



MEMORANDUM

To: Our Partners
From: Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes
Re: National Foster Care Month
Date: May 31, 2019

During the month of May, we have celebrated **National Foster Care Month**. Events statewide afforded us the opportunity to give thanks and show appreciation to our foster and adoptive families.

In my travels, I have met with countless individuals to hear their personal stories on why they made the commitment to be licensed. With pride, families recalled when they had their first placement, the bonds they formed with children of all ages and the anticipation of receiving the next call for a child in need.

These moments reinforce why I believe I was called to this work; to strengthen families and protect society's most vulnerable children.

Our families love children unconditionally. With very little information they open their homes, serving as the calming force during one of the most traumatic times in the life of a child – removal. Caring for children is no easy task. It is through our joint collaborative efforts that our children can receive timely and comprehensive services leading towards permanency.

Events this month spanned across the entire state. We thank the Connecticut Alliance for Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF) for yet again, another great annual conference. Our staff and partners arranged activities such as chalk walks and luncheons to unique events where prospective families spent an entire weekend together to expedite the licensing process. Staff appeared on radio and television to talk about the critical need for families. Dinners were held where inspirational speakers shared how the bonds of a foster and adoptive family changed their lives. We even had a foster parent prom!

Our children are strengthened, they heal, regain trust and reach their potential when placed with the right family at the right time. Most impressive are those families who partner with the birth parents of the children in their care. What a wonderful message for a child to know the adults in their life accept each other and are joined together- because of them.

Perhaps there is no greater story which exemplifies the power and impact of our families as the one highlighting Ms. Tiffany Strain. During a recent press conference, Ms. Strain spoke of spending a large part of her life in foster care and residential facilities, eventually having a family of her own. When difficult times ensued, two of her children were placed into the foster home of Sarah and Rodney DeMerchant and Ms. Strain's youngest child was placed with Jacquelyn and Rodney Diggs, both DCF employees. Jacquelyn was actually the social worker on Ms. Strain's case when she was placed into foster care. With the foster parents standing by her side, Ms. Strain credited her relationship with these families for strengthening her and giving her confidence - leading to reunification. Her impactful words can be heard below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-34QKL-M6eY&feature=youtu.be>

So what is the perspective of our foster and adoptive families? What motivates them to foster and adopt in the first place? And what may attract them to consider doing it? I have spoken to many foster families over the course of 27 years here at the Department. While almost all foster parents – much like anyone who raises a child – will readily talk about the challenges and difficulties, almost all foster parents also talk about the emotional rewards, the relationship with a child, and the meaning that fostering and adopting provides. Listen to how Chris and Chad Raasumaa-Boots describe their experiences and the beautiful story of siblings being placed together.

<https://www.wtnh.com/on-air/connecticut-families/hebron-couple-raises-awareness-about-lgbtq-people-fostering-and-adopting-through-dcf/2031056430>

The importance of foster and adoptive families has also captured national attention. Sesame Street, the longstanding children's show, now features a Muppet named Karli who is in foster care. Please take a moment to view the enclosed video as you may find it helpful to watch and discuss within your organization.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2e7e2Hpb7I>

Please join me in expressing to our foster and adoptive parents the high regard in which they are held. Our families are the best recruiters and most effective messengers for this critical work to be accomplished. Their real life experience gives them credibility with others that no one else has. If our families are treated well and feel duly appreciated, this will be evident when they talk to others about being a foster and adoptive family and the positive experiences of partnering with us.

Thanks to each and every one of you for the efforts you put forth on a daily basis towards supporting our families.