



*BECOMING A WHIMSPIRE FOSTER FAMILY*



*RECLAIM AND INSPIRE YOUTH*

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# Thank you for inquiring with WhimSpire!

This booklet, arranged in the following four sections, will provide information to help you make a decision about applying for a WhimSpire foster parent contract.

1. A series of questions and answers about foster care. We try to respond to the most common questions asked by families interested in foster care.
2. The performance guidelines for WhimSpire foster families to provide an idea about expectations for families.
3. A description of the Reclaiming philosophy that provides a framework for WhimSpire services.
4. A series of questions prepared by an experienced foster parent to assist you and your family with the decision about applying for foster care.



We hope that you will find this information useful. You should also review Minimum Rules and Regulations for Family Foster Homes, the Colorado State licensing rules for foster homes. You will find the current version of these rules on the WhimSpire website at: [www.whimspire.com](http://www.whimspire.com). WhimSpire staff will visit with you in your home so that you have an opportunity to discuss any further questions you may have after reviewing this material.

## 1. QUESTIONS ABOUT WHIMSPIRE AND FOSTER CARE

***What is WhimSpire?*** WhimSpire is one of several private, licensed child placement agencies in Colorado. Our license is issued by the Colorado Department of Human Services and authorizes WhimSpire to license foster homes and place children and youth in foster homes. We are required to provide services consistent with standards and regulations of the Colorado Department of Human Services. WhimSpire specializes in providing foster family care; we concentrate our efforts to provide a high quality foster care program.

***What are foster families?*** Foster families are families who have been licensed by WhimSpire to provide foster care. Provision of care within families is in the best interest of most children who cannot be cared for by their own parents or kin. This is a valuable service provided to society by our families.

***What types of children does WhimSpire place with foster families?*** We place boys and girls, usually of school age. These young people have a wide variety of needs. WhimSpire strives to match the needs of the young person with the strengths and interests of the family care provider. Your licensing worker will discuss with you the types of youth and behaviors with which you will be most successful. The need is greatest for families who can care for teenagers, school age children with special needs, or for a group of siblings.

***How long will a child or youth stay in my home?*** The length of placement varies depending on the needs of the child and the permanency plan. Some placements may be as short as a few months and others may be long term until the child emancipates into adult living. Whenever possible, efforts are made to reunify the child with his or her birth family; when this is not possible courts will be asked to terminate parental rights so the child can be considered for adoption. If no appropriate adoptive home can be found, the child may remain in long term foster care until he or she is able to assume adult responsibilities.

***Will I be expected to have contact with the birth parents?*** Most likely, unless this will create a danger to you or the child, or if parental rights are terminated. The permanency plan for many of these children will be family reunification; contacts with the birth parent are important to help accomplish the permanency plan. Further, the birth parents are important to children and youth even in situations where you may not be asked to have contact with them. In these situations you will still need to maintain a positive attitude towards the birth parents and to assist the youth to come to understand the nature of his experiences with his parents. Knowledge about birth parents is essential for a child to develop a sense of identity and answer the question, "Who am I?"

***Will I be required to take a specific youth?*** No. You will not be required or expected to take any youth with whom you are uncomfortable. You and WhimSpire staff will discuss referrals and you will usually have the opportunity to meet the youth before a placement is made. At any time during this pre-placement process you may indicate that you are uncomfortable with the young person. Your views will be respected and you will not be pressured or expected to take the youth into your home.

***What are the benefits of being a foster family with WhimSpire?*** The most important benefit is making an important contribution to the welfare of the young person. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping a young person grow into responsible adulthood. You will be working together with other colleagues and treated as a valued member of a service team. You will have the enjoyment of seeing young people grow and develop and you will learn to handle the frustrations of seeing them have difficulty growing and developing. You will also receive modest compensation for your services.

***How are foster families compensated?*** You will be paid on a monthly basis for each youth in care. The amount varies depending on the “difficulty of care” of the young person. The staff person working with you to complete your licensing study can share specific information with you about foster family rates currently being offered in your area.

***Are there reasons for me not to become a foster family?*** Yes. Here are a few things that are likely to lead to unhappiness and interfere with your ability to care for foster children in your home:

- Difficulties in your marriage. Foster care adds a complex dynamic to an existing intimate relationship with your partner. The success of the placement depends heavily on the stability of your primary relationship with your partner. Both partners should have equal commitment to the prospect of foster care.
- Providing a playmate or companion for your own child. Children do need playmates and companions but this is not likely to be a useful motivation for becoming a foster parent.
- Discomfort working on a team with other people. Serving foster children successfully requires a group of people working together on behalf of the child. If you do not like to share responsibilities in decision-making, you may find this a difficult experience.
- Giving up quickly. Foster parents work hard with challenging youth. They need to be persistent in finding ways to work with youth and not give up early.

***How many foster children can I have in my home?*** The number of placements will depend on the size of your home, the number of your own children at home, and your level of energy and enthusiasm in taking on this work. There are also State guidelines that determine the number of children who can be in the home.

***Can a single adult be licensed as a foster family?*** Yes, WhimSpire has one-parent homes. We carefully consider the time the parent has available to care for a foster child and to meet obligations as a foster parent.

***Can both adult foster parents work outside of their home?*** We have some families in which both of the foster parents work outside the home. We consider the amount of time these families have available to care for a foster child and, whenever possible, encourage that at least one of the foster parents either try to work part time or spend full time caring for foster children.

***How do I become licensed as a WhimSpire family?*** A staff person will be contacting you to arrange a home visit and discuss the licensing process. In summary, you will need to do these things:

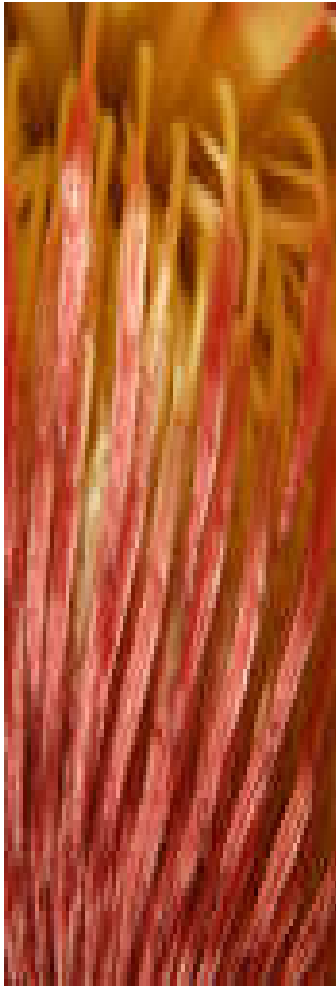
- Submit an application.
- Arrange for five references.
- Arrange with your local law enforcement agency for fingerprinting; we use the fingerprint cards to do criminal justice background checks.
- Arrange to have a health care provider complete a health appraisal for all members of your household.
- Complete CPR and First Aid courses.
- Complete interviews with your WhimSpire staff.
- Complete 12 hours of pre-service core training.

***How long will it take to complete licensing?*** WhimSpire can usually complete the licensing process within three to four months from the receipt of an application. The length of the processing time depends on your timely completion of requirements. A longer time may be required if there are any delays in securing your fingerprints, CPR/First Aid certification, health appraisals, or completing pre-service training.

***Will a criminal record disqualify me from being a WhimSpire foster parent?***

It may, depending on the record. Convictions for child abuse, child sexual abuse, family violence, or violent felony offenses will disqualify you from being licensed as a WhimSpire foster parent. Convictions for other offenses may also disqualify you depending on the nature of the offense and how long ago it occurred. If you have a criminal history, we encourage you to discuss this very early in your contacts with your licensing worker.

***What kind of assistance will WhimSpire provide as I carry out my services as a foster parent?***



WhimSpire staff and foster parents work together to provide the best quality care for children. No one works in isolation. You will have regular contacts with WhimSpire staff both by telephone and visits in your home. Emergency crisis service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You will be expected to participate in monthly foster family support meetings through the academic year so that you can share experiences and learn from other families caring for WhimSpire children. In addition, you are encouraged to participate in a variety of educational lectures and courses offered by WhimSpire and available in the community. All WhimSpire foster parents are required to complete 47 hours of education in their first year (post certification) to help strengthen their services as WhimSpire foster parents. For ongoing years, the primary foster parent will need to complete 40 hours, and the support parent 32 hours. You will receive a modest educational fund that you may use to purchase some of the educational services you require.

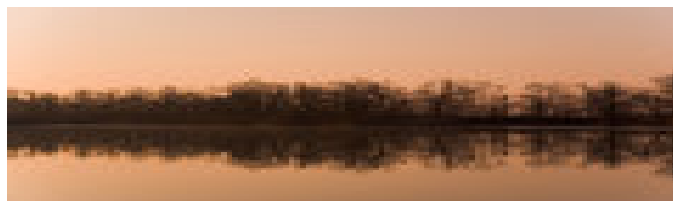
## 2. PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES FOR FOSTER PARENTS

This material from the WhimSpire program manual will provide you with information about your job as a foster family. Foster parents are under contract to WhimSpire to provide an environment in which children and youths have an opportunity to learn constructive behaviors, appropriately meet developmental tasks, and develop links to community social networks. WhimSpire foster parents are partners with other members of the WhimSpire service team. You will be involved in all decisions relating to placing children and youth in your home and for developing service plans with these youth. The adult with primary responsibility for providing care is designated as the primary foster parent; others are designated as support foster parents.

1. Foster parents are licensed under State rules and regulations and are required to be in compliance with these rules at all times.
2. Foster parents are expected to meet the requirements of WhimSpire's program, even when such requirements are in excess of state licensing rules.
3. Foster parents are expected to have access to the internet and the ability to view and download information from the WhimSpire website, as well as the ability to communicate via email.
4. The primary foster parent is expected to attend and participate in all service planning meetings concerning the youth; support foster parents are encouraged to attend and participate.
5. One foster parent is required to attend and participate in all scheduled monthly foster parent support group meetings. The other foster parent is encouraged to attend.
6. Foster families are expected to identify the types of children and youths they are most and least able to serve.
7. Foster parents are expected to work as members of a service team. This will involve openly communicating with other members of the team about child or youth behaviors and the manner and extent to which performance expectations of all members of the team have been carried out.
8. Foster families are expected to work cooperatively with community agencies important in the life of the child or youth.
9. Foster families are expected to provide liaison to the school and assist with educational programming for children and youth in care.
10. Foster families are expected to prepare an annual training plan in cooperation with the WhimSpire staff. The plan will identify knowledge and skills to be further improved.

11. Foster families are expected to maintain communication with the child or youth's family of origin as described in the service plan.
12. Foster families are expected to advocate for children and youth to enhance community involvement.
13. Foster families are expected to communicate appropriately with children and youth and to assist in shaping positive behavior by:
  - Assisting children and youth to cope with separation and loss by responding appropriately to feelings.
  - Assisting children and youth with appropriate handling of anger.
  - Relating to children and youth without escalating conflict or unnecessarily engaging in power struggles.
  - Communicating expectations clearly.
  - Setting appropriate limits.
  - Respecting privacy.
  - Allowing children and youth to test and, when safe, to fail and to learn from failure.
  - Assisting children and youth in making choices.
  - Assisting youth in appropriate expression of sexuality.
14. Foster families are expected to be committed to working with children and youth placed in their home, to not give up when the child or youth misbehaves, and to recognize that child or youth misbehavior is not a personal attack on the foster parent.

The performance guidelines indicate that the job of the foster family is to provide an environment in which youth will learn constructive behaviors and develop links to their communities. Staff will be there to support you as you learn and implement techniques that complement your parenting style and the youth in your home.



### 3. THE RECLAIMING MODEL

The mission of WhimSpire is: *“To reclaim and empower youth to become positive participants in a democratic society.”* The framework WhimSpire uses to assist in accomplishing its mission is inspired by the Native American “Circle of Courage.” The principles in the Circle of Courage have been used in the child rearing practices by Native peoples for centuries. The Circle of Courage principles differ from traditional philosophies by building on the strengths and internal power of youth instead of taking a more punitive approach. In addition, they rely on the community as a whole to contribute to the well-being of the individual, instead of focusing on the youth exclusively.

WhimSpire has adopted the “Reclaiming Model” from the Reclaiming Youth at Risk; *Our Hope for the Future*. All WhimSpire foster parents receive a copy of this book when they are licensed. Most simply put, the Reclaiming Model features four main tenets as a guide for working with children: *Independence, Belonging, Mastery, and Generosity*. Each of these principles intertwines with one another to assist in raising wholly successful adults. Almost every interaction that we have with a child can be shaped around the promotion of these principles.

**The Spirit of Belonging:** *Feeling part of a circle of caring and loving people — whether related or not, helps to strengthen and validate a youth’s notion of his worth in society.*

#### **How it is achieved:**

- Active participation in the community, including voluntary associations, recreational interest groups, religious organizations, or other community organizations.
- Promotion of respect the rights of others; teaching the youth to appreciate differences, and to avoid victimizing others through illegal behavior.
- Living in a family relationship where one gives and takes emotional support.
- Increasing the variety of social connections so that young people have opportunities to interact in a variety of different groups; including peers, family members, neighbors, interest group participants, and so forth.
- Increasing the continuity and closeness of relationships.

**The Spirit of Mastery:** *Facilitation of small success encourages youth to strive for bigger success.*

**How it is achieved:**

- Increasing strengths by identifying interests and skills and assisting youths to develop these.
- Encouragement and trust in the youth's abilities even in the face of frustration.

**The Spirit of Independence:** *The purpose of any external discipline is to build internal discipline.*

**How it is achieved:**

- To promote work and the ability to be self-supporting.
- Teach youth to manage personal and household matters including budgets, cleaning, shopping, cooking and laundry.
- Model the pursuit of a lifestyle that is personally fulfilling.

**The Spirit of Generosity:** *In reaching out to help another, one breaks free from preoccupation of the self.*

**How it is achieved:**

- Contribution to the benefit of the community through volunteer service to others.
- Increasing opportunities for young people to make active, positive contributions to their communities and expecting young people to contribute to community betterment.

A quote from a foster family on using the Reclaiming Model in their work with children:

"I absolutely find the Reclaiming Model very helpful on many levels:

- Helping us focus on certain areas with each child... each day;
- Keeping us focused on each goal we are trying to achieve;
- Putting things in black and white to help us stay on task.

"What I mean by that is: it is awesome to have a model to help us to work with each child individually on the specific needs that *THEY* need help with. Each child is so different that when you actually write it down and focus on each day, it is awesome to see the growth and changes from month-to-month.... never mind that: *day-to-day* changes are also present.



"Belonging, Mastery, Independence, Generosity...all of these qualities... **Character Trait builders**... are so important for everyone. My goal each day is to help the children learn this model not only for today, but for the future. The POWER for TRUE SUCCESS and Character Building is what I strive for each day not only with the children (all 5 of them) but in myself as well."

From Amy, WhimSpire Foster Home Coordinator: "A new WhimSpire foster family recently welcomed a neglected boy into their home. He brought, in addition to a sweet three year old smile, an explosive temper that often led him to act violently toward himself and others. The Reclaiming Model became a natural fit for this child's diverse needs, helping him grow and heal from the inside out. The family helped him belong in his new unfamiliar world by filling his days with friendly faces at home and preschool. To help him achieve independent control of his anger, the entire family worked to catch him succeeding. To build mastery they hugged him through his anger, provided consistent structure and gave him daily doses of learning and love. His foster parents extended the reclaiming circle when they became mentors to his father. Generosity came naturally in the five months he knew them and he gave this family the opportunity to watch the unveiling of a lovable little boy, whose spirit was no longer shadowed by anger."



## 5. QUESTIONS FOR YOUR FAMILY

Here are some comments and questions prepared by experienced foster parents that may help you and your family with the decision to apply to become a WhimSpire foster family:

***Do we have room for another child?*** “The Foster Home Coordinator who first visited our home remarked that she was looking for “emotional room for a child” more than for physical space. I now understand better what she meant. It is necessary to have a place to sleep and a place to play. For an older child, it is also a matter of a reasonable degree of privacy, but emotional room involves more. The child should not be made to feel like an intruder.”

***Can I accept a mess?*** “Can I put up with having new rugs pulled on and the furniture hacked up a bit? This happens in some cases. Children are hard on furniture, and some foster kids are extra hard. Can you tolerate a fair degree of mess and noise? You can't drop all your rules on a foster child at once, and damage can be done before he has adjusted to reasonable regulations.”

“In our home, we use the back door routinely for trips in and out of the yard. This saves wear and tear on the carpet and cleaning for mother. If you are extra dirty, you clean up in the basement shower. We cut laundry loads by hanging towels up and using them over. We seldom eat in the living room. Not earthshaking—just family rules to make things last a little longer and save a little work. It would be unreasonable to expect a new foster child to absorb the rules the first day. He will be busy trying to adapt to more important aspects of living with you.”

***How stable is our family?*** “No real-life family is without problems. The agency will expect normal ups and downs, and turmoil in your home. But care of foster children will place extra strains on a family. Try to appraise the situation in advance. Is the level of communication in your family good enough so that problems are openly discussed and acted upon? There may be new problems to discuss with the arrival of a new youth. Are your present children getting along together reasonably well? It will be easy afterward to forget problems that already exist and blame the new child for any and all troubles. Are any of your children experiencing difficulties in school? Are you having delinquency or truancy problems? Another child in the home may make helping your child more difficult and the foster child may get involved in the problem.”

“The quality of the husband-wife relationship is very important. Little positive help can be offered to the foster child unless both parents agree that fostering is a worthwhile use of the family resources. You will want to counsel and support each other; you will need each other's insight into difficult situations. The bulk of the extra physical care of a child often rests with the foster mother. But the foster father also offers assets. Do you both want to get involved in foster care and are you prepared to work together in making a success of this experience? Are you generally getting along well together? Foster children can exploit a weak relationship between the foster parents with harm to foster parents and foster child.”

“Some foster children persistently seek exclusive attention. They seem to feel they must test the strength of your love for them by requiring that you do not show love to someone else. Until

resolved, this behavior can cause problems in the family relationship. Sometimes one foster parent becomes isolated from the interactions going on between the other parent and child, or occasionally a child in the family resents the attention being given a foster child."

***How are we doing now as parents?*** Do you feel that you can evaluate yourself and your relationship to your children and conclude that you are doing a good job as parents? You will experience testing of your confidence in your abilities, as you become foster parents. It helps to have the feeling that you are doing or have done a pretty successful job of being parents. Of course, a foster child or youth is different and many other factors enter the situation, but have you satisfied yourself that you can parent a child?

***What do our children think about our plan?*** Involve your children in the process of exploring the plan and how all family members will fit in. This is not a matter of a children's veto. Your children should be willing to give a fair hearing to a plan their parents have agreed upon. If you were correct in your evaluation of the stability and quality of your family life, their lively interest in the project is almost certain.

"Try to give the children a clear picture of what kinds of changes foster care will bring to the family. Be sure they know that money is involved. Our children tended to find this puzzling and we have explained to them the rationale behind foster care payments. Use plenty of examples of the kinds of situations in which the foster child's presence will affect their lives. You will not be free to help as much at school; they will need to share your time and attention. Try to get across to your children the reasons why you feel foster care would be worthwhile for your family. Tell them about the foster child's needs and what you believe your family has to offer. Let them talk too! Encourage questions or bring up the subject several times over a period of days. Children and adults are likely to cooperate in plans they had a genuine share in making."

"When our family decided to do foster care, we anticipated what the foster kids would be like and what their backgrounds would be. We talked with our biological kids, ages 5 and 3, about foster care and how we would be helping out some families. We prepared them to accept having new kids living with them temporarily. One thing we didn't consider was the emotional effect it would have on our biological kids. The first few days with our first placement seemed to go well, sort of like a play date. Then, when our biological kids realized that the foster kids would share everything...even their parents...there became a learning curve. After a couple of months, we all adjusted well. We, as parents, learned that each child needs their own space and quiet time. In this case we have a sibling group of foster kids, so we learned that it is totally fine to have our biological kids play in their room together for "sibling time" and have the foster kids play together to get their "sibling time." Now, our biological kids are very attached to our foster kids and sometimes I will hear one saying "That's what little brothers do!" when their foster brother does something boyish."

***What type of youth can we bring into our family?*** Another part of planning for foster care involves choosing the right youth for your family. You will explore carefully the kind of youth for whom you are best able to provide a home. This exploration should be done with the licensing worker, but there are some aspects you can consider in advance of the discussions.

Assuming that you have children of your own at home, what are their ages? There are some periods in a child's development when there is turmoil and uncertainty in your relationship with her and her relationship with siblings and others. Early adolescence tends to be one of these periods. Adding another child in the same age range may increase your difficulties and those of your children. Early adolescence is also an age when a youth is beginning to see herself as moving towards adult roles. She may not be ready to commit to a younger child. Think about the age of your own children as you try to determine what age foster child you would like to parent.

***Are we looking for long or short-term care?*** Some children need homes in which to grow up. There are early adolescents who need homes until they finish high school. There are children for whom some type of family emergency makes shorter term care necessary. There are children disabled in some way who cannot be kept in their own families, but who would not benefit from institutional care. There are children who need a home to live in while they are being evaluated and an adoptive home is being readied. There are children who are taken from their homes while efforts are made to improve the parenting so that the children can return. There are combinations of all these different situations. Which ones look like possibilities for your family?

***How active are we and our family members in our community?*** Do you participate in religious organizations, community centers, community clubs and groups, recreational organizations and so forth? Are you active with your children in school? Do your children participate in youth groups, sports, drama or music groups, and so forth? Will you and your children be comfortable involving foster youth in the community groups and organizations in which you participate? The most successful foster parents are actively involved in their communities and see these organizations as resources for their foster children.

***What depth of commitment will we bring to foster care?*** "No thoughtful person assumes that taking on the responsibility of being a parent to any child will be easy. Some days it will be hard. There will be times that are good and times when you feel you are making a mess of the whole experience. One conviction keeps me going. I believe that every child is meant to reflect in the world the image of a perfect Creator and that I can have a part in the restoration of that image. We have received children still bearing bruises from parental cruelty. Another child was content to sit blankly and quietly far too long. Others are beautiful and intelligent, but with strong emotions that their lives seem one long scream from morning until night."

"In a way, it is exciting to work with these children. Sometimes change comes surprisingly fast. A child's personality is remarkably resilient. More often, a more plodding, persistent kind of concern is required. At times, progress may be hard to see and day after day it is one more set of clothes to care for, one more mouth to feed, and one more child to get ready for bed. The value of children is such that they are worth your best efforts day after day, and that is what they require."

**A QUOTE FROM RECLAIMING YOUTH AT RISK:**



***"The most important observation you can make is when you become a glimmer in the child's eyes and he becomes a glimmer in yours."***  
***---Albert Trieschman***