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PORT JERVIS

Drug crisis drives rising need for foster homes

Staff Writer Times Herald-Record

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By Jessica Cohen

For the Gazette

PORT JERVIS – The need for foster homes is trending upward in Port Jervis, says Victoria Naylor, director of foster care at Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth.

Much of the need stems from parental drug abuse, and they often place babies born with drugs in their system. Two newborn babies were recently placed in a Port Jervis home, six months apart.

Causes for foster placement also include medical and educational neglect - when parents allow their children to avoid going to school - as well as domestic violence and physical abuse.



The need for foster homes is trending upward in Port Jervis, says Victoria Naylor, director of foster care at Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth. Jessica Cohen/For The Gazette

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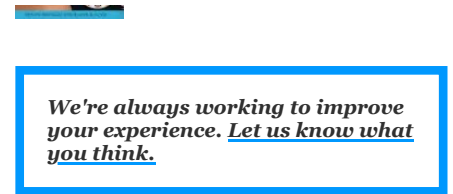


The two babies are in the process of being adopted, but reunification with biological families is the goal.

“Fostering often lasts eight to 12 months, and a majority are reunified with their families, but we don’t predict how long,” Naylor said.

The four children currently in Port Jarvis foster homes have been there for more than a year, including brothers who are 3 and 6 years old, and a girl who is about 10, with a brother under 4. Berkshire has three Port Jarvis families providing foster care, but more are needed.

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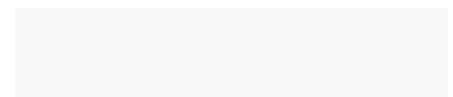
“There’s a huge need for foster homes for sibling groups and teens,” Naylor said.

Berkshire specializes in placing children with medical or behavioral issues, and she sometimes encounters anxiety in prospective foster parents about taking in adolescents who would live amid their younger children, about taking in children of a different race, and about coping with behavior issues.

“Open-mindedness is sometimes a deterrent to placement,” says Naylor. “You need to look past race and certain behaviors. We’re upfront in our workshops about the situations children come from.”

She notes that many foster children have been “parentified,” that is left to care for

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themselves and sometimes siblings too.

But Naylor enthuses about current Port Jervis foster parents and the way they have integrated their foster children with their biological ones.

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“They took in the children as their own and went through their ups and downs. I wish I could clone them,” she said.

Berkshire provides preparatory training for fostering in a 10-week program, and clinicians are always on call as needed for foster families. Meanwhile, they offer family engagement programs that help biological parents “break down barriers to reunification.” Their programs involve an “everyday parenting model,” in which clinicians visit homes to identify parenting obstacles and work with parents as a counselor would.

“We’ve had a lot of success with that program,” said Naylor, who oversees it.

Biological parents also must comply with court-imposed requirements, such as completing a substance abuse treatment program. Foster parents maintain varying degrees of contact with biological parents, sometimes including visits, Naylor said.

“Fosters are as involved with biological parents as they want to be,” she said.

Permanency hearings occur at six-month intervals to consider whether children should have adoptive homes.

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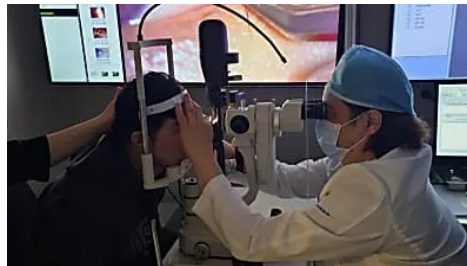
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