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Laying the "Pathway" to Foster Care

"I wish the phone would ring all day," says Patricia Lott, Recruitment Director at Pathway Caring for Children. "That's what we need."

Founded in 1973 by Jim and Velma Bridges, Pathway provides foster care, mental health, and adoption services to children with emotional, mental, and/or behavioral issues. Today, Velma is still on staff and remains passionate about the work. More than 600 children now use the agency's services annually.

Pathway's biggest need right now? Families who will open up their homes and hearts to the difficult-to-place children with intense emotional and behavioral needs who require Therapeutic Foster Care. Pathway has coordinated this high level of foster care since 1992. Currently, it is the largest Therapeutic Foster Care agency in Stark County, with 62 children placed in 58 licensed homes.

Families often find the licensure process daunting and, on average, take up to three years to decide before registering for a class at Pathway. Licensure requires 43 hours of preliminary training on what Lott calls "intense subject matter," including behavior management and the impact of abuse. Once licensed, families must complete 60 training hours every two years, stay up to date on the seemingly ever-changing legalities, and continuously support the child.

Funding from the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton has helped Pathway to expand its family recruitment and retention efforts. Banking on its best recruitment tool, word of mouth, the agency offers financial incentives for referrals, which typically come from within its current foster family network. It organizes group activities, like day trips to SkyMax Trampoline Arena, to build camaraderie and mutual support among the families.

Pathway works to "circle around the child," as Lott says, to attend to all of his or her needs. The agency also circles around the families who demonstrate dedication, resilience, and love while following their calling to provide Therapeutic Foster Care.

To learn more, please contact Patricia Lott, Pathway's Recruitment Director, at (330) 818-0444 or plott@pathwaycfc.org

