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Editorial: You can help raise them up

Across the country, a half-million vulnerable children languish in foster care - waiting and hoping for a stable home. A new public awareness campaign debuting Tuesday in Philadelphia seeks to improve their situation. This city has more than 5,000 foster-care children under its supervision.

Child-care advocates hope to inspire and challenge communities and the everyday folks who live in them to get involved with the "Raise Me Up" campaign. The program wants to recruit not only foster and adoptive parents, but also neighborhood mentors and volunteers - a relatively untried approach in Philadelphia, which could yield huge gains.

"We understand that we can't do the job alone," says city Department of Human Services Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose.

Funded by Casey Family Programs, the campaign began last year in Austin, Texas. Philadelphia is its second stop, along with a statewide campaign that was launched in New Jersey last week. New Jersey has more than 7,300 children in foster homes.

The majority of children in foster care in Philadelphia are minorities. Nearly half are between ages 1 and 12.

The ambitious campaign's slogan is: "You don't have to raise foster children to raise them up. You just have to raise your hand and say you'll help."

Simple but powerful, that statement urges the public to help foster children in whatever way a person can.

The program offers viable opportunities to get involved. Participation can be as simple as tutoring a child for an hour after school, driving a kid to practice, or lending a sympathetic ear to a neighborhood child.

Some people may make the major commitment of becoming a foster or adoptive parent and providing a temporary or permanent home to a vulnerable child.

As important, the Raise Me Up campaign wants to put foster care in the spotlight as an urgent public issue. People generally become concerned only when there is a crisis, the tragic death or abuse of a child, for example.


Without stable homes, statistics show, children in foster care are more likely to land in prison later or become homeless.

Ultimately, child advocates want to cut the need for foster homes nationally in half by 2020, a laudable but lofty goal given the statistics. But it can happen, if at-risk families get the support they need to prevent child abuse and neglect. Meanwhile, Raise Me Up will help children who do need foster care.

For more information visit www.RaiseMeUp.org

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