



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

FOSTER MOM TO 200 TRANSFORMS LIVES

For Barbara Johnson, it's in her nature to nurture. With more than 25 years as a foster parent alongside her husband Frank, her passion is to build confidence, instill character and help kids and teens to overcome their challenges.

Barbara grew up in the Seattle area as the oldest of seven children. Her mother was often ill, which meant Barbara was usually in charge of caring for her younger siblings. She and Frank married 44 years ago, raised their family in the Seward Park area and are now grandparents, residing in Renton.

"For as long as I can remember, young people in need of support have always had a place in our home," says Barbara. "It's been a way of life for us."

Barbara developed a career as a fraud investigator for Washington state and then worked part-time with Bank of America to have more time for her family. One day she was on a walk with a friend who was the foster care licenser for the YMCA. Her friend suggested that the Johnsons become foster parents, to receive financial support to help cover the expenses incurred as they hosted youth. Fostering with the Y, she explained, would also enable Barbara to receive training and other useful resources.

Barbara registered and thus began her long, mutually beneficial relationship with the Y – she and Frank have fostered more than 200 children! As the years went by, her awareness of the local need for foster parents only increased, especially for children of color and especially in south Seattle.

Working with local schools to develop IEPs (Individual Educations Plans) for the children they fostered, Barbara got to know many educators. As a result, Seattle Public Schools hired her in their Special Education Department to peer mentor parents and foster parents of children with behavioral issues. Barbara is skilled at de-escalating potentially volatile situations; her techniques and insights are highly valued.

"Behavioral challenges are often an issue with foster kids, but they're far from insurmountable," says Barbara. "Some kids are aggressive or behave in other unusual ways because they lack the ability to process their feelings before acting out. They've never been taught a better way. Caring adults can make a huge difference by helping them to develop the coping skills they'll need for life."

When asked what qualities make a good foster parent, Barbara says patience, endurance and a network of support such as the Y offers. Her process in the beginning of each relationship is to look for that child's interests, talents or hobbies to help develop them and build self-esteem.

"It's so fulfilling to see a child grow and change. There are many types of foster care you can provide through the Y, with the ultimate goal of reuniting the child with his or her family, or finding another safe, permanent home if their family is unable to care for them," says Barbara. "Whatever type of care is right for you, the important thing is to set small goals and take it one day at a time. All children are different, but all need love. Stick with it, because progress happens over time."

The Y needs families for four types of Foster Homes in King, Snohomish and Pierce counties:

- Respite homes for short stays of 2-14 days while therapeutic and traditional foster parents are out of town or on adult vacations.
- Treatment homes for youth ages 6-20
- Short-term assessment homes for stabilizing youth and families, while the family needs are assessed by the Y and the Children's Administration social workers.
- Traditional foster homes for short or long term care while a safe family situation or independent living situation is developed.

How the Y supports Foster Parents:

- Training: Two free parent trainings and support meetings each month, 10 months a year.
- Support: A team of Child and Family Therapists, Family Support Specialists and interns support each home and child. A Permanency Program Manager serves as an advocate and coach for parents. Twenty-four hour crisis consultation and outreach support are available.
- Respite: Two week respite (vacation) per year and two days "weekend" respite per month for new foster parents.
- Payment: Up to \$1700 per month in compensation per child, depending on the type of placement and needs of the child.
- Y Membership: Foster families qualify for free membership to the YMCA of Greater Seattle (13 branches).

To Apply or Learn More:

For more information or to apply to become a foster parent through the Y, contact 206.382.5340 or fosterparenting@seattleyymca.org or visit www.yfamilyservices.org