

Commissioner's Message



There are various ways families are formed - adoption is one special way to achieve that goal.

These words came true as we celebrated November as **National Adoption Month!** During **Connecticut's Adoption Day**, 49 children achieve legal permanency bringing the total number of adoptions this year to over 440 and approximately 1,700 in the past 4 years!

Adoption is merely one form of permanency.

Since 2019, we have reduced the number of children in out of home care by approximately 30% which includes over 2,400 children being safely reunified and over 1,400 children reaching permanency via transfer of guardianship.

Our sincere gratitude to our partners in the Judicial Branch, especially the Judges in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters, who opened their courtrooms across the state.



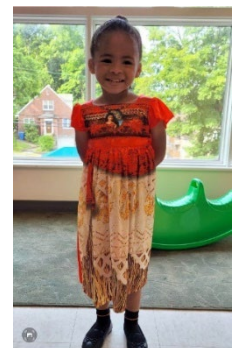
Thank you to Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz who participated in the adoption of "Nate the Great" in Waterbury - finding permanency with two former teachers! Watch Nate here: [Nate the Great](#)

Our "*Spotlight on What's Right*" newsletter highlights some remarkable families and their journeys to adopt.

"*Small Steps Open Doors*," is the theme of Adoption Month which places emphasis on pursuing permanent families for teenagers. Read as 13 year-old Daemion and Kimberly are now a family and how "messy love" is all part of their relationship: [Hartford Courant- Daemion's story](#)

The Santos family continued answering the telephone when DCF called! On Adoption Day they completed their third adoption. "I feel so lucky they were born," stated Sandra Santos. Will the phone ring again?

Elias is the "why" for one family who wished to raise a child. As he banged the gavel, a forever family was formed. Watch his special story here: [Glastonbury Couple Officially Adopts Son on National Adoption Day](#)



Celebrations occurred across the state.

Lilly decided it was best to make herself comfortable on the courtroom floor. Her mother, Keren Clarizio, has now adopted three children including two siblings years apart. Watch her story here: [Forever Homes](#) and [It's worth it.](#)



No room was left on the courthouse steps for the picture after Alyza and Luna were adopted! Quite a family!

The Paulhus family invited the media right into their living room as their last adoption - one of three adoptions in five years - was finalized: [Zeke](#)

Ongoing supports are available for families after they adopt, or guardianship is transferred. The UCONN Health Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) provides post-adoption support, including assessment, education, brief counseling, and referral services to adoptive families and to families formed through guardianship. Information about AAP can be obtained by visiting the [Adoption Assistance Program](#) website, by calling (877) 679-1961 or by e-mail at aap@uchc.edu

Whether it's stepping up for kids with complex needs, sibling groups, teens or young people identifying as LGBTQIA+, Connecticut's families have continued to take the step towards opening their hearts and homes for all children in need. It is with much gratitude we say thank you today and every day.

Great job everyone!

Elias Is Our "Why"



For years Jay and Lori Catubig thought, "why us?" when questioning infertility issues and their desperate desire to have a child of their own. After pursuing licensure with the Department of Children and Families, a sweet little boy named Elias answered that question.

He is their "why."

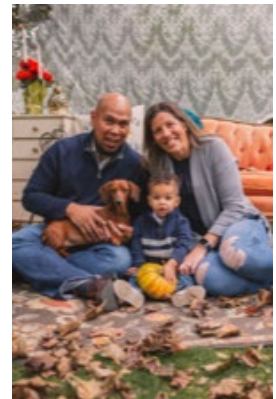
Born with a medical complexity called, Erb's Palsy, Elias essentially had no function in his right arm due to an injury he sustained during the birth of his brachial plexus. After complex surgeries and ongoing occupational therapy, Elias is doing very well. Although he does not have a normal range of motion, he finds ways to be successful.

This resilient two-year-old toddler has an affectionate nature and a big personality.

Elias was initially placed in kinship care with a blood relative where it was learned he would benefit from more extensive attention. His Occupational Therapist, Jennifer, and her husband, Ross, opened their home to Elias as a temporary foster care placement. They cared for Elias while the Department worked towards permanency.

The Catubig's were chosen as a permanent home for Elias through the teaming process. "When our social worker, Becky, showed us Elias's picture, we just melted. We felt so lucky to have been chosen," explained Lori.

Rebecca Bruey, the DCF Social Worker for the family, shared, "I remember facilitating the disclosure meeting, and then meeting Jay and Lori for the first time at an OT appointment, and instantly knew this was the perfect placement for Elias. I don't think anyone could have handpicked a better placement for him. Their commitment and love for Elias is undeniable."



On March 29, 2021, Elias transitioned to their home. It was because of Lori's experience as an Occupational Therapist that she qualified to be a medically complex foster parent for Elias, however, medical expertise is not required to provide care to children with this designation.

Within the Department of Children and Families, there is a group of children who have medical care needs that go beyond routine well-child care and common childhood illnesses. These children may have challenges that range from a child who requires daily medications for mild-persistent asthma to a child who must have assistance with all their care due to severe cerebral palsy or other complex medical conditions. DCF designates children with complex medical needs into a 4-tiered classification system. Children who are in Classification 4 are the children with the most complex medical and associated care needs while children in

Classification 1, have fewer care needs and less medical risk. All caregivers of children with complex medical needs are required to have additional health-related training that is facilitated by the Department.

On the weekend before Elias was placed in the Catubig home, Lori reached out to Jennifer (Elias' temporary foster mom) to introduce herself. After a few words that led to an hour-long telephone conversation, a deep friendship and mutual love for a little boy was discovered. Jennifer echoes Lori's sentiments. "There is no better gift than to stay a part of Elias's life and to be friends with Lori and Jay".



An open adoption was agreed upon between the Catubig's and Elias' mother. There are weekly emails, shared photographs, and a one-time year in-person visit. "We are in a really good place with Elias's Mom," Lori explained.

Holding back tears, Lori spoke emotionally about her journey to motherhood and the way that her extended family has embraced Elias as their own. "He is so loved, so very loved," she explained. When asked to describe Elias, Lori paused, and with true joy in her tone, she explained that he is super lovable, sweet, just so sweet and so much fun to be with. He loves to cuddle and adores Mickey Mouse, pasta, hamburgers, and desserts, adding that she could talk about him for days.

Lori feels that Elias is a match made in Heaven. She and Jay now have a son of their own and a friendship with Jennifer and Ross that is more like family.



Jennifer and Ross vacation with the Catubig's and provide respite for Elias.



Elias was adopted by Lori and Jay Catubig on National Adoption Day, November 18, 2022. A caravan of supporters traveled to the Torrington court to celebrate this memorable day.

"My heart is just exploding", Lori explained. I want the whole world to know that he is my boy!" she added.

Watch the video of the adoption here: [Glastonbury Couple Officially Adopts Son on National Adoption Day](#)

“Love Can Be Messy”

Kimberly W. and Daemion



Inspired by her father who was adopted as an infant, Kimberly W. knew since she was a school-aged child that she would one day adopt.

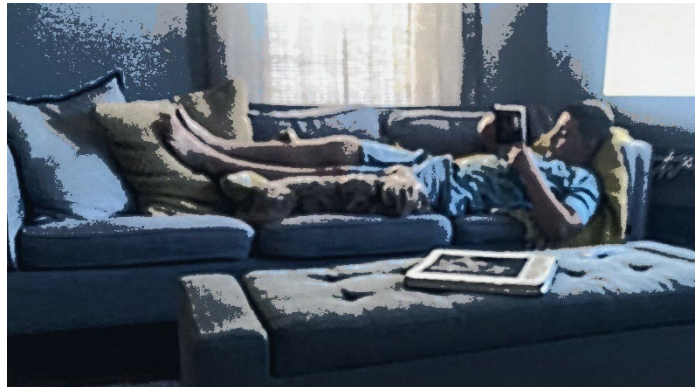
It was never a matter of “if”, it was just a matter of “when.”

Over two years ago, just one month before the Covid-19 pandemic turned the world upside down, that Kimberly was licensed by Children’s Community Programs of Connecticut (CCP) and ready to care for a child. Her intentions were always to adopt, knowing full well that any child who came through her door would be welcome to stay forever.

Kimberly planned to parent a child who was approximately 6 years old, that is until her heart became touched by the story of a 10 ½-year-old named Daemion. She recounts a telephone call from Brandon Warner, a CCP worker. He asked her to consider Daemion, a boy who had already been in multiple foster care placements. She explained that she was initially hesitant but after some thought, she said yes to the placement.

CCP’s Therapeutic Foster Care Program provides an intensive level of support to children ages three to eighteen in accordance with the Department of Children and Families’ regulations. The program recruits, screens, approves, and trains parents to become foster parents and provides children in placement with a comprehensive array of services including but not limited to individual therapy, support for the foster families, coordination with DCF regarding visitation and the permanency plan, and case management with schools and other service providers.

A newly licensed, and single foster parent, Kimberly welcomed Daemion into her home never realizing that within a month’s time the world would shut down and she and Daemion would be literally alone to navigate this life together.



With limited support and resources available to her because of the quarantine, Kimberly and Daemion spent the next several months getting to know one another.

Kimberly was teleworking while Daemion was attending school remotely. “We didn’t have much time to figure this all out, we learned as we went,” explained Kimberly. “It was really hard. It was challenging.”

Jessica Nordlund, Daemion's DCF Social Worker, agreed at how difficult this time was for both of them. "Covid-19 made for an intense adjustment period for both Daemion and Kimberly as they were still getting to know one another when they were suddenly required to be isolated with very limited access to outside supports," She stated. "Kimberly had the time and energy to focus on Daemion's needs and was able to make him her priority."

As the months and years passed by, Kimberly learned a lot about herself. She firmly believes in commitment, in sticking it out, explaining that Daemion had been through so much and it is up to her to make up for the lost time. To teach him how to eat well, bathe, brush his teeth properly and do laundry. She needed to be certain that her head and her heart were working in sync to offer Daemion all that he needed.

Kimberly believes that love is what Daemion needed to be healthy and successful. She explained that love can be ugly and messy and exhausting but that true love never gives up on someone and she never gave up on Daemion.

"Kimberly never let fear stop her," explained Brandon Warner. "From the first time I met her, I could feel how motivated and passionate she was about the idea of adopting a child and together we normalized her fears and ambivalence and helped her to believe in herself and her son."



When asked what she would say to someone who is thinking about fostering or adopting a teen, Kimberly explained, "Be ready to crawl in bed and hold that child while he is crying hysterically from a nightmare, be a fierce advocate – his first line of defense, be patient when they question your commitment over and over again, teach that child to be self-sufficient, don't lose patience when they don't know what they haven't been taught. Teach them. Love them even when it's messy."

Kimberly also recited information she received from her father. "Until you see him as your own child, you will never cross over to where you both need to be," she added.

Damion, who is now 13 years old, is a bright honors student, who is excelling in both swimming and tennis. He is adored by Kimberly and her extended family and is thriving in her care.

It was 2,169 days ago that Damion entered foster care and during a pivotal moment in his life he called Kimberly, "Mom" and he gave her permission to call him her son. Kimberly remembers this moment with a dramatic pause, sharing, "I cried like a baby. It was at that moment when I thought, OK, Kimberly, you are doing ok."

Soon after, Daemion told his therapist that he was ready to be adopted and when asked what made him feel safe to say this, he replied, "She is so fine with keeping me. She has always been there for me and has never let me down."

On November 18, 2022, he became Kimberly's boy. Never did she fully realize the impact that this one life would have on hers until she found her teen-aged son, Daemion.

Read more about the family here: [Hartford Courant- Daemion's story](#)

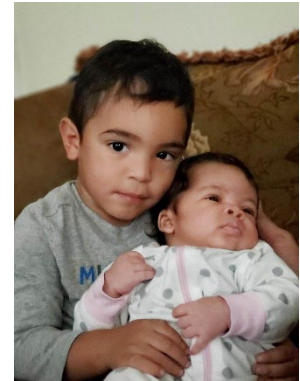
“I Feel So Lucky They Were Born”



For Sandra and Reinaldo Santos, their hearts know no boundaries. Biological parents of three adult children, eight grandchildren, and three adopted children, the Santos family is a beautiful example of the heart's capacity to love.

Their foster care story began 11 years ago after being made aware that a family member needed a foster care placement. They participated in the Department's kinship care training so that they could welcome their nephew, Mason, into their home. "We received a call from DCF that this baby needed us. We did what we needed to do," Sandra explained. Mason was four months old at the time he was placed.

Five years later, Sandra recounts a similar call from the Department, asking if she and her husband could take care of Mason's brother, Benjamin, who was just four days old. She was admittedly surprised. "Of course, we can," was her response and soon after another child walked through their doors.



Two years after Benjamin was placed, the Santos family received another call from the Department sharing that Mason and Benjamin have a baby sister named Isabella and asked if she too could join the family. Laughing and filled with so much joy, Sandra explained that she felt "so lucky" to be able to love these kids and make up for all that she feels that they have lost.



Sandra spoke of the Department so fondly. "I tell you, those DCF social workers are wonderful. They are responsive, always there when I need them, and they make me feel good about myself."

Amy Allegro, DCF Social Worker, shares that same sentiment for the Santos family. "As the family DCF worker for Benjamin and Isabella, I have had the pleasure of working with this family since 2016 and once again had the honor of being with the Santos family on such a special day, celebrating their joy on national adoption day as they officially make their family complete," she stated.

The three children have the same biological mother but different fathers. Sandra explained that her brother is Isabella's father and until his passing two years ago, was an integral part of Izzy's life. Sandra feels that it is so important for extended family to step in to help care for children when their parents are unable to do so. "It is best for their well-being," she said.

As a Department, we know intuitively that when a child cannot remain safely at home, the trauma of separation can be lessened if they can be cared for by kin - a grandparent, uncle, or aunt, or even a teacher or neighbor. The term "kin" includes those individuals who share a blood relationship with a child or have a supportive relationship with them. Kin from "the village" are whom a child needs to be successful.

The Department of Children and Families has embraced kinship care, with the percentage of children in the Department's care and custody placed with kin at approximately 50% while the national average remains around 33%.



Sandra explained that her adult children supported their decision to adopt, explaining that the love they share is so beautiful. She explained how happy it makes her to see her adopted children and her grandchildren growing up together. "Our holidays are big and busy," she stated.

"These children are special. I feel so lucky they were born and that I can love them throughout their lives," Sandra stated when asked to describe the feeling she experienced with each placement.



With a momma's pride, Sandra boasted about Mason, who is 11 years old, describing him as shy, very bright, and an old soul. He does well in school and loves video games. She spoke of Benjamin, who is six years old, as a helper who loves people and dinosaurs, snakes, and animals of all kinds. He also loves to draw. Then there's Isabella who is four years old and loves pink, her dollies, and coloring.

"My husband and I are so overwhelmed," Sandra explained, "But in a good way. It's scary to love like this but we both feel so blessed to be able to raise these children as our own."

Izzy was adopted on November 18, 2022, National Adoption Day. Look soon for the family on WTNH!