

Respite Care a home away from home for many

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Heidi and Nick Munholland knew they were making the right decision to adopt their daughter Gertie when they found out there was respite care available near their home.

Gertie, now 7 months old, has Down syndrome, a chromosomal disorder that affects her development.

The couple knew they wanted to adopt a baby with the condition but also realized she would need special care. That's why respite care was so important.

"We knew this was meant to be because there are only a few respites in the United States," Heidi Munholland said.

Fort Collins-based Respite Care Inc. is a nongovernmental agency that provides care 24 hours per day, seven days per week, for children from birth to 21 with developmental disabilities.

The organization, which has operated for 26 years solely on small payments from parents and donations from the community, helps more than 140 families in Larimer County.

Parents pay for their children's care based on a sliding scale, executive director Sherry Pelton said. That can be anywhere from \$1.50 an hour to \$10 an hour, although on average most pay \$3.50. No parent is charged for more than 10 hours in a 24-hour period.

Providing that care costs \$18.50 an hour, Pelton said.

The service provides day and night care for children, allowing them to socialize with other kids, expand their creativity through art and music therapy, and just enjoy themselves.

"Gertie will be able to have friends, birthday parties, go bowling, go to camps at respite," Munholland said.

Gertie now goes to Respite Care three days a week while the Munhollands work, but that will increase as she gets older, they said.

About 39 percent of the 140 families that come to Respite Care are single-parent families that need the service so

the parent can work, Pelton said.

"Respite is about giving families the break they need, and for some families that means they can go back to work or go back to school," Pelton said.

And, with a two-to-one employee-to-child ratio, parents don't have to worry about their children.

"(Respite) let's them do some of the things that families don't get to do with a special needs child - things like going out to eat," said Tom Rock, a volunteer with Respite Care for seven years.

And for most, it also provides a home away from home.

"They are like a second family," Munholland said. "They always greet you when you get in. You get a hug, you get a smile and a 'how was your day?' "

Want to help?

Donate or volunteer to help Respite Care by calling 207-9435. Donations also can be made at www.respitecareinc.org/care.html

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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