

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2024

**TAKE A LEAP INTO FOSTER CARE THIS YEAR,
JOIN US ON FEBRUARY 29**

Canton, Ohio - Stark County residents are invited to take a LEAP into foster care this year with Stark JFS' Division of Children Services! The agency will kick off a yearlong foster parent recruitment campaign on Leap Day, Thursday, February 29, 2024 from 4 to 7 p.m. at Ohio Roasting Company, 4870 Frank Ave. NW, North Canton, Ohio 44720.

Those who are interested in learning about the foster care process are encouraged to stop by to meet licensing specialists, ask questions, and enjoy a free cup of coffee. Registration is not required.

Stark JFS's LEAP campaign is part of a regional initiative to recruit foster parents. Since the pandemic, the number of licensed foster families in the State of Ohio has significantly decreased, while the number of children in custody continues to grow. Stark County has experienced a 30% increase in the number of children in custody since 2020.

The Division of Children Services currently has more than 500 children in foster care, with 122 licensed families available to care for them. When children are placed in a foster home, every effort is made to keep them close to their community. However, with a limited number of homes available in Stark County, children may need to be placed outside the county and their school district, or in an alternative setting such as a group home or residential facility.

"We are hoping our Leap Day event helps us meet Stark County families who are ready to take that leap, because we really need foster homes right here, in our community," said Tricia Mayle, Deputy Director of Children Services. "There is a profound benefit to keeping foster children close to familiar surroundings and in a family setting, where they can feel safe, loved, and maintain a sense of belonging."

Foster parents provide necessary support during a challenging time in a child's life. The goal of foster care is to provide for the physical, emotional, and social needs of a child until they can be reunited with their biological family or placed permanently with an adoptive family.

The process to become a foster parent requires training and licensing through Stark County Job & Family Services and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. Potential parents must be at least 18 years of age, provide proof of income to meet the needs of the household, and successfully pass required background checks.

To learn more about foster care and adoption in Stark County, please call 330-451-8789 or visit StarkJFS.org.

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