

It's difficult to separate the thought of children from the spirit of the season. So full of hope and happiness, children truly embody the magic of the holidays.

But for the nearly 28,000 Texas kids who will spend the holidays in foster care, the season is not so bright.

Most children entering foster care in Texas linger in the system for months, if not years. Separated from friends and family and bounced around foster homes and schools, these children live in a constant state of uncertainty that is even more pronounced during the holidays. Will Santa bring them any presents this year? Will they be able to see their friends and family? And above all, will they ever be placed in a stable home?

Foster children yearn for the warmth of family connections that so many kids outside of the system take for granted. What foster children want most is to live in a safe, loving, and secure home – a place where they know they'll stay forever.

Unfortunately, far too often foster children's wishes go unfulfilled.

This holiday season, Texans can do their part to make the holidays a little brighter for foster children.

First, Texans can buy clothes, toys, or books for foster children, many of whom will be hard pressed to receive any gifts this holiday season. Another way to help is by making a donation to offset the cost of a foster child's extracurricular activities. Far too often, foster children are unable to participate because they lack the funds to pay for sports uniforms, musical instruments, or art supplies. For more information, contact your local Department of Family and Protective Services office.

In addition, people who want to work directly with foster youth can volunteer at one of over 60 local CASA organizations across the state. Texas employers can make a difference by hiring foster care youth and providing them with the skills and training they'll need for successful careers.

Most important, there is always a need for caring adults to serve as foster or adoptive parents. Foster and adoptive parents are critical for the children in foster care who are unable to remain with or return safely to their birth families.

On the national level, the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care is leading a movement to more timely placing foster children in safe and stable homes. To achieve this goal, the commission has issued a series of recommendations ranging from attracting and retaining qualified lawyers for children and parents and fostering better collaboration among judges, lawyers and child agencies, to funding programs designed to keep families together. You can learn more about the recommendations at www.pewfostercare.org.

It is critical that policymakers heed these recommendations so that foster children in Texas and across the nation can experience the magic of the season. Every child deserves a happy holiday.

Tiffany Roper
Policy Analyst, Center for Public Policy Priorities

900 Lydia Street
Austin, TX 78702
512-320-0222
roper@cphp.org

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization committed to improving conditions for low- and moderate-income Texans.