

Allendale Specialized Foster Care Program FAQs:

What is Specialized Foster Care versus Traditional Foster Care, and who is considered a “specialized” child?

Essentially a youth who is considered specialized has additional needs. The needs can be medical, emotional, behavioral or mental health related. A specialized youth may need additional appointments, more visits to a doctor or therapist. There is an additional requirement for the foster family and therefore an additional board payment is provided, in order to cover the additional travel and other requirements. Additionally, immensely increased support from your foster care team is provided to you. As an agency we have trained case workers, therapists, nursing consultation and can therefore provide an in-depth and expert cohesive team. We use an evidence-based clinical model called REStArT which we use to clinically understand a youth’s trauma reenactment and behavior. We provide our services to the kids that need help “the most” and pride ourselves in committing to that passion! One of the unique ways that Allendale receives referrals for intake/foster placement is through our own internal agency residential treatment program. Although distinct from the foster care team, we work closely with our residential partner teams and have some youth in care who are free for adoption and fostering direct from a residential placement. The youth from residential treatment are typically specialized youth in care. We encourage all foster parents to consider a child from this referral base, as we are able to work closely to prepare all parties for a discharge to your home!

What kinds of specialized children need foster homes the most?

Allendale is always in need of foster families to meet the needs of:

- Children with behavioral or mental health complexities
- Babies born with the HIV (AIDS) virus or with substances such as cocaine in their system
- Children with special medical needs (e.g. diabetes)
- Adolescents
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth
- Children with developmental delays, such as Autism

What kind of support will foster parents receive?

Each foster child gets a medical card from the state which guarantees payment for all necessary medical care and preventive medicine. You will not pay any medical bill directly.

Foster children go to regular public schools, unless they need special education, for which the state can pay.

Allendale provides clinical consultation by telephone. Our clinical consultations are a regular opportunity for the foster parents to discuss the youth’s case and behavior and gain a deep understanding of the youth’s trauma and behavior. Every 90 days, you will have a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) about the child placed in your home, which is family and youth-driven.

We have trainings where foster families can connect and share experiences and learn together. As families in similar situations the learning extends to peer support. We gather for dinner prior to each training (during non-COVID times). If the trainings can be held in person, we provide childcare for every child in your home (foster and biological) so that parents can learn uninterrupted. Additionally, our team looks forward to annual appreciation events for our families and fun ways to celebrate our families.

Our case specialists have tailored training to meet the needs of their individual caseloads. As the needs of specialized youth are greater, the caseloads the case specialists hold are manageable to give optimum support. Our case specialists take pride in providing a consistent and individually

tailored structure to meet the needs of our families, often making meetings in the evenings to meet the needs of working families and children in school.

We provide 24/7, 365 on-call support, and you will never find that you cannot reach someone in the foster care department!

Can foster parents ever adopt a child through foster care?

Absolutely! There are many children in foster care whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and have adoption goals right now! The goal of "adoption" or "guardianship" can be set wherever the child is placed, and if you have been the caregiver for more than 6 months, you are first in line to take legal custody. You can receive an ongoing subsidy payment after a child is permanently (through adoption or guardianship) in your home.

The first goal is to reunite children in foster care with their families when that is possible. However, if a child who has been in your home for some time becomes available for adoption, you can discuss your interest in adopting him or her with the caseworker.

Does fostering and adopting cost a lot of money?

Allendale Association, through DCFS, provides reimbursement for caring for foster children through a monthly stipend. These payments are meant to reimburse you for food, clothing, allowance, transportation, etc.

Specialized foster youth can use Enrichment Funds and Nonrecurring Expenses, which are available to foster parents for needs outside of what the board payment reimburses for. These funds can be used for things like camp, sporting equipment, clubs or groups that the child wants to join, school activities/trips, etc. "Respite care" funds can be used and requested if there is someone that drives the child to an appointment or visit, the foster parents are unable to temporarily care for the child.

Adoption and Subsidized Guardianships are entirely free of cost to the foster parent. If they choose an attorney to review their Adoption or Guardianship Subsidy and represent them in court for legal finalization from the Adoption Attorney Panel, foster parents have no out-of-pocket expense.

The purpose of a subsidy itself is to be an argument to both the State and Federal Governments as to why it is in the best interest of the child to remain in your home, but also to demonstrate why a subsidy is appropriate to be given to families. It also serves to inform the State and Federal Governments and the court system about everything from the child's birth information to where they are now (i.e. medically, clinically, educationally, etc.), to introducing the foster parents, foster family, and foster home to demonstrate why it is in the best interest of the child to remain with the family and ensure a successful and safe discharge into the care of that family.

If I can't adopt or foster, how can I help?

As much as we need foster families, we also need to raise awareness of foster care. There is a place for everyone to help a youth in care!

Some ways you can get involved include:

- Become licensed to provide emergency and short-term foster homes (needed just as much as we need long-term homes!)
- Sponsor, or ask your company to sponsor, a Foster Parent Appreciation Event.
- Arrange a fundraiser to raise funds and awareness for foster care.
- Sponsor, or ask your company to sponsor, a meal for our foster families during one of our monthly training events.
- Hold a "Toy Drive" with your church or community organization.

- Volunteer your time to help us organize donations, set-up for trainings, provide child care for parents during monthly trainings.
- Commit to having our poster or leaflets available for your company's staff or clients.
- Donate some of our frequently-needed items, such as:
 - Wrapping paper
 - Birthday packs (such as cake mix, candles, party hats, etc.)
 - Toys
 - New or gently used clothes
- Educate your families, communities, churches, schools, social circles and friends that there is a great need for licensed foster care homes.

Give us a call to see how you can help in any of these ways! You can truly make a difference!

Please contact our Foster Care team at 847-356-3322 to request additional information or to help answer any other questions!