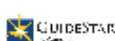


Fostering Hope

Coalition Newsletter | **Summer 2021**



Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition

For Every Child . . . A Place to Call Home

www.foster-adopt.org

1750 S Brentwood Blvd., Suite 210

St. Louis, MO 63144



Letter from the Board President Joe Bergan

If a single theme emerged over the last year, it's this: Connection is everything.

When we're uncertain, alone, or afraid, we look to our families for support. But for our kids, for kids in foster care, who can they look to?

The last year was an important reminder that there are children right here in our community for whom loneliness and uncertainty are not the exception but the rule. The feelings we all struggled with were only a glimpse of what they go through. After all, just as important for a child as food, water, and shelter is an often overlooked basic need: Family.

In 2019, we celebrated our 30th anniversary as an innovative, agile leader in ensuring every child in foster care has a home to help them heal. In 2020, we realized

it has taken us those three decades to prepare for the present moment. We know our kids and families have a hard road ahead. Everything from reopening and recovering after the pandemic to dramatic reforms to our residential and mental health services will test the creaking and exhausted infrastructure upon which our kids rely.

But, in the last year, we saw the community step up to turn a tremendous threat into an opportunity for healing. More families received more support than ever before. Our work didn't slow down, but in fact redoubled.

We have you to thank for that. You share our vision of "For Every Child . . . A Place to Call Home." You, along with thousands of other parents, volunteers, donors, advocates, and professionals, believe

that no child should face the future alone. Thank you for connecting our kids so they can grow and heal.

There are enormous, intractable problems ahead in foster care, but you showed us over the past year that the biggest problems can be the greatest opportunities for progress. And, we promise you this: our vision, and the goals we set on the way to achieving it, will be as great as the needs of our kids.

After all, if you believed a home for every child was within your reach, is there anything you wouldn't do to make it happen?

Joe Bergan
President, Board of Directors

SOPHISTICATED GIVING



STIFEL

Coalition Featured in **Sophisticated Giving** Guide by Stifel

Thanks to a generous donation from Stifel Bank, the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition has been featured in the annual Sophisticated Giving philanthropy spread. Thank you Stifel for continuing to share our vision, "For every child . . . A Place to Call Home." Be sure to grab your copy today!

Sophisticated Living, the

publisher of Sophisticated Giving, says on their website, "The guide features dozens of nonprofit organizations, spotlighting their missions, impact in St. Louis and ways to help lend a hand either at events or for fundraising. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, charities need your help more than ever."

Generous **St. Louis Community Partners** Stepped Up to Support Foster & Adoptive Families



Since the beginning of 2021, several organizations in the St. Louis community have supported the Coalition's kids and families through their unique services and talents. We are so grateful for their care! A special thank you goes out to:

1. Katie's Pizza - A huge thanks to Katie's Pizza & Pasta Osteria, Town and Country, for choosing the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition for their Give Back Tuesday on February 23. 100% of their profits that day went to support our mission of creating permanency in the lives of kids in foster care in the St. Louis region. We are so grateful for your generosity! Thank you to everyone who supported us by ordering.

2. STL Barkeep - We are sending a big thank you to STL Barkeep for helping

us celebrate 1,000 children served by our 30 Days to Family® program by donating a percentage of all sales from their delicious to-go cocktail program, Silver Lining Cocktails. Cheers to supporting our kids!

3. Penny Queen - Thank you Cor Jesu Academy for choosing the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition as your Penny Queen fundraising recipient. We are grateful for your creativity and partnership!

4. Community Carry Out Initiative - St. Louis restaurants Grace Meat + Three and Just 1 Taste provided over 80 meals to foster and adoptive families through the St. Louis Community Foundation Community Carry Out initiative. Our families were so thrilled to receive these

delicious meals!

Community Carry Out is a charitable fundraising effort in St. Louis that helps local restaurants and caterers struggling during the pandemic and feeds the hungry in our community. Eligible restaurants and caterers receive grants in exchange for the preparation of healthy and delicious meals, to be delivered to participating non-profits and then distributed to our neighbors in need.

We are so grateful for their support and care for our foster and adoptive families.

5. Lunar New Year Festival at Washington University - A Huge shoutout to the student volunteers from Lunar New Year Festival (LNYF) at Washington University!

While they weren't able

to volunteer in-person at the Coalition because of the pandemic, they stepped up to help in a big way. They held online fundraisers, clothing drives, and partnered with local businesses to raise support for children in foster care.

LNYF is a student-run organization at Washington University in St. Louis that showcases Asian multicultural dances and performing arts. This year, LNYF partnered with the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition to donate all proceeds from their celebration to benefit our mission.

Their 2021 performance, Unwavering, premiered on YouTube on March 27. We are grateful for the LNYF community and their support to St. Louis nonprofits year after year!

Your Support Made the **Coalition CareLine** Possible



Within a week of lockdown, we launched the Coalition CareLine to quickly help foster, adoptive and guardianship families connect to services.

Alicia had lost everything in a fire a few months before the pandemic stay-at-home orders went into effect. She is the primary caregiver for her two grandchildren in a very small house and was trying to piece together furniture for the home. Her hours were cut at her job due to COVID-19. She contacted the Coalition CareLine in desperate need for help to keep the family afloat during this time. The Coalition staff quickly provided wraparound support

to Alicia and her children. Alicia received a grocery gift card, as well as food pantry resources in her area that had events on days that she wasn't working. Staff also did a porch drop-off of clothing from ReFresh for Alicia's children. To ensure Alicia was connected to longer-term supports, Coalition staff helped her sign up to receive pandemic food stamp (P-EBT) benefits through the school system and provided guidance to navigate unemployment and

tax processes. The Coalition also connected Alicia with non-profits in the area that helped her find furniture for her home. The Coalition CareLine support helped ensure Alicia and her kids' immediate needs were met. It helped reduce her stress levels and also gave her the confidence she needed to stay strong while navigating this difficult season of life.

Within a week of lockdown, we launched the Coalition CareLine to

quickly help foster, adoptive, and guardianship families connect to services. Our

2020 annual evaluation found we served an additional 781 families, made thousands of proactive calls to ensure families received benefits, and provided thousands of clothing items and masks to keep kids safe. Rather than widespread instability and further trauma, our families experienced unparalleled support. Your support over the years made that possible. The Coalition had the luxury of being agile, proactive, and intentional because thousands of individuals, foundations, corporations, and advocates have empowered us into a position to do so.

Due to consistent

demand for this kind of basic and material support, the Coalition will continue the CareLine through 2021.

In addition to many of the same issues our families needed help with last year, we anticipate assisting foster, adoptive, and guardianship parents with P-EBT cards/food stamp sign-ups, housing and rental assistance applications, special broadband rates for families, and school uniforms and school supplies when kids return in the fall.

Thank you for helping us empower the families on the front line of foster care. Your support over the last year gave foster, adoptive, and guardianship families the resources they need to help their kids heal.



Celebrating the Coalition's **Stand Out Volunteers** of the Year

On April 7, the Coalition creatively hosted a socially-distanced Appreciation Luncheon to thank some of our extraordinary volunteers who supported the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition in 2019.

Because of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, the recipients remained in their vehicles in Tilles Park the entire time. Lunch and dessert were provided by the award-winning Nathaniel Reid Bakery. We introduced each recipient via conference call and shared details about their outstanding contributions to support foster/adoptive children and families. Our Standout Volunteers recognized at our appreciation event were:

Jim Martin, Board of Directors
Julie Treloar, Community Outreach
Kaitlin Hrenak, Junior Board
Tonya Howard, Little Wishes
Debbie Gray, ReFresh
Elizabeth Maize, ReFresh
Judy Steffans, ReFresh
Leah Stroup, ReFresh
Kevin Wisniewski, ReFresh
Cari Wegge, Special Events
Michelle Shockley, Special Projects
Tom Kircher, Special Projects
MOMS Club of Kirkwood, Volunteer Group

You can learn more details about each of these amazing volunteers on our website at www.foster-adopt.org/blog.

Despite Being Shuttered During Pandemic, **ReFresh** Got Creative to Serve Our Families in Need

Thanks to your generous donations during 2020, the ReFresh staff distributed nearly 11,500 clothing items to kids in foster care. We can't thank you enough for caring for our kids!

While ReFresh remains temporarily closed as a result of the pandemic, staff members have surely missed seeing you at the store. They continue to work hard to fulfill the clothing requests of our foster, adoptive, and guardianship families.

Here is what ReFresh has been up to and a few ways you can get involved:

ReFresh has resumed its donation drop-off events. The store plans to continue holding these contact-free clothing drop-offs in the alleyway behind our Brentwood office on the first Saturday of every month from 12:00-3:00 p.m. Visit refresh.foster-adopt.org to learn about the items needed.

ReFresh has also been busy fulfilling the summer clothing requests of our families. To help meet their needs, brand new donations of socks and underwear are always very much appreciated!

Due to concerns about COVID-19, we were unable to hold our prom dress* events

this year. However, ReFresh manager Tammy Hayes has been able to fulfill this need for young ladies in care, by holding several virtual prom dress shopping appointments instead.

We are thrilled to continue fulfilling our kiddos' clothing needs, and we are so grateful to YOU for making our work possible. We feel honored to be part of a supportive community that is always ready to show up for our kids. Thank you for your generosity, and thank you for caring for our families!

**ReFresh is currently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, we were not able to hold our Cinderella Project or Say Yes to the Prom Dress events this year. Therefore, we are still not able to accept formal dress donations. We will be sure to update our website and social media channels when this changes.*



ReFresh has resumed its donation drop-off events. The store plans to continue holding these contact-free clothing drop-offs in the alleyway behind our Brentwood office on the first Saturday of every month from 12:00-3:00 p.m.



Making Birthdays Special: West County Center Partners with Coalition's Birthday Buddies Program

When officials with West County Center got word that many foster families were struggling during the pandemic, the shopping center went to work to find a way to help. Sean Phillips, the Marketing Director, came up with a very creative plan for the mall and its shoppers to support Birthday Buddies, an initiative of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition, so that all children in foster care would still be sure to receive birthday gifts and have happy birthday memories.

The mall installed an 8-foot-tall faux birthday cake, trimmed with envelopes

labeled with the names of stores popular with kids. Shoppers simply pick up an envelope, write a birthday message on the enclosed card, drop in a gift card from one of the designated retailers, and insert the envelope into the opening on the cake. More than 110 gift cards were collected in the first month! Wow! We have been gratefully giving out these gift cards to children who were likely to receive nothing or almost nothing for their birthday. We so appreciate having the West County Center as a partner in supporting our kids!

Donor Spotlight: Ameren Corporation Charitable Trust

Thank you Ameren Corporation Charitable Trust for supporting the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition with \$50,000 to help our children and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world was shaken to its core by this pandemic, Ameren stepped up without hesitation when called to support the most vulnerable kids in our community. We are grateful

and lucky to have your support and partnership in making sure our children can heal.

"Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition stands in the gap by doing some of the most vital work for children at the greatest risk. I was particularly impressed with the way the organization responded during the pandemic, quickly shifting to also support the families of their child clients.

This organization makes sure children are placed and adopted into safe and stable home environments, regardless of what's going on in the world." - D-Lori Newsome-Pitts, Manager, Corporate Contributions & Community Initiatives Ameren Missouri





Even During Pandemic, 5 On Your Side's 'A Place to Call Home' Continues Finding Homes for Kids

to keep telling our stories, so they worked quickly to get us up and running over Zoom. They brought in the wonderfully talented Anthony Slaughter to host our segments and help tell the stories of our kids looking for forever families.”

We are especially grateful to Anthony Slaughter for ensuring that the spotlight continues to shine on these amazing kids:

“My favorite part is offering hope to these kiddos in finding a home,” he said about hosting the zoom version of the A Place to Call Home segments. “Even just getting the word out to

Slaughter:

“I think it’s important to feature these wonderful children because a lot of times people who aren’t affected by this can be blind to the need that exists. The kids in foster care didn’t choose to be there, but with love and patience from a forever family, they can overcome their challenges, and in turn, become conquerors in their own life, and one day give back to help those in similar situations overcome as well. One thing I’ve learned in this life is that everything we go through is meant to help someone else. My belief is that in helping

This year marks 20 years of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition’s partnership with 5 on Your Side and “A Place to Call Home.” In two decades, 464 children have found their forever families through “A Place to Call Home,” and 79,249 Little Wishes have been granted to kids since our partnership began. 5 on Your Side is dedicated to driving transformative change in the community.

This was especially evident as they found creative ways to continue featuring St. Louis children looking for families despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

When social distancing guidelines went into effect, we could no longer safely go out in the community to film the kids for their “A Place to Call Home” segments. This meant a big loss to

our recruitment programs. The “A Place to Call Home” segments not only provide an exciting and fun day for the children, but also serve as an important tool to reach

potential forever families for them. Thankfully, 5 on Your Side quickly rose to the challenge!

Summer Renne, the Coalition’s Director for “A Place to Call Home,” shed light on 5 on Your Side’s agile response to this difficult circumstance:

“Since the pandemic, we’ve had to move all of our stories online,” she said. “5 On Your Side was eager

In two decades, 464 children have found their forever families through “A Place to Call Home,” and 79,249 Little Wishes have been granted to kids since our partnership began.

highlight the need that exists gives me great joy.

The pandemic has reinforced the fact that family is a child’s most basic need. While it is always urgent to find forever homes for kids that have lingered in foster care for far too long, now more than ever our kids need families. 5 on Your Side did not miss a beat to help us do just that!

In the words of Mr.

these kids find a loving home, that one day they will be able to use their story to empower someone else who feels hopeless.”

Big thanks to the 5 on Your Side team for its continued partnership and their relentless work to support St. Louis’s most vulnerable children during the pandemic and beyond!

Coalition Partners with **St. Charles Co. Starbucks** Locations to Collect Gift Cards for Children in Foster Care

Because of the pandemic, Missouri kids in foster care are not receiving clothing vouchers. The state is working on it, but it's been a year since kids in foster care received their last clothing vouchers.

St. Charles Co. Starbucks stepped up to help! From Friday, April 2 to Friday, April 19, the stores asked customers to drop off \$35 Target or Walmart gift cards at the drive-thru or in-store*.

Because of the outpouring of support from the community, our kids will have new clothing they can wear proudly, and struggling parents will get a little financial relief.

We are grateful for Starbucks's partnership!

*Participating St. Charles Co. Starbucks locations included: Wentzville, Lake Saint Louis, K & 40, K & Laura Hill, Mexico & Mid Rivers, and 94 & Mid Rivers.



Thank You for Your Support on **Give STL Day 2021!**

On May 6, you showed up in a HUGE way on Give STL Day!

In just 24 hours, 429 donors came together to support the Coalition's mission. Our goal was \$180,000 to help ensure no child has to face the future alone. You shattered that goal and donated \$213,774!

We could not be more grateful for the commitment you have for our kids. We were touched how you used this stay-at-home time to elevate

the needs of our kids by encouraging your friends and family to help, too. You joined hundreds of like-minded individuals who believe every child deserves the support of a family. Your gift allows our expert teams to find families for the most at-risk children in our community, and to support those families as they help kids heal.

Your gift will do amazing things, like find a home for a 17-year-old girl about to age

out of foster care without a permanent family. Or, quickly place three siblings who have never been separated into the home of their cousin so they don't get split up with strangers. Your gift will put our highly trained and talented clinicians in the home of new foster parents struggling to support a child with autism and PTSD. Your gift will keep a ten-year-old boy in school and create a therapeutic plan that puts

his single foster mom back in control of her child's education.

In short, your gift will transform the life of a child in foster care. They will never know it was you who made that transformation possible, but we do. We hope you take a moment to appreciate it, too.

Thank you for being a part of our family. Thank you for supporting the Coalition.



Healthy Blue Missouri Makes \$60,000 Investment to Support Kinship Providers

Kinship providers are an invaluable resource in the process of getting children in foster care to permanency. Research shows that living with relatives is better for children and benefits them in several ways including reduction of trauma, decreasing negative mental health and behavioral issues, promoting sibling ties, and helping preserve children's cultural identity and relationship to their community. Kids placed with relatives are more likely to succeed in school, and less likely to be placed in often harmful and costly residential facilities.

We all saw through the struggles of the pandemic that connection and family mean everything.

Healthy Blue Missouri recognized this dire need

in our communities, and donated \$60,000 to support the kinship providers at the front-lines of foster care.

This funding assists families as they navigate the complex child welfare system, advocating for family and child needs, in-home services, and wrap-around supports.

Hannah Trout, Families United Specialist at the Coalition, said of the program, "While families have natural supports, sometimes they just need to call someone who understands exactly what they're going through, and I'm happy to be that call."

Thank you Anthem Healthy Blue Missouri for sharing our vision, For Every Child...A Place to Call Home.

Policy Spotlight: State Rep **Kimberly-Ann Collins** Steps Up for Kids



We would like to thank our State Representative Kimberly-Ann Collins for working closely with budget leaders on both sides of the aisle in the Missouri House and Senate to secure funding for RESPOND and other Coalition programs.

Though the budget has not been signed by Governor Parsons at the time this article was printed, her hard work has kept kids in foster care front of mind in the legislature every step of the way. Without your advocacy and passion, we would not be where we are today. Thank you for being a voice of the Coalition at the Capitol!

Created in the 1990's

by African American foster parents who knew our community could do better, RESPOND led our region in recruiting African American foster parents to support the cultural needs of our youth. 70% of children in St. Louis foster care are Black, compared to 30% of our general population. With the blessing of RESPOND's founders, the Coalition seeks to bring the program back to combat this disparity and give every child access to a home which can meet their unique cultural needs.

Thank you Representative Kimberly-Ann Collins for being a part of the Coalition family!

How **30 Days to Family®** Helped Tristan Find a Forever Home with His Fifth Cousin

Tristan came into care due to prenatal drug exposure. Scared and unsure of what to do next for their little boy, his parents left him at the hospital. He was there for weeks without visitors and upon discharge was placed in a traditional foster home.

Tristan's two older brothers, Trevor and Bryant, had come into foster care several years ago and were subsequently adopted by different families. Neither family was able to take Tristan into their homes.

Tristan's case manager referred him to the Coalition's 30 Day to Family® program, and Teara was assigned to the case.

Teara searched for family members who might be interested in a connection with Tristan. Several were upset when they were contacted because of their estranged relationship with Tristan's mom and dad. Tristan's maternal grandmother and paternal aunt could not provide placement, either.

During her search, Teara found 271 family members to add to Tristan's family tree. Finally, when Teara called Tristan's fifth cousin, Maleka, there was no hesitation before she said, "Yes!" She and her partner, Callie, had recently



discussed becoming foster parents. Maleka had been contacted years prior when Trevor and Bryant came into care, but she wasn't at a point in her life to take them into her home. That decision haunted her.

Due to COVID-19 precautions, Teara completed a safety walk-through of the home virtually via Zoom. She found the home to be more than suitable for Tristan. They live near Maleka's sister and nieces and nephews, so not only would the family have support, but Tristan would get to grow up with some of his relatives. On top of that, Maleka works at a daycare that Tristan would be able to attend with her during the day.

After Tristan moved into the home, Teara referred Maleka and Callie to the Coalition's Families United program for licensing. Anne was assigned to the case and was quickly able to build rapport with the family, even though it was a virtual relationship. She enrolled the couple in virtual training through the Coalition and supported them throughout the licensure process. They were so eager to become Tristan's caregivers that they completed everything in record time. They were new

to foster parenting, so Anne spent a lot of time helping them understand the child welfare system and their role on Tristan's team of professionals.

Maleka and Callie were hesitant to reach out to the family members identified by Teara because of their complicated history, and their worry the experience with others would be the same. Anne spoke to them in-depth about the importance of familial connections, especially for youth in foster care. Anne's encouragement and guidance helped them contact family members, including maternal grandma and paternal aunt who initially reached out. They continue to speak regularly to Tristan's family as well as send pictures and updates.

Maleka and Callie love Tristan so much. They are amazing advocates and proactive about his growth and development. Tristan has completely integrated into their family and is thriving. His case plan has changed from reunification to adoption.

Maleka and Callie look forward to their future with Tristan, and they remain committed to ensuring that he stays connected to his relatives.

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