medical exams, school report cards, Individual Education Plans (IEP), behavior incidents and medication logs
**What You Can Do Next**

If you’re asking yourself if you could be a Specialized Foster Parent—there is a good chance you can.

Call **1.877.282.4274**

- Ask questions or get more information
- Sign-up to attend a Foster Parent Orientation

Read more about Children’s Home + Aid and our programs at [childrenshomeandaid.org](http://childrenshomeandaid.org)

Spread the word to your community about the need for Specialized Foster Parents