

An urgent need for foster care sparks a call for help



Claudia Bing (far left), shown in this photo from 1999 with some of her foster children, said parish involvement makes a huge difference to foster families.

RAVENEL—For more than 25 years, Claudia Bing of Ravenel has served as a foster parent, opening her home and her heart to children with special medical needs.

Three of the young people she cared for are still with her and now, as young adults, have been able to find work and pursue an education.

There is a critical need for more people like Bing around South Carolina.

In mid-June, the state Department of Social Services put out an urgent call for more foster parents. The agency estimates that 1,500 foster families are needed statewide.

Children are placed in foster care when their parents or other family members can't care for them. Often the parents suffer from addiction or mental illness or are incarcerated. Many foster children have experienced abuse, abandonment and neglect in the past, according to information compiled by DSS.

Statistics from the agency show that 8,352 South Carolina children were placed in foster care in 2018 and 4,702 are currently in foster care.

The children who are placed in DSS custody who do not have a foster care placement are housed in a network of DSS group-care facilities around the state.

Susanne Wolfe, president of the South Carolina Council of Catholic Women, knows all too well how difficult it can be for children who are placed in the care of the state. Wolfe, a member of St. Mary Church in Greenville, has served as a guardian ad litem for five years, representing the best interests of children in the system.

The Diocese of Charleston is currently developing a campaign to encourage Catholics to become foster parents, and Wolfe said the SCCCW will promote the need for foster care at the parish level.

"As a guardian, I've seen that the system is pretty broken in a lot of ways, and that's why we need to encourage more people to become involved," Wolfe said. "I think if we could encourage more Catholic parents to become foster parents, we would be bringing the love of the Lord into more of these children's lives."



Claudia Bing, bottom right, is shown with three of her adult foster children (now adopted), along with Joan Mack, top right. Mack and other members of St. Patrick Church have served the family with friendship and outreach for many years. (Provided)

This won't be the first time the SCCCW has been actively involved in promoting foster care. In the early 2000s, the organization sponsored a "Friends of Foster Care" program where members acted as mentors and provided financial and spiritual support for foster children.

As a foster parent, Bing said she knows firsthand how effective parishes can be in helping with the foster care effort.

For more than 20 years, she and her foster children have received assistance from the women's guild at St. Patrick Church in Charleston. The women have helped her with everything from diapers and cleaning supplies to Christmas gifts for her and the children.

Joan Mack, a member of St. Patrick women's guild and former president of the SCCCW, was serving on a foster care review board when she first met Bing. Mack said she was moved by Bing's commitment to children with special needs and knew that women of faith could help her and other foster families.

"It's important to do what you can to support the parents that open their homes to these children," Mack said.

Support from others is especially important for foster parents like Bing, who work with special needs children. She became involved with fostering medically fragile children after working with disabled youth at the Coastal Center in Summerville.

Bing had experience as a nursing assistant and then received training at MUSC on how to care for children with special medical needs.

Over the years, she has cared for infants and children with a wide variety of medical problems. It is a difficult journey and several of her foster children have died from their illnesses. Her sadness and the daily challenges, however, are balanced by the accomplishments of the children she has adopted. Damien, 23, works and is active in church; Tory, 21, is studying criminal justice at Charleston Southern University; and Christopher, 35, attends classes for the hearing-impaired.

Bing has some concise advice for those who think they would like to become foster parents.

"I would tell them to be sure this is what you want — don't do it just because someone else you know is doing it," she said. "You need to have dedication and you need to be ready to love the children. If you don't love them, don't take them into your home. This is something you have to do with love from the bottom of your heart."

To learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit <https://dss.sc.gov/foster-care>.