

ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

2023

Category 1: Family Contributions

The Parker Family

Beaverton, Oregon

Brian and Josie Parker are a most creative couple in bringing awareness to the critical role and relevance of people of color in foster care adoption through a completely unique and innovative approach through the self-authoring, illustrating and publishing magic of children's books. Brian is the "Creator of the Fantastical" while Josie is the "Curator and Artisan of Imagination and Wonder" and their sons through adoption, Victor and Kamari, serve as the CIO's or "Chief Inspiration Officers".

Together this family makes up "Believe in Wonder", a self-owned, self-grown, family venture creating science fiction fantasy children's books. Their self-proclaimed message is "to share wonder, creativity, and the idea of endless possibility to their readers, but with a particular focus on underrepresented audiences including BIPOC, LGBTQIA, at-risk youth, children in care and children who have experienced trauma.

Foster adoptive parents since 2007, Brian and Josie have fostered children in Tennessee, Alaska, and Oregon and eventually adopted two multiracial boys. They have had a continuous, positive impact on the State of Oregon and have received the Certificate of Recognition Award from Oregon DHS in 2018 for their commitment to children. They have written, illustrated and published over 20 books, many of which include themes of adoption with the goal of better representation for lead characters of color, many of whom were adopted and/or are recovering from traumatic circumstances and are embarking on magical adventures and achieving fantastical things. Their books are included in the Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center library and are in libraries and bookstores across the nation.

Their story is so compelling that it has been made into a documentary and is a finalist in the Oregon Documentary Film Festival for 2023, has won the Best Documentary in the CineYouth Film Festival in 2023 and was shown at the Chicago International Film Festival in 2023.

Their extraordinary gifts and positive reputations have allowed them to leverage their voices as leaders for foster care adoption and have allowed them to make connections and contributions in numerous communities.

Category 2: Individuals/Professionals

Toni Oliver

Atlanta, Georgia

Ms. Oliver has been a visionary and trendsetter in adoption and child welfare as noted by her efforts at the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act to establish the first and only African American/Black Adoption Agency in the State of Georgia. The agency was named ROOTS, Inc. and almost every black family adopting in Georgia knew of or was approved to adopt through this agency. In the years of its operation, they have successfully placed over 700 children from Georgia's foster care system. In addition, ROOTS placed more than 300 children with kin.

Ms. Oliver began her work in adoption almost fifty years ago as the Director of Special Recruitment for Region III in Philadelphia and she later became the Associate Director of Training and Consultation with the National Adoption Center. She currently provides consultation services around race and cultural issues in adoption through the National Adoption Association.

She has spent over 50 years advocating for black children, black families and black practitioners. From early on she identified the need for black children to be connected to black families.

Kim Stevens

Londonderry, Vermont

Kim Stevens is an adoptive parent who has dedicated her personal and professional life to improving the lives of adoptive, foster, and kinship families. Kim recently retired from being a program manager at the North American Council on Adoptable Children after many years there training families and professionals across the US and Canada and developing curricula on key topics related to resource family wellbeing. Ms. Stevens is the first person many people across the country think of when they have adoption-related questions or when they want to get connected to other change-makers.

Ms. Stevens has been a key partner on innumerable state and federal projects across the nation including AdoptUSKids, QIC-EY, NTDC and with countless organizations including the Dave Thomas Foundation, Generations United, the National Foster Parent Association, and Annie E. Casey Foundation.

As a white adoptive mom to BIPOC children, she has committed herself to ensuring that transracially placed children are instilled with a positive sense of racial identity. She has routinely worked in partnership with BIPOC people with lived experience in developing and delivering training on issues related to transracial adoption.

Amber Nagorski

Lawton, Oklahoma

Ms. Nagorski has been a most successful member of the AdoptUSKids speakers bureau and has done much to help raise awareness of adoption from foster care and the need for prospective foster/adoptive parents, especially for teens. She has been a speaker both locally and nationally for AdoptUSKids by being part of the media launch for the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign and also as part of the “Navigating Adoption” podcast series. She has also been a speaker at our annual CB NAM event and on the annual CB NAM webinar.

She entered foster care at the age of fifteen and was adopted at the age of nineteen after aging out of care. She is now twenty-eight, has a BS in criminal justice and an MSBS in behavioral sciences. Ms. Nagorski has pursued a career in social work, initially as a child protection worker for the State of Oklahoma and now with the Children’s Bureau as a contracted employee with ICF.

As a young adult who aged out of foster care and experienced trauma, she models the importance of strategic sharing when using her voice to create better outcomes for others. Ms. Nagorski offers a unique perspective by combining her personal lived experience in foster care with her professional experience in child welfare.

Beth Hardman

Murray, Utah

Ms. Hardman has been a most devoted and valued volunteer for Utah Foster Care for over twenty years. She has worked tirelessly to find creative solutions to need of foster and adoptive families such as creating a used clothing shed for youth in foster care and those that have been adopted may pick out clothing as well as a sibling shop event where youth in care may pick out gifts for their sibling and them wrap them. She has used media and business connections to attract resources and to teach and train about the needs of children and youth with lived experience in the child welfare system.

Ms. Hardman has also been a foster and adoptive parent as well as a guardianship parent for several youth. She also works hard to support reunification efforts for families above all else. She mentors the foster adoptive families to further support their growth. It has been noted that she is not just a voice for the children/youth in care, but that she also puts actions behind her words.

Jillana Goble

Portland, Oregon

As the Founder and Foster Support Advocate for Every Child Oregon, Ms. Goble has provided deep and meaningful support to the recruitment of thousands of prospective foster/adoptive parents in the State of Oregon as well as in other states. She has made extensive use of digital platforms as well as a volunteer recruitment and business and community partnerships in these recruitment efforts. She has let the way in Oregon regarding what an engaged and transformative foster and adoptive family can look like including the primacy of relationship with birth parents, parenting children with special needs and navigating the medical, educational, and disability services worlds.

Ms. Goble and her husband are the parents of two children adopted from foster care and she has worked closely with their birth and extended families which has led to her role in inspiring other prospective adoptive families to imagine holistic and ongoing ways of collaborating for the best outcomes for children in foster care.

Ms. Goble has spoken at national foster/adoption conferences, produced podcasts, written articles for national publications, and written two books about her experiences which have served as resources for other foster/adoptive families.

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

Marcia Cipriani

Farmington Hills, MI

Ms. Cipriani has been partnering with Spaulding for Children for nearly thirty years to bring to life the needs of children and youth who are awaiting permanency in the child welfare system. She uses her expertise in film production to create dynamic, engaging videos that portray real life situations to which people can relate. Although she is not a social worker, she has a great depth of knowledge about child welfare and specifically adoption and this has enabled her to tell a story that truly captures the needs of children and youth in the child welfare system.

Every video that she has produced is a masterpiece that includes critical information, authentic stories from those closest to the topics and interesting scenes and images that makes the information come to life and make an impact on the audience.

All of the curricula that Ms. Cipriani has been involved with has been proven effective through formal evaluation and is publicly available through websites such as the Child Welfare

Information Gateway and Spaulding for Children and it can be downloaded and utilized by any site across the nation.

Just a handful of the projects related to adoption that Ms. Cipriani has produced include: The Curriculum for Cultural Competence in Child Welfare, Adoption Support and Preservation Curriculum, Parents as Tender Healers Curriculum, The Adoption Competency Curriculum, Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute, National Resource Center for Adoption promotional video, Quality Improvement Center for Adoption/Guardianship Support and Preservation, Quality Improvement Center for Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency, and the National Training and Development Curriculum for Foster/Adoptive Parents.

All of Ms. Cipriani's work has proven to be inspirational material and has allowed Spaulding for Children to produce some of the most state-of-the-art curricula that exists in the field.

Category 5: Child Welfare/Judicial System Change

Erie County Department of Social Services – Adoption Units

Buffalo, New York

The Erie County DSS Adoption Team has made great strides in achieving permanency for the children/youth with an adoption goal through the means of very specific techniques including Permanency Round Tables and through the development of a Rapid Permanency Review tool utilized by all adoption units. Their achievement is noted even during the COVID pandemic when the county was able to maintain a high number of adoption finalizations. The tools they have employed have been particularly successful in identifying, engaging, and supporting adoption resources for the harder to place population of older youth with a degree of behavioral or mental health diagnoses.

The DSS Adoption Team has also created a specialized unit named the Family Unification and Support Team (FUST). The goal of this unit is to either assist an Erie DSS case worker identify and enlist a kinship resource willing and able to care for their own kin or to support an already identified kin resource. This support consists of meaningful conversations with the kin resource of what to expect with the foster care process, conversations about permanency options, assistance with resources to support kin in completing an application for temporary assistance and in providing monetary assistance. This is in keeping with the goal of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services of having at least 50% of children placed in foster care with kin or fictive kin. Family group conferencing and Family Finding are two other tools actively utilized in their work.

The Erie County DSS Adoption Team have extensive collaborations and partnerships in the community and across the nation, they are committed to sustaining the excellent work they are currently performing and the tools and methods that they utilize are easily replicable to other sites.