

ADOPTION EXCELLENCE AWARDS

2019

CATEGORY 1: FAMILY CONTRIBUTIONS

Amy and Scott Arntson

Duluth, MN.

Amy and Scott Arntson have very willingly and openly shared their personal adoption of a teen from foster care story on an extensive and national level through the Children's Bureau's/AdoptUSKids National Adoption Recruitment Campaign and the 2018 National Adoption Month Event. In the process, they have also responded to and supported other prospective adoptive families that have reached out to them about adoption.

In October, 2018, Amy and Scott and their son, Isaiah, whom they adopted from foster care as a teen, participated as national spokespeople for the Campaign through a satellite TV and Radio Media Tour. They also participated in the Facebook Live event during the media tour.

In November, 2018, Amy and Scott participated in our National Adoption Month Event in the Great Hall of the Humphrey building with Scott joining a "Dads Panel" at the event.

The very impressive characteristics of this family and their ability to really speak in a very genuine manner about what bringing Isaiah into their family has meant to them has resulted in the development of many multi-use form videos that have been filmed in their home in Duluth and in the surrounding area. These videos and articles have been viewed well over half a million times in various media outlets.

The Arntson's unique and ongoing partnership with the AdoptUSKids project and the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign is remarkable and has had one of the most important ramifications for the work of the Children's Bureau. They also serve as speakers for their agency in MN, North Home Children and Family Services, have been a resource to other families in Duluth and also for Adopt MN Kids.

Chris and Gigi Kean

Lauderhill, Florida

The Kean family adopted Maci just 51 days before her 18th birthday. They had not previously considered adoption from foster care, however, they were connected through the high school Maci attended, and at which Gigi was a teacher and their daughter, Carolyn, was a student.

The Keans are all active member of the volunteer-based AdoptUSKids Speakers Bureau and have assisted with the development and promotion of the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign, as well as other high-profile media opportunities. The Keans are an important resource for their agency of record, ChildNet, as well as Forever Family Florida, and the Dave Thomas Foundation. They are speakers for local MAPP classes and serve as an asset and resource for other foster and adoptive families in their community.

CATEGORY 2: INDIVIDUALS/PROFESSIONALS

Representative David Meade

Frankfort, KY

Rep. Meade who is an adoptive parent himself, advocated for and eventually convinced the House Speaker to establish a bi-partisan legislative Taskforce in 2017. Rep. Meade led this Taskforce as it set out to develop specific policy changes to address the many issues and barriers to permanency after hearing from numerous advocates, judges, attorneys, parents, providers and social service workers. As a result, the Taskforce recommended comprehensive reforms and developed a 112-page bill known as House Bill 1 which became the KY House of Representatives top priority in 2018 due to his perseverance.

House Bill 1 created a Child Welfare Oversight and Advisory Committee to report back to the General Assembly on child welfare matters, established a “putative father registry”, streamlined the termination of parental rights process, ensures that a child’s time to permanency is significantly reduced, that children are returned to their family whenever possible, and if a child cannot be returned home, that the child can be adopted in a timely manner.

Rep. Meade also in insisting that the Taskforce would improve the system, impressed upon the group of leaders that they needed to continue to hear from the public about issues facing adoptive and foster children and through the committee that was established there is now review on an annual basis of the complexities of the child welfare system and plans continually developed for improvement to the system.

Maria L. Quintanilla, MSW, LCSW

W. Covina, CA

Ms. Quintanilla has developed through her long career an expertise in working with the Latino community resulting in a life dedicated to recognizing and removing organizational barriers for the Latino community. She has developed a culturally based practice model of service delivery for Latinos and has trained nationally on this model. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Latino Family Institute, Inc. which specializes in providing adoption, kinship care, foster care services and family support services to the Latino community.

Ms. Quintanilla has been interviewed on radio, local and national television and various media outlets regarding Latino child welfare issues. She is on the board for the Adoption Exchange Association, the North American Council on Adoptable Children and a member of the Child Welfare Advisory Board for Azusa Pacific University where she contributes to the development of current child welfare curriculum, presents regularly to specialization year MSW students, and aids in the selection of Title IV-E child welfare students.

Christie Erwin

Little Rock, Arkansas

Ms. Erwin developed Project Zero to have zero children left waiting for adoption in Arkansas. She uses a mix of matching events, short films, and a Heart Gallery that features all waiting children to pursue this goal. Her approach has increased the number of finalized adoption in Arkansas, helping to set statewide records the last two years.

Ms. Erwin has established many activities/programs that impact the lives of youth waiting for adoption including a scholarship fund, birthday parties for waiting teens, a Disney extravaganza bringing together community partners and waiting

youth from across the state. She is described as a leader that lives out her mission of raising awareness and building hope in waiting children every day. She not only builds hope in the waiting children/youth, but also inspires people to do something about it including the Arkansas DCFS staff.

Kim Daugherty

Bartow, Florida

Ms. Daugherty is the COO of Heartland for Children and has been a leader in Florida in finding and developing means to speed up permanency for children in foster care. She has created the Child Study Project putting together a team of child welfare workers who could tackle pending child studies increasing the number of finalizations completed. There are numerous examples of how she has created critical staff positions to support parts of the system where identified barriers have delayed finding permanent placements for children/youth. She has also garnered important collaborations including community and business partnerships to bring attention to the needs of children/youth waiting for adoption and thus bring additional support to the needs of these children and the importance of permanency. One important faith-based initiative, the Florida 111 Project, has assisted in recruiting adoptive families through local churches and with implementing the Florida CarePortal initiative. This initiative connects families from the child welfare system to local churches and their volunteers to offer concrete supports, as well as, supportive relationships to kin, foster and adoptive caregivers.

Martha Inga

Oklahoma City, OK

Ms. Inga is the Programs and Field Representative of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and has created a program that has changed the direction for young people who are legally free for permanence. She organized events for judges, district directors and the executive team from OK DHS to attend listening sessions to hear what young people awaiting permanence had to say. She developed support for a special initiative, the Permanency Expeditors, in which certain workers in each region of the state would take a secondary assignment for a youth that had a goal of “planned alternative permanent placement”(PAPP). They would assist caseworkers in identifying connections, having conversations with

young people about the importance of permanence, and exhaust all avenues for a young person before they leave custody. She convinced each region to give up a much coveted caseworker position for her innovative approach. This initiative has been very successful in assuring permanence for teens that would otherwise age out of care and she has also advocated for a change to DHS policy to ensure all efforts have been made before the “PAPP” goal can be chosen for a youth.

After working with these young people, Ms. Inga has been able to identify many of the barriers in the communication with them about finding a permanency instead of aging out of foster care. She arranged a training to educate staff about the benefits of permanent connections and created a unified message from the Oklahoma Successful Adulthood program to help her in spreading the word and engaging young people to achieve permanence.

CATEGORY 3: BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS/INITIATIVES

Center for Adoption Support and Education

Burtonsville, MD

The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E) has pioneered the provision of adoption competent clinical services through a clinical practice model based on research and delineated practice principles for over two decades. C.A.S.E. has expanded its impact through the development of two adoption competent training programs designed to provide professionals with core knowledge, skill, and value competencies that enable them to effectively meet the needs of children and youth and their adoptive and guardianship families through the National Training Initiative on Adoption Competent Mental Health Services funded through the Children’s Bureau in 2014 for a five year period. Two state of the art web-based trainings were developed: one which is for child welfare staff and one for mental health practitioners. Over 9,000 child welfare and mental health professionals completed the training that was developed and tested in 9 pilot

sites across the nation. The evaluation found that participants in NTI experienced statistically significant knowledge gains across all modules for both of the training. Feedback from participants also revealed important changes in practice related to the completion of this training. This training is now being disseminated across the nation to all states, tribes and territories with the promise of it being a game-changer for many children/youth in care and in adoptive homes.

America's Kids Belong/Dream Makers

America's Kids Belong was launched in CO in 2015 by founder, Julie Mavis, to address the foster care crisis in states across the nation.

Dream Makers supports older youth aging out of foster care by connecting them with donors who help supply their basic needs and make their dreams come true. These youth are often left without a loving support system or resources to help them reach their full potential. Donor support can give them the confidence they need to succeed and change their future.

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

Karen Graham

New York, NY

Ms. Graham is the CEO of Sign1News in New York City which is the first and only digital network, partnered with world news leader CNN to offer on-line news and information in American Sign Language. The vision of Sign1News is to be the preeminent and unparalleled news outlet for the Deaf community by providing first-of-its kind network access to news and information. The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services recently partnered with Sign1News to pilot the "Chosen" A Family Connection Adoption Story. This innovative adoption program is a digital feature within their news program to raise awareness amongst the Deaf and hard-of-hearing of the 123,000 children who are waiting to be

adopted in the U.S. foster care system. In Georgia, there are more than 300 children awaiting adoptive families.

Ms. Graham has demonstrated a passion and commitment to serving children in foster care through her past work as a CASA in the State of Florida and in her role as the Wednesday's Child on-air personality in Georgia. This experience was instrumental in her decision to use her current platform to highlight the need for families for hearing impaired children. The film that was created to feature a deaf child in foster care was extremely well received and reached a very large audience through social media (Facebook and YouTube). Ms. Graham is now also connecting with other state child welfare networks to bring this particular expertise of featuring deaf and hard-of-hearing children to the attention of resource families. She also has collaborated effectively with a large variety of partnerships with businesses and local communities to bring a shared understanding of common goals toward serving family and children's needs.

AWARD CATEGORY 5: CHILD WELFARE/JUDICIAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services, Child Welfare Division

Baton Rouge, LA

The Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services has transformed their approach to foster and adoption in recent years resulting in three consecutive years of record-breaking number of children finding permanency through adoption. The changes began in 2016 with a statewide implementation of the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), a team approach to foster care that encourages birth parents, foster parents and agency staff to work together, focusing on quality parenting for all children in the child welfare system. In 2017, the state strengthened the support system with the launch of Louisiana Fosters, a statewide network of nonprofits, faith-based organizations and businesses working hand-in-hand with the state to support foster caregivers and the children in their care. The Department also partnered with Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters using a child-focused recruitment model to recruit specifically for older youth and children who have been available for adoption for more than one year. They have also worked with

the Annie E. Casey Foundation to intensify recruitment efforts for foster/adoptive parents for teens. This campaign encourages potential caregivers to “be that ‘special person’ for a teen in their community, just as someone did for them when they were younger.

In FFY 2018, 912 LA foster children found loving, permanent homes which was an 18% increase over the record set in FFY 2017 when 771 children were adopted. In FFY2016, 735 were adopted beating the record that had been set in 2013. The largest increase was seen for teens (ages 13-17 years) with 30.8% more teens adopted in FFY 2018 than the year before. The Department also saw an increase in the number of families who adopted sibling groups which was 22.7% of families in FFY 2018 v. 18.4% of families in FFY 2017.

Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Sitka, AK

The Sitka Tribe’s “For Our Grandchildren Committee” spoke out and charged the entire tribal community with the social, spiritual, and financial responsibility to protect and provide for the Tribe’s children. The Elders charged the Tribe with promoting the safety and well-being of tribal children in every sphere, particularly when impacted by other governmental institutions. In 2016, the Sitka Tribe initiated the Sitka ICWA Partnership with the State of Alaska’s Office of Children’s Services, which simultaneously launching the “Dachxchanx’I yan” – For Our Grandchildren Initiative in its own Tribal Court. These internal and external partnerships are making serious differences in what are otherwise daunting statistical trends in AK.

Results include: Through early intervention and collaboration at the Initial Assessment phase, the Sitka Tribe has reduced the number of unnecessary or reactionary child removals by the State of AK child welfare system by 23%, while maintaining the lowest child removal rate per capita in AK; tribal diversion of families into Tribal Court/Social Services has reduced the number of Tribal Children in the State of AK’s child welfare system by 58%; during the term of the “For Our Grandchildren” Initiative, 75% of the Tribal Children in protective care achieved permanency, with 11 adoptions and 6 family reunifications; permanency and best interest of Tribal Child are the front-piece of every decision; the Sitka Tribe’s For Our Grandchildren Initiative continues to innovate through the revision of it’s Children’s Code to include traditional modification of parental rights while

advocating for change in the AK Bureau of Vital Statistics policy so that Tribal adoptions modifying parental rights can be properly recognized with full faith and credit.