

## Treatment Foster Care

### Levels of Care

#### *Definition*

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) have rules regulating all foster care and treatment foster care in the state. Administrative Rule DCF 56 (see Appendix A of this Handbook for a copy of DCF 56), the general foster family rule, must be adhered to as the primary licensing rule for all families wishing to be licensed foster homes in Wisconsin.

As of January 1, 2011, DCF has recently implemented the Levels of Care (LOC) initiative in order to improve stability, safety, and permanence of children by matching their assessed needs with the skills, abilities and capacities of caregivers.

All foster parents licensed in the state of Wisconsin will be assigned a Level of Care certification during the foster care licensing process based on meeting specific requirements in each of these categories:

- Qualifications
- Training
- Caregiver references
- Caregiver experience

Each of the five Levels of Care certifications has been assigned a specific number of training hours, personal references, and experience requirements.

The five Levels of Care and their requirements are described in the follow chart:

	Training Hours	Number of References	Experience	Qualifications
Level 1 Child Specific	6 hrs. pre-service			
Level 2 Basic	6 hrs. pre-service, 30 hrs. initial	3 unrelated		
Level 3 Moderate	36 hrs. pre-service, 24 hrs. initial, 18 hrs. on-going	3 unrelated, 1 relative	3 of 7 listed criteria	
Level 4 Specialized	40 hrs. pre-service, 30 hrs. initial, 24 hrs. on-going	3 unrelated, 1 relative	4 of 7 listed criteria	
Level 5 Exceptional	40 hrs. pre-service, 30 hrs. initial, 24 on-going	5 years work references, 2 personal	4 year degree, 2 years work experience, or personal with similar family member	Previous employment as manager or professional development plan for such;
Level 5 Program Staff	40 hrs. pre-service, 80 hrs.	5 years work references, 2		1 of 5 listed criteria

	work with experienced staff, 24 hours on-going	personal		
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Below are characteristics of the A Helping Heart program, which sets it apart from regular foster care.

The A Helping Heart program:

1. Is created for children and youth with complex needs;
2. Is designed to achieve a planned outcome in the youth's behavior, attitude, or general condition;
3. Recognizes a home environment as the location where behavioral change occurs;
4. Sees the treatment foster parents as the key agents of change;
5. Provides social work staff to actively support the foster families in meeting their responsibilities as change agents;
6. Develops, with the program manager/foster parent, treatment plans for each child and youth in the program;
7. Coordinates other support services, such as psychotherapy, drug and/or alcohol treatment, special educational services, employment, etc.;
9. Provides education and training opportunities for AHH foster parents and staff; and
10. Provides after hours crisis support services.

### *Treatment Foster Parents*

A Helping Heart Treatment Foster Parents are the main providers of treatment for children placed with A Helping Heart. They are expected to have the knowledge and skills required to deliver treatment programs in their homes. They must have patience, flexibility, confidence, self-awareness, and intelligence to develop and carry out treatment plans. They must also have "common sense." A Helping Heart foster parents are open to ongoing learning and growth and are willing to work cooperatively with other members of the treatment team.

Those who join A Helping Heart become licensed foster families under Wisconsin law. To qualify as treatment foster parents, they must be experienced in working with children. Most also have had some training in working with children who have complex emotional needs. To qualify as a Level 5 provider, an applicant must have 1) previous employment as a manager or supervisor or a professional development plan to develop management and supervisory skills, and 2) shall have at least one of the following:

- a) A 4-year degree from an accredited college or university with a major in social work, sociology, special education, psychology, counseling and guidance, criminal justice, nursing, certified nursing assistant, or other health related field, education, or any other area in a human services field as approved by the department,
- b) Two years of supervised full-time work experience in an out-of-home care program or assisted living program with adults, or
- c) Personal experience with a family member who has needs similar to the population to be served.



## ***Initial Foster Home License***

The laws of Wisconsin require that every foster family be licensed to show that they have met the standards in the state laws regulating foster care and treatment foster care. Most of these requirements are in DCF 56, called "administrative rules" which have the force of Wisconsin law. In addition, each new AHH foster parent must complete 40 hours of training before becoming licensed.

It is the duty of the foster family to follow DCF 56, and we recommend reviewing these documents frequently. Sometimes questions come up about the rules and what they really mean. AHH staff and foster parents are urged to talk with their AHH social worker or administrative staff as these questions arise.

A Helping Heart licenses families for two years, although there are also some licensing requirements that need to be fulfilled every year (a training plan and a training log, showing 24 credits of training a year). The foster family license specifies the number, ages, and sex of the children who may be placed for care. A treatment foster family license is usually written for no more than two children. It must be changed each time major changes occur in the family's living situation.

All prospective parents must complete an application process before being licensed. The process includes, but is not limited to: meetings and personal interviews with AHH staff; written applications; medical certificates from a family physician; verification of insurance; home studies; and training and reference letters from friends, employers and schools. Prospective foster homes will be checked to meet space, health, fire and safety standards as required by Wisconsin Administrative Rules and State Statutes. Once all of these pieces of documentation are gathered, the AHH social worker will compile a written home study and recommendation based on the information.

***Important Note: A complete description of the licensing requirements and process is mailed to prospective foster parents when they initiate contact with A Helping Heart, Inc. The pre-licensing process is an evaluation stage and does not ensure/guarantee that we will issue a license.***

## ***Re-licensing***

At least 30 days before a foster family license is due to expire, a family must apply for re-licensing. Staff will complete a performance evaluation based upon the family's experience during the period of the current license, and written home studies will be updated. The license may be renewed for any period of time, not to exceed two years. Unless there are unusual circumstances, A Helping Heart' practice is to renew licenses for a period of two years.

## ***Foster Home Agreement***

When a child is initially placed or re-placed, the AHH foster family and its assigned AHH social worker are required to complete a Foster Home Agreement for each child. The Agreement defines the roles and responsibilities of the agency and the AHH treatment parents.

## *Expectations of AHH Parents*

After the licensing processes are complete, the work of the Treatment Foster Parent is just beginning. Maintaining licensure requires continuous commitment to the agreements made to become licensed initially. The on-going duties of an AHH parent are outlined below. Some of the responsibilities are an extension of the usual responsibilities of parents – to provide a caring, consistent, and stable family environment. Other responsibilities represent an agreement to provide an additional level of care necessary to serve the treatment needs of young people who come into our care.

## *Expenses*

- AHH parents are expected to provide for the foster child's needs and expenses as they would for their own children. This includes costs associated with developing competencies, such as school fees, lessons, sports equipment, camps, and hobbies.
- AHH parents should provide an adequate wardrobe to make the youth indistinguishable in appearance from their peers in the community. In general, AHH parents are expected to provide children with adequate clothing out of the monthly payment for the child. Situations and costs vary, so no firm rule exists for how much should be spent on each child per month. However, an informal and non-binding rule of thumb suggests that AHH parents plan to spend a yearly average of around \$600.00 on clothing for each child, or about \$50.00 per month. Social work staff will assist the AHH parents in assessing the child's needs for clothes. Excessively worn or ill-fitting clothes often make a child feel inferior to other children, and certainly are not helpful in creating the positive sense of self-esteem needed to grow and mature in the healthiest way.
- AHH parents are expected to transport the children to needed services, work (when applicable), and extra-curricular activities.
- The monthly stipend that foster parents receive covers the increased household expenses of caring for another person (electricity, water, hygiene items, etc.).
- AHH parents are expected to provide foster children with an allowance for spending money. The amount may vary from family to family and according to the age of the child.

## *Treatment*

- Assist your social worker in the development of a treatment plan that addresses the individual needs of the youth in care.
- Assume primary responsibility for implementing treatment strategies in the home on a daily basis.
- Help the child maintain contact with the family and work to enhance those relationships.
- Prepare teens for independent living through hands-on teaching.
- Obtain needed services in the community. Arrange for medical, TB tests, dental, and eye exams within the first month of placement.
- Keep records of the youth's behavior, significant incidents, and progress in targeted areas.



- Spend at least 10 minutes of one-on-one interaction with each child daily in a supportive and non-judgmental way.
- Maintain a rate of praise, recognition, and support which always exceeds the rate of criticism and reminders.
- Provide at least 30 days' notice when requesting that a child move unless there are serious health or safety concerns.

### *Team Membership*

- Participate in treatment team meetings, school meetings, etc.
- Develop and maintain positive working relationships with the child's family, other team members and community service providers.
- Communicate concerns in a positive, supportive, direct and honest manner.

### *Training*

- Understand and adhere to DCF 56 and all A Helping Heart policies.
- Obtain 40 hours of pre-placement training, 30 hours of training during the initial licensure period, and 24 hours of training each year thereafter.
- Become culturally competent; accept and understand the importance of cultural issues in family and community life and in treatment planning.
- Seek out information regarding the specific needs, issues, and diagnoses of the young people placed in your care.

### *Placements*

- The number of placements in an AHH treatment home shall not exceed two.
- AHH parents shall accept for placement only those children approved by A Helping Heart.

### *License Revocation*

The license of any foster parent not in compliance with DCF 56 may be revoked by the agency. This is an extremely rare occurrence in A Helping Heart and is only likely to happen in cases of abuse or when families are unwilling to change conditions that the agency finds to be outside legal and program guidelines.

When an incident occurs which might fall outside the rules, a family will be notified and given instructions on how to correct the situation. If the situation is so serious that the children may be in danger, they may be removed from the home, at least temporarily, until things are resolved.

DCF 56 states, "Any applicant for a license to operate a treatment foster home who is denied a license or a licensee whose license is revoked or whose application for renewal of a license is denied may appeal the decision by asking the department for a hearing in accordance with Ch. 227, Stats." Information on how to appeal the revocation may be found in DCF 56.10.

### ***Foster Parents' Bill of Rights***

It should be noted that an organization in Wisconsin has drafted a "Bill of Rights" for foster parents that they are attempting to have ratified by legislators. See Appendix C for this bill of rights in detail. For a detailed description of A Helping Heart, Inc.'s grievance procedures, see Chapter 8, Employment Policies.