

Fostering Hope

Coalition Newsletter | Summer 2022



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

In March of this year, **Jackalyn Olinger Rochelle** stepped into the role of President of our Board of Directors. Jackalyn has been part of our Coalition Family for 15 years. She served as part of our first Junior Board for young professionals, as a founding member of the Hope in a Handbag Committee, and as Secretary of our Board of Directors. We are so excited for her to step up as the leader of our team at such an exciting time of growth and change!



Letter from the
Board President
**Jackie O.
Rochelle**

When I first got involved with the Coalition in 2007, I didn't realize I was beginning a journey that would lead me here. But, here I am, and I'm ready to get to work.

Because gratitude is the core of our culture at the Coalition, I'd like to start my first presidential letter with some thank yous! First, I want to thank my predecessor in this role, Joe Bergan, for leading us through an incredibly challenging time yet leaving me with nothing but opportunity. Thank you for your steady hand, courage, and strength. You will be missed.

Next, I want to take a moment to thank the Coalition's staff. You faced a once-in-a-generation crisis with grace and agility and took it as a chance to improve the way we help children heal. You demonstrated tremendous flexibility through the pandemic and continue to do so as we

grow. While we always tend to move fast at the Coalition, the pace at which you made these changes is like nothing we've ever seen! You are incredible. Thank you for your hard work.

To our volunteers and donors – if we want to achieve a future where we are no longer needed, it's going to take every single one of us, contributing at whatever level we can, to make that happen. Your support over the last 30 years has put us within reach of a future where no child faces the future alone. We are so, so grateful to you!

Finally, I want to close by telling you what I am excited for. Of course, I am excited for the challenges our recent growth will bring to us, but I am even more excited for what lies beyond it. In five years, our goal is that every child will have a family with the capacity and support

necessary to meet their unique physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral needs. If we can achieve that, we will be the very best community in the country for children impacted by foster care. Our kids deserve this, and this is what the families helping them heal deserve as well.

Thank you so much for helping make these goals a reality for every child, one family at a time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jackie O. Rochelle'.

Jackie O. Rochelle
President, Board of
Directors

Special Shout-Outs to Our Generous St. Louis Community

One thing about our community is they always step up to meet the needs of our kids. Our third-party fundraisers continue to be the unsung heroes who come in without even being asked. We can't thank you enough for bringing awareness to foster care and supporting our kids.

Welcome to the Coalition Family!

- Texas Road House
- Second Attic Mini Storage
- Jim Butler Maserati
- Saint Louis University Interfraternity Council Greek Week




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**CREATING THE MOST
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A Place to Call Home: **Callie's Story**



Due to the pandemic, we had to move all of our A Place to Call Home stories online. 5 On Your Side was eager 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. Concurrently, Vantage Credit Union stepped in to sponsor A Place to Call Home. We are beyond thankful for 5 On Your Side's agile response and Vantage Credit Union's dedication to ensuring A Place to Call Home would continue to air during this time.

This is the story of Callie, one of the hundreds of children whose life has been positively impacted by A Place to Call Home: At three and a half years old, Callie entered foster care due to domestic violence in her home. After her mom,

who struggled with untreated mental illness, tried to abduct Callie, her father gained limited custody. That tenuous placement wobbled for almost three more years before collapsing.

At six years old, Callie went to her first foster placement. Callie bounced between four different foster homes in less than three years. Her trauma made it hard for her to trust adults. The smallest thing could put her back in the worst moments of her life. Physical aggression, delayed social skills due to lack of interaction with other kids, and an intellectual disability made things hard for her at home and school. She was sent home often for biting, kicking, and spitting over reasons the teachers couldn't understand.

Finally, Callie was placed in a specialized therapeutic home. While this somewhat helped her behaviors, Callie's team saw her becoming a teenager in three short years. This made her especially high risk for "aging out" of foster care to harrowing odds of unemployment, homelessness, early pregnancy, and incarceration. Unsure of what to do, they called Extreme Recruitment®.

When Callie first entered care, her mother, battling a mental health crisis, was not able to work with the social workers who find family. So while dad's side of the family was well-known, mom's was not. Mike, a private investigator who works for the Coalition, quickly found 100 relatives no one had talked to. He introduced himself and shared Callie's A Place to Call Home video. It stirred their memory in a way a

decided their home would be perfect for Callie. Thomas, a pastor, and Sophia, a social worker, had adopted their niece just two months before. Sophia especially had talent and experience working with traumatized youth. They also had two adult sons, one of whom had a disability, giving them insight into raising differently-abled children. When they held their first Zoom meeting, Thomas and

her therapist and prepared the school and Callie's parents to secure her special services in the classroom. She also helped reestablish Callie's mental health services she had lost due to a clerical error.

Callie was officially adopted at the end of February. She has lived with Thomas, Sophia, and her new little sister for almost a year. With involved parents as advocates, she is thriving in school. After almost seven years of uncertainty, Callie finally has a chance to heal.



Amanda, an Extreme Recruiter® with the Coalition, quickly realized a source of stagnation in the case; the team wanted Callie's current foster mom to adopt her. However, Amanda was able to quickly assess it wasn't a good fit due to unrealistic expectations for a young girl with extreme trauma and an intellectual disability. She began to search for alternatives.

phone call simply doesn't. Even if they couldn't take Callie, many of her relatives offered names and introductions to others who they thought might.

Two months after Amanda started the case, she sent Callie's A Place to Call Home feature to Callie's maternal cousin Sophia and her husband Thomas. They immediately asked for a meeting. Amanda quickly

Sophia hadn't seen Callie in years. Sophia pulled out a photo album and began to show Callie pictures of her family. Callie was riveted; she didn't remember most of them because she was so young when she entered foster care.

As Callie prepared to move in, Amanda coordinated with the team so everything would be ready. She ensured Callie could keep





The adoption
took time. The
love arrived
instantly.





After two long years, we held our first family event in person! Earlier this year, we received a generous donation of 300 free tickets from the Aquarium Foundation for our foster, adoptive, and guardianship families. We sent out the invite to our families and “sold out” within minutes. On April 3rd, we got the chance to greet families and kids as they made their way into the Aquarium.

This event wouldn't have been possible without our sponsor EDF-RG and their CEO and his wife, Chris and Ashley Pondoff. Chris and Ashley, who are adoptive

parents, made it possible for us to gift each kid a Nike drawstring bag filled with Aquarium water bottles, stuffed animals, candy, fidget toys, and snacks. Chris and his son Charlie had a great time attending the event and loved giving back.

Kids were overjoyed to receive the goodie bags; many opened them up right away to see what was inside. “This is the cutest little toy I've ever gotten,” one kid shouted. “I'm going to snuggle with him every night!” Other kids showed off their sea animal shirts and toys from home to our volunteers. One little boy told

Family Fun at the St. Louis Aquarium

our team that he was “going to show the sharks [his] shirt.”

Families were able to spend as much time inside as they wanted. “It's something that was on our bucket list of things we wanted to do, and you fulfilled that wish for us,” one mom wrote. Thanks to the generosity of our partners, we were able to create a meaningful and fun outing for our families.

“Seeing the excitement from caregivers and kids alike made the day so special,” said Madison Brown, our new Volunteer Manager. “It was a beautiful day and a great way to kick off the springtime with our families, and we could not have done

it without our sponsors, volunteers, and team at the Coalition.”

We are extremely grateful to the St. Louis Aquarium Foundation for making this event possible. A BIG thank you to our Junior Board volunteers who stuffed and handed out goodie bags:

- Kaitlin Hrenak
- Rachael Lynch
- Grace Palmer
- Joe Schwegel
- Erin Sternberg
- Ryan Wood

The photos included are courtesy of Nicky Williams Photography. HUGE shout out to this amazing community partner for donating her time and talent to capture this magical day.



Donor Spotlight: NISA

NISA Investment Advisors started investing in the Coalition in 2020, supporting our Coalition CareLine in response to the COVID Pandemic. In 2021 they continued to invest in the Coalition's Education Advocacy program which strives to provide children with educational stability and personal growth while helping our caregivers become more astute advocates for their children. We are grateful for NISA's generous partnership and look forward to growing our relationship to best support our kids!



Hope in a Handbag was a HUGE success, and we couldn't have done it without every single one of you!

Thank You for an Incredible Hope in a Handbag Event!

St. Louis' most fashionable folks joined us at the Hilton Frontenac on April 21st for a fabulous fundraising night to benefit children impacted by foster care.

Our guests enjoyed the most amazing auction featuring hundreds of designer handbags, as well as an evening full of delicious food,

live music, and fun surprises. We are grateful for each one of you who brought your incredible energy and fun spirits, creating a vibrant atmosphere for what was the best Hope in a Handbag event yet.

This was our first in-person event since the beginning of 2020, and with a total of 312

tickets sold, you helped us raise \$152,040!! This was a record-breaking year for ticket sales, and we are thrilled!

Thank you so much for supporting our kids. We hope you're enjoying your new handbags!

Thank you to our generous sponsors who made this wonderful night possible:

\$10,000 COUTURE SPONSOR

Debra and Tim Niemann

\$7,000 TENT SPONSOR

Kiesel Company

\$5,000 DESIGNER SPONSOR

Cass Information Systems

Edward Jones

Mike Erce

Robert and Lisa Forsyth

\$2,500 BOUTIQUE SPONSOR

Connie Lohr

Rachel Oliver

\$1,500 VINTAGE SPONSOR

Barb Giudici

Jennifer O'Keefe

MAI Capital Management

Mark and Julie Kiehl

\$750 TRENDY SPONSOR

Christine Pennell Party

Danna McKittrick, P.C.

Gunther Salt Company

Holly Blumeyer Interior Design

Marcia Ambrose

Marsh & McLennan Companies



Thank you to our Hope in a Handbag Committee Members:

Aimée Bergan, Kristine Bouchaert, Holly Demerath, Kelly Doerhoff, Katie Doggendorf, Lucy Dolan, Lisa Forsyth, Natalie Gavrilovic, Veronica Grimes, Annie Hayward, Jackie Knolhoff, Connie Lohr, Laura Lueken, Kristina Marks, Carly McClanahan, Maren Mellem, Diane Milburn, Angie Moore, Debra Niemann, Melody Noel, Jennifer O'Keefe, Jackie Olinger-Rochelle, Chris Pennell, Natalie Rohlfing, Kristina Ross, Kelsey Runyon, Jerry Saban, Stacey Sappington, Lauren Sczurko, Alison Shubert, Ashley Silverman, Deanna Spell, Lauren Sullivan, Nikki Sullivan-Handshy, Patti Sutherlin, Kate Turner, Karen Mac Wallach, Debby Wicks



Creating the Most Supportive & Innovative **Foster Care & Adoption Community** in Our Country

The Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition held a series of “town hall” meetings with hundreds of local child welfare community members after learning that the State of Missouri is making a \$5 million investment to expand foster care and adoption services. These conversations helped the Coalition form a bold vision for changing the way children experience foster care in St. Louis. In close collaboration with our community partners, the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition will expand our work for families in the following four areas.

1. Rapidly Increase the Number of Foster Parents. Every child in foster care will have a family who meets their unique cultural, behavioral, and emotional needs by expanding the number of African American, medical/behavioral, and respite foster homes. Grow capacity by 133%.

2. Permanent Families for Children as Quickly as Possible. Recognizing that every moment in foster care is too long, children will reach a permanent family as quickly as possible by reducing waitlists for 30 Days to Family® and Extreme Recruitment® and providing expanded family finding services to partner agencies. Grow capacity by 62%.

3. Wraparound Support & Training. Caregivers and professionals will have timely, effective access to the best support and training to meet children’s mental health and cultural needs, including the areas of trauma, transracial parenting, and LGBTQIA+ support. We will bolster services in rural, underserved counties. Grow capacity by 88%.



4. Tailored Services for Families & Older Youth. Ensure no child falls through the cracks by eliminating current wait lists for educational and mental health systems navigation, as well as crisis intervention and supporting older youth with housing and workforce development needs. Grow capacity by 62%.

To carry out this work, the Coalition staff will grow substantially with new supervisory, program, and administrative staff across all teams to ensure every foster, adoptive, and guardianship family in St. Louis has the support they need to help kids heal.

The Coalition is Hiring

After continuous, steady growth, the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition will nearly double in size thanks to additional funding from the State of Missouri. If you are interested in joining our mission, please visit our website for a full list of our open positions: <https://www.foster-adopt.org/employment/>

Thank You for Your Support on Give STL Day 2022

This year our Give STL Day goal was \$250,000, our largest one yet! In less than 24 hours, more than 400 donors came together to support the Coalition's mission and helped us raise \$265,595 for our kids. We are simply blown away by your generosity!

We could not be more grateful for your commitment to our kids. 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 support those families as they help kids heal.

Your gift will go on to 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. 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 a child's life in foster care. They will never know it was you who made that transformation possible, but we do, and we hope you take a moment to appreciate it too. Special thanks to the Berges Family Foundation for doubling the Give STL match this year! We are grateful for your generous support to children impacted by foster care. Thank you for all you do to uplift the St. Louis community!

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

A Record-breaking Jr. Board Trivia Night

Millennial Madness Trivia Night finally took place after two long years of being canceled because of COVID-19! In the end, the Junior Board of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition raised \$15,333, exceeding their goal of \$15,000. The sold-out event was a night of fun, laughs, and generosity.

Our sincere thanks go out to Urban Chestnut for providing the best venue space we have ever had! Big shout out to Todd at Porta Party DJs, who kept the energy high and hosted a fantastic event!

Special shout out to our 2020 sponsors who held their sponsorships until we could resume in-person events.

Last but certainly not least, we would like to thank our generous sponsors who made our 2022 Jr. Board Trivia Night possible.

Thanks for sharing our vision, For Every Child...A Place to Call Home.



30 Days to Family®: Rayna, Jasmine & Charlie

In September, 12-year-old Rayna, 4-year-old Jasmine, and 3-year-old Charlie entered foster care after their parents struggled to provide adequate supervision. They were initially placed in a foster home and Joel, 30 Days to Family® Specialist, was assigned to the case.

Joel spoke with children's mother who mentioned 10 relatives that Joel could look into, including a maternal grandmother, Caprice. Joel discussed those family members with Rayna to see if she had any thoughts on where she would like to be placed. Rayna told him that she would like to be placed with Caprice because her older sister, 16-year-old Becca, lived there, and they

spent most weekends there anyway.

Caprice did not hesitate to accept placement of Rayna, Jasmine, and Charlie. She was not only raising Becca, but she also raised two of their older brothers until they were old enough to live on their own. A walk-through of the home and thorough background checks were completed. The team spent some time considering Caprice's capacity to care for three additional children. They decided it was in the children's best interest to live with Caprice and their older sister. Joel advocated for Caprice to receive Urgent Needs Funding from the Coalition to purchase a fire extinguisher which is needed

for foster parent licensure. Caprice lived in the same school district that Rayna attended, so there was continuity in Rayna's education which is paramount in limiting the impact of trauma caused when children enter foster care. They were placed with Caprice within 22 days of coming into foster care.

Even though Joel found Caprice, he continued to look for more family. Caprice was worried Joel would find someone else to care for her grandchildren, and she would lose contact with them. Joel spent time building a relationship with Caprice to assure her he was trying to build up a network for her to have a

support system as well as find potential backup options in case anything should happen to Caprice. She trusted Joel and provided information for family members Joel could contact. Joel's list of relatives went from 6 at the beginning of the case to 150. He personally spoke to 20 family members; most of them lived close by and were eager to help.

Joel visited with Caprice, Rayna, Jasmine, Charlie, and Becca in December. He dropped off Christmas gifts for them: art supplies and a big sack of toys. The children seemed happy and loved. Joel could tell they were right where they needed to be.





Celebrating the Legacy of Mr. Richard H. Patton, Jr.

Our Coalition family is mourning the loss of one of our former leaders, a tireless advocate for children in St. Louis, and a kind, generous soul, Mr. Richard H. Patton, Jr.

As former President of our Board of Directors, Mr. Patton helped set us on the path we are still on today: intentionally seeking out unmet needs in our

community so no child falls through the cracks. His connections in the child welfare community helped advance key partnerships and create a culture of collaboration we still treasure.

Lottie Wade helped coordinate the founding of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and worked with Mr. Patton on numerous child welfare issues. She remembered his warmth and kindness: “He was a quiet leader – you could count on him for data, you could count on him

to show up. After long meetings, some of us would start to fidget but he never lost his ability to listen. And he had such a wonderful sense of humor.”

Mr. Patton’s awards, accolades, and accomplishments are too numerous to list here; he worked his entire life to achieve justice and well-being for kids in St. Louis. As a founder and leader of Vision for Children at Risk, Mr. Patton not only impacted the kids and families we serve, but so many of the professionals who share our mission. As

such, Mr. Patton’s legacy is so much more than his many accomplishments. He set an enduring example of solidarity and selfless service.

Wanda Stokes, who also worked with Mr. Patton on the Coalition’s Board, summarized his service as a leader: “He was the connector, always making sure we got in touch with the people we needed. He was kind and gentle, and he got things done.”

The entire Coalition Family is sorry for the loss of a great leader in our community, yet grateful for the example he set and the time and talent he gave to us all.



Rebooting the **RESPOND** Program



We are so proud to be rebooting the RESPOND program, a project created by Howard and Vickie Denson in the early 90's to address the shortage of African American foster parents. The overrepresentation of African American children in foster care and the lack of culturally appropriate homes are still present today. With the support of the Missouri Legislature and Representative Kimberly-Ann Collins, who spearheaded making sure RESPOND was in the budget, we are here today reopening the RESPOND program to best serve our kids.

We know we can't do this work alone. We reached out to the community and developed an advisory committee and focus groups to support not just the launch but to build trust and genuine connections with the

community. This advisory committee consists of 18 professionals including community volunteers, stakeholders, corporations, funders, and Governing and Junior Board Members. The RESPOND Advisory Committee Members are:

Vickie and Howard Denson, Andrea Hoosman, Rep. Kimberly-Ann Collins, Jackie Olinger Rochelle, LaShonda Lambert-Howze, Dr. Wilmetta Toliver-Diallo, Terrence Chance, Carla Hughes, Charlotte Ottley, Dashawn Cason, Trisha Gordon, Kiesha Davis, Dr. Lanette Madison, Shante Lampley, Cynthia Crim, D-Lori Newsome Pitts, Ebony Hutchinson, Monique Bynum, Rhonda Lingard, and Gisele Marcus.

In order to make sure our work is effective, we hired The Mirror Group, LLC to evaluate and study

RESPOND over a 3-year term and hired Jasmine Evans, a marketing consultant, to help create a brand that resonates with our community.

Cisely Beard and Jenny Jones, two of our extremely talented Coalition leaders, were promoted to spearhead the implementation of the RESPOND Program:



Cisely Beard, Senior Director of General & Targeted Recruitment

Cisely has been a fearless advocate for children for over 27 years. She has worked her way up through our direct service program 30 Days to Family® to the Supervisor of Access and Advocacy. Cisely has now moved into the role of Senior Director of General & Targeted Recruitment.

Jenny Jones, Director of RESPOND

Since 2017, Jenny has been a member of the Coalition working as a trainer and support staff to the Dennis & Judy Jones Foundation Foster Care and Adoption Program. She has developed expertise in connecting families to valuable resources, training, and supporting them after placement. With this experience in recruitment and retention, she is the perfect leader for RESPOND.

RESPOND is still seeking four passionate and dedicated employees. Please be on the lookout for RESPOND job opportunities on our website.

Special Thanks to the Deaconess Foundation

In related news, the Deaconess Foundation has invested \$20,000 for one year to support advocacy work to create racial equity for youth in foster care. This will allow us to expand our work to make foster care equitable for our kids and families.





Volunteer Activities Are Resuming!

The Coalition's work is powered by volunteers, and we have missed each one of you. We're excited to be resuming volunteer activities in the coming months. We will especially need volunteer groups to help at ReFresh, our resale clothing boutique.

We're looking for groups to sort clothing donations and select the fashions we'll give to youth impacted by foster care and/or sell in the store. If you have a student, corporate, or church group (preferably 4-10 individuals) that can help in late summer/early fall or after, please contact Shelley at shelley@foster-adopt.org.

Best Places to Work Award

The St. Louis Business Journal recognized the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition as a finalist for the **2022 Best Places to Work in St. Louis** awards program. They received more than 230 applications for this year's contest, and we were one of 74 finalists. All the credit goes to our wonderful staff, who embody our values every day: equity, family, diversity, innovation and excellence, inclusion, integrity, courage, and teamwork and collaboration, and to our Board of Directors who support the staff in all that we do.

ST. LOUIS BUSINESS JOURNAL



2022 BEST PLACES TO WORK

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