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Public and Private Organizations Unite to Recruit Foster Parents

Campaign Portrays Foster Parents as Everyday Heroes in Effort to Boost Number of Foster Homes and Keep Children in their Neighborhoods

Cincinnati (Jan. 30, 2008) A collaborative of public and private organizations has kicked off what they hope will be a \$1 million recruitment campaign to increase the number of foster parents for abused and neglected children in Hamilton County and the Greater Cincinnati region.

The campaign, entitled “Everyday Heroes,” will feature a commercial, billboards and other marketing materials to entice local residents into foster parenting. Recruiters will also visit local businesses.

The campaign features foster parents portrayed as super heroes and praises them for carrying out the daily, routine duties necessary to care for abused and neglected children.

The goal of the Everyday Heroes campaign is to increase the total number of viable foster homes in Hamilton County by 100. Because many of those homes will be with private agencies that serve several counties, regional capacity also will increase. Additionally, Hamilton County wants to increase the total number of children placed inside of Hamilton County to 84 percent.

“The choice to be a foster parent is a noble choice; it provides the opportunity to change a child’s life and to change this community,” said Moira Weir, director of the Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services. “We’re very hopeful we have hundreds of Everyday Heroes throughout this region step up and open their hearts and homes to vulnerable children.”

The campaign – supported by Hamilton County Commissioners Todd Portune, David Pepper and Pat DeWine, along with Clerk of Courts Greg Hartmann -- comes at a time when the need for foster parents is critical. One of the many repercussions of Marcus Fiesel’s tragic death was a further thinning of the foster care ranks.

In Hamilton County alone, 850 foster children are in care at any given time. The county's Department of Job and Family Services has lost more than 100 foster homes in the past two years. Approximately 30 percent of foster children must be placed outside the county because there are no local homes to meet their needs. Private foster care agencies and neighboring counties also have experienced losses in foster home capacity.

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Weir said placing a child in a home far away from their family home decrease the chance of a positive outcome because:

- Uprooting children from familiar surrounding makes the transition into foster care even more traumatic, magnifying behavior issues.
- Removing a child from their school eliminates an important source of stability and makes any academic success even more unlikely.
- Keeping sibling sets together becomes harder, increasing the chance of siblings losing contact.
- Visitations with biological parents are more complicated and less common, making our ultimate goal of reuniting the child with their family more difficult.
- Because reunification is less likely, children placed out-of-county tend to stay in foster care for longer periods of time than similar children placed locally.

Placing children in homes outside of Hamilton County also increases transportation costs and overtime costs for caseworkers. And, when homes are not available, children may be forced to stay in more restrictive settings for longer periods of time. Out-of home residential treatment costs for the Job and Family Services Department have climbed from \$15 million to \$25 million in the past four years.

The new recruitment campaign is the result of a public-private partnership with local government, businesses, social services organizations and the United Way. Northlich donated time and resources to develop the theme of the campaign.

“Every so often you get the opportunity to do something that returns as much to you as it gives to the community” said Donivan Perkins, Northlich’s chief creative officer. “The most rewarding aspect of this work is that we have a chance to help return the luster to the selflessness of these real life everyday super heroes.”

The goal is to raise \$1 million for commercial air time. The Department of Job and Family Services is investing more than \$200,000. James Anderson, CEO of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, will lead fundraising efforts among local businesses.

“We’re tremendously grateful that Mr. Anderson, along with Commissioner Portune, Commissioner Pepper, Commissioner DeWine and Mr. Hartmann, have offered their support and leadership to this campaign,” Weir said. “We feel this team can do great things for the county’s children.”

To become a foster parent, call 211. To learn more about the campaign and foster parenting, visit www.fosterhero.com. To request materials or a speaker to help educate yourself and others about foster parenting, please contact info@fosterhero.com or 513-946-2137. To donate funds to support the recruitment campaign, please mail checks to FCEC, P.O. Box 18283, Cincinnati, OH 45218-0283.

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