

Q: Who is Toomey?

A: Toomey Residential and Community Services is a non-profit 501c3 affiliate of Catholic Charities of Onondaga County. As an agency, we provide numerous residential and clinical services for individuals in the Central New York region.

Q: How big is Toomey?

A: Toomey employs approximately 160 people throughout our various programs. The agency serves approximately 150 persons on an annual basis.

Q: How long has Toomey been an established Agency?

A: Toomey was founded in 1990

Q: What types of services does Toomey provide to the community?

A: Services and programs are available to children and adults with developmental disabilities, children experiencing mental health issues, children who cannot remain at home and require foster care placement in a group home or foster setting, and children who are Unaccompanied Refugee Minors.

Q: What is an Unaccompanied Refugee Minor?

A: An Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) is a youth younger than 18 who qualifies for refugee status and is being resettled in the United States without their parents or a viable sponsor.

Q: Are there other URM programs in the United States?

A: The Syracuse URM program is one of only 22 programs nationally that serve unaccompanied refugee minors.

Q: Who is liable for youth in the URM program?

A: Youth in the URM program are in the custody of the Onondaga County Commissioner of Social Services, so that county is legally liable for their care and well-being. Toomey is contracted to work with the county to provide foster care services for these youth.

Q: Do youth in the URM program go to family court?

A: Yes, just like all youth in care youth in the URM program will have family court hearings at least twice per year. They are provided a law guardian for these hearings.

Q: How are youth referred to the URM program?

A: Youth referrals are sent to Toomey by the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), a national resettlement agency. Some other URM programs nationally receive their referrals through Lutheran Immigration Services (LIRS). These are the only two organizations that work with URM foster care nationally. Prior to being referred for resettlement, youth are carefully screened to determine their eligibility and the appropriateness of their placement.

Q: What kinds of security screenings are URM's subject to?

A: Before being determined eligible for resettlement, youth are screened by a variety of agencies. Youth who are resettling overseas undergo security screenings by the U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR), a Resettlement Support Center abroad, the National Counterterrorism Center/Intelligence Community, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, and Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Youth who are deemed eligible for immigration relief after cross the southern border are screened by an Immigration Court, the National Counterterrorism Center/Intelligence Community, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the State Department, and Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Q: What kind of medical screenings are URM's subject to?

A: After security screenings are complete, refugees are subjected to comprehensive medical exams to make sure that they do not have a serious illness such as tuberculosis that would make them ineligible for travel. This screening must be done no later than 3 months prior to resettlement to the United States. If a medical exam expires, the refugee will have to have a new exam prior to traveling.

Q: Who pays for the URM program?

A: The URM program in Syracuse contracts with Onondaga County Department of Social Services for our foster care services. The county covers the majority of the costs for the care of these youth; however this program is federally reimbursed. For costs not covered by the county, Toomey may step in and cover the costs for services (such as interpreters).

Q: Where are URMs coming from?

A: Throughout the history of the program, we have resettled youth from all corners of the world. The countries of origin of youth in our program are highly dependent on global current events that create refugee crisis. Most recently, the majority of the youth requiring foster care resettlement services are from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo, Kenya, Sudan, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Central African Republic and Tanzania.

Q: How old are the youth that are resettled through the URM program?

A: The majority of youth in the foster care program are in their teens. Once they enter foster care, all children (including URMs) are eligible to continue to receive foster care services until their 21st birthday.

Q: What religions do youth in the URM program practice?

A: Youth in the program come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. The program serves youth who are Orthodox Christians, Catholic, Buddhists, Muslims, Agnostic, etc. We do not discriminate based on religious beliefs.

Q: What kind of services and supports are offered to URMs once they enter care?

A: The unaccompanied refugee minor program provides intensive case management services to all youth in our program. Some of the benefits of this include tutoring, independent living services, in house counseling (or referrals for psychiatric care), medical services, permanency planning, transportation assistance, interpretation services, therapeutic case managers, and foster boarding.

Q: Who is eligible to be a foster parent?

A: Foster parents must be over the age of 21, have sufficient income to meet their own family's financial needs, have space in their home and heart for a youth, be flexible, and be willing to work as a part of the foster care team.

Foster parents can be married, single, or living with a partner, be of any sexual orientation, practice any religion (or no religion), can be stay at home, employed or retired, and can be of any ethnic background.

Foster parents must be willing to complete a series of background checks through the state, county, and justice center and complete fingerprinting prior to accepting a youth into their home. Some criminal history or indicated CPS reports may disqualify an individual from becoming a foster parent.

Q: Who makes up the foster care team?

A: The foster care team is composed of the youth, the foster parents, the agency case worker, the county case manager, the youth's law guardian, the youth's teachers/tutors, and any medical or supportive services staff.

Q: What kind of trainings are foster parents provided?

A: Foster parents are certified at a therapeutic level through a nationally recognized 9 week certification program (Parenting Skills Training through People Places). This training focuses on relationship building, effectively navigating unique foster care situations, and supporting youth who have experienced complex trauma. The training is supplemented with cultural and refugee specific information from the agency.

After their initial certification, all foster parents are required to complete additional trainings annually. These training hours can either be met through monthly agency trainings, or through trainings by approved outside providers or resources.

Q: What kind of support do foster parents receive?

A: Foster youth are assigned an intensive case manager through Toomey, who is also available to support foster parents and answer their questions. Foster parents may also reach out to the foster parent manager and program director at any time for additional support or with concerns. The foster parent manager will meet with all foster parents in their home at least once a year, but is available to foster parents more often as needed. Foster parents can also participate in an agency support group run by fellow foster parents.

Q: Are foster parents financially responsible for foster youth in their home?

A: No- foster parents are required to demonstrate that they are financially stable prior to certifying, however once a child is placed in their home they are provided a daily board and care allotment to offset the costs of taking care of that child. Some additional costs are also eligible for reimbursement (such as sports team fees, clothes, etc.). We strive to make certain that finances do not hinder people who are motivated to foster.

Interested in becoming a foster parent? Have additional questions? Contact foster parent program manager Brianna Kline at 315-424-1845 or Brianna.Kline@dfa.state.ny.us !