

Foster Now

Why it's important
Why you're qualified
Why Wellpoint Care Network

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Wellpoint Care Network
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The Growing Need for Foster Care

According to the **Wisconsin Department of Children and Families**, nearly 7,000 children are currently in foster care.

Foster care is home-like care provided by licensed foster parents for children who cannot live with their parents because they:

- are in need of a structured, nurturing environment to thrive.
- have special care or treatment needs their parents are unable to manage.
- other circumstances resulting in their parents or family being unable to care for them.

Across the state, the number of children and youth in care currently exceeds the number of available beds. In Milwaukee County alone, dozens of children enter care each month, creating a significant gap between the number of kids and licensed foster providers.*

- Today, there are **about 7,000** Wisconsin children in foster care.
- In Milwaukee County alone, nearly **2,000 children** are in foster care.
- Nearly **32% of children** have been in foster care for more than two years.
- Currently, **68% of children** in foster care are African American, while only about 30% of licensed Wellpoint Care foster parents are*.

Often, the misconceptions around foster care can scare potential foster parents away. Many worry they are not fit to properly help the potential children in their care. Others believe they will have no support. Still others may worry that they'll be too hurt when the time comes to reunite the child with their family.

However, when working together, we can make a difference in a child's life and make the community stronger. Plus, you will experience one of the greatest feelings in the world — helping a family in need.

*Source: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

FOSTER PARENT STORIES



Meet Michael

"It has to come from the heart. It has to be there. You can't fake this. You have to love these children, because that's something that they didn't get a lot of."



Meet Deb and Francisco

"I knew that the need was great for foster homes. So, we thought this would be another way to have more kids."

Reunification is Always Our Goal

Placement in foster care is usually temporary and gives families time to make necessary changes so the child can safely live in their home and community. Most children in foster care return home to their families. This is called **reunification**.

When a person can make the necessary behavioral changes to parent more safely and effectively, we see positive long-term outcomes for children.

That's what reunification is all about.

It's been proven that the best place for a child is usually with their biological family. Children have greater success when foster care agencies embrace the concept of **shared parenting**, where caregivers build and maintain relationships with biological families to support reunification. It's also important to place siblings in the same foster home whenever possible.

At Wellpoint Care Network, the majority of children in our care are placed with relative or foster families while case managers work to reduce or mitigate the factors that brought the family into care. The focus of case management in these instances is to help families achieve safety, stability and reunification.

Wellpoint Care's **Family Preservation** program aims to promote well-being, strengthen family relationships and keep families together safely. Participation can help families reunify more smoothly or prevent family separations through parent skill development and education.

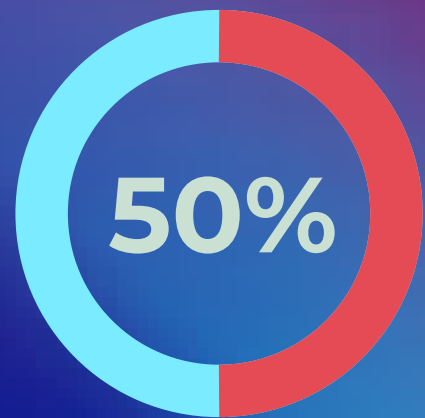
KEEPING KIDS WHERE THEY ARE

Even when necessary, being separated from a parent is hard. That's why whenever possible, we attempt to place them with relatives, family friends or caregivers within the same community.

We can limit the adversity a child experiences by keeping them in a neighborhood they are already familiar with. When children can maintain connections with their siblings and schoolmates, they tend to experience less stress — and have better outcomes.

ABOUT HALF of the children in out-of-home care in Wisconsin are reunited permanently with their biological families.

That's in keeping with the national reunification average, which hovers at around 50%.



The Benefits of Reunification

The **Washington Association for Children & Families** lists the following five benefits of reunification:

Better Outcomes

When a child is taken from their home — even for their own health and safety — it can cause additional stress and trauma. It's not always possible to find foster parents who align with the child's traditions, culture and maybe even first language, which makes the separation even harder. When children are reunified with their parents, they regain a sense of stability and security.

Better Development Outcomes

Children who remain in their community of origin are more likely to thrive in school and social settings. When children are placed in a completely new situation, it only makes sense that they don't feel like they belong. Foster children are deprived of the stability most children take for granted, which can lead to anxiety, fear and depression in children unequipped to cope.

Less Stress for Children

Changing homes is traumatic. Reunification allows children to return to a stable, consistent environment, with routines they know and understand. It's just one of the many ways foster parents promote better mental health, lower stress and happier lives for children.

Positive Impact on The Parents

Children are often placed in out-of-home care because their parents are battling challenges, pressures and coping with their own trauma. As a foster caregiver, you give parents the time and resources they need to improve their situation — a change they're more likely to maintain with reunification in mind. By fostering a child, you're fostering a future in which they and their parents can thrive.

Positive Ties to Extended Families

Reunification also helps the child's extended support network, who don't have to divide their support between a child's foster and biological families.

REUNIFICATION STORIES



The Johnsons' Success Story

"I must have cried all day, but the happiest tears. That was probably the best feeling that you'll ever have in your whole life...just knowing they're back with you."



How Beth Learned to Co-Parent

"It was a challenge at first to figure out how to co-parent successfully, but once we started it seemed so simple."

The Levels of Care

There are general requirements that must be met for all levels of fostering. High levels of need have additional requirements. Once licensed, additional support and resources are provided for foster parents to care for children with specialized medical needs, mental health diagnoses or cognitive delays and disorders.

Child-Specific Care (Level 1)

When a child needs out-of-home care that can be provided by a relative, that relative can apply for a child-specific license. Wellpoint Care Network does not issue this level of license.

General Foster Care (Level 2)

These foster parents care for children with minimal to moderate physical, behavioral and emotional issues from exposure to maltreatment. These children have experienced trauma and may struggle with adjusting to a new environment and certain triggers, but with consistent and supportive care, can flourish. Most children enter foster care at this level.

Treatment Foster Care (Levels 3 & 4)

These advanced levels of care focus on children who need extra support to address their needs due to exposure to significant trauma. These children may react with multiple unique behaviors, and may also have medical needs, mental health diagnoses, cognitive delays or disorders.

Exceptional Treatment Foster Homes (Level 5)

This level of care differs greatly from those before it. Sometimes known as “shift-staffed” care, these homes employ staff who work in rotating shifts to care for children with much greater, specialized or more demanding needs. It is only considered as the last community placement option when all other options have been exhausted or determined not to be in the child's best interest.

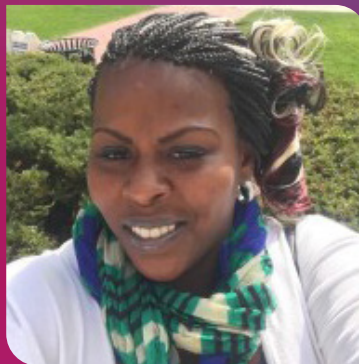
You can read a full description of each level of care and its licensing requirements at wellpointcare.org/foster-levels.

FOSTER PARENT STORIES



Meet Jennifer and Xavier

“It will be both the most rewarding and most challenging thing you may get to do in life. There’s just no way to predict what a kiddo’s story is going to look like.”



Meet Antoinette

“I think any kid can be changed with love. I think helping the parents too and being patient with them is so important.”

Dispelling Common Foster Care Myths

I would have to provide medical insurance for a foster child in my home.

Foster parents do not pay any of a child's medical expenses, other than over-the-counter medicines and supplies. Every foster child is afforded Title 19 health insurance to meet all their medical and dental needs.

I will get too attached and will have my heart broken.

It definitely isn't easy to love a child and return them to their home, but with training and support, we will help you understand your part in helping a family heal – a gift that will last a lifetime. Many families maintain an informal relationship with their foster family, which can continue the bond that you have created.

Foster children have been abused so much that they're beyond repair. I wouldn't really be making a difference, anyway.

With proper training, foster parents can help mitigate the physical, behavioral and emotional effects of trauma, so that foster children can heal and thrive.

There's too much red tape and bureaucracy involved in adopting a child from foster care.

Foster care agencies often have dedicated staff ready to help you navigate through the process.

Foster parents have to stay at home with the children, and I work full time. I guess that excludes me.

No, it doesn't. Many foster children attend day care while foster parents work outside the home.

Once I take in a foster child, I'm on my own.

Children need stability, and foster care agencies offer various kinds of support, including access to training, respite, mentorship, child care and education.

I'm too old to be a foster parent. My children are already grown and out of the house.

There is no age cap on caring. Many "empty nesters" find foster parenting to be a rewarding experience.

YOU'RE MORE QUALIFIED THAN YOU MAY THINK

You don't have to be perfect or have the perfect home to begin fostering. We're looking for people from all backgrounds, cultures and family structures to represent the diverse range of children in need of care.

- You can be single, married, divorced or partnered.
- Your job isn't important. All you need to do is provide verifiable income to cover expenses of you and your family.
- Foster parents can have biological children in the home, or have never parented before.

More than anything, we're looking for people with love and patience to share (a sense of humor always helps!).

The Wellpoint Care Network Difference

Trauma Informed Care

Wellpoint Care Network's mission is to facilitate equity, learning, healing and wellness by restoring the connections that help children and families thrive.

We strive to address the impact of trauma, prevent adversity and promote resilience for the people in our care. Headquartered in Milwaukee, we empower people to overcome barriers to well-being — poverty, poor educational outcomes, unemployment and discrimination, to name a few — so they may thrive.

Wellpoint Care is at the forefront of Trauma Informed Care, a science-based approach that helps children overcome adverse experiences and thrive. This adversity can include abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, divorce, alcohol and/or drug abuse of a parent, incarceration of and mental illness in a parent.

Foster parents receive training, resources and other support services based around Trauma Informed Care. All foster parents are required to take an introduction training within a year of being licensed. Additional advanced trauma trainings are also offered.

All staff at Wellpoint Care are also trained in Trauma Informed Care. Everyone involved in the care of the child having a universal understanding of the principles and practices of Trauma Informed Care is beneficial in reiterating the importance.

Trauma Informed Care is not just an idea to us at Wellpoint Care, we practice what we preach. Our case workers are bringing what they have learned through training to every home visit.



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Trauma Informed Care can be both a philosophy and a practice. At Wellpoint Care Network, we believe the following seven elements will help you understand how to implement it in your everyday life.

Prevalence

Exposure to adverse experiences is more common than previously known. To help people who have experienced trauma, we need to consider this fact — especially when it comes to children.

Impact

The impact of trauma can be profound, especially when it occurs during key developmental timeframes, and can contribute to difficulties later in life.

Perspective Shift

Shifting our perspective is a key to empathy and can reveal new truths about the people in our care. Change the question from, “What is wrong with you?” to “What has happened to you?” and “How can I support you?”

Regulation

Most interventions focus on the “thinking” parts of the brain. Trauma-informed interventions prioritize emotional and behavioral regulation instead.

Relationship

Strong, caring connections create resilience in children and help shield them from the effects of trauma.

Reason to Be

By ensuring a connection to family, community and culture, children can develop a healthy sense of purpose and direction.

Caregiver Capacity

If we're going to effectively work with traumatized people, we need to take care of ourselves. By identifying our limits, we can find a sustainable work/life balance.

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)

Wellpoint Care Network adopted **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI)** several years ago because of its proven track record of success. It offers practical tools for parents, caregivers, teachers, or anyone who works with children, to help those in their care reach their highest potential.

The **TBRI Model®** was developed by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross to address the effects of early adversity and relational trauma through three sets of principles: **Empowering, Connecting** and **Correcting**.

Taking the Next Step in Trauma Informed Care

TBRI is often viewed as a next step in Trauma Informed Care, one that builds on working knowledge and applies tangible skills for a variety of real-world situations.

Where Trauma Informed Care provides the perspective shift necessary to move away from, “What’s wrong with you?” to focus on, “What happened to you?” TBRI equips you with tools to understand what a foster parent can do to help.

In Practice, Not Just Theory

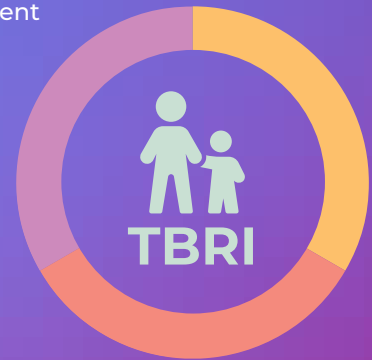
Because we believe in putting theory into practice, Wellpoint Care Network requires all Treatment Foster Care Caregivers to train in the TBRI Model. It is also made available (and highly encouraged) to all Level 2 Caregivers.

TBRI training is also offered to every Wellpoint Care employee. Many of our Treatment Foster Care Specialists are active practitioners, which allows them to reinforce learned techniques with caregivers during home visits.

THE 3 PRINCIPLES OF TBRI

TBRI Caregiver Training is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention specifically designed to meet the complex needs of our most vulnerable children. The program is designed to be highly interactive and is delivered in-person by certified practitioners who emphasize three core principles:

- **Empowering Principles** address a child’s physical and environmental needs and build self-regulation skills.
- **Connecting Principles** address a child’s attachment needs and focus on the building of trust and positive relationships between caregivers and children.
- **Correcting Principles** disarm fear-based behaviors and focus on building children’s social competencies.



Neurosequential Model (NM)

Wellpoint Care Network is one of just a handful of agencies in the United States with site certification through the **Neurosequential Network** in the Neurosequential Model.

NM is a developmentally-informed, biologically-respectful approach to working with at-risk children who have a history of trauma.

Our NM clinical consultation work starts with highly-skilled therapists trained in NM who assess a child's trauma history and symptoms to assess the impact of trauma on their daily life. This leads to individualized service recommendations and psychoeducation for caregivers to support a child in their care who are recovering from the effects of trauma.

The brain develops in stages. Knowing when childhood trauma or maltreatment occurred can help pinpoint how the developing brain was affected along with assessing the child's trauma symptoms. Interventions are then individualized accordingly.

In many cases, NM clinical consultation is facilitated by a Wellpoint Care Network consultant, and is a perfect additive to other efforts to improve the mental health and overall function of children.

The NM approach is an effective solution for families, systems and providers who seek:

- Streamlined interventions that address the impact of adverse experiences and current neurodevelopmental functioning to provide more realistic solutions and expectations.
- Effective early interventions and prevention services geared to support children and youth before crisis situations occur.
- Ways to prevent failed interventions and placements.
- A psycho-educational approach that ensures all participants in the client's care plan understand and can fully act on the recommendations of care plan.
- A flexible approach that supports a wide range of interventions and supports for clients.

THE BENEFITS OF NM ASSESSMENTS

Neurosequential Model Assessment, Consultation and Implementation Services are an effective set of tools for achieving durable, effective outcomes to support higher-risk youth who:

- Have trauma histories.
- Have been involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare systems.
- Are at risk for out-of-home placement in residential/group home settings.
- Have histories of aggressive and/or sexualized behaviors.
- Have experienced or are at risk of school suspensions or expulsions.

Support for Our Foster Parents

Every foster parent receives a financial stipend from the state which varies by the child's unique needs, but Wellpoint Care Network provides the following additional support to its licensed caregivers.

Child Care: We understand that many of our caregivers work and will need to utilize childcare. The Department of Children and Families uses the YoungStar program to evaluate and rate child-care providers. We encourage foster parents to ask about YoungStar ratings when deciding on a child-care provider and we encourage foster parents to use child-care providers with ratings of 3 or higher.

Early Childhood Education: Since many foster children have experienced developmental delays, we want to provide every opportunity for them to stay on track or get ahead. We ask that every eligible foster child aged 3-5 be enrolled in an early education program such as Head Start.

Foster Parent Mentors: This program connects caregivers with veteran mentors who offer support, advice and encouragement. Their firsthand experience can help you feel understood in a way child welfare staff sometimes can't. Support can be offered via phone or email, and can be as regular or infrequent as needed.

Hair and Skin Mentors: These volunteers have years of hands-on experience caring for African American hair and skin and can provide you with free in-home one-on-one consultation to ensure a proper continuity of care.

Events hosted by Wellpoint Care: We believe giving caregivers time to meet and talk can help build important connections, confidence and support. Past events include waterpark outings, Trunk-or-Treat, pizza nights, and Candy Cane Connection, an end-of-the year holiday get together.

Respite: Everyone needs a break sometimes. And with Wellpoint Care's focus on Caregiver Capacity, we encourage Foster Parents to utilize respite providers to take a much-needed short term break. After all, you can't be expected to care for others if you're not able to take care of yourself!

ABOUT HEALTH CARE

Every foster child is afforded **Title 19** Health Insurance to meet all medical and dental needs at no cost to their caregiver. The only costs that a foster parent may incur is over-the-counter medication.

Foster children also have a **care4kids** plan established once they enter out-of-home care, which lays out their medical history, diagnoses, medications, notes from prior office visits and contact information for the child's primary doctor, dentist or other specialists.

A dedicated **care4kids coordinator** will call with reminders when appointments are coming due and provide dates and information related to the child's medical/dental care if those records are not kept organized from one placement to the next (or even one appointment to the next).

Additional Mental Health Support

Our long history of providing child- and family-wellbeing services across the continuum of care, from crisis to ongoing interventions, has given us a unique vantage point. We have seen, firsthand, how the right mental health services, provided by caring professionals, can promote recovery from trauma and adversity.

At Wellpoint Care Network, we offer:

- Clinical assessments and consultation
- Group sessions for children, teens, families and parents
- In person or virtual appointments
- Pediatric occupational therapy
- Medication Management
- School Based Mental Health
- Occupational Therapy
- Comprehensive Community Services

These services are very beneficial to the children in our care.

If a foster parent believes a child needs therapy, their caseworker can immediately refer them to one of our many therapists. We are on-site in our clinic, in schools and in the community, ready to meet you where you are.

Our occupational therapist in particular has done many assessments for children in our care and made many recommendations.

Rather than search around for a provider or try to go to a walk-in clinic, our therapists are ready and available to help.

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR

The need for emotional or behavioral healing isn't as obvious as the need for physical health care. It's a lot easier to see or feel a broken bone, for example, than to pinpoint specific emotions. Here are some signs it may be time to contact Wellpoint Care:

- Changes or challenges with friendships
- Depression
- Developmental concerns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Discovering a new gender identity or sexual orientation
- Low self-esteem
- Moodiness, anxiety
- Self-harm or talk of suicide
- Sensitivity to light, sounds, clothing or food textures or other changes in sensory processing

A History of Healing and Hope

Founded to care for Milwaukee-area orphans and growing into a national leader in recognizing and addressing the impact of trauma, Wellpoint Care Network has been actively helping communities **for nearly 175 years.**

Throughout that time, we've stayed true to our purpose: we help people overcome barriers and thrive. Across a comprehensive array of services, wellness is — and always has been — the point of all we do.

Both **St. Aemilian's Orphan Asylum** and the **Milwaukee Orphans' Asylum** grew and evolved for more than 100 years in different locations, focused mainly on meeting basic needs like food and shelter. As the needs of the community changed over time, we stepped up to meet them — and, eventually adapt our approach entirely.

With improved medical care, Social Security expansion and a growing body of social workers in the 1950s, we were able to introduce an entirely new approach to care for the “whole child” using therapeutic treatments in the residential setting

Now merged into a single organization, our work evolved from caring for children to caring for the well-being of entire families to prevent future crises. Expanded services included mental health care, in-home family services, foster care and care management. With the end of residential care services in 2017, we made the commitment to focus on community using the latest understandings of the effect of trauma on brain development.

This shift to **Trauma Informed Care** quickly revealed that to create truly self-healing communities, underlying historical traumas would also need to be addressed. This began our work in equity, diversity and inclusion. Our commitment to transform child- and family-serving systems has made us rethink the way we approach work within our community. We continue to learn, adapt and grow.



In Summary

Wellpoint Care Network works to find loving foster caregivers for children who need a safe place to call home. We have a nearly 175-year history of helping children and families thrive.

The need for foster parents is great — and, the rewards are even greater.

In Wisconsin, there are more than **7,000 children** in foster care at any given time.

Lots of people have already stepped up to become licensed foster parents, but there still aren't enough homes for the number of children.

By becoming a foster parent, you are providing a child — often with some degree of physical, behavioral and emotional needs — a structured, nurturing environment to thrive in.

By becoming a foster parent with Wellpoint Care Network, you will receive endless training and support.

From crisis response and stabilization, to ongoing programs to assist in overcoming adversity and prevent future trauma, we're here when you need us.

FOSTER PARENT STORIES



Meet Jessica

"Their lives are already disrupted so much. If you take them away from their siblings as well, that throws another wrench in the situation."



Meet Judy

"People always say 'I could never (foster) because it would hurt too much to give the kids back,' and I say, 'You would make a perfect foster parent, because it **should** hurt.'"



**BECOME
A FOSTER
PARENT**

Reach out to us:

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Find us online @WellpointCare

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