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For immediate release

Chris and Becky Turgeon and the three foster children they're adopting enjoy the chickens on the family's farm.

The Turgeons believe so strongly in foster parenting that they plan to continue even after the adoption is final. (Rice County photo)



## **Foster parents offer their hearts, homes to children who need them**

Becky and Chris Turgeon are used to supporting each other's out of the box ideas.

But when Becky suggested the empty nesters become foster parents, she wasn't sure how her husband would react, even telling Chris that if he wasn't completely on board that she'd be OK with his decision.

Becky says there were signs: newspaper headlines and news stories about foster care that caught her eye. But more than that, she felt foster parenting was something she was being called to do.

"I was OK with it," said Chris of becoming foster parents. "I thought we'd go down that road and maybe it wouldn't happen."

By June 2019, the Turgeons had completed the necessary paperwork and background checks needed to become licensed foster parents. They began by providing respite care, pre-arranged, short-term breaks for children/families. Before long, the Turgeons, who were then employed full time, were caring for four siblings -- all under 6. They children stayed with the Turgeons for 10 months.

Becky smiles as she talks about how the couple rearranged their lives and their schedules to make sure the children felt loved and cared for. Today, they're foster parents to three siblings, and are in the midst of adopting the kids, ages 11, 12 and 13.

The Turgeons, who have two adult children, don't expect adoption will mean the end of foster parenting. They plan to continue offering their home and their hearts to children who need it.

Becky and Chris Turgeon, and Theresa and Charles Olson of Dundas are just two examples of the hundreds of foster families across Minnesota. In 2021, approximately 12,400 children and young adults experienced out-of-home care, according to the state Department of Human Services. Rice County currently has almost 100 children in foster care.

Katie Anderson and Cheryl Marek, Rice County social workers who license foster parents, say there's always a need for foster parents.

"We are grateful for the outstanding foster parents we have in Rice County, said Marek. "However, there is always the need for additional licensed homes in order to provide the best matches for our kids needing care."

### **The best gift**

Like the Turgeons, Theresa and Charles Olson were enjoying life as empty nesters. They loved boating, camping and traveling south when the Minnesota winters turned frigid.

But when three of their grandchildren were about to be sent into foster care, they went back into parent mode.

"I'd rather give up my life to give them a home," said Theresa, who relishes helping each child decorate their bedroom to suit their taste, allowing them to have friends come visit and planning outings she knows they'll enjoy.



Charles Olson helps push his granddaughter's hair behind her ears. He and his wife, Theresa, right, are foster parents to the preschooler and her two siblings and hope to adopt the children. (Rice County photo)

It's not been easy for the Olsons. One of the children has a serious medical condition; all three have been bounced around from place to place and given few parameters. But there are plenty of bright spots, they say.

"It's worth it," says Theresa. "These kids are worth it. If somebody could step in and be (a foster child's) mom and dad, it would be the best gift you could ever give."

Nationally, there's a need for families interested in caring for teens, who DHS says make up more than one quarter of the children in foster care. That includes teens who are parenting their own children.

As Theresa Olson will tell you, older children are more challenging. They've seen more, carry more emotional baggage.

According to DHS, the most common reasons children and young adults in Minnesota enter out-of-home placement in 2021 were

- Caretaker drug abuse (34%)
- Allegations of neglect (14%)
- Child mental health needs (9%)

## **Proof of love**

Foster parenting has changed Becky Turgeon. She's more willing to go with the flow, more selfless, less judgmental, more willing to have a different perspective than others might.

She and her husband say they've realized that parents whose children have been placed in foster care are often just children in an adult's body.

"A lot of them never learned parenting skills," says Chris Turgeon. "We were lucky enough to grow up in pretty stable homes. A lot of them haven't had that advantage."

Like the Turgeons, the Olsons want to continue being foster parents, possibly providing respite care, which is short-term and can be scheduled in advance.

"I see what these kids go through," said Charles Olson, "and we want to be able to do that."

A saying printed on one of Becky Turgeon's sweatshirts captures her feelings on the subject.

"When it's hard to love, love harder," it says.

"Love, it's a choice. You choose," says Becky, who's upfront about how painful it is to see her foster children return to their families. But it's in those moments that she reminds herself that the hurt is the proof of love.

"It's challenging," she says, "But it's so worth it."

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## **MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH**

The Children's Bureau's National Foster Care Month campaign recognizes the important role that members from all parts of the child welfare system play in supporting children, youth and families.

## **BECOME A FOSTER PARENT**

Foster parents play a huge role in providing love and support, and are a lasting presence in the lives of children who have endured a great deal of hardship.

Rice County has the need for additional licensed foster care homes, both short- and long-term. Foster parents also provide occasional respite for children (pre-arranged scheduled breaks for children/families).

To learning more, contact Cheryl Marek or Katie Anderson, child foster care licensors, at 507-332-6115.