



Part of the Catholic Charities of St. Louis Family

Shepherd's Watch

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Treatment Foster Care Story:

Opening her heart and her home

Please allow us to introduce you to Miss Barb, Mama Barb... Her name is Barbara and she's a Treatment Foster Care parent. She answers to more than one affectionate name earned during her time providing care to girls who've come to find a loving, stable home with her as part of Good Shepherd's Treatment Foster Care program (TFC). Here, she describes what it's like to be there for children who need her, with the help of Good Shepherd.

How did your TFC journey begin?

I grew up in St. Louis and moved to Atlanta as an adult. I became a foster parent there when I heard people talk about the need, jumping right in and offering to take teenage girls. I've also been a 9-1-1 operator and have worked with the Children's Division. After about a year and a half, my supervisor pulled me aside and said, in her insightful way, that wasn't the job for me. I couldn't stop caring for the families even after my work with them was done.

I began working with Good Shepherd a few years ago. They gave me the training I needed and I decided to again specialize with older youth. I have a 15 year old and 17 year old in my home right now.



How do you know if a placement is a good fit?

First, you go on gut instinct. I believe face-to-face contact – sitting back and connecting with them, really getting to know them as much as you can – is irreplaceable. With one of my girls, Dairy Queen was her spot. I would pick her up at the group facility

where she was living and we would go sit across from each other and talk. It let me get a feel for where she was emotionally and mentally.

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- Mama Barb, Good Shepherd TFC Parent

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There are many options for helping youth. Why did you choose TFC?

I chose TFC, and specifically teenagers, because they're a disparaged population. They're not easy to place, to find homes for. You go into this knowing TFC work is hard because these youth, through no fault of their own, are coming from a hard place.

What advice would you offer someone who's considering becoming a TFC parent?

You're going to be responsible for making sure all their needs are met, from medical to emotional to physical. You see it as your job to watch them, but they're watching you, too. And they see you caring about them.

I'm constantly making myself available to them. When they want to talk, I stop and listen. I'm present. We learn in training about this invisible bag these kids carry with them. It's full of hurt, and you try to help them unpack it. You have to let them know you've got their backs.

I'd also say to anyone considering becoming a TFC parent: You're going to need a lot of patience. We all need grace, and kids make mistakes. I have rules in my house and sometimes they get broken. Usually, the best way to deal with it is to let them make and learn from these mistakes. Natural consequences are the best learning tool.

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- Mama Barb

What's the reward for doing this work?

The reward is seeing that kid prosper. Seeing them go from being angry and hurt and rejected to a kid that is happy, whole, and loving life. We're no longer talking about hurting ourselves – we're talking about life and our future and college and going into the military. They understand that life isn't as bad as they thought it would be. They learn that they aren't as bad as they

were told.

For some of the kiddos who have been with me, my house was the first house they had Christmas in, the first refrigerator that had food in it. They see me cooking for them and cleaning clothes. They tell me, "Mama Barb, you're a real mom."

They see it and they know you're

not faking it. Seeing them break through is the real reward.

How has Good Shepherd supported you?

I love my team! I'm a talker, and when I have an issue I can pick up the phone and they always answer. I don't want them to come over here and fight my battle, but I do need someone to talk to and give me a different perspective. I can also text any time of the day or night and they respond.



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