

kids these days...

By Dr. David Rideout, CEO
North Central Alberta Child & Family Services Authority

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

There is a familiar African proverb we have all heard, saying "It takes a village to raise a child." The proverb speaks to the nurturing and assistance, from a wide array of people, which is required to help children grow into well rounded, happy adults. Nowhere is this as important as when a child no longer has a home and needs someone else in the community to provide that place of security, a place to call home.

Within the geographical boundaries of our Region, which literally stretches from the British Columbia to the Saskatchewan borders, we have almost 300 children and youth without a permanent home; a place where they can be assured of love, acceptance, understanding and support – as well as a place to celebrate Thanksgivings, Christmases, Birthdays, an "A" on a report card, and all the significant events in their lives.

Kids these days, perhaps more than in any other generation, require strong family ties to give them security and confidence while also showing them firsthand the value of love and trust.

Fortunately, in this Region there are about 125 foster families who commit to providing many of those young people with a temporary home. Our Foster Care Program is based on the belief that a family is the best environment for raising a child. The goal of foster care is to return the child to his or her own family when the situation is more stable, or another permanent placement if that is not possible. However, the foster home offers an important place while waiting for that to happen.

A supportive atmosphere in a foster home is key to helping kids who have been through many very traumatic experiences develop healthy self-esteem and behaviours. Foster parents play an important role in giving a temporary refuge to children and youth who have gone through the hardship associated with separation from their biological family.

Foster care is usually only a temporary stop for a child or youth, it can still be traumatic when one is removed from the place they have known all their lives as home. That's why we appreciate the foster parent who is first and foremost a surrogate mother or father, but can also be a confidant, a friend and an advisor.

Recently, our office received a letter from a young person confirming the positive impact of such support. The writer said, "I am just letting you know that being in foster care has been a great experience... I've learned how not to be fearful, how to stand up for myself, and the basic skills of life."

The letter continued, "I have an aunt who lives nearby, so when she has days off she makes plans for us to see our family and other relatives.... If it wasn't for me being in care, I would have never been able to know the importance of life, and I am just glad that I am in a safe and healthy environment."

I think those comments expresses so profoundly what I'm trying to say, namely that foster parents make a huge difference! This is why we continually look for new foster parents to assist youth like this one – especially as older foster parents are no longer able to continue providing that service.

As we celebrate Alberta Foster Family Week during October 18-24, I would like to encourage readers to consider the possibility of helping a child or youth in need. And on behalf of our Board and Staff, I would also like to say a big "THANK YOU" to the foster parents who are currently providing such tremendous service!

For more information on Foster Care, Kinship Care or Adoption, contact your local Children Services office or Families for Alberta's Children Today at 1-888-310-3228.

Feedback is welcome and can be sent via email to david.rideout@gov.ab.ca.