



For Immediate Release

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Open Hearts, Loving Homes event to share foster care stories *Public invited to learn more about how to help children in crisis*

Pontiac, Mich. (Nov. 2, 2016) – What does becoming a foster parent really involve? Find out at Open Hearts, Loving Homes, an Oakland Family Services event that will feature inspirational stories from foster care parents and share information about the need for these special people.

Open Hearts, Loving Homes kicks off 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17 at the agency's Pontiac office, 114 Orchard Lake Road. After a short program, staff will be available to answer questions about the foster care licensing process. Those interested in attending should RSVP by Friday, Nov. 11 to (248) 858-7766, ext. 1236 or lgillett@ofsfamily.org. Light hors d'oeuvres will be served and free childcare will be provided.

"There is a pressing need for more foster homes," said Melissa McIntosh, foster home licensing supervisor at Oakland Family Services. "We need people who are willing to care for the most vulnerable children in our community - children who, through no fault of their own, have experienced abuse or neglect and have been removed from their biological families."

Open Hearts, Loving Homes will feature people like Angela, a single foster parent raising five children she adopted, all under the age of 6. Over the past five years Angela has cared for 21 foster care children.

Adoptive and foster mother Marvette also will be at the event. After encountering issues conceiving, she and her husband opened up their home to two, four-month-old boys who were underweight and dealing with complications from exposure to cocaine. They adopted the boys and have since reopened their license and are on their second foster care placement.

Slated to speak as well is Velma, who had always considered fostering but ended up needing to get licensed quickly to take in a family member. She adopted that girl and has had seven other foster children, one of whom has been in her home for nearly three years.

Oakland Family Services receives calls daily to place children in foster homes and faces the challenge of finding homes that meet the unique needs of every child. It's a challenge seen statewide.

The number of licensed foster care homes in Michigan dropped by 349 from Oct. 1, 2015 to Oct. 1, 2016, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. In October 2015 there were 6,427 licensed foster homes compared to the 6,078 in October 2016. The homes include both relative and non-related licensed foster homes.

Through Open Hearts, Loving Homes Oakland Family Services hopes to increase the number of licensed foster homes.

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“Oakland Family Services wants to build brighter futures for children by making sure they have a stable, foster home until they can be reunited with their family or adopted,” said Abbie Blackshire, vice president of Program Operations. “We are trying to get the message out about the need and recruit people to open their homes to children who need a loving home.”

Oakland Family Services is a private, nonprofit 501 (c) (3) serving the community since 1921 and dedicated to providing individuals and families the opportunity to build brighter futures. The agency’s prevention, education and treatment services touch the lives of more than 40,000 individuals throughout southeastern Michigan. The agency has offices in Pontiac, Berkley, Rochester Hills and Walled Lake. For more information, go to www.oaklandfamilyservices.org.

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