

2013 ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

CATEGORY #1 FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS

AWARDEE: **Gary & Cate Ingalls**
(Category #1 Family Contributions)

Farmington, NY

Gary and Cate Ingalls are described as caring and compassionate foster and adoptive parents who are also strong advocates for children's rights. Despite several obstacles in their journey to adopt, including the loss of a child, the Ingalls have always remained focused on their core mission to provide love, security, and guidance to children who come into their care. The Ingalls are raising the children they adopted no differently than their birth children; all receive equal love and attention and are provided with clear structure and expectations. As a result of their parenting, the Ingalls' children are said to demonstrate the same caring and compassion they were taught from their parents. The children have held fundraisers in their front lawn to raise money for other children in the hospital and even provided support for a neighbor's child who had cancer. The Ingalls are tireless advocates for their children and others and have worked with the school and child welfare systems and local politicians to ensure their needs are met. The Ingalls began a foster/adoptive parent clothing closet for children where local consignment shops and other organizations donate clothes, toys, cribs, and other items to benefit foster and adopted children. Over the years, the Ingalls have also been a tremendous asset to the Ontario County Department of Social Services by volunteering their time to help recruit and train foster and adoptive families. Their commitment and leadership is also demonstrated by the frequent requests from birth parents and resource families who often seek out the Ingalls for advice. All of their efforts, compassion, dedication, and undying faith have contributed to numerous success stories in the lives of children and families in the Ingalls' community.

AWARDEE: **Craig & Audrey Rosenstein**
(Category #1 Family Contributions)

Las Vegas, NV

Craig and Audrey Rosenstein, parents to 5 biological and 7 adopted children, are known leaders in their community, providing real life perspective and expertise to resource families involved in child welfare. Mrs. Rosenstein is the current President of Fostering Southern Nevada, an organization that focuses on issues of foster parent recruitment and retention of foster parents. Mr. Rosenstein is a fellow on the Community Improvement Council and former President of the Clark County Foster & Adoptive Parent Association. The Rosensteins have worked closely with the Clark County Department of Family Services on several programs, including the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI). The QPI is a program designed to promote quality care for children by redefining the expectations and roles of foster parents. The couple's leadership has enhanced the QPI program by highlighting the significance of communication, recruitment, training, and

retention of qualified foster parents. The Rosensteins have also been significantly involved with Child Haven and Peggy's Attic. Child Haven is a program that provides emergency and temporary care for a small number of children when no other placement is available. Peggy's Attic, founded in 2001 by Mrs. Rosenstein and Peggy Leavitt, is a donation cottage for the Child Haven campus designed to accept and distribute resources to foster families. Voluntarily operated by the Rosensteins, Peggy's Attic provides clothing, toys, school supplies, and other children's items to foster and adoptive families, foster relatives, and children in the juvenile justice system. The cottage runs solely on community donations and serves approximately 350 children every month. Together, the Rosensteins help raise funds to benefit children in foster care and participate in numerous events that bring awareness and resources to a variety of programs for children in care.

AWARDEE: **Steve & Kristen Marler**
(Category #1 Family Contributions)

Casper, WY

Despite a unique and oftentimes challenging living arrangement, Steve and Kristen Marler are often sought in their rural community by resource families who need help and advice. The Marlers have 3 biological children and 6 children adopted from foster care. Honesty, integrity, and compassion are key traits of Mr. and Mrs. Marler and extend to their biological children, who are described as equally accepting and responsible as their parents. The Marler's motivation for becoming foster parents was to support biological parents who are unable to care for their children. They accomplish this by encouraging and working directly with biological and extended families to help them toward reunification. They have an exceptional ability and willingness to respect the children's relationship with their parents. Even after children are placed back with their biological family, the Marlers have spent time helping them by taking the family to church, providing special financial and other needs. The community in which Mr. and Mrs. Marler live has come to respect and admire them as leaders in the area of foster care. The Marlers often serve as community spokespersons, sharing their stories and inspiring their community. In addition to creating permanency for children, they also provide support and resources and mentor other foster parents. While they characterize themselves as "silent" leaders, they have clearly demonstrated their commitment to families and community.

CATEGORY #2 INDIVIDUALS/PROFESSIONALS

AWARDEE: **Pat O'Brien**
(Category #2 Individuals/Professionals)

c/o You Gotta Believe
Brooklyn, NY

For several years, Pat O'Brien has spread the message of youth permanency in a unique way full of passion and experience. He has changed hearts, minds, and systems nationwide. As founder

and former Executive Director of *You Gotta Believe!*, Mr. O'Brien directly facilitated adoption and permanency for hundreds of young people in the New York City area. Under his leadership, *You Gotta Believe!* collaborated with a number of foster care and residential agencies to help build and support their permanency programs. Through his efforts to educate and motivate the field, he played a direct role in improving the quality and urgency of permanency services across the country, especially for older youth and teens. Mr. O'Brien is also known to be a foremost champion of adult adoption and family search and engagement. Child welfare audiences have been captivated by Mr. O'Brien's presentations at numerous conferences, where he motivates and educates people in an entertaining manner that often sends them home full of inspiration. In addition to his national speaking engagements, Mr. O'Brien promotes permanency in many other ways, including his publications focusing on youth adoption and permanency, collaborating with adoption researchers studying youth permanency issues, and testimonials to the U.S. Congress. He pioneered the use of other forms of media to spread the word on adoption and permanency for teens, including his long running weekly radio and public-access television shows. Mr. O'Brien's outreach has helped him connect with child welfare professionals, youth and parents across the country. He has been a long term partner with the New York City and county public child welfare agencies and their private agency partners. Mr. O'Brien is a member and current President of Family Builders Network.

AWARDEE: **Ruth G. McRoy, Ph.D.**
(Category #2 Individuals/Professionals)

Boston College Graduate School of Social Work
Chestnut Hill, MA

Dr. Ruth McRoy has been a strong contributor to the field of child welfare for more than three decades through a wide array of endeavors from research and writing to teaching and mentoring. Throughout her career, she has been a model in identifying and collaborating with academic, professional, research, and grassroots organizations to help raise awareness about child welfare, foster care and adoption issues. Over the years, Dr. McRoy has served as a professor at three leading schools of social work; published in several professional journals; served on dissertation committees; and managed numerous public and private grants. Dr. McRoy's involvement with research and grants has included such issues as the influence of race in adoption, transracial adoption, racial disparities in the child welfare system, openness in adoption, adoption matching, and family preservation. Dr. McRoy has worked extensively with AdoptUSKids, a cooperative agreement funded by the Children's Bureau, on a number of different projects including her role as the principal investigator for the first in-depth longitudinal research assessing the personal and institutional factors that result in prospective adoptive parents navigating their way through the adoption process. These studies, entitled *Barriers and Success Factors*, resulted in publications, a video, and a follow-up study of a sub-group of self-identified lesbian and gay participants from the original studies. Dr. McRoy has a special interest in disparate treatment and representation of families and children of color in the child welfare system. In addition to writing extensively on the topic, she also served on the faculty of the Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI), a program designed to enhance leadership skills of potential and emerging leaders of color. Dr. McRoy's genuine interest in the program's participants has significantly contributed to the success of the MALDI program. While serving in her current role as the lead

evaluator for AdoptUSKids, Dr. McRoy also works on multiple projects from all across the country. Despite the high demands of her career, she has always maintained roots in her local community, which includes pro bono consultations and speaking or training events on adoption and other child welfare related issues. Dr. McRoy has truly dedicated her life to improving outcomes for children and families and continues to inspire and encourage countless students and colleagues.

AWARDEE: Nia Vardalos
(Category #2 Individuals/Professionals)

West Hollywood, CA

Nia Vardalos is an Academy Award nominated writer, actor, director and producer who has successfully used her celebrity and personal experience to increase awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the United States foster care system. Ms. Vardalos became an advocate for foster children when she and her husband adopted a little girl several years ago. She began sharing her family's story of adopting a child from foster care through various media including articles for *People* magazine and *Huffington Post*; and television interviews on CNN with Anderson Cooper and ABC's "Good Morning America." In 2010, Ms. Vardalos became a spokesperson for AdoptUSKids, a service of the Children's Bureau, to promote the adoption of children from foster care. As spokesperson, she participated in several events, including a Twitter party where she hosted an hour-long online question and answer event with prospective and current foster and adoptive families and professionals. Ms. Vardalos also participated as a celebrity spokesperson for a radio and TV media tour to launch a series of national public service announcements focusing on recruiting families for siblings in foster care. More than 9.8 million people were reached through the media tour. Every time Ms. Vardalos speaks publicly about adoption and the AdoptUSKids photolisting website, inquiries almost always double from the average. In spring 2013, Ms. Vardalos published a New York Times bestselling autobiographical book, *Instant Mom*, which is a humorous and uplifting story about her personal road to adoption. With her signature comedic flair and honesty, Ms. Vardalos shares the heartaches and headaches, tears and laughter of parenthood, and also includes an appendix of useful information on how to adopt a child. She is donating the book proceeds to adoption groups worldwide. In addition to her extensive writing, producing, and acting, Ms. Vardalos continues to be a spokesperson for National Adoption Day and advocates for all children to have permanent, loving homes.

CATEGORY #3 BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS/INITIATIVES

AWARDEE: State of Missouri and the Adoption Resource Centers
(Category #3 Business Contributions/Initiatives)

Jefferson City, MO

In 2008, a unique public/private partnership was formed between the State of Missouri's Children's Division and the Adoption Resource Centers. The Adoption Resource Centers are parent-led organizations that attract more than 1,000 volunteers and are managed by two nonprofit agencies, Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association of Kansas City and the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition of St. Louis. The State of Missouri partnered with the Adoption Resource Centers with the purpose of promoting permanency for and maintaining adoptions of the hardest to place children in foster care, which led to the development of the following new permanency programs:

- Extreme Recruitment® - general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment efforts are implemented simultaneously over a 12 to 20 week period to seek adoptive placements for children languishing in foster care. Private investigators also identify relatives for each child served.
- Family Connections Intake & Assessment Center – a comprehensive community-based shelter program used to address the needs of children entering care, with the goal of reuniting children with family quickly and safely.
- 30 Days to Family™ - seeks relatives/kin as children first enter the foster care system; a program where 70% of the children are placed in kinship care within 30 days of entering custody.

With the support of the Children's Division, the Adoption Resource Centers are one-stop-shops that provide supports for families. The partnership has resulted in a wide array of programs free of charge for Missouri adoptive families including parent training, support groups, respite care, and adoption preservation/crisis intervention. From July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, they served nearly 3,000 families, over 2,000 children, promoted 139 adoptions, and helped prevent 145 adoption disruptions. The Children's Division and Adoption Resource Centers have secured partnerships with over 50 community groups such as churches, Girl Scouts, and other companies. They also receive significant business support from several companies who support foster/adoptive families through volunteers, free tickets to events, and monetary donations. The partnership receives support from a local television station that produces a segment featuring waiting children; clothing donations for more than 2,000 children and families; and support from a community food pantry that assists close to 2,000 foster and adoptive families.

CATEGORY #4 MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA/PUBLIC AWARENESS

AWARDEE: **Voice for Adoption, Adoptive Family Portrait Project**
(Category #4 Media/Social Media/Public Awareness)

Washington, DC

Established in 1996, Voice for Adoption (VFA) is a coalition of organizations that works together to improve adoption policy by educating members of Congress about current issues in child welfare and suggesting improvements to increase adoptions from foster care. Nicole

Dobbins, Executive Director of VFA, demonstrates her commitment to raising awareness of children in foster care through her leadership of VFA's Adoptive Family Portrait Project. This project is an annual celebration of families who have adopted children from foster care with special emphasis each year on one specific aspect of the system, such as kinship adoptions and family diversity. The primary goal of the project is to raise awareness among members of Congress and their staff about the real experiences and needs of families that have adopted children from foster care. Each year, between 50 to 75 senators and representatives participate in the project by displaying a family portrait in their Washington, DC office in November, National Adoption Month. A family is identified from the home district or state of each participating member and their family photo is framed along with a description detailing their adoption experiences. A reception is held to bring attention to the project and display all of the family photos and stories. A young person who was adopted or an adoptive parent is always invited to speak at the reception about their experience. Ms. Dobbins takes great care in organizing the project, knowing that families' experiences are going directly to the source of change, federal policy makers. Voice for Adoption and the Adoptive Family Portrait Project's presence and advocacy on Capitol Hill have proven to be effective in bringing national attention to the critical issues that affect children in foster care.

CATEGORY #5 CHILD WELFARE/JUDICIAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE

AWARDEE: **Portland State University Postgraduate Training Certificate in
Therapy with Adoptive & Foster Families Program**
(Category #5 Child Welfare/Judicial Systemic Change)

Portland, OR

The Therapy with Adoptive & Foster Families Program is a creative collaborative effort between Portland State University's School of Education/Continuing Education, Child Welfare Partnership, and School of Social Work; the Oregon Department of Human Services; and the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center. This clinically-oriented adoption and foster care specific therapy training program for professionals is having a significant and sustainable influence in the lives of many foster and adopted children and their families. The Therapy with Adoptive & Foster Families Program curriculum is a series of advanced, evidence-based courses, all of which are offered both on campus and online. This flexible distance education program is designed for maximum accessibility for professionals engaging with foster parents, counseling adopted children and families, and working with individuals adopted from county and state systems. Recognizing the importance of access to adoption competent therapists, the curriculum includes specialized theories and practices for treating adopted and foster children and their families. The Program's objectives include increasing accessible, affordable, adoption and foster-competent mental health support for children and families and reducing the risk of adoptive or foster family dissolution or disruption. It trains therapists to engage proactively and sensitively in therapeutic work that embraces empathic listening; maintains a non-blaming approach; and seeks an empathetic understanding of children. The University awards Continuing Education Units for coursework and publishes a Directory of individuals who successfully complete the Program. There is now also a postgraduate certificate for child

welfare professionals and an ongoing post-certificate consultation group. Over the past ten years since the Program began, over 500 students have been trained. The Therapy with Adoptive & Foster Families Program has a proven record of innovation and has had a positive impact and significantly benefited children and families in Oregon and in the greater Northwest region of the United States.