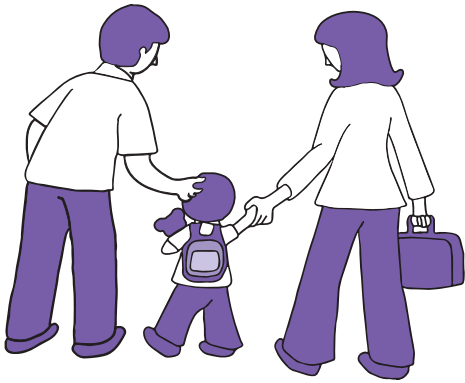




Tsi Ionteksa'tanonhnha

Keeping Our Children in Kahnawà:ke

BY TYSON PHILLIPS, COMMUNICATIONS



THE TSI IONTEKSA'TANONHNHA
(Where we mind the children)
Foster Care / Extended Family
Program is presently looking for

families who would be willing to open their home for children in need.

Joanie Montour, the team leader for the Program, and Lisa Fazio, the program's resource worker, have been working to develop a bank of emergency homes for children who are in need of care. An emergency home can range from one night to 30 days. At this time, there are not enough emergency homes within the community.

"When a child has to be removed from their home, extended family members are asked first to take in the child. If they are unavailable, we look to one of our emergency homes, which we hope to have more homes available," Joan explained. "We feel it is very important that the child /children stay in Kahnawake."

When community members open their home to become an emergency or long term foster home, there are

supports in place for the foster parents. The program offers financial support, support groups, and individual support and training for the foster parents to understand the child's behaviour.

The child has been through traumas, such as exposure to physical and mental violence and/or neglect, "Foster parents would need to be open to learning about different social issues that have impacted the children. The needs of the children are becoming complex; they have multiple needs," Lisa said. She continued "The foster parent would not be left alone to deal with the child's complex behaviour. I am here to answer any questions or concerns that the care giver may have. I also offer supports such as home visits, referrals, reading materials, and sometimes just a listening ear."

When a child is removed from their home, it is the last option as the child's well-being is seriously at risk. "We work as a team for the children's well-being. Youth Protection will try to keep the family intact and offer help to the biological parents and/or legal guardians to eliminate risks that are compromising the child's security and development," Joan explained.

A common fear potential foster parents have is that they will have to foster a teenager with serious behavioral issues. Joanie explained that when the child is removed from the home, the Youth Protection workers will assess

the situation to see if the child should go to a family home or group home. A teenager with behavioral issues would not be placed into a foster home.

The foster parent can identify if they want to take in a boy or girl, and choose the age range of the child. "Some people think fostering a child means raising the child until they turn 18," Lisa said. "There are some long term homes but for most cases it is only temporary and the child eventually returns to the biological parents."

As of February 2018, there are 35 Kahnawà:ke children in foster care and approximately 60 per cent of them are with extended family.

"If you would like to give back to your community and offer a nurturing, stable, caring, loving environment, foster a child," Joanie said. "You don't have to be a couple; a single parent can also be a foster parent."

Lisa and Joanie want to see more foster homes in Kahnawà:ke as the child will be in familiar surroundings. "Let's keep our children in Kahnawake" is the program's promotional message. If you are interested in becoming a foster parent or want more information on our program, please call Joanie Montour or Lisa Fazio at KSCS at 450-632-6880.