



Foster Care and Adoption Information



Summit County

CHILDREN SERVICES

Building Families . . . Building Futures

summitkids.org





Make a difference, one child at a time!



To help children and families at risk, Summit County Children Services along with its partners in the community provides a number of support and preventive services, including:

- 24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline
- Intake Services
- Protective Services
- Foster Care & Adoption Inquiry Line
- Clothing Center
- Kinship Care
- Kinship Care Navigator Services of Summit County
- Independent Living Program
- Medical care provided by Akron Children's Hospital and dental care by community providers
- Family Interaction Center
- Volunteer & Donor Opportunities



Summit County Children Services Today

Summit County Children Services is on the 'front line' of the community's desire to protect abused and neglected children.

The agency is mandated by law to provide a variety of important services for these children and their families. These mandates, which are considered the 'cornerstones' of today's Child Welfare System, include: *Investigation, Reunification, Child Safety, Permanency and Child Well-Being.*

Today at Summit County Children Services innovative approaches are being taken to provide these important mandated services . . . while at the same time actively engaging with families in more collaborative and supportive ways than ever before.

For example, through a strategy called *Team Decision Making (TDM)*, agency staff involves families and local community members collaboratively in the many decisions involving a child. This strong communication among all parties involved in a case helps staff evaluate the situation, builds strong community partnerships, and above all gives children a better chance to stay with their families.

Another exciting initiative launched by Summit County Children Services is the innovative *Alternative Response (AR)* service delivery model. This emerging practice in child welfare provides some families that are brought to the agency's attention with an 'alternative' service track. This AR approach not only

eliminates the labels 'victim' and 'perpetrator' but truly focuses on the needs of the family through rapid implementation of tangible and intangible services and supports to keep children safe and in their own homes.

Thanks to Team Decision Making, Alternative Response, and a variety of other innovative approaches being instituted at Summit County Children Services, the agency's critically important work of protecting abused and neglected children has taken on a much broader dimension – that of building families and building futures.

Accountability to the Community

Summit County Children Services complies with the rules and standards of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

Waiting Children

Summit County Children Services features many of its waiting children on websites (see list below). Photographs and informational narratives of children in the agency's permanent custody are included along with worker contact information.

You can find information on boys, girls, teens and siblings who are available for adoption through Summit County Children Services' website: **summitkids.org**

When you visit the agency's website, you can also find more information about the foster care and adoption process.

The agency also features many of its waiting children on the following websites: **adoptuskids.org**
adoptionphotolistingohio.org

For additional information on foster care and adoption, contact Summit County Children Services at (330) 379-1990.



What is Foster Care?

Foster care, by definition, is temporary care provided to children lasting from overnight to a year or more. Children are removed from their homes when they are abused, neglected or are identified as being dependent and their parents are unable to care for them safely at the time of placement. If no relative is available or identified, children are placed on a temporary basis with foster parents. Priority is placed on keeping children in their own neighborhoods and schools.

Foster parents, along with Summit County Children Services' staff, are considered part of a professional team that works together for the benefit of children. They provide respite care for other foster parents and offer specialized help for challenging adolescents. Foster parents are asked, when appropriate, to work with biological families to promote effective reunification. When reunification is not possible or in the best interest of the children, the agency obtains permanent custody of the children and they become available for adoption. Many foster parents adopt the children placed in their care.

The Need

Foster parents care for children of all ages, but there is a particular need for foster parents to care for:

- Teenagers (age 12 and older)
- Sibling groups (brothers and sisters who should remain together)

Qualifications

To become a foster-to-adopt parent, you:

- Can be married, single, divorced or widowed
- Can be with or without children of your own
- Can be a renter or home owner
- Must be 21 years or older (18 to adopt)
- Can be employed or a stay-at-home parent – as long as your income is adequate to meet your household needs
- Must be committed to caring for children
- Must be able to accept children as they are
- Must be able to provide support and be a strong role model of positive family life

The Process

Staff members at Summit County Children Services are committed to working closely with families throughout the foster care process. Please read "How to Become a Foster or Foster-to-Adopt Parent" on page 6.

Support Available

Summit County Children Services provides the following support to foster parents:

- Personal support from an assigned Foster Home Coordinator
- Ongoing training
- Monthly board checks
- Medical, dental and vision care for children
- Mileage reimbursement
- Special occasion and holiday support
- Foster Parent Association

Monthly information meetings are available for you to learn more about becoming a foster parent. To register to attend the next information meeting, call (330) 379-1990 or visit our website at summitkids.org.



What is Adoption?

Adoption is a legal process that creates a lifelong commitment and relationship between parents and children not born to them. The adoptive parents become legally, morally and financially responsible for all aspects of the child's care.

Children become available for adoption only after the court has determined that reunification with their biological family is not possible or is not in their best interest. If a relative is not available or identified to adopt or permanently care for the children, then an adoptive placement is pursued.

Children in the permanent custody of Summit County Children Services are often adopted by their foster parents. All adoptive parents will also be licensed for foster care. The goal is that children will only have one placement if reunification does not occur.

NOTE: Summit County Children Services no longer approves ADOPTION-ONLY home studies unless the family is approved for a child-specific adoption. Families who are interested in adoption complete the training, paperwork and home study process and become approved and licensed for BOTH foster care and adoption. They are known as foster-to-adopt families.

The Need

The children who are waiting to be adopted are boys and girls of all ages. Children come from a variety of cultural, ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds and are in need of stable foster-to-adopt parents who are sensitive to their circumstances. Summit County Children Services has a need for families to adopt:

- Teenagers (age 12 and older)
- Sibling groups (brothers and sisters who should remain together)

Qualifications

To become a foster-to-adopt parent, you:

- Can be married, single, divorced or widowed
- Can be with or without children of your own
- Can be a renter or home owner
- Must be 18 years or older (21 to foster)
- Can be employed or a stay-at-home parent – as long as your income is adequate to meet your current household needs

The Process

Staff members at Summit County Children Services are committed to working closely with families throughout the foster-to-adopt process. Please read "How to Become a Foster or Foster-to-Adopt Parent" on page 6.

The Cost

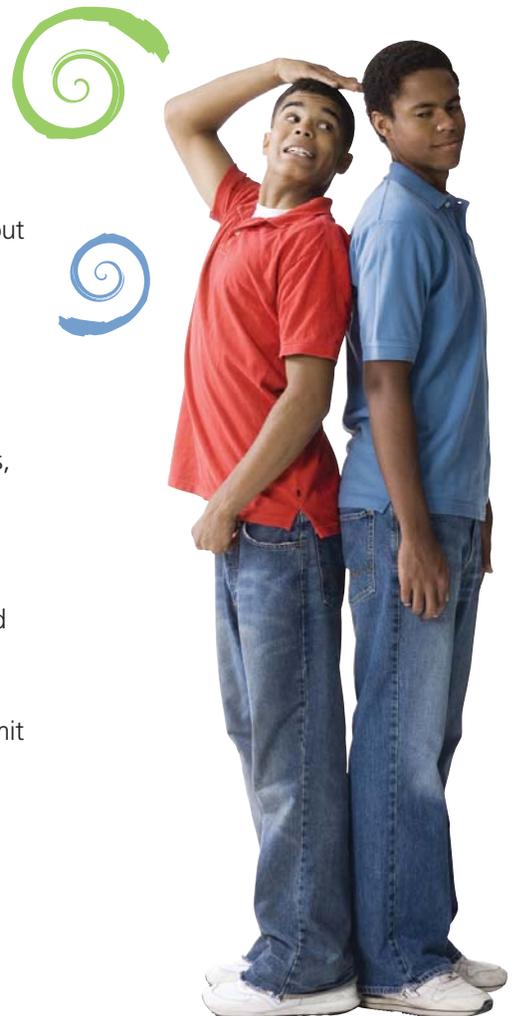
Summit County Children Services charges no fees for adoption services, though there are minimal costs involved with adopting a child. You will have to pay fees associated with court costs for the adoption and a new birth certificate for your adopted child. These costs are reimbursable after the adoption.

Most children adopted through Summit County Children Services are eligible for an adoption subsidy, a monthly support check issued to adoptive families to assist with the cost of caring for the child. Most adopted children also qualify for medical assistance through Medicaid.

Support Available

Summit County Children Services has staff readily available to offer supportive services to families after an adoption has been finalized. Information or referral services can sometimes be provided to an adopted child seeking information on his birth parents; to birth parents or birth siblings looking to reunite with a family member; and to an adoptive family that needs background information on their adopted child. In addition, families who adopt can receive financial assistance through the Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy (PASSS).

Monthly information meetings are available for you to learn more about becoming a foster-to-adopt parent. To learn about children currently available for adoption, visit the Summit County Children Services website at summitkids.org.



How to Become a Foster or Foster-to-Adopt Parent

At Summit County Children Services, there is a multi-step process to become a licensed foster or foster-to-adopt parent. The length of time it takes to complete the process is six to nine months. The process is outlined below.

Step 1 – Make an Inquiry

Families or individuals interested in foster care and adoption can contact Summit County Children Services by calling the Inquiry Line at (330) 379-1990; by visiting the agency's website at summitkids.org; or by mailing a request to 264 S. Arlington Street, Akron, Ohio 44306. A complete information packet is mailed to you.



Step 2 - Attend an Information Meeting

Attendance at an information meeting is mandatory. Individuals interested in foster care and adoption are given an opportunity to learn more about these programs and the need at Summit County Children Services. For a complete list of information meetings, visit summitkids.org.

Step 3 - Fill Out an Application

All prospective foster and foster-to-adopt parents are required to fill out and submit an application. After submitting an application, all adult household members will have criminal background checks done.

Step 4 - Attend the Required Pre-Service Training and Complete the Necessary Paperwork

The training sessions are offered evenings and weekends for your convenience. Attendees will learn more about foster care and adoption, the agency and the children in care. While you attend training, you will be required to complete all paperwork.

Step 5 - Have a Home Study Completed

A Home Study Assessor will conduct a family assessment that involves interviews with all family members. This information gathering will help the Home Study Assessor better understand the personal values, parenting strengths and styles, and dynamics of the family to determine what children will be best suited for placement with the family. Families will also learn the unique concerns and challenges of caring for abused, neglected and dependent children.

Step 6 - Identify and Select a Child for Placement

Licensed families are assigned a Foster Home Coordinator. A child is identified for placement based on the family's ability to meet the child's needs. Information about foster care board rates and/or adoption subsidies is explained during this step. Prior to a child being placed with an approved adoptive family, the family is provided with detailed information about the child and any specific financial and medical resources available.

Step 7 - Pre-Placement of a Child in the Home

Prior to a child being placed with a family, the family is provided with an opportunity to discuss the characteristics of the child, as well as detailed information available regarding any specific care or special needs of the child.

Step 8 - Post-Placement of a Child in the Home

The child is placed with the family after pre-placement visits (if possible). Both the family and child must deal with new pressures and challenges. The child's social worker and the Foster Home Coordinator will help the family through this adjustment period by making regular home visits, maintaining phone contact, and helping with counseling, crisis intervention and referral assistance.



Frequently Asked Questions



For your convenience, Summit County Children Services has listed below the most frequently asked questions and answers regarding foster care and adoption. If you still have more questions, please feel free to call the Foster Care and Adoption Inquiry Line at (330) 379-1990 or visit summitkids.org.

How old do you need to be?

You must be at least 21 years old to become a foster parent and at least 18 years old to adopt a child.

Do you have to earn a certain income?

You must be able to meet your household needs.

Do you have to be married?

No, you can be married, single, divorced, widowed or be a co-parent.

Do you have to own your own home?

No, you can rent. But you must have adequate space available and your landlord's approval to take in foster children.

Can you be a foster parent if you work?

Yes. Extra help for the cost of day care may be available.

Do foster children have to have separate bedrooms?

No, but each child must have a separate bed. Foster children cannot have a bedroom in the attic or basement. After age five, boys and girls have to sleep in separate rooms.

How many foster children can I take?

For the first two years, licensed foster parents may take up to three foster children. After two years of service, up to five children with a total of ten children maximum (including your own children, foster children and any children for whom you provide day care).

Can a foster parent request specific ages or gender of foster children?

You may ask for the age and gender of children you think would fit best with your family situation and needs.

Can I be a foster parent if I have a criminal record?

Possibly. Each situation would be reviewed under the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' rules for family foster care. If it is found that the person's criminal record meets the rehabilitation requirements of the State of Ohio rules, then the person could be considered as a potential foster parent. All adult household members must have a criminal background check.

What happens after training is completed?

Once you have submitted an application and completed the required pre-service training, the training liaison will visit your home to complete a cursory safety audit and gather any remaining required paperwork. Some of the required paperwork includes a fire inspection, an autobiography, a medical statement for your doctor for each member of the family, and information regarding alternate child caregivers. Then a social worker, known as a Home Study Assessor, will be assigned to continue the home study process.

What is the home study?

The home study is a process which involves information sharing and gathering for the purpose of determining an applicant's suitability in meeting the general criteria to be licensed and/or approved as a foster or foster-to-adopt parent based upon state and agency eligibility requirements.

The home study is a detailed process which involves all household members. During the home study, all family members will be interviewed by the Home Study Assessor. The process affords applicants the opportunity to assess whether or not foster care and/or adoption is the appropriate option for one's family. The home study process also provides the applicants and the agency the opportunity to mutually assess which children in the agency's care the applicant is best suited to parent.

Who will do my home study?

Once your completed application and required paperwork have been submitted, a Home Study Assessor will be assigned to continue the home study process. All Home Study Assessors have received specialized Adoption Assessor Training that qualifies them to conduct home studies.

How long does all this take?

The home study process usually takes three to six months.

When can I have foster children come to my home?

After your home study has been completed and approved, the agency recommends the family to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services for licensing. When you receive your license, the agency can begin placing foster children with your family.

What kind of assistance does the agency provide to foster parents in caring for children?

The foster parents receive a board check each month for the care of each child. Medical care is provided by Akron Children's Hospital and dental care by community providers. A Foster Home Coordinator is also assigned to each foster home to provide personal support. Additionally, foster parents are invited to attend regular Foster Parent Association meetings for support and training opportunities.

Can I adopt a child of a different race?

Yes. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, age or gender. Each of our available children will be placed with the family who can best meet their needs.

What is meant by children with "special needs"?

In adoption, "special needs" include a wide variety of characteristics. This could simply include children of a minority race, part of a sibling group, or an older child. It could also include a child with a medical condition, developmental disability, behavioral problem, or even a child who has been in permanent custody for more than a year. What all these children have in common is a "special need" to become part of a caring family.

What is the greatest need for foster care?

Summit County Children Services' greatest need for children entering foster care is families to care for teens and large sibling groups. The largest percentage of children coming into agency custody are children, birth to age 2; children, ages 12 and older; and sibling groups, with three or more siblings.

What is the greatest need for adoption?

Summit County Children Services' greatest need for children waiting to be adopted is families to adopt older children (age 12 and older). Nearly 90 percent of the children in the agency's permanent custody are age 12 and older.





Mission Statement

SCCS is committed to the safety, permanency and well-being of all children served, in partnership with families and the community.

Vision Statement

Because we believe in family preservation and that all children deserve a safe, stable and permanent home, we will:

- Intervene only where necessary and only to the proper degree;
- Assess the community's concerns of abuse and neglect focusing on safety, risk and family strengths;
- Serve as partners with families and in teamwork with partner agencies in the community;
- Actively engage families, and their extended families and supports, in the decision-making process;
- Diligently work towards reunification when a child must be removed from home;
- Seek permanent homes for all children who cannot safely return to their parent or guardian;
- Remain mission-focused in our everyday work;
- Recruit and maintain diverse staff committed to serving all children and families;
- Approach our work with integrity, ethics and compassion;
- Be fiscally responsible.

Our Values

We Believe:

- All children have a right to a safe and stable home.
- All children should be in permanent homes, i.e., their own home, a relative's home or an adoptive home.
- The well-being of all children is vital to us, the child, the family and our community.
- All families deserve our best efforts to partner with them and to treat them with respect and honesty.
- We have an ongoing responsibility to increase our knowledge and improve our services by learning all we can about the diversity of our families and community.
- We have a duty to remain objective and consistent in all of our interactions with families and children.
- We must be creative and innovative in the delivery of services so as to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of our work with families.
- We have a responsibility to be able stewards of taxpayer resources.

Important Phone Numbers

24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline
(330) 434-KIDS (5437)

Foster Care & Adoption Inquiry Line
(330) 379-1990

Volunteer & Donor Opportunities
(330) 379-1994

Speakers Bureau & Community Education
(330) 379-2090

**Kinship Care Navigator Services
of Summit County**
(330) 996-1798 OR (866) 996-1798



Summit County

CHILDREN SERVICES

Building Families . . . Building Futures

summitkids.org

264 S. Arlington Street, Akron, Ohio 44306

Phone: (330) 379-9094

Hearing Impaired: ORS 7-1-1



Follow us on Facebook.

