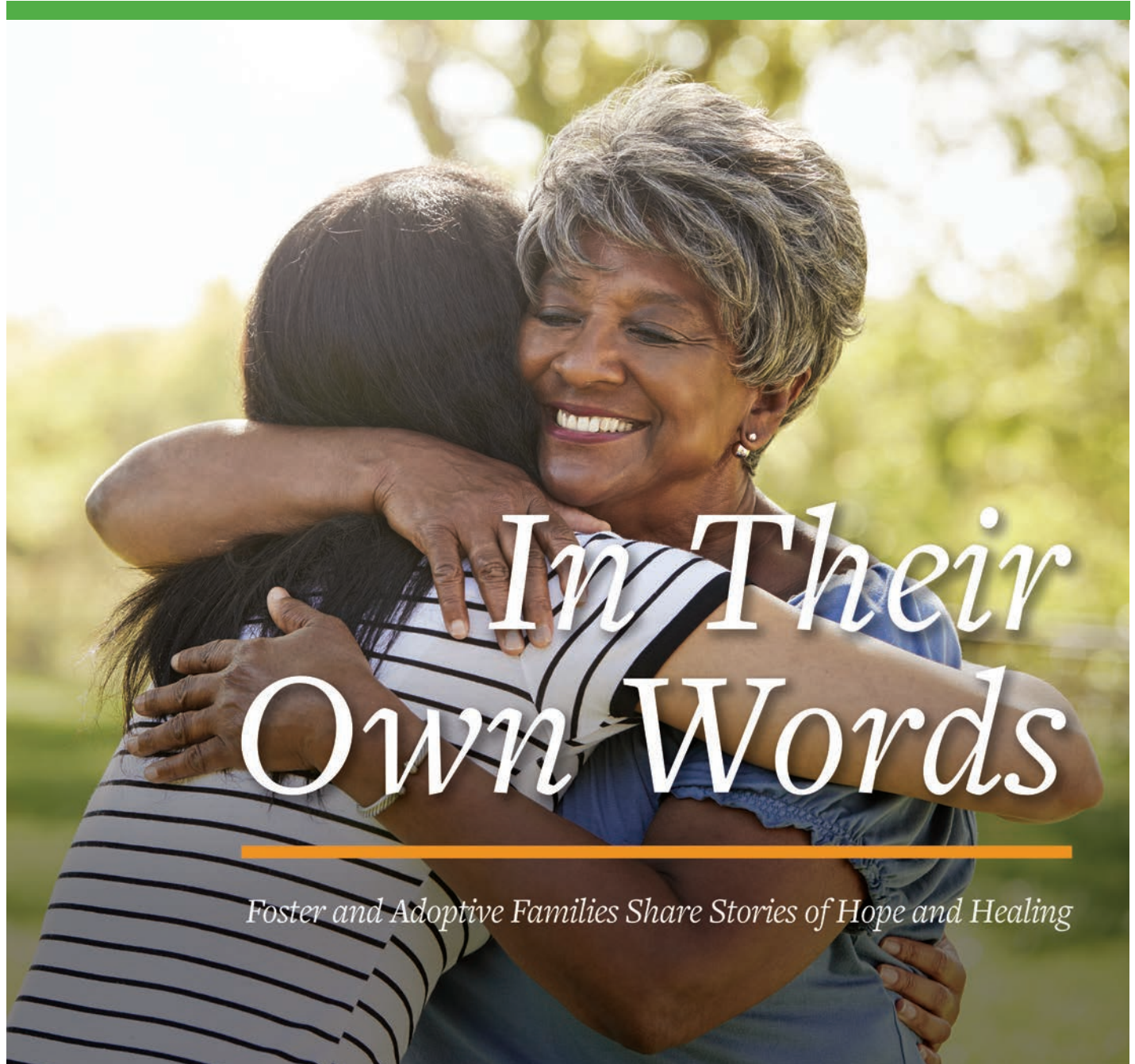


Fostering Hope

Coalition Newsletter | Fall 2021 | In Their Own Words Edition



In Their Own Words

Foster and Adoptive Families Share Stories of Hope and Healing



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

Introduction

“In Their Own Words” Edition

You will never find a more resilient, creative, and compassionate group of people than our kids and families.

They come from every walk of life and corner of our community, but the one thing they share is their incredible stories. Foster care is designed to be invisible to protect children’s privacy, but too often invisible also means unaccountable. Too often it means the adversity and triumphs

of our kids and families go unnoticed. It means their voices go unheard, and their stories go untold.

We do our best to share these stories, but one of our core values is that we always strive to do better. That’s why we created this newsletter, “Fostering Hope: In Their Own Words” Edition. In the following pages you’ll find longer-form stories, quotes, and short vignettes told

in the words of families helping kids heal in St. Louis. You’ll get a chance to know our families. In doing so, we hope that you gain a richer understanding of their experience.

As a volunteer, donor, or ambassador, please remember that you are a vital part of every story. Thank you for being a part of our family, and thank you for supporting the Coalition.

Featured Program:

The Dennis and Judy Jones
Family Foundation Foster Care
& Adoption Program

*How could we not?
He’d already
become our son.*

By Courtney, Adoptive Mom



“

We didn’t become foster parents to adopt. Christian and I signed up with the Coalition so we could support kids and their biological families. We’d supported each other as teenagers, growing up in less than ideal circumstances. When we got married, it only seemed natural that we’d try to be there in that same way

for others.

Not long after finishing our training, we got partnered with Karen at the Coalition, and we got our first call to take placement of a young boy.

I can’t think of how to describe that initial feeling other than a mix of excitement with a whole lot of anxiety. He could be such a joy but there were times when the trauma

he’d experienced would show through. Those were the times we were grateful to have Karen’s support. She listened and gave Christian and me so many resources to help understand what this child was feeling. The things he had to learn and unlearn. That support helped us understand that these behaviors didn’t mean we were failing as foster

parents, or somehow that we weren't helping him succeed. It showed us he was a normal kid who'd been put in bad circumstances.

Because we were able to keep that perspective, and because we had a whole lot of support, things got better. And all the hard work we put in brought us together and made us a family to one another. When we found out he couldn't go back to his parents, we jumped at the chance to adopt. How could we not? He'd already become our son.

One thing you've got to figure out in the adoption process is names. And when we got our court date for the adoption hearing, we asked our son what he wanted to do. He'd gotten so close with Christian over the years he spent with us. I can't overstate how important having that male role model was for him. So when we asked him if he wanted to change his name, he said yes, he wanted to change his first name to Christian. You can imagine what that meant to us.



Karen would talk to us often about unconditional love and how important that is for kids in foster care. Taken away from the parents they were born to, they often feel like love has limits. Giving a child

absolute love doesn't mean you never have moments of weakness or that you always know the right thing to say. For us – and this is what Karen really helped us with – it meant an absolute commitment to

always trying to understand our son. Whatever he was telling us, with his words or otherwise, we were going to be there to hear it and try to understand. ■

Program Featured in Story: The Dennis and Judy Jones Family Foundation Foster Care & Adoption Program trains, supports, and prepares families for foster care licensure and adoption readiness. The Jones Program is the most robust in the region. In addition to requiring the minimum 27-hour training requirements, our participants receive an additional 14 hours of nationally-recognized trauma training, plus two-years of ongoing support services from our highly-trained staff, many of whom are foster/adoptive parents themselves.



S.C., Relative Foster Parent

"I called you first because I know that I can come to you and just talk things out, plan, and then do what I need to do. You are a professional but also a friend I can lean on to hear my concerns and help me know what steps to take to ensure my nephew is cared for."

Featured Program:
Families United Program



K.M., Relative Foster Parent

"I honestly am not sure what we would do without your program. The courts, case managers, and lawyers – it's hard to know where to start or what to expect. I am so glad you all are there to help us understand how the process works and answer all our questions."

Featured Program:
Families United Program

Program Featured in Quotes: The Families United Program is an enhanced kinship licensing, training, and support program that takes a customized, hands-on, evidence-informed approach to ensure that each kin-caregiver has the unique combination of skills and resources to meet the needs of each child in foster care in their home.



Program Featured in Story:
The Navigation & Support program at the Coalition tirelessly advocates for families to get the supports and services needed to stabilize placements. The program bridges the gap between families and complex systems to offer support for foster, adoptive and relative families.

I was literally crying. It was the best news I had gotten in six years.

By Courtney, Adoptive Mom

“

I reached out to the Coalition when my teenage daughter Ashlynn was struggling with her mental health. I didn't know where to turn, but I'd heard wonderful things about the Coalition, so I picked up the phone. I spoke with one of the Coalition staff who explained the Illinois Family Support program and connected me to Specialist

Kim Barnhart. I was literally crying. It was the best news I had gotten in six years.

For the past six years, we were living in survival mode and were mentally and emotionally exhausted. Ashlynn received a lot of services, but none of them were helping. Her mental health declined so much that she tried to take her own life.

I was so overwhelmed and exhausted from running into dead ends. I felt like we were missing something because Ashlynn was still struggling. I wanted a comprehensive psychological evaluation completed for Ashlynn but didn't know where to start.

Kim gave me resources and referrals for agencies close to me that provided

trauma-informed in-home therapy, mental health system advocacy, skill-building, parent support groups led by therapists who specialize in parenting teens dealing with trauma, child therapy groups, crisis intervention, outpatient mental health programs for teens, and psychological evaluations.

Kim let me know it is okay

for this to be overwhelming because it is a lot. She told me we would work through it together, and that I was not alone. ■

”

I knew if I could get Jason into their program, they could help.



Featured Program:
Educational Advocacy

By Hope,
Foster Parent



I can't tell you how frustrated I was when I knew something was wrong with Jason, but the school wouldn't get him tested. I've fostered Jason for two years, and after seeing his first year of development, I knew something wasn't right. Being a foster parent for over ten years, I had worked with Kami, Educational Advocate at the Coalition, before. I requested Jason's caseworker contact her and the Educational Advocacy team to help.

The Coalition has always been a great support for me, whether parent training with Nickie Steinhoff or utilizing ReFresh. I knew if I could get Jason into their program, they could help. The school evaluated Jason for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) but said he wasn't eligible, and Jason continued to struggle across the board academically. His main struggles were with reading and writing. Originally, Kami, Educational Advocate, started working on the case, and we considered pursuing a less formal plan than an IEP. As Kami dug through all the files, she found that Jason had only been evaluated in one academic area, reading. There were a lot of attention concerns, writing, and exposure to lead poisoning

early on in life that were completely overlooked.

With Kami's assistance, we were able to utilize her relationships and explain the situation to the school principal about why we wanted Jason to be reevaluated. Using those relationships and tools, she wrote another request to get Jason tested. After some pushing she got Jason a new evaluation that covered all areas, including: social-emotional behavior, intellectual/cognitive, academic achievement, language, and motor skills. In addition, Kami taught me that Jason had issues with multi-step directions due to his language impairment and processing speeds. This allowed me to change my parenting skills and be more mindful of this when telling Jason the task. It wasn't that he was being defiant; he just couldn't process everything we were saying. This was an enormous help.

Everything we did was over Zoom, but it never lacked quality. They did a great job. The Educational Advocates eliminated barriers I couldn't surpass. I am grateful and excited to see the progress Jason will make in this upcoming school year in the third grade. ■



Featured Program:
Educational Advocacy

*Even with setbacks,
her kindergarten
year turned out a
huge success.*

By Amanda, Foster Parent

Dr. Marnice Anthony, Educational Advocate, was such a blessing to my family. Our foster daughter was headed into kindergarten from the early childhood program with a long list of medical and behavioral needs. I didn't fully understand everything they were saying with all the test results scores. How would Tamira be fully included at school? The overwhelming dread, confusion, and anxiety parents feel trying to prepare for an

IEP meeting is awful, but not this time. Dr. Anthony was there to help prepare me for the meeting and to understand Tamira's needs, so that her needs would be met and that she could thrive. Even with setbacks, her kindergarten year turned out a huge success. Tamira worked hard to finish the school year strong, and the advocates worked hard to make sure she was supported through it. A huge thank you to Dr. Anthony and the advocacy team. ■

Program Featured in Stories: The Educational Advocacy program works with children's Educational Decision Maker to determine and secure appropriate school placement, obtain educational evaluations, ensure implementation of special education services, and protect student's rights during suspensions. Our Educational Advocacy program strives to provide children with educational stability and personal growth while helping our caregivers become more astute advocates.



2020 AT A GLANCE Annual Report

2020 By the Numbers



Together, We Served
12,276 Children & Families

Raised
\$5,777,654

From
3,134 Donors

With the Help of
371 Volunteers

Who Gave
2,768 Hours

Family Finding Programs

We focus on finding homes for our community's older youth, sibling groups, and kids with special needs.

77 Children placed with kin through 30 Days to Family®

27 Children found adoptive families through Extreme Recruitment®

26 New foster families licensed

Parent Support Programs

Our comprehensive, wraparound support services help foster and adoptive families succeed and build resilience.

46

children achieved their school goals through educational advocacy

100

children successfully served through crisis intervention

1,128

parents assisted via the Coalition CareLine

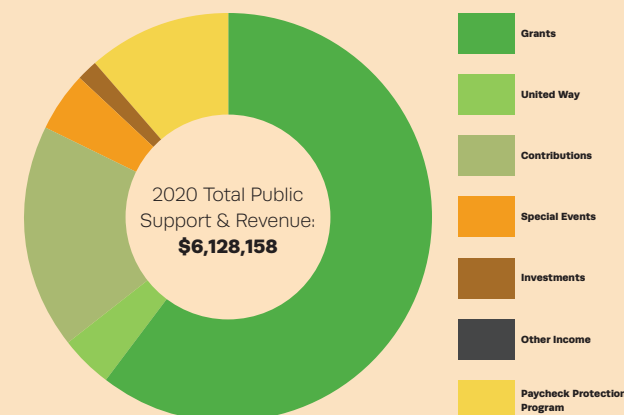
4,240

Little Wishes Granted for children impacted by foster care

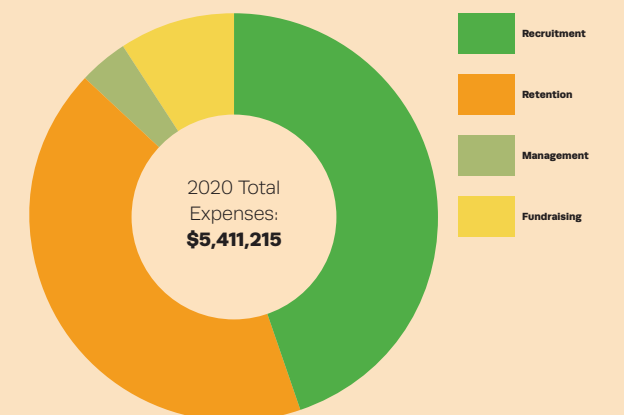
8,536

training hours provided to parents and professionals

2020 Revenue



2020 Expenses



Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition
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Saint Louis, Missouri 63144

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