

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP**

### **Special Friends –**

#### ***MENTORING***

Special Friends are volunteers who commit to spending quality time each month with a child in Arizona's foster care system. These volunteers mentor, listen, support and encourage children while enriching their lives through shared interests such as sports, the arts and volunteerism in the community. In addition to participating in free monthly activities, Special friends are able to share everyday events and special occasions with their young friends.

#### ***TUTORING***

Special Friends can also volunteer as tutors for children in foster care, serving as reading or math coaches for children who may have fallen behind academically. These volunteers help children acquire the skills they need to achieve their personal best in school.

*It typically takes a Special Friend volunteer 2 - 6 weeks to complete the Special Friends training and approval process. Once this approval process is completed, a volunteer will be matched with a child in foster care. Volunteers and children are typically matched based on mutual interests and geographical proximity.*

#### ***COMMUNITY ADVISING***

One of the most critical needs in our community is for mentors to support foster teens age 17 and older. Upon celebrating their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, foster teens "age out" of the system. These youth are expected to live independently and without support, are more likely to become homeless, unemployed, incarcerated, and become involved in drug and alcohol abuse.

As a **Community Advisor**, you can help make a difference in the life of a foster teen by providing them with emotional support and assistance they need to transition successfully from foster care to independence. You can assist a young adult in learning important life skills, such as job skills, budgeting, educational planning, housing and social skills. To find out more please visit <http://www.aask-az.org/specialfriends/communityAdvisor.html>

### **Foster Care –**

Foster families open their hearts, arms, and homes to children who desperately need them. They provide love, support, safety and commitment, claiming children who are not biologically their own. Foster parents are there in good times and bad to help children heal from the physical and emotional scars left by abuse, neglect, drug exposure and abandonment. They nurture and protect the children, instilling in them the strengths and skills they will need to face life's challenges and opportunities. Foster parents have a difficult job: they are entrusted to love and care for children in need, knowing that their time with them is only temporary. And good foster parents know that making a difference in the life of a child can positively change the child's life forever.

*Foster families must be approved by the state through the foster care licensing process, which includes Orientation, Intake Interview, 30 hours of training, fingerprinting and Homestudy. This process typically takes a foster family 4 – 6 months to complete. This approval process, once completed, allows families to be considered for children available for temporary foster placement in Arizona. Upon approval, a family may be matched with a child or children immediately.*

### **Adoption –**

Adoptive families come from all walks of life. Their families are all shapes and sizes, from two-parent homes with multiple children in the home to single individuals who have never parented before. The common denominator for all adoptive families is that they are strong and loving people with love to share. Adoptive families open their hearts and homes to children who desperately need them. They are entrusted to love, nurture and protect these children for a lifetime. Adoptive parents are there in good times and bad, instilling in their children the values and skills they will need to face life's challenges and opportunities.

*Adoptive families must be approved by the state through the adoption certification process, which includes Orientation, Intake Interview, 30 hours of training, fingerprinting and Homestudy. This process typically takes an adoptive family 6 – 9 months to complete. This approval process, once completed, allows families to be considered for any child available for adoptive placement in Arizona. A certified family may wait anywhere from 2 to 18 months for an adoptive match to be found.*

*During the adoption approval process, families can begin working with a child as Special Friend volunteers. This allows families the opportunity to start building strong, meaningful relationships with children much earlier in the process.*