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These are the words that drive James Clifford, a man whose journey as a foster father has touched the lives of many.

Born and raised in Connecticut, James, known as Jim, now resides in North Haven with his wife and their adopted daughter, Natalie, who is three years old. As the Chief of Prosthetics at the Veterans Hospital in West Haven, Jim's professional life is dedicated to care and support, a commitment that seamlessly extends into his personal life.

Jim and his wife have been licensed foster parents since 2021, a journey sparked by their struggles with infertility. Initially, fostering was a path to adoption, but along the way, the couple developed deep respect and pride for the birth families they encountered.

The Clifford's have an open adoption agreement with Natalie's birth parents, sending "pictures of the week" photographs through email. Their dedication to the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) reflects their commitment; they actively assist with transportation for visits between a foster child and the child's birth family, preparing for reunification.



Jim explained that rooting for the family's success and hoping the parents would reunify didn't change his hope of one day adopting, but it changed how he experienced fostering.



The Clifford's have embraced fostering with open hearts, caring for children from birth to five years old, and even providing respite and emergency temporary care for children up to eleven. Jim recalls a particularly memorable experience when their support social worker, Lori McClain, informed them they had been chosen through the permanency planning team process for a little girl who needed a permanent home. After hearing the details, Jim knew he needed to discuss it with his wife. However, when Lori revealed the little girl's name was Natalie, Jim immediately said yes. Having already provided respite and foster care to Natalie, the decision was effortless—they already loved her.

“When the Clifford’s accept a child into their home, they ensure that all of the child's physical, emotional, and medical needs are met,” explained Lori, adding, “They like to take the children to their appointments and have been able to partner with biological and extended family members. Jim is a hands-on father and works with his wife managing appointments, visitations, daycare pickups, and drop-offs. He always answers his phone, even when he knows it might be for assistance with another placement.”

Jim's passion for fostering was also influenced by a high school friend who was a child in foster care. Conversations with his friend's foster father left a lasting impression, teaching him that love and commitment, not genetics, bond a family. This wisdom has guided Jim and his wife through their fostering journey.



Support from their extended family has been invaluable, with every child welcomed with love and acceptance. Jim hopes that his role as a foster father will change the narrative for children who have never had a positive male role model and for mothers who have had traumatic experiences with men. He believes his impact on the children and their mothers can alter how men are perceived. Jim often reflects on how simple gestures and interest in hands-on parenting can leave an indelible mark on a child's life, fostering a sense of security and belonging.

One of the significant challenges Jim has faced is that not all birth parents are open to forming a relationship with him and his wife. He has learned to be patient and let the parents determine the relationship's nature and pace. Despite this, his most rewarding experience involved an emergency placement of a non-verbal 2.5-year-old boy. Within a week, the child began to speak a few words, a testament to the love, patience, and teaching Jim and his wife provided.



Moments like these reaffirm Jim's belief in the transformative power of a stable and loving environment.

Participating in the "Best Dad by Par" golf tournament was a highlight for Jim. It was an opportunity to meet other foster fathers and staff members dedicated to caring for children. The networking and shared experiences reinforced foster fathers' unique and vital role. For Jim, it was more than just a tournament; it was a celebration of the often-unspoken bond between foster dads who strive to make a difference. Jim hopes that the media coverage of this event will send a powerful

message to fathers who have considered fostering but didn't know if they could do it, showing them the profound impact they can have on children's lives.

Jim recently appeared on the WFSB "Great Day at 9a" show to discuss what foster parenting is like and to encourage others - especially men - to consider becoming licensed.



Currently, Jim and his wife are fostering two babies. One is on the path to reunification with their mother, while the other will soon have parental rights terminated, leading to adoption. Support from their support worker, Lori McClain, has been crucial throughout their journey. Jim describes Lori as available, staunchly supportive, and a wonderful advocate. Her guidance has helped them navigate the complexities of the foster care system, ensuring that they can provide the best possible care for the children.

Jim and his wife also appreciate the resources and support provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF). They encourage anyone considering fostering to take the next step, emphasizing the profound impact it can have. Jim often shares his story with prospective foster parents, hoping to inspire them to make a difference in the lives of children in need.



As Jim's interview was coming to a close, he eagerly shared that he and his wife are preparing for a respite visit at the end of the week for a family of five siblings, ages 4 to 15. He sounded excited and ready, embracing the challenge with enthusiasm and purpose. Jim's eagerness to welcome this sibling group into their home reflects his unwavering commitment to offering support and stability to children who need them, no matter the circumstances.

"Until I am too tired or too old, I will be here, fostering," Jim repeats, his dedication unwavering.

Through their love and commitment, the Cliffords continue to provide a safe and nurturing environment for every child who enters their home, leaving a lasting legacy of hope and compassion. For Jim, fostering is not just about providing temporary

care; it's about offering a beacon of stability and love, a chance for every child to experience the warmth and security of a family.

In every laugh, every tear, and every milestone, Jim finds the strength to keep going, knowing that each moment spent fostering is a step towards a brighter future for the children they cherish.