

# **ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

**2016**

## **CATEGORY #1: FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS**

**AWARDEE: Nedra and Matt Cox**

Colorado

As first time parents and foster parents, Nedra and Matt Cox received a 3 month old son into their home. Though not expecting the child to have significant medical needs, the infant was diagnosed with a rare form of childhood cancer shortly after his placement with them. They proved to be extraordinary caregivers during the intense period of treatment, surgery and recovery for this infant. Throughout the ordeal, they maintained constant communication with the infants' birth mother, keeping her informed as any mother would want to be. Mrs. Cox would call and face-time with her from the hospital to keep her informed about each treatment and provide an opportunity for her to see her infant son's sweet face. She also began journaling about the moments she shared with her new foster child so that her son's birth mother would feel connected and involved. She wanted to support reunification by helping the parent even though her son was not physically with her. Mr. and Mrs. Cox brought the journal on weekly visits with the birth mother to share the developmental milestones of their foster son and this helped them build a relationship of trust with her. Though it became clear that their son's birth mother would not be able to parent this child, they have recognized that her love and connection to him will continue. The good news is that the cancer is in remission and last spring his adoption by the Cox Family was finalized.

The Cox Family has also done much work for the State of Colorado in the recruitment of other foster/adoptive families and they have been very open about sharing their experience with other families in Colorado via social media, local media, and through the use of other recruitment materials. They were recognized for their work during National Foster Care Month this year by the First Lady of Colorado and many other families have been encouraged to foster/adopt through their efforts. They also intend to further grow their family through adoption.

## **CATEGORY #2: INDIVIDUAL/PROFESSIONALS**

**AWARDEE: Adam Pertman**

Massachusetts

Adam Pertman established himself as an insightful observer of the complex world of adoption in 1998 when, as a reporter with The Boston Globe, he published a lengthy, cutting-edge series of articles titled “The Adoption Revolution,” which were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. These articles and subsequent work he did on the subject brought Pertman other honors as well, including a Journalist-of-the-Year Award from Holt International Children’s Services; the Dave Thomas School of Law’s first award for “the nations’ greatest contributor to public understanding about adoption and permanency placement issues;” the President’s Award from the African American Council of Virginia; and the American Adoption Congress’ first award for the journalist who “most informed the nation on adoption issues and for his eloquent witnessing of contemporary adoption.”

For the next few years, Pertman conducted extensive additional research and interviews to expand his newspaper series into one of the most highly regarded and influential contemporary books in the field, “Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America.” Pertman’s expertise, reputation and impact grew over the subsequent decade, during which he served as Executive Director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and under his leadership, a substantial body of work was developed that has had a very concrete impact on adoption law, policy, and practice throughout the U.S.

Adam Pertman is a recognized thought leader who strives to accomplish systemic change with an eye on improving the lives of children and families. His most recent initiative has been to create the National Center on Adoption and Permanency and he has assembled a team of professionals to accomplish its’ mission by conducting research, working with practitioners and policy-makers, providing services and assisting families.

**AWARDEE: Sarah Gojkovich**

Arizona

Ms. Gojkovich is the Foster Care/Home Assessment/Adoption Program Supervisor for Arizona’s Children Association. She began her work with the Association four years ago as a Resource Family Specialist and was then promoted to her current title. She has been praised as an outstanding supervisor that displays her passion strongly for the children and families served by her agency. She has been most successful reunifying families and has also facilitated over 50 adoptions. Her team expresses the utmost respect for her in the management of the team, her assurance that every foster/adoptive family will be educated and trained about the trauma

experienced by the children placed with them and they describe her as the very essence of the mission of the Arizona Children Association in protecting children, empowering youth and strengthening families.

Ms. Gojkovich has contributed to the field by teaching, coaching, and mentoring foster/adoptive families, going the extra mile in all of the cases in which she is involved, developing a “foster care closet” full of donations from various groups and individuals, promoting community outreach and involvement, and collaborating with various community committees and leading by example.

**AWARDEE:            Barbara Stair**

Alaska

As a member of the Aleut tribe, Barbara Stair is the first and singular foster parent for the St. Paul Aleut Tribal Government/DHHS. She is the first member of her community, since the Tribe assumed active Child Welfare responsibilities in 2008 to step up and become a fully licensed foster home. Her example is what will allow the Tribe to build a foster care system in the future. She is described as a strong, consistent parent who provides support by example and action. She takes tribal children into her home, raising them alongside her extended family and makes an effort to integrate them into her family. The children are able to maintain their communal and tribal relationships because of her relationship with her people. She facilitates and encourages visits to their family and tribe and takes a very active and engaged role to support this through the DHHS and the Tribal Government. She works directly with the parents to keep access and maintain their connection to their children and she addresses the children’s medical, psychological and emotional needs by facilitating participation in appointments, groups, counseling, camps and any extended services. She clearly develops and facilitates an environment of love and growth for others. Children placed in her care have experienced tremendous growth and she goes “above and beyond” the normal expectations and requirements for foster parents and this illustrates her level of commitment and dedication to her people, her family and the children who become part of her family. Ms. Stair demonstrates a commitment to building strong Aleut children and leads by example. She is a very bright light for her community.

**AWARDEE:            Addie Williams**

Michigan

Addie Williams has been the President/CEO of Spaulding for Children for 16 years. Established in 1968, Spaulding’s philosophy from the beginning has been that all children are adoptable,

without regard to their age, race or disability. Under her leadership, Spaulding has become internationally acclaimed for its pioneering work with special needs adoption and they continue to develop and disseminate new training curricula, publications, and training videos that set the standard for special needs adoption practice worldwide. She has also assured that Spaulding continues to find new and innovative ways to serve foster/adoptive families. This applies to both pre-service training as well as to the development of a robust post permanency support system that provides training, support and services after the adoption of a child.

One means of assuring the on-going innovative programming has been Spaulding's success with obtaining over 30 state and federal grants for the agency that have provided a macro perspective and allowed staff to learn and implement best practices that are utilized across the nation. For 28 years, Spaulding was the site for the National Resource Center for Adoption and they applied lessons learned in the direct service side of Spaulding to adoption practice across the nation. Under Ms. William's leadership, Spaulding has placed more than 1,000 children in adoptive homes and has trained more than 135,000 people nationwide in its permanency techniques.

With almost 40 years of experience working in the child welfare, legal and educational fields, Ms. William's career has included collaboration and leadership with a wide assortment of programs and organizations working to improve services for children and families. She is a Charter Member of Voice for Adoption, a Charter Member of Family Builders by Adoption Network, a member of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, and Board chair of Family Care Network. Spaulding was named the Best Managed Non-Profit with a budget of more than \$3 million by Crain's Detroit Business. Her strong belief that there are no unadoptable children has resonated through every service offered by the agency. Among her colleagues, she is consistently described as having creative, resourceful, and solution-oriented leadership skills. She is known for being able to see through challenges to come up with decisive and rational responses that keep children and families on the forefront.

**AWARD CATEGORY #4: MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA/PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ADOPTION FROM FOSTER CARE**

**AWARDEE: Tim Wieland, News Director KCNC CBS4**

Colorado

For more than 30 years, KCNC CBS4 in Denver has collaborated with The Adoption Exchange in a meaningful partnership to promote finding permanent, loving homes for waiting children in foster care. KCNC CBS4 is strongly committed to promoting broad public awareness of the waiting children and generously donates its time, production, and talent to support these efforts. As a result of this partnership, two innovative and unique approaches have developed to promote finding permanency for waiting children in foster care. One is the Wednesday's Child program

through which each Wednesday a child or sibling group in need of an adoptive family is featured. These segments have proven to be one of the most enduring and impactful public awareness campaigns, as each year, more than 66 percent of the children featured on KCNC CBS4's Wednesday's Child segments find permanent, loving and stable homes.

Secondly, to create more opportunities for positive outcomes in terms of matching families with children and to promote an understanding of the challenges children in foster care face in the public's mind, an annual fundraiser called "A Day for Wednesday's Child" is held each spring. An entire broadcast day is spent showcasing Colorado children waiting for adoption, family success stories, the work of The Adoption Exchange, and a celebration of adoptive families. Each year, The Adoption Exchange, and the children and families it serves benefit from the television exposure that reaches an estimated 300,000 families per week.

KCNC CBS4 is committed to having a leadership voice within the community to raise awareness and Tim Wieland, KCNC CBS4 News Director, serves as vice chair of The Adoption Exchange's Board of Directors. He is a vocal champion of raising awareness in the community and recognizes the importance of the station's partnership to help foster children find permanency.

**AWARDEE: Rut N. Tellado Domenech and Jorge Ramirez**

Puerto Rico

For the first time in Puerto Rico, a digital newspaper collaborates with the adoption efforts of the Department of Family, by publishing biweekly stories portraying the lives of children who are under the custody of the state, and are candidates for adoption. The children are between 8 and 15 years of age. The efforts have resulted in citizens actively contacting the Department expressing their interest and willingness to adopt the children profiled in the stories.

The benefits of this work is significant, since there is an increase in adopting, the children speak of the importance of being adopted and while the child's face is not shown, it is possible to listen to the voice of a child, communicating their wish for a permanent home.

The stories taped for the electronic version of El Nuevo Dia facilitate the spreading of information to places other than Puerto Rico, where potential adoptive parents exist.

This work represents a collaborative effort between the Department of Family and GFR media which has been in place since 2015. The stories have generated significant interest in the citizens in the adoption process and many have completed the process to become candidates to be adoptive parents.

**AWARD CATEGORY #5: CHILD WELFARE/JUDICIAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

**AWARDEE: Kidsave of Los Angeles – Randi Thompson**

California

Kidsave Los Angeles developed their innovative and successful Weekend Miracles program in 2005 and has served 185 of Los Angeles County’s older foster youth population since its’ inception. Kidsave’s approach for facilitating interaction between youth and families is the first of its kind in the U.S. Kidsave recognizes that adults who would otherwise want to help older foster youth might be inhibited by not knowing how to reach out or daunted by the lengthy process to foster or adopt. The program seeks to address these discouraging factors in order to give adults an opportunity to explore the possibility of working with older youth. To be involved with Kidsave Weekend Miracles, new prospective hosts (mentor-advocates) and families thinking about adopting can avoid the many inquiries associated with the adoption process. Instead, they only need to attend an orientation in order to participate in a supervised weekend event where they interact with foster youth and engage in fun and youth-centered activities. The youth, who are between the ages of 9-17, only need to be willing to meet adults who they might want to get to know better. This process takes much of the pressure off of both the youth and families and creates a genuine setting that allows them to easily get better acquainted with each other without complication or high expectations.

Of the 185 youth that have participated, 75% continued in the program and now have a permanent family or a permanent connection to a caring adult.

**AWARDEE: Anne Arundel Co. Dept. of Social Services, Adoptions and Resource Homes Units – Terri Lowther**

**Maryland**

The Anne Arundel County Dept. of Social Services exceeded its goal for the number of children adopted in 2016. In the last three years, the Dept. also exceeded its’ state and federal adoption goals. During the year, 24 children were adopted from foster care and 92% of them were from Anne Arundel foster homes. The Dept. worked tirelessly with the pre-adoptive families and the birth families to promote permanency for the youth. The Dept.’s Resource Homes Unit recruits families who are interested in both foster care and adoption with the understanding that reunification is the primary goal. The families receive training in the Social-Emotional Foundations for Early Learning as well as P.R.I.D.E. which equip them to be trauma-informed and understand relationship building and implementation of behavioral strategies to assist with making their homes a supportive environment.

The Maryland Dept. of Human Resources gave Anne Arundel Co. the goal of 19 adoptions for the year and the Adoptions and Resource Homes Units surpassed that by finalizing 24 adoptions, 126% of the goal and the most adoptions in a single year in recent history. Of the 24 adoptions, 15 were of sibling groups and 3 were adopted by relatives. Anne Arundel Co. has decreased its foster care population by 49.2% since 2005 when there were more than 260 children in care.