**EDITORIAL: Do you foster care?**

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June 06--The question "Do you care for kids?" is answered daily with an enthusiastic "yes" by adults throughout the Midland Empire -- parents, educators, mentors of all backgrounds. Now comes the follow-up: "Do you foster care?" This is the thought-provoking question posed by Healthy Families Programs, the leading provider of child and family-support programs, including foster care and adoption services, in 30 counties in Northwest Missouri. The organization is in the midst of a drive to expand services to our part of the state. Starting in 2014, it began implementing a two-year contract from the state to increase the number of foster and adoptive homes by recruiting, training, licensing and supporting these partners. Healthy Families reports it has found supportive communities throughout the region and 571 new foster homes were licensed in the first year. But during the same period, 1,214 children were removed from their parents' custody in the area due to abuse and/or neglect, the organization said. In short, the need for foster home placements far outpaces the availability. You can join Healthy Families in becoming part of the solution. But don't expect someone to try to coerce you into doing something just because you have a soft place in your heart for kids. That's not how it works. Children in need of foster care have suffered multiple setbacks in life. They are in need of help because adults failed them -- either through abuse, neglect or abandonment. Their home life has been disrupted and often they are separated from brothers and sisters. The last thing a kid in the system needs is someone who doesn't want to be there or is ill-suited for the role. And yet, many more people are capable of taking on this challenge than do. And the rewards are immense for both the child in need of a stable, nurturing home and the foster parents. Interested persons from all walks of life are encouraged to take the first step by attending an informational program -- no commitment or obligation expected. The program, "The Most Rewarding Challenge: An Introduction to Foster Parenting," will be presented from 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, June 7, at McCarthy Baptist Church, 2710 S. Belt Highway. For more information, call toll-free to 855-778-5437 or visit the website www.healthyfamilies4kids.org.

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