

ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: FAMILY NEWSLETTER

March 2020

WHO ARE WE?

In an effort to keep services and resources localized and easy for Michigan families to access, the Adoptive and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention program was divided into six regions throughout the state.

Your Regional Resource Team, Region 4, is a program of Judson Center, funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. We work to organize foster parent recruitment and retention activities and events, PRIDE trainings, and the Foster Care Navigator Program in Branch, Hillsdale, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe and Washtenaw counties.

MEET THE NAVIGATORS:

Q: How many Foster Care Navigators are there?

A: Throughout the state, there are about twelve navigators on staff at various agencies. Here in Region 4, there are three navigators who assist families.

Zelma has served as a mentor coordinator, support group leader for foster parents, PRIDE trainer for 22 years, and is a foster parent.

Jackie is an enrolled member of the Oneida Nation of the Thames Tribal Community. Her Master of Education degree and experience as an adoptive parent make her an incredible resource with vast knowledge about fostering and adopting children with special needs.

Monica, who began her journey as a relative caregiver, is passionate about keeping families together and making sure other relative caregivers have the tools and resources they need to be successful.

Q: How do I connect with a Foster Care Navigator?

A: Give us a call! Using the 855-MICH-KIDS phone line, you can have any additional questions answered and be connected to the foster care navigator who services your county!

LOCAL SUPPORT ENCOURAGES LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

We have seen that engaging current and former foster parents and word of mouth from satisfied caregivers have been the most

effective methods of recruitment. Every time you share why you became a foster parent, you join the recruitment team! When existing families are a part of recruitment, support networks for new families are improved and more families make the decision to foster. The process of becoming licensed and beginning to foster can seem daunting. Many Michigan families in various stages of being a part of the foster care community find it very encouraging that they can interact with local, experienced people who answer their questions, empathize with frustrations, and provide guidance and support.

The primary goal of foster care is to reunite children with their parents. This can take some time, so we need caring adults who are willing to provide children in their care with stability in a safe and nurturing home.

FAMILY INTERVIEW

Small, but mighty, Jamie and Andrew Murphy's family is growing in both size and strength through foster care. The Murphys, after enduring the loss of a miscarriage and the heartache of infertility, weren't ready to give up on their dream of growing their family and turned to adoption. Deeply moved by stories they heard at a foster care and adoption panel, the couple took one look at each other, and "knew we had to do this."

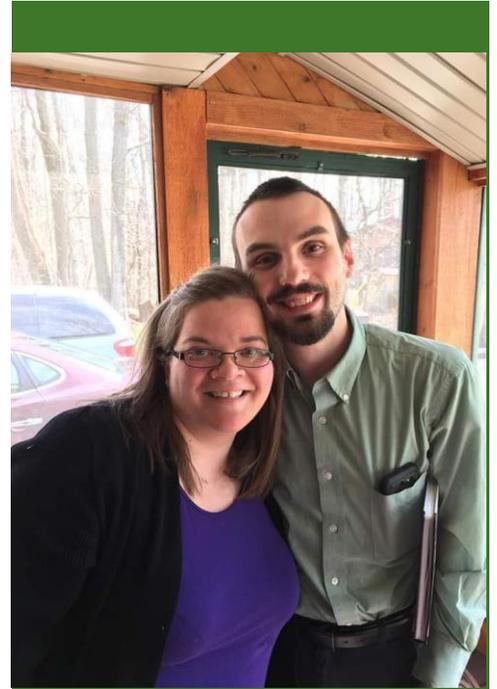
FOSTERING THROUGH THEIR FEARS, FINDING SUPPORT AND LOVE

When asked about some of their biggest fears and reservations about becoming foster parents, Mrs. Murphy shared that she worried about how friends and family would react. Would they be accepting and supportive of their decision and of the children that would enter their home? Would they love them like any other child? Meanwhile, Mr. Murphy was concerned with "trying to care for a child with needs beyond what I could meet."

Since completing the licensure process, the Murphys have faced their fears (with great results). Mrs. Murphy shared that the family has "been overwhelmed by the support we have been given and still receive today." She also shared that while some are not as supportive as she had hoped, "Those who are, outweigh the sadness of those who aren't." Mr. Murphy, who has also found strength in that support said, "It is a lot less scary when you know you don't have to do this alone."

In addition to the support they have received from their family and their agency, the Murphys note, "One of the biggest supports for us is having another married couple who also has infertility issues and are fostering with intent to adopt, as they completely understand what we are going through and feeling." Finding this personal connection so beneficial, support groups were the first thing that they mentioned when asked what would be most helpful for current foster parents. Mrs. Murphy shared that while they "have family that is supportive and helpful, there can never be too many – someone to help babysit, make sure you can get your self-care in, and so on." As a result, she encourages families considering foster care to "surround yourself with people who are supportive and committed to helping children."

Like many other new foster parents, the Murphys "were afraid that the emotional toll of getting attached and reunification with birth families would be too much for us." When asked how they feel now, Mr. Murphy stated, "I now know that it is an absolute blessing to become attached to a child that needs you, even if it is only temporary. I would not trade anything for my (child)." Mrs. Murphy added that when they accepted their first placement, they "were surprised to be attached to the child by just having the name and age."



"Remember who you are doing this for (the children). Anyone who is considering fostering is aware of the need and that's why they are considering it, they need to remember what it's all about. It's easy to forget when you're going through the process."

– Jamie Murphy

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ~~April 17th & 18th 2020~~
- Postponed TBA -
Empowered to Connect Simulcast
Ann Arbor, MI
- May is Foster Care Awareness Month
- ~~May 2—3, 2020~~
- Postponed to August -
Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parent Conference
Kalamazoo, MI
- May 10, 2020
Mother's Day
- June 17 – 19, 2020
Wraparound Conference
Traverse City, MI
- PRIDE trainings are held monthly in local counties; families should be referred to PRIDE by their licensing workers.
- Orientation dates for local agencies can be found by searching by county on our website at:
<https://www.fcnp.org/resources/orientation-dates/>.
- Local Support Groups can be found by searching by county on our website at:
<https://www.fcnp.org/support-group/>.

CELEBRATING MOMS & SUPPORTING THE CHILD IN YOUR HOME

Like many other holidays, Mother's Day can be a confusing time for youth in care. While they may feel comfortable and safe with you, those very feelings can lead to guilt, grief and loneliness when they consider family members who aren't present.

- Youth may need your help navigating their emotions. Watch for signs of distress and meltdowns, making yourself available to listen if they want to talk.
- Be consistent in your availability and love. Youth may not want to discuss their feelings with you and may even attempt to push you away as they wrestle through them.
- Ask about past holiday celebrations or traditions and work to incorporate their history into their present.
- Talk to teachers, coaches, youth group leaders, friends and relatives about any plans or special provisions for the holiday that may not be familiar to them.

HONORING BIRTH MOTHERS:

Acknowledging birth family members in holiday celebrations can be extremely important for youth in care. If youth are unable to physically spend time with their mother this Mother's Day, consider doing an activity that honors them:

- Pick out a plant or flower together in honor of her.
- Create a homemade card, letter or artwork to send to her.
- Make a photo book of the time spent apart from her so that she can see how her child has grown.
- If the relationship with a mother doesn't allow for these types of activities, foster parents are still encouraged to find an appropriate way to honor the mother for having given birth to the youth in their care.

CELEBRATING YOU:

- Let go of your expectations! Unburdening yourself of society's Mother's Day can be a great relief for all mom's, but especially foster moms.
- Recognize yourself! Have you taken placement for the first time, implemented a new parenting technique or learned more about trauma or behaviors you're seeing in the home? Celebrate your "mom-milestones" this year.
- Treat yourself to some mom time! Whether it's on Mother's Day or another day that week, take some time away from the kids and practice your favorite form of self-care to rejuvenate.



WHAT IS A FOSTER CARE NAVIGATOR?

A Foster Care Navigator is someone who serves as a liaison between current and prospective foster parents and their agency. As trained and experienced foster parents themselves, each Navigator will mentor, through their own experience, parents navigating through the world of foster care.

Contact Us

Judson Center

AFPRR – R4

3840 Packard, STE 170

Ann Arbor, MI 48108

734-794-2898

Connor_Robinson@judsoncenter.org

www.fcnp.org

The Adoptive and Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention program in Region 4 is a program of Judson Center and is funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about becoming a foster parent, visit us at www.fcnp.org, or call 855-MICH-KIDS.

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3840 Packard, STE 170

Ann Arbor, MI 48108

Recipient Name

Street Address

City, ST ZIP Code