

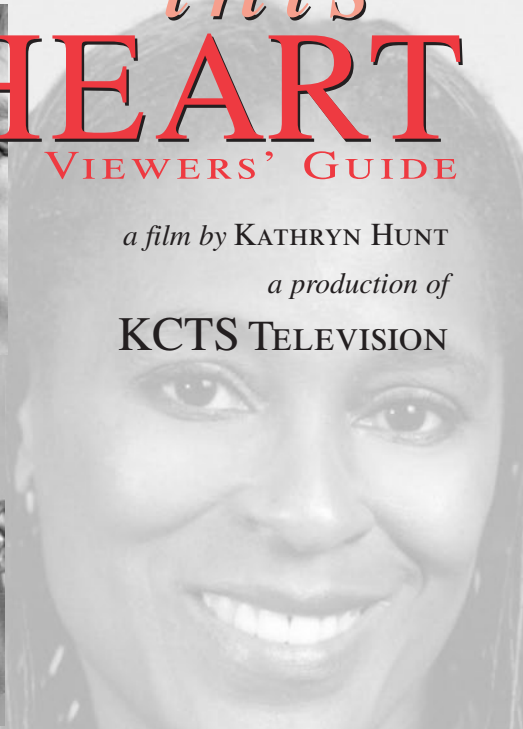
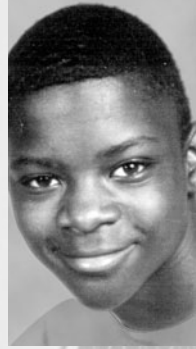


# TAKE *this* HEART

VIEWERS' GUIDE



a film by KATHRYN HUNT  
a production of  
KCTS TELEVISION



## A National Foster Care Awareness Campaign

in association with the  
**Child Welfare League of America**



OUTREACH FUNDING PROVIDED BY  
THE DAVID & LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION  
THE CASEY FAMILY PROGRAM AND  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



# TAKE *this* HEART

*This guide is designed to provide viewers of the Public Television documentary Take this Heart with additional information on foster care and specific suggestions about how to help foster families and children in your community.*

*On behalf of the Foster Care Project and its national awareness campaign, we thank you for your interest in foster care and hope you will take this opportunity to become involved with the children and families in your community. For regular updates on this campaign and foster care needs throughout the nation, please visit us on the KidsCampaigns website*

**(www.kidscampaigns.org/fostercare).**

*At KidsCampaigns, a website published by the Benton Foundation, concerned citizens of all ages can find out how to volunteer, support local groups in other ways, and get smarter about the status of children in their own communities.*



*Take this Heart is a national public television community awareness campaign. For additional information about the 19-minute community video, companion discussion guide, viewers' booklets or the full-length 60-minute documentary, contact:*

**Kathy Barbell**  
Director of Foster Care  
Child Welfare League of America  
voice: (202) 638-2952  
fax: (202) 638-4004



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**FOSTER CARE FACT**

In 1985, 147,000 non-relative foster care homes were available for 276,000 children in need of care. In 1994, 125,000 non-relative foster care homes were available for 450,000 children in need of care.

**“I want to help.”**

This quick reference table shows which organizations can assist you in getting involved in your community.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
<b>SUPPORT CHILDREN IN CARE</b>									
1 Tutor A Child		•			•	•	•		
2 Give Free Lessons		•			•	•	•		
3 Donate Sporting Goods		•			•	•	•		
4 Donate Computer		•			•	•	•		
5 Offer Recreation		•			•	•	•		
6 Be A Big Brother/Sister		•			•	•	•		
7 Free Day Care		•			•	•	•		
8 Be An Advocate		•	•		•	•	•		
9 Create A Resource Bank		•	•		•	•	•		
<b>SUPPORT TEENS IN CARE</b>									
10 Be A Mentor		•		•	•	•	•		
11 Tutor A Teen		•		•	•	•	•		
12 Donate Your Services		•		•	•	•	•		
13 Apprenticeships		•		•	•	•	•		
14 Scholarships		•		•	•	•	•		
15 On-The-Job Training		•		•	•	•	•		
16 Recognize Achievements		•		•	•	•	•		
17 Find Housing		•		•	•	•	•		
<b>SUPPORT FOSTER PARENTS</b>									
18 Provide Baby Supplies		•			•	•	•		
19 Offer Discounts		•			•	•	•		
20 Offer Relief Care	•	•			•	•	•		
21 Sponsor Appreciation Event		•			•	•	•		
22 Offer Dental Care		•			•	•	•		
23 Donate Your Services		•			•	•	•		
24 Provide Transportation		•			•	•	•		
25 Amusement Park Passes		•			•	•	•		
26 Volunteer Office Work		•	•		•	•	•		
27 Sponsor Resource Bank		•			•	•	•		
28 Donate Your Skills		•			•	•	•		
29 Advocate on Behalf of Foster Parents		•			•	•	•		
<b>SUPPORT BIRTH PARENTS</b>									
30 Be A Mentor		•		•	•	•	•		
31 Help Write Letters		•		•	•	•	•		
32 Provide Transportation		•		•	•	•	•		
33 Offer Affordable Housing		•		•	•	•	•		
34 Facilitate Parenting Classes		•		•	•	•	•		
35 Find & Repair Housing		•		•	•	•	•		
36 Provide Relief Care		•		•	•	•	•		
<b>BECOME A FOSTER PARENT</b>									
37 Visit Our Web Site	•								
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39 Locate/Visit Foster Parents									
40 Find Out Who Needs Care									
41 Attend Fostering Seminars									

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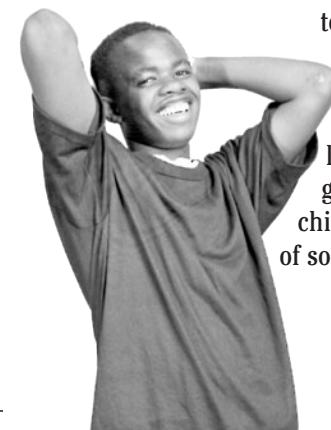
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**ABOUT THE FILM**

On any given day, nearly half a million children in the United States are living in foster care. Many have been cast adrift at an early age. Some will never be reunited with their parents.

Take this Heart is the story of three boys living in a foster family in Seattle and struggling to make sense of their own fates. Ranging in age from 10 to 17, Robert, Jamil and Joaquin have moved from one foster family to the next, eventually landing in the care of Tess Thomas, a state-funded foster mother. Tess sees her work with the children as “God’s purpose for me,” and although she never proselytizes, it is clear that her commitment derives from a serene and fierce spirit.

This documentary allows the viewer to live moment to moment with the family, experiencing life as they experience it. There is no script or acting. Rather, the film is crafted from the modest and ordinary events of daily life, collected over an eight-month period. Ever watchful for the gestures that signal a child’s tentative sense of belonging, the film reveals the remarkable resiliency and tough-minded will that enables these boys to go on with their lives. By exploring the experiences of a few children living in one foster family, the film gives voice to a population of children otherwise invisible to most of society.



**National One Church, One Child, Inc.**

National One Church, One Child, Inc. is an initiative that informs African-American church congregations about the role other congregations and the larger community can play in ensuring permanency for African-American children in foster care systems.

ADDRESS: 2811-2E Industrial Plaza Dr.  
Tallahassee, FL 32301  
CONTACT: Patricia O’Neal-Williams  
TELEPHONE: 904/488-8251  
FAX: 904/921-8757

**North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)**

The Council advocates for the right of every child to a permanent, continuous, nurturing and culturally sensitive family, and presses for the legal adoptive placement of any child denied that right.

ADDRESS: 970 Raymond Ave.  
St. Paul, MN 55114-1149  
CONTACT: Charlotte Vick  
Assistant Director  
TELEPHONE: 612/644-3036  
FAX: 612/644-9848  
EMAIL: NACAC@aol.com



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

Nearly 500,000 children nationwide are currently living in some form of out-of-home care.



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

Nationwide, infants and young children under four years old comprise the fastest-growing population in need of foster care. Infants also remain in care longer than other children.

### F National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association

National CASA is a nationwide organization of programs that train community volunteers to speak for abused and neglected children in court. CASA volunteers, appointed by a judge, conduct thorough research on a child's case, review files, talk with parties involved, particularly the children, and make recommendations to the court as to what they believe is best for the child. CASAs also monitor the case, helping to assure the child remains safe until a permanent resolution is reached.

ADDRESS: 100 West Harrison St.  
North Tower, Suite 500  
Seattle, WA 98119-4123  
CONTACT: Staff  
TELEPHONE: 800/628-3233  
FAX: 206/270-0078  
EMAIL: staff@nationalcasa.org  
WEBSITE: www.nationalcasa.org

### G National Foster Parent Association

The National Foster Parent Association provides services, support and training to foster parents nationally.

ADDRESS: 608 Hanson St.  
Madisonville, KY 42431  
CONTACT: Shirley Hedges  
President  
TELEPHONE: 502/825-0097  
FAX: 502/821-9284

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

The following pages provide suggestions about how you can help children and families in your community's foster care system. You can volunteer your time or resources to directly assist specific families and children, or you can become an advocate for all families and children in care by volunteering to help advocacy groups in your community. Following each suggestion is a letter or series of letters that refer to organizations to which you can turn for additional information. The organizations are listed in the back of this booklet and can be referenced simply by using the key system.

#### Support Children In Foster Care

In the first part of the twentieth century, foster care served primarily children whose parents had died or become incapacitated by illness. By contrast, children come into foster care today primarily because they've been abused or neglected. As a result, children now enter foster care with far more complicated needs, and foster parents must try to meet these needs, often without adequate external support. There are many ways you can help children in care. Below is a list of possibilities. You could offer assistance by yourself or recruit members of your neighborhood, office, service organization or church to volunteer as a group.

#### 1 TUTOR A CHILD B • E • F • G

Volunteer to become a tutor to a child in care, focusing especially on the child's reading skills.



#### 2 GIVE FREE LESSONS B • E • F • G

Offer a child in care free music or art lessons.

#### 3 DONATE SPORTING GOODS B • E • F • G

Offer to purchase and install a basketball hoop for a child in care or donate a swing set or jungle gym to children in care.

#### 4 DONATE COMPUTER B • E • F • G

If you upgrade your home computer, donate the older model to a child in care, and offer to spend some time teaching the child how to use it for learning and playing.

#### 5 OFFER RECREATION B • E • F • G

Offer recreational opportunities to children in care. (You could offer a child a space in your dance or gymnastics class or on your soccer or baseball team, and pay for the child's uniform and other needed equipment.)

#### 6 BE A BIG BROTHER/SISTER B

Volunteer to become a big brother or sister to a child in care.

#### 7 FREE DAY CARE B • E • F • G

Offer a child in foster care a free space in your day care program.

#### 8 BE AN ADVOCATE B • C • F

Contact your local child advocacy organization to volunteer your time or resources, or become a court-appointed special advocate for a child in care, representing the child's best interests in court cases.

#### 9 CREATE A RESOURCE BANK B • D

Create a resource bank in your community where volunteer services, donated items and recreational opportunities can be matched with a child's needs.

### D Generations United

This organization promotes using intergenerational approaches to meet a wide variety of community needs, such as intergenerational child care, education and literacy programs and mentoring projects and programs for at-risk youth and persons with disabilities.

ADDRESS: c/o CWLA  
440 First St., NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
CONTACT: Judith Leavitt  
Executive Director  
TELEPHONE: 202/662-4283  
FAX: 202/408-7629  
WEBSITE: www.gu.org

### E National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA)

NAPCWA represents the interests of state and local public child welfare administrators around the country. Its mission is to enhance and improve public policy and administration of services for children, youth and their families.

ADDRESS: c/o American Public Welfare Association  
810 First St., NE  
Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20002  
CONTACT: NAPCWA Project Manager  
TELEPHONE: 202/682-0100  
FAX: 202/289-6555



**FOSTER CARE FACT**

*Youths between the ages of 13 and 18 comprise roughly one-third of the foster care population. Each year, 25,000 youths in care reach the age at which they are forced to live on their own because they no longer qualify for foster care.*



**FOSTER CARE FACT**

*More than 85% of children in care have siblings in care, but only 25% are placed together.*

**B Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)**

The Child Welfare League of America is a federation of public and private non-profit agencies and organizations dedicated to serving vulnerable children, youth and their families.

ADDRESS: 440 First St., NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
CONTACT: Kathy Barbell  
Director of Foster Care  
TELEPHONE: 800/ASK-CWLA  
FAX: 202/638-2952  
EMAIL: kbarbell@cwla.org  
WEBSITE: www.handsnet.org/cwla

**C Children's Defense Fund (CDF)**

The Children's Defense Fund exists to provide a strong and effective voice for all the children in America, who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves, including children who are abused and neglected.

ADDRESS: 25 E St. NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
CONTACT: MaryLee Allen  
Director, Child Welfare and Mental  
Health Division  
TELEPHONE: 202/662-3573  
FAX: 202/662-3550



**Support Teens In Foster Care**

Few adolescents in our society are able to support themselves immediately upon graduating from high school. Yet each year approximately 25,000 adolescents reach the age (generally 18) at which they must leave foster care because the state no longer will reimburse their foster parents for expenses. Currently, fewer than 25% of foster care agencies provide employment-related services for youths in care; only 17% provide employment and career-training assessments; 16% provide job-training; and 24% provide vocational training. To help adolescents in foster care, consider the following possibilities:

**10 BE A MENTOR B • D • E • F • G**

*Become a mentor to a teen in care, offering support and advice as needed.*

**11 TUTOR A TEEN B • E • F • G**

*Volunteer to provide tutoring services to teens in care.*

**12 DONATE YOUR SPECIAL SERVICES B • E • F • G**

*If you have special training in working with teens who have learning disabilities, offer to donate some of your time to a teen in care.*



**13 OFFER APPRENTICESHIPS B • E • F • G**

*Offer a teen in care an apprenticeship in your company.*

**14 OFFER SCHOLARSHIPS B • E • F • G**

*Enlist your company or organization to provide a scholarship to college or vocational training for a teen in care.*

**15 PROVIDE ON-THE-JOB TRAINING B • E • F • G**

*Enlist your company or organization to recruit teens in care for entry-level positions that provide on-the-job training.*

**16 RECOGNIZE ACHIEVEMENTS B • E • F • G**

*Enlist your company or organization to sponsor a recognition event for teens who advance to the next grade level in school or have other academic or personal achievements, such as winning a math contest or a basketball championship.*

**17 FIND HOUSING B • E • F • G**

*Organize your neighborhood or church to help identify housing opportunities for teens in care who face emancipation.*



**RESOURCE GUIDE**

The organizations referenced in the section titled What You Can Do are listed below and are ready to take your calls. They will direct you to local organizations that can provide you with more specific information about the foster care needs in your community.

**A ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services**

The mission of the ARCH National Resource Center is to provide support to service providers and families through training, technical assistance, evaluation and research.

ADDRESS: 800 Eastowne Drive  
Suite 105  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514  
CONTACT: Sue McKinney-Cull  
TELEPHONE: 919/490-5577  
FAX: 919/490-5950  
EMAIL: 75124.3171  
@compuserve.com





#### FOSTER CARE FACT

*In 1993, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture estimated the annual cost of caring for a child in a middle-income, two-parent household to be \$572/month. In most states, the reimbursement rates for foster parents are lower than the cost of providing care for a child, so foster parents often make up the difference.*



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

*Of the children for whom reports were substantiated, 55% were neglected, 26% were physically abused, 10% were sexually abused, 3% were emotionally abused and 7% were classified as suffering from some other form of abuse.*



#### Santos

An unforgettable moment in *Take this Heart* occurs when Santos, Joaquin's twin brother, is detained in juvenile jail and subsequently asked to leave Tess' home. Interviewed in a holding cell, where he

spent an evening because he brought martial arts knives to school, Santos seemed resigned to his fate. He knew that getting locked up, for however brief a time, would violate the limits set by Tess. While not required by the state to expel kids who get arrested, Tess had grown so frustrated by Santos' refusal to follow the rules that she told him if he was ever put behind bars, he would lose his place in her home.

After leaving Tess' home, Santos spent months homeless, just one slight misstep away from serious trouble. Eventually, he moved into an apartment with a friend, but a fist fight quickly brought an end to that arrangement. A recent move to a suburban apartment might signal a move away from trouble. But like his brother Joaquin, Santos' future remains precarious. With little education, his job prospects are limited. He too will need considerable support from the community if he is to successfully find a place in society as an independent adult.

#### Support Foster Parents

Taking care of children, many of whom have extraordinary needs, is a 24-hour-a-day job for any parent. In return for their services, licensed foster parents do receive a modest reimbursement, but it frequently falls short of the actual cost of caring for the children. For example, foster parents typically receive only about \$200 a year to pay for a child's clothing, even though a pair of sneakers alone can cost up to \$60. In addition, most foster care agencies lack sufficient resources to provide adequate consultation to foster parents. As a result, too often even the most caring foster parents eventually become overwhelmed by the financial and emotional burden and are forced to stop fostering. Here's how you can help:

#### 18 PROVIDE BABY SUPPLIES B • E • F • G

*Provide foster parents with diapers, formula, clothing and toys.*

#### 19 OFFER DISCOUNTS B • E • F • G

*If you own or manage a grocery store, pharmacy, or department store, offer foster parents a discount.*

#### 20 OFFER RESPITE CARE A • B • E • F • G

*Offer weekend and emergency respite care to give foster parents a break from their responsibilities.*

#### 21 SPONSOR APPRECIATION EVENT G

*Sponsor a recognition event for foster parents in your community to demonstrate your support and appreciation for the work they are doing.*

#### 22 OFFER DENTAL CARE B • E • F • G

*Provide free or reduced-rate dental care to kids in care.*

#### 23 DONATE YOUR SERVICES B • E • F • G

*If you are a professional psychologist or counselor, or a physical, speech, or occupational therapist, offer to donate some of your time to kids in care and their foster families.*

#### 24 PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION B • E • F • G

*Offer to provide transportation to help foster parents take kids to their appointments.*

#### 25 FREE RECREATIONAL PASSES B • E • F • G

*If you own or manage a theme park, amusement park, or other recreation center, offer foster parents a discount on passes.*

#### 26 VOLUNTEER OFFICE WORK B • C • E • H

*Provide administrative support to a local foster care agency, such as typing, filing, answering phones, or coordinating volunteer schedules. This frees up staff to devote more time and resources to helping foster parents.*

#### 27 SPONSOR RESOURCE BANK B • E • F • G • H • J

*Sponsor a school, university, business, or church resource bank and collect food, clothing, furniture, services and supplies to be donated to foster families.*

#### 28 DONATE YOUR SPECIAL SKILLS B • E • F • G

*If you do handiwork or carpentry, offer to build ramps and other needed devices for foster parents who care for children with disabilities.*

#### 29 ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF FOSTER PARENTS G

*Contact your local chapter of the National Foster Parent Association to learn how you can become an advocate for foster parents in your community.*

youths in care. In some states it is 18; in others, 21. In the State of Washington, adolescents can remain in foster care until the age of 21 as long as they continue to pursue their GED or stay in school, which Joaquin has chosen not to do.

Being fully emancipated at 18 is an enormous challenge for any teen, but particularly for teens in foster care. Many have not had the opportunity to fully develop social skills and self-esteem to enter the work world. Joaquin's struggles are exacerbated by the fact that he can barely read. While some programs and support services are available to help Joaquin, so far he has been unable to take full advantage of them. Friends say he is at a critical juncture, and with the right help, could turn the corner and make a successful transition to independent living. He will need extensive support from the community in order to do this.

OUTREACH FUNDING PROVIDED BY  
THE DAVID & LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION,  
THE CASEY FAMILY PROGRAM AND  
THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION  
OUTREACH ACTIVITIES DIRECTED BY OUTREACH EXTENSIONS



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

66% of children who enter foster care are reunited with their birth parents within two years.



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

In 1995, 3.1 million children were reported as abused and neglected - an increase of more than 50% since 1985 and more than 300% since 1976.



varies as to the benefits of allowing children to maintain regular contact with their birth parents, particularly when the parent is fighting a drug addiction or other serious emotional problem. However, child welfare professionals generally agree that many children have strong bonds with their birth parents, and that those bonds should not be completely severed unless it becomes absolutely necessary to do so.

For Jamil, there are no easy answers. While Tess and Rodger do the best they can to help him, Jamil will need extensive assistance with his education in order to prepare for independent living. He is also in need of a role model and mentor to help him face the broader challenges of adolescence.



#### Joaquin

Tess recently saw two of her longest-term children, the identical twins Joaquin and Santos, leave her home as they neared or reached their 18th birthday. Their stories reflect the

strengths and weaknesses of foster care for adolescents. For although these young men were able to gain a sense of balance and hope while living with Tess, they now face extremely uncertain prospects as they try to establish a life beyond her extra-ordinary home.

States vary as to the age at which they cease making payments to foster parents who have

#### Support Birth Parents

Most children reside only temporarily with foster parents, and return home when it is considered safe. To optimize the potential for children to return home and remain there safely, foster care agencies and communities must provide families with the support and services they need to overcome whatever difficulties they are experiencing. If, for example, poor parenting skills played a role in the separation, birth parents may need parenting classes to learn appropriate care-giving and behavior management techniques. If homelessness led to the separation, birth parents may need job training and access to affordable housing in order to create a stable home for their children. A variety of options exist for those who wish to help birth parents. Below are just a few.

#### 30 BE A MENTOR B • D • E • F

Become a mentor to a birth parent, offering support and advice as needed. (Teen parents, in particular, need strong role models.)

#### 31 HELP WRITE LETTERS B • E • F

Volunteer to help a birth parent write letters to her/his child/children in care.

#### 32 PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION B • E • F

Volunteer to provide transportation for birth parents, enabling them to visit their child/children in care; to attend drug counseling sessions; to attend parenting classes; to look for employment; or to get to a job.

#### 33 OFFER AFFORDABLE HOUSING B • E • F

If you are a landlord or the owner of an apartment building, offer birth parents reduced rent on a unit in your building.

#### 34 PARENTING CLASSES B • E • F

If you teach parenting classes or know someone who does, offer a birth parent a space in your class or provide financial support to allow a birth parent to attend someone else's class.

#### 35 FIND & REPAIR HOUSING B • E • F

Organize a committee in your neighborhood or church to identify housing that requires only minimal repair work in order to become habitable. Then recruit volunteers to assist with repairs and solicit businesses to donate needed materials.

#### 36 PROVIDE RESPITE CARE B • E • F

Offer a birth parent respite care or day care after they have been reunited with their children.

#### Consider Becoming A Foster Parent

Many people believe that only married couples with homes can become foster parents. In fact, foster parents can be single, married, or divorced. They can be homeowners or apartment dwellers. They can have a job outside the home. They can be as young as 21, or they can be retired. To qualify for foster parenting, you must first demonstrate the qualities and attributes essential to fostering, including attentiveness, tenacity, patience, and empathy, along with a willingness to grow and learn from the experience of fostering and an equal capacity to love and let go. Then, if you can offer a safe living environment, adequate bedroom



#### Jamil

In *Take this Heart*, we come to know Jamil, a gangly 14-year-old who not only is struggling with drugs but also having difficulties in school. At age 14, he is only reading at the second - or third-grade level. His math

skills are similarly poor. Jamil's story depicts the cycle of substance abuse that often afflicts children in foster care. Jamil's mother, Frances, has been battling a drug addiction of her own throughout Jamil's life. The court deemed Frances unfit to parent Jamil and his five siblings when Jamil was four years old. During the next seven years, Jamil was placed with a series of foster families. A few of his placements lasted up to a year, but usually Jamil would remain in each home for just a month or two. Tess' home has been his most successful placement.

The film follows Jamil on a pair of visits to his mother's house. As he tries to get his mother's attention, it is clear that the experience is disappointing. But we also hear Tess say that if Jamil were not able to maintain contact with his mother, he would likely become explosive.

While not all children maintain contact with their birth parents when placed in care, foster parents and social workers are required to make reasonable efforts to facilitate regular visits when it is in the best interest of the child. Public opinion



#### FOSTER CARE FACT

*More than two-thirds of foster children do not have severe emotional, behavioral or developmental problems. However, children and teens with special needs, like those depicted in Take this Heart, are the ones most in need of foster parents.*



#### Robert

In the film's opening scene, Tess picks up Robert, a diminutive 10-year-old boy, during the night at a Department of Social and Health Services office. The camera follows Robert as he trudges along with

Tess. All of Robert's belongings are in a partially filled garbage bag, and he doesn't appear to know who Tess is or where he is going. While this situation may seem extraordinary, it is not uncommon for children being placed in foster care to be handed off on an emergency basis in the middle of the night to foster parents they've never met before. Although obviously it would be better for children to have some preparation for this moment, they are placed in foster care because they are perceived by social workers to be at imminent risk of abuse or neglect. Robert's situation was slightly different. He was in the process of being adopted by his foster parents when they realized they could not manage his intense needs. The family therefore relinquished custody of Robert to the state, which in turn had difficulty finding another home for him. He was turned down by nearly 15 foster families before being placed with Tess. While in Tess' care, Robert's behavior has improved considerably. Nearly a year and a half later, he is still with Tess and doing well at home. He is also getting along better in school with other children, and his academic performance has improved.

space to accommodate a child, and sufficient income to make ends meet even without the reimbursement received through a foster care agency, you can learn, through training programs, the other skills essential for effective fostering. Below are some ways to learn more about becoming a foster parent.

#### 37 VISIT OUR WEB SITE B

*Check out our Web Site to learn about the need for foster parents in your community.*

#### 38 RESEARCH FOSTERING

*Read up on fostering in your local library.*

#### 39 MEET WITH LOCAL FOSTER PARENTS G

*Call your state foster parent association to identify foster parents in your neighborhood, church, or child's school and arrange to visit them, if possible.*

#### 40 FIND OUT WHO NEEDS CARE B • E • I

*Contact your state foster care association to identify the age range and special needs of children in your community who need foster parents.*

#### 41 ATTEND FOSTERING SEMINARS G

*Check your local newspaper or cable station, or call your local foster parent association, to learn about seminars on becoming a foster parent.*

#### ABOUT FOSTER CARE

Nationwide, nearly half a million children and adolescents live temporarily with foster parents while their own parents struggle to overcome an addiction to alcohol or drugs, illness, financial hardship or other problems that placed the children at imminent risk of abuse or neglect. Because of the hardship or maltreatment they experienced at home, the trauma of being separated from their birth parents, and the uncertainty they face as they enter the foster care system, children in foster care often are fearful. They can also be remarkably resilient.

Foster care frequently is confused with adoption. In adoption, a child becomes a permanent member of a new family, and legal bonds to birth parents are severed. By contrast, most children reside only temporarily with their foster parents, until it is considered safe for them to return home. A child's stay with foster parents can be as short as one night or as long as several years or more. Approximately one-quarter of children in care currently have no plans for being either adopted by a family or reunited with their birth parents. These children, like the children in *Take this Heart*, are classified as being in long-term foster care. However, two-thirds of children who enter foster care are reunited with their birth parents within two years.

Children can enter foster care at any age. Generally speaking, children who enter foster care for the first time at a very young age are likely to remain in care the longest. Children in foster care

foster parent, and relies on reimbursements from the state to run the household. Aside from her extensive experience in caring for children with extraordinary needs, Tess relies on outside social support and her faith to help her meet the challenges of foster parenting. She also receives some assistance from social workers and others in the state foster care agency.



#### Rodger

Tess' support within the home consists primarily of Rodger, a full-time aide whom Tess pays out of the reimbursements she receives from the state.

Because Tess is single, Rodger is the most consistent adult male presence for the boys. Rodger's official role is threefold. He brings Robert to school each day and serves as his educational assistant while at school. He brings Robert home and supervises the other children while Tess attends to errands. And on most nights he is responsible for preparing dinner. Having a full-time paid staff member in the household is unusual for foster parents. However, Tess is able to afford this help because of the number of children she has in her care and the intensity of their needs, which allows her to be reimbursed at a higher rate than the average foster parent.



# TAKE this HEART

## FAMILY PROFILES



### Tess

Tess is a 48-year-old state-funded foster parent living in a Seattle suburb. When *Take this Heart* was filmed, she had six children in her care. Prior to becoming a foster parent, Tess worked with children

with special needs at a children's center in her home town. She also set up a tutoring outreach program and worked for the Seattle public school district on integration issues in the 1970's. She completed a myriad of courses over the years on child development and psychological issues. Some of this course work was required of her by the State of Washington, which, like other states, mandates that foster parents complete various foster parent training programs or child development classes prior to becoming a foster parent.

In addition to the children in her care, Tess has one grown son of her own. She is single, and finds the job of foster parenting too consuming to allow for outside employment. Thus, she is a full-time

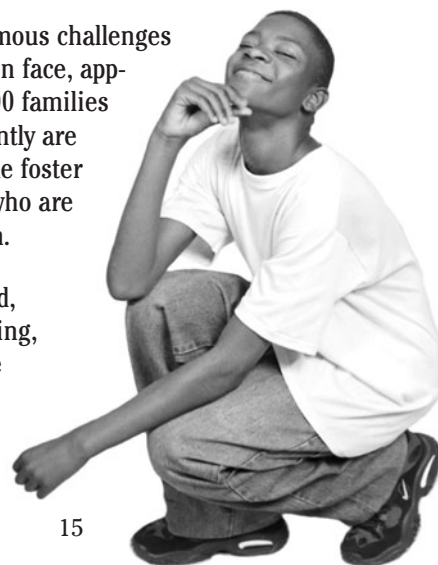
**FOSTER CARE FACT**  
*African-American, Latino and Hispanic children are over-represented in the foster care system by a margin of two to one. Children of color comprise 64% of the foster care population and remain in care longer than any other group.*

also come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In 1990, 40 percent of children in care were African-American, slightly more than 33 percent were white, 12 percent were Hispanic, and 4 percent came from other racial/ethnic groups.

A particularly vulnerable group are teens in foster care. Youths between the ages of 13 and 18 comprise roughly one-third of the foster care population. Each year, 25,000 youths in care reach the age (generally 18) at which they must leave foster care because the state will no longer reimburse their foster parents for expenses. This transition to independence is very difficult because the foster care system lacks the resources needed to prepare teens to be on their own. Currently, fewer than 25% of foster care agencies provide employment-related services for youths in care; only 17% provide employment and career-training assessments; 16% provide job training; and 24% provide vocational training.

Despite the enormous challenges that these children face, approximately 125,000 families nationwide currently are licensed to provide foster care to children who are unrelated to them.

In addition to food, shelter, and clothing, foster parents are responsible for providing each



**FOSTER CARE FACT**  
*The U.S. General Accounting Office estimates that parental abuse of alcohol and drugs is a factor in the placement of more than 75% of all children in care.*

child with adult supervision, emotional support and affection, personal attention, and structured daily routines. Working in collaboration with the foster care agency, they might arrange for needed medical, dental, psychological, developmental and educational services. When the goal is to reunite the child with his or her birth parents, foster parents also work with the foster care agency and birth parents in preparing the children for returning home. This includes helping to facilitate regular visits between the children and their birth parents.

The foster mother in *Take this Heart* had six children in her care, but this is not a typical-size foster family. On average, foster parents take two to three children. Foster parents also can decide to take just one child.

Foster parents are reimbursed by the state for at least part of the cost of caring for the child. In addition, health care costs for children in care generally are covered by Medicaid, the federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled. While children are being cared for by foster parents, their birth parents may have an opportunity to stabilize their home, obtain needed treatment or services, and work with the foster care agency toward the appropriate permanent plan for each child.

A variety of complex social and economic factors have contributed in recent years to a steady increase in the number of children requiring out-of-home care. Between 1984 and 1993, the

number of children in need of out-of-home care increased by 61 percent. At the same time, the number of foster families available for children declined steadily.

The result has been a shortage of foster parents, particularly foster parents of color and those who are willing to care for sibling groups, medically fragile infants or emotionally disturbed teens. Thus, recruitment and retention of foster parents currently rank among the most pressing needs of the child welfare system. An educated public, possessing realistic expectations for the foster care system and the will to make it better and stronger, offers the best hope for the children and families in need of this vital service.

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