

ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

2018

Category 1: Family Contributions

Amber and Travis Thompson

Asheboro, NC

The Thompsons were licensed foster parents with only the intent to foster when a student of Amber's, Dylan, approached her about adopting him. Amber was teaching nursing at a local high school when Dylan came to her attention as a teen in need of a home. The Thompsons were unconditionally committed to Dylan and knew they would be there for him no matter what happened in his life. They worked with his agency toward reunification of Dylan with his family which included siblings that were in a different foster home. They were supportive of visitation and tried to encourage Dylan to be forgiving of the mistakes his parents had made. Dylan thrived in the Thompson home and made the decision himself to not want to return to the environment that he came from and asked the Thompsons to adopt him. Though they endured the typical challenges that separation and loss can bring, the Thompsons have demonstrated their strong commitment to Dylan. This family also recently participated in the spokes family training through AdoptUSKids and will be participating in many of the NAM events planned this year.

The Thompsons also adopted two babies after adopting Dylan. Amber leads support groups for new foster and adoptive parents and contracts with Randolph Co. to provide first aid and CPR to foster families. The Thompsons also share the impact that fostering and adopting has on a child and family through church, work, social media, and county sponsored events such as foster parenting trainings. Their most significant partnerships are with foster children and their families and encouraging them to always put the child's needs first.

Mike and Jennifer Allred

Asheboro, NC

The Allreds have fostered twelve children and adopted three and in addition they've been a support system for the families of the children they've fostered and adopted. They are currently planning to accept guardianship of an additional teen and hope to be the next placement provider

for that child's twin sister who is in a group home. Beyond fostering, they have assisted Randolph Co. with recruitment and retention of foster families and are national and state representatives for AdoptUSKids. The Allreds have worked closely with their agency, their employers, their children, their foster and adoptive children's families, and Guardians Ad Litem to meet their children's needs and spread awareness about foster care. They have also utilized resources provided to them through various trainings as well as networking with therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, mentors and crisis centers.

Peter and Ginger Smith

Raleigh, NC

The Smiths are foster/adoptive parents since 2013 and have fostered eight children and are the proud parents of three children (one adopted and two birth children). They are unique in the many ways in which they have collaborated, partnered, and extended themselves beyond their own family to work diligently in many leadership roles to support other foster families and permanency for several children and youth of Wake County. They successfully transitioned three siblings to a pre-adoptive home so that they could be adopted into a home with their siblings and they provide strong leadership in training and professional development of their fellow foster caregivers. Peter and Ginger presented a new and unique training in 2018 entitled "Strategies for Strengthening Your Relationship and Successfully Fostering with Your Spouse-Partner". Peter also developed a support group Foster Father's Fitness which aims to increase support to foster fathers to address the unique needs and stressors of male foster caregivers.

The Smiths have been strong voices and advocates for many of the improvements in policy, programs, and practice within child welfare and have also been strong advocates for shared parenting and reunification with birth families and kinship caregivers whenever possible.

Category 2: Individuals/Professionals

Debbie Marker

Olympia, WA

Ms. Marker is the Adoption and Guardianship Program Manager for the Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families and has done much to improve the system in terms of moving children/youth to permanency faster. She transformed and expedited the process of moving a case from case worker to adoption worker. To make this process more streamlined, she

developed an electronic case file system for adoption workers. This allowed for decreased time to permanency for youth as well as decreased costs to the system in terms of time and materials required for staff. Debbie has also diligently worked to build and maintain community relations for Washington State. She developed a relationship with the Jockey program that provides backpacks for children moving to adoption and also requested that they open this up to children moving to guardianship too. She developed a very successful recruitment system and has also provided leadership in developing collaboration between staff and the community.

Brenda Lawrence

Harrisburg, PA

Brenda Lawrence co-founded Family Design Resources, Inc. in 1999 with the premise that Pennsylvania's children and families would benefit from a comprehensive and needs-based approach to training, consultation and delivery of permanency services. Within months of launching Family Design Resources, she was approached by Tressler Lutheran Services to partner to deliver the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) prime contract for the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. Through her leadership, SWAN has expanded its continuum of permanency services to include child preparation, child profile, family profile, child specific recruitment, placement, finalization, post-permanency services, helpline, the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, older child matching initiative, and the SWAN Legal Services Initiative. She has also provided leadership in permanency through the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Council, CWLA's National Commission on Practice Excellence (2014-2016) and with the SWAN Advisory Committee. She continues to champion the Family Design Resources, Inc. mission and is the face of permanency to many.

Carol Bishop

Salinas, California

Ms. Bishop started her career in adoption in 1964 as a child services social worker and is currently the Executive Director and Statewide Adoption Policy Director at The Kinship Center which is now part of the Seneca Family of Agencies. She has positively affected the lives of thousands of children, youth and adoptive families during her fifty-four years working in child welfare. She is known for her ability to develop, lead, implement and advocate for best practices in the field of adoption, kinship and the mental health services. Under her leadership, The Kinship Center was the first provider in California to develop an adoption competent mental health center for adoptive and kinship families. Thousands of families have benefitted from these services utilizing innovative practice that today is known as best and evidence-based.

She has volunteered her time and expertise to work with the California Dept. of Social Services on the Continuum of Care Reform, she is partnered with C.A.S.E. and Spaulding for Children on two federally funded grants to develop training curriculum, and she also took the lead in developing the Adoption Standards used in accrediting licensed adoption agencies in California. Carol has also provided leadership in many state, local and national adoption organizations including Voice For Adoption. She is highly respected as a leader in California as well as across the nation.

Representative Les Gara

Anchorage, AK

Rep. Gara is a member of the Alaska State House of Representatives and an Alumni of the foster care system. He grew up in foster care in New York City and aged out at 18 years. He went to Boston College and then received a law degree from Harvard University and then made his way to Alaska. He has dedicated his legislative career to improving outcomes for children and families engaged with child welfare, most notably with a focus on safe reduction and community engagement. He has partnered with the youth and alumni of Facing Foster Care in Alaska to sponsor and pass numerous child welfare reforms and volunteer efforts. Over the past decade Rep. Gara has worked to pass a laundry list of reforms including bills and budget items to strengthen Alaska's Child Welfare system.

Sean Anders

Hollywood, CA

Screenwriter, film director and producer, Sean Anders and his wife, adopted a sibling group of three from foster care in California. They were first drawn to adoption from foster care by viewing the AdoptUSKids website and attribute the site to informing them about the needs of children/youth in the child welfare system and the enormous need to provide loving adoptive homes for those photolisted there. He took their adoption experience and turned it into a film "Instant Family" that already has created a lot of interest among the adoption community. Sean and his team conducted extensive research to ensure the film reflected the actual adoption from foster care process. He interviewed social workers, teens adopted from the foster care system, judges, and more to inform the story. Sean also reached out to AdoptUSKids with a request to feature the website in the film. His research also inspired him to feature a teen as one of the primary characters in the movie to showcase the need for permanent families for teens. The pre-screenings of this film have been very well received by the Adoption Community and the Children's Bureau and AdoptUSKids are in the midst of plans for many collaborative projects

with our National Adoption Recruitment Campaign and the many elements of the AdoptUSKids project. This is definitely a film that will make an impact on families considering to foster or adopt children/youth from child welfare. Sean has provided the leadership in making this film that will enhance all national efforts around the opportunities for permanency for children/youth.

Joshua Christian

Indianapolis, IN

Joshua is a 21-year old college student, campus leader, community advocate, loving brother and son, and gifted salesman. He has met with the Governor of Indiana and inspired legislative recommendations to extend services in Indiana for youth in foster care to the age of 23 years. He is also a Jim Casey Young Fellow. He also spent 2 decades in the Indiana child welfare system which inspired him to advocate for change and impact the system for other foster youth and young adults through system-level improvements and policy change. He constantly uses his voice to raise awareness of the needs of youth in foster care and to recruit for foster parents. Joshua also serves on the Indiana Youth Advisory Board where he has helped develop a working relationship with the executive team at the Dept. of Child Services.

Category 3: Business Contributions/Initiatives

JAFCO (Jewish Adoption and Family Care Options)

Sunrise, FL

Founded in 1992 in South Florida, JAFCO is a non-profit organization with the original mission of providing homes and services to assist Jewish children in the state of Florida who experienced abuse and neglect. In response to the increased number of abused and neglected children and their needs, JAFCO enhanced its mission and services to assist all children regardless of their religious practices and background. JAFCO goes beyond the typical functions of adoption agencies and offers unique and commendable approaches to working with this population and they are committed to assuring placement stability and have a record of 100% of their adoptive families remaining intact post adoption.

Category 4: Media/Social Media/Public Awareness of Adoption from Foster Care

Lacey Lett and KFOR-TV OKC Anchor/Reporter

Oklahoma City, OK

While “waiting child” features are common across the US, Lacey Lett’s segment on KFOR in Oklahoma City, A Place to Call Home (APTCH), has evolved into a true community outreach and involvement effort. Since March 2015, Ms. Lett’s weekly feature not only includes foster youth waiting for adoptive homes, but follow ups on youth still waiting after their initial feature, special segments on the need for families for specialized foster care and the adoption process, and features on finalized families. Ms. Lett has demonstrated an outright commitment to permanency for foster youth, well beyond that of her job as an anchor and reporter. Ms. Lett engages the community and local business and organizations to host A Place to Call Home segments, attempting to match the needs of youth in care. Her youthful attitude and genuineness engage youth in a way that makes them feel at ease, helps them open up to her, and illuminates their personalities, helping them to “come alive” to viewers.

Wake Co. Human Services Adoption Resource Team

Raleigh, NC

Wake County Human Services (WCHS) is a public child welfare agency in Wake County, NC, which is the second largest county in NC and consists of 12 municipalities including the capital city of Raleigh. Over the past several years, WCHS has taken an intensive and multi-faceted approach to improving adoption services for children in foster care, making numerous improvements throughout the process. The success of these efforts is evident in the number of adoptions accomplished during this period, which has consistently exceeded agency-specific adoption baselines. Based on potential matches and feedback from private agencies and prospective families, two areas of impact that have stood out include adoption matches and placements and an overall shift in attitudes about adopting older children.