

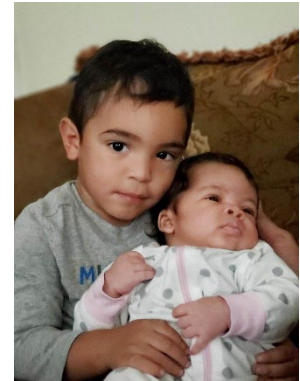
“I Feel So Lucky They Were Born”



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!