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## Local News



### Foster parents' get night out

Volunteers watch kids while their folks enjoy a rare evening to themselves

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BY TOM VOGT

COLUMBIAN STAFF WRITER



Kim Glover, back right, and her children, from right, Paris, 3, Kia, 9, Keishi, 6, and Charlie, 5, participate in a "fostering fun" event for the county's foster families at Community of Christ in Hazel Dell on Oct. 3. (Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian)

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The little girl put down her marker, walked over to where Kim Glover was sitting and touched the woman on the arm. Then she walked back to the craft table and resumed her coloring.

Six-year-old Keishi was just checking in, Glover said. Before they became part of Glover's family, Keishi and her older sister Kia had been left in a car by themselves for two days. "That scares kids," Glover said.

"When she can come over and touch you, it's a way she can reassure herself: 'OK, I'm safe,'" Glover said.

The Glover family was part of a recent night out for local foster children. A few other people were part of the "fostering fun" event, too — people who weren't even at the Hazel Dell church. And that was the point. The people who weren't there were local foster parents who had a chance to enjoy an evening out, maybe go to dinner or a see a movie.

The Friday night session at Community of Christ was the first in what organizers hope is a series of "fostering fun" events in churches around the county. Another session will be held Saturday at Washougal United Methodist Church.

Glover brought several different perspectives to the session earlier this month. She and her husband, Arthur, have been foster parents for 35 children in the past six years. They have adopted five of them, and have three biological children.

The Glovers certainly qualified for a night out. They could have left the kids at Community of Christ and spent some time together. But Kim Glover also is foster-parent liaison for the Clark County area, so she was there as a representative of the fledgling program.

"A lot of times, foster parents don't get out as often as they should," Glover said. The goal is to have licensed homes available to take care of the children when foster parents want a break. But, "We don't have enough respite homes in the Clark County area to serve everybody," she said.

The session drew about 25 children who enjoyed pizza, games, crafts and a movie. It was set up by Peggy Hays, with the Vancouver office of the state's Department of Social and Health Services.

Foster-parenting is intensive, Hays said. "Even a night with four or five hours to go to a movie, to dinner or just grocery shopping: Wouldn't that be nice?"

It was that and more, said Jill Hoffstead.

"That was really fun, really a treat," she said after going out to dinner with her husband, Bill. "When you're foster-parenting someone, the stipulations from the state are pretty strict. It's hard to get out for a night."

Hays would like to secure several sites across the county, bringing a neighborhood feel to the respite program. Churches can work nicely in that role, said Hays, who works in the Division of Children and Family Services. She has found that many churches are showing an interest in community outreach that extends beyond their immediate congregations.

And that's how Community of Christ wound up participating.

"Our church family was looking to make a difference somewhere," said Teri Swift, director of Christian education at Community of Christ.

The Rev. Susan Gregory, co-pastor, forwarded the notion of a respite night.

"Foster parents do such an important job," Gregory said. "My sister read about churches that do



respite."

And when Gregory learned there was an unmet need in Clark County, she decided: "Let us be the first."

About 600 Clark County children are in foster care, also called out-of-home care.

"Probably the biggest reason is drug and alcohol abuse," Kim Glover said. "I've never met a parent who didn't love their children, but sometimes the addiction takes over."

Which has taken some children down tragic paths to the Glovers' house. She recalled their first evening with a girl in foster care. After finishing her first supper with the Glovers, "Her cheeks were huge."

When Glover tucked the girl in, "She was eating. She had learned to keep food in her mouth while drinking milk and eating dessert."

Even after going to bed, the girl still had food in her mouth that nobody could take from her.

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