



Dear Future Foster Parent,

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a foster parent for Ascentria Care Alliance's Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (URMP). Our job is to listen, support and give strategies to help you succeed as a foster parent. We look forward to working together to achieve that goal.

Ascentria's URMP is in urgent need of loving foster homes for refugee youth and unaccompanied minors who have entered the United States prior to their 18th birthday. These youth have embarked on this journey without a parent or an appropriate caregiver to provide for them. Burma, Afghanistan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, and Central America are a few of the countries and regions from which the refugee and migrating youth have fled. In the past our foster homes have welcomed some of the "Lost Boys" from the Sudan.

Many of the unaccompanied refugee minors are victims of abuse and violence and come seeking safety, education, and a life which offers the hope of realizing their potential. The children we work with have experienced trauma, abuse and/or neglect; it is common for them to need assistance from their foster families to work through challenging behaviors and emotional difficulties. Our program provides foster families with around-the-clock support and many opportunities for training to help them in this journey. We work in partnership with you to make this experience the best it can be for both you and your foster child.

Ascentria welcomes prospective foster parents from many backgrounds and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, or sexual orientation. Prospective foster parents can be single or a couple, and don't need to own their own home. Foster parents must be age 25 or older, must be able to pass a Massachusetts criminal record check (CORI), and must be fingerprinted.

If you can provide a caring environment for an unaccompanied refugee minor whose life, language, and cultural experiences are very different from your own, then we are eager to speak with you. Foster parents are financially reimbursed for their services. Our staff will provide the needed training and ongoing support (i.e. translators and support groups) once the youth is placed in your home.

On behalf of our refugee minors, we thank you again for your interest in becoming a foster parent!

Sincerely,

Colleen

Colleen Schroth
Recruitment and Retention Specialist
774-243-3062
cschroth@ascentria.org





Description of the Program and the Youth:

Ascentria Care Alliance's Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program (Ascentria URMP) is a contracted agency with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). It provides services, primarily through foster care, to children and adolescents who come to this country as refugees from sociopolitical conflict and oppression and who have been separated from their parents. The program began during the outpouring of Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees, and for years, served mainly Southeast Asians. Today, the population is diverse and includes Southeast Asians, Congolese, Eritreans, Somalis and Central Americans.

It is important to note that these young people are mainly boys, in their mid-teens. They need long-term commitments, since they may remain in the program until they turn 22—provided they stay in school and continue to work toward developing skills in independent living.

There are many rewards to working with this population. These young people have faced multiple losses of family, home and country. They may have been affected by the traumas of war and of their refugee experiences. Most are motivated to succeed in this country and do amazingly well in American schools, even while taught in a foreign language. Many of them may require adjustment to new educational structures. Some have lived on their own for years and need to adapt to the rules and boundaries of family life, including having someone to care for them. The task of each youth is to adapt sufficiently to this country and to survive as an adult, without losing the essence of his or her own ethnic and cultural identity. Foster parents are key in helping refugee youth face these challenges.

Steps to Becoming a Foster Parent

- 1. INQUIRY**— Call the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program Recruitment Specialist at 774-243-3062 or email cschroth@ascentria.org to express your interest in fostering a refugee minor. You will be required to complete a phone screening as well as a brief questionnaire. For more information, please visit us online at ascentria.org/urm.
- 2. APPLICATION**— After completing the phone screening and questionnaire, you will be given a URMP Foster Care Application. Complete the application and return it to our recruitment specialist via email, fax or mail. Your application will be assigned to a family resource coordinator who will start the verification process, and will be in touch with you.
- 3. BACKGROUND CHECK**— Background checks (criminal, and state child welfare), reference checks (employment, personal, school, and medical) will be completed, and your home will be inspected by the family resource coordinator. Your home must meet state-mandated regulations in order to proceed with the application process.
- 4. TRAINING**— After your application has been approved, you will attend a state-mandated training called Massachusetts Approach to Partnership in Parenting (MAPP). The MAPP training highlights the many different profiles of children in the foster care system, particularly as it pertains to refugee youth. The MAPP curriculum comprehensively covers key topics such as communication techniques, trauma, sexual abuse, physical abuse, sexual orientation, discipline, and mental health.
- 5. HOME STUDY**— Your family resource coordinator will visit with you and your household members during a series of home visits in order to get to know your family better. The home study is an opportunity to reflect upon your family's strengths as you consider what type of youth may fit best in your home. Your family resource coordinator will be happy to accommodate your schedule. You are able to set the pace for how quickly to proceed through this important step.





6. **LICENSING**— After the background check, training and home study are completed, and your family is determined to be an appropriate fit for the URM program, you will officially become a licensed foster parent! Congratulations, an unaccompanied refugee minor is now ready to be added to your family!
7. **MATCHING**— Your family resource coordinator, along with additional professionals on the URM team, will review referrals and match the needs of a refugee minor with your family's strengths. You will receive all available information about the minor so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to move forward with placement.
8. **PLACEMENT**— Now the real journey begins! You will be closely supported by a team of professionals — including the youth's case manager and your family resource coordinator — as your family adjusts to the new family member. This partnership will continue as we collectively work to empower the youth toward reaching their full potential and the ultimate goal of living an independent, healthy and fulfilling life.

What are the requirements to be a foster parent?

Any single person, married couple, or unmarried couple who understands or is willing to learn about the impact of trauma, abuse, and neglect on a child can qualify to become a foster parent. These individuals must also meet the following criteria:

- Be at least 25 years old
- Be a resident of Massachusetts
- Be a permanent resident or citizen of the U.S.
- Be a responsible, mature and healthy adult able to meet the needs of a youth
- Have a clean criminal record for the past 5 years with no history of abusing children
- Reside in a home that meets safety requirements and standards

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long does it take to become a foster parent?

That depends on how quickly you can complete the paperwork, training, and home study. It can take from 60 days to 3 months or more.

What are the ages of URMs in need of care?

URMs range in age from 4 to 22. In the state of Massachusetts, at the age of 18, youth are able to sign a voluntary placement agreement and remain in care as long as they continue to pursue their education. The majority of youth are between ages 15 and 17.

How long are URMs in foster care?

There are a lot of factors that contribute to how long a URM remains in a foster home. Our goal is to find permanent homes for these young people and find families committed to working with them through the completion of high school. However, many of our families remain connected for life to their foster children and continue to support them.

Will I be eligible to adopt my URM?

In the past, refugee minors were not eligible for adoption. Recently in an effort to secure the most permanent placements for all children in the foster care, the Office for Refugee Resettlement has begun to allow the adoption of refugee minors. The adoption process for refugee minors follows that of the MA Department of Children and Families adoption process.





Are URMs ever reunited with their families of origin?

URMs often reconnect with their birth families. However, due to immigration requirements, they are rarely able to reunite formally.

What languages do URMs speak?

URMs speak a range of different languages from Lingala to Swahili, and Spanish. All URMs are learning English. Upon first arrival, families must be creative in communicating with URMs.

Can I work full time?

Many families juggle work and family life. This is not a problem.

Do I need to own my own home?

Absolutely not. The only requirement is that your residence must meet safety standards and spatial requirements.

May I choose the gender, race and age of the child I would like to foster?

You and your family resource coordinator will determine the best possible match for your family which includes consideration for the gender, race and age of the youth.

May I foster more than one URM?

Absolutely! As long as your home meets the requirements, and we determine that you can care for multiple youth. Many URMs come with their siblings; we prefer to keep siblings groups together.

How do I pay the cost associated with caring for a URM?

The URM program contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) to reimburse you for the expenses of fostering a refugee minor. These expenses include food, clothing, household necessities, and other basic costs of having an added person in your home, such as utilities, transportation, etc. The exact rate is determined by the State and the number of calendar days the child is in your home.

Who pays for the medical/dental/vision/hearing, prescriptions and mental health services for these youth?

Young people in the custody of the State of Massachusetts receive MassHealth insurance—state provided insurance program that covers medical/dental/vision/hearing, prescriptions and mental health services.





Foster Parent Questionnaire

Ready to take the next step? Please complete and submit this questionnaire. This questionnaire helps both our program and your family to determine if foster care is the right fit for you at this time. Please take a few moments to answer each question. Thank you for your interest and time.

Your completed questionnaire may be submitted via mail, email, or fax to:

Colleen Schroth, Recruitment and Retention Specialist, Ascentria Care Alliance
Mailing Address: 11 Shattuck St., Worcester, MA 01605
Email: cschroth@ascentria.org
Fax: 508.519.8310

Name: _____

Date: _____

Home address: _____

Daytime phone number: _____

Email address: _____

1. What are the names and ages of all the members in your household?

2. What is your occupation?

3. What is the occupation of other adult household members?

4. Do you have a valid Massachusetts driver's license? Yes No

5. Is there anything that might come up on a background check search for you and/or other household members? If yes, please explain:





6. Have you ever been a MAPP certified foster parent? Yes No
If yes, by what agency?

7. Please select all that apply. Do you have prior experience or knowledge about working with children with any of the following?

- Behavioral difficulties
- Emotional difficulties
- Developmental disabilities
- Mental illness
- Trauma

If you have checked any of the above, please explain where you obtained your knowledge or experience.

8. Please select all that apply. Are you interested in providing foster care that is:

- Long term with the goal of independent living
 - Long term with the goal of adoption
 - Respite care (school vacations, weekends)
 - Not Sure
 - Other (please describe)
-

9. What is your room capacity? How many available bedrooms do you have?

10. What do you anticipate will be the most rewarding part of foster parenting?

11. What do you anticipate will be the most frustrating part of foster parenting?

12. Do you have any additional questions at this point?

Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this questionnaire!

