



# A new beginning

Across Connecticut, hundreds of children are in need of care, stability and love. They need foster parents.



**M**ost adults consider children to be precious gifts – gifts to be cherished, protected and loved. But in many families, the reality is much different.

Across the country, countless children are neglected, abused, threatened, beaten, and worse. Their parents – often raised in abusive or alcoholic environments themselves – may perpetuate the cycle, or may simply have no idea how to provide the empathy, guidance and discipline that their children need.

Some of these kids have never known their biological fathers, who abandoned them before they were born, or soon after.

Their mothers, many of them struggling

as single parents, may feel they have no choice but to leave their kids alone while they work – or in the care of a boyfriend who is strung out on drugs, in trouble with the law, or more inclined to scream at or slap the children in their care than to help them with their homework.

The daily lives of these kids are filled with torment, fear and hopelessness. The place they call home is the very place they dread. In Connecticut, this is the stark reality for thousands of children who wonder if anyone is coming to rescue them – or have long since given up hoping for change.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is charged with protecting

all of Connecticut's children. When its staff members receive reports of suspected abuse or neglect, the department has the authority to remove children from imminent danger. The goal is to help change the dynamic so that biological families can one day be reunited, but the children's safety and wellbeing come first.

When kids are removed from their homes, DCF is faced with another problem: Who will care for them? For the state and these children, foster families are a critically important lifeline.

If you've never thought about becoming a foster parent – and especially if you have – read on to learn how you can change the life of a child who desperately needs you.



DCF Commissioner, Joette Katz

# A new beginning for us all

**DCF is creating new ways of interacting with foster parents to better support children.**

*By DCF Commissioner, Joette Katz*

“Helping a child transition from feelings of fear, anger and hopelessness to ones of comfort, safety and warmth is one of the most gratifying experiences.”

At the Department of Children and Families, we care about children. We want kids whose families have been torn apart to have some normalcy in their lives. We want them to feel safe and wanted, and to know that people care about them. We want them to feel part of their communities, play on sports teams, go to birthday parties and go on vacation. We want them to have breakfast in the morning with the same people who put them to bed at night.

But that will require us to recruit more foster families and do a better job of retaining the ones we have.

In the past, DCF has not always fulfilled its promise to foster parents. Our foster parents have told us that, over the years, department workers have not always given them enough information, provided them with the appropriate help and supports, or shown them the respect and appreciation they deserve. Sometimes, foster parents have reached out to caseworkers for help or advice, and waited far too long for a response.

But a new day has dawned.

When I stepped down from my position as a Supreme Court justice in the winter of 2011, it was because I felt compelled to make a difference for the most vulnerable children in our state. As a judge, I frequently saw the disturbing results of a society that didn't do enough to care for its children: parents charged with abusing their offspring, and kids in trouble with the law.

As a mom, I couldn't bear the thought that our children were falling through the cracks.

After taking the helm as commissioner of the DCF, I gathered a team to get Connecticut's largest government agency

back on the right track – to find out what was wrong, and figure out how best to make necessary changes.

Over the past year, we've been working on a report called “We All Need Somebody,” aimed at clarifying our mission and procedures so that foster families and foster children receive the highest level of care and support.

That report is our road map to the future. It looks at everything from how we recruit to how quickly we license foster parents; how we put needed services in a foster home and keep kids out of congregated care.

This is a time of tremendous momentum and change. We are revamping our system from end to end and from top to bottom. From the minute you call DCF, you will not only get a friendly, responsive person on the other end of the line, but information, training, licensing and support – everything you need to make an informed decision, know where you stand throughout the licensing process, and connect with a child who desperately needs your care.

Those who become foster parents will also receive the resources they need: health insurance for the child, a monthly stipend, and access to programs, activities and resources that will make their experience more manageable and more rewarding.

If you've thought of fostering a child but are concerned that you may not be able to afford it, don't worry. Fostering a child will not cost you anything but love. We will even pay the cost of sending that child to college.

Our job – and yours – has also been made easier by new legislation that allows us, for the first time, to share personal background information about any medical

and emotional challenges that children may have as a result of issues in their previous environment. Armed with better information and more comprehensive support, foster parents will be better equipped and more confident about meeting their foster child's needs.

Many prospective foster parents have concerns about how a new child, especially one who comes from a difficult background, will blend in with their existing family. We know that these children may act out, especially in the beginning. That's because, perhaps for the first time in their life, they feel safe to express their emotions. They are not used to structure – the family structure that you're providing.

But as our existing foster families tell us, helping a child transition from feelings of fear, anger and hopelessness to ones of comfort, safety and warmth is one of the most gratifying experiences they've ever had. And involving their biological children in that process has allowed the family to relate on a deeper level and develop shared values and memories that last a lifetime.

No matter what your concern, we are here for you, in more and better ways than ever before. We know what needs to be done, and we have committed to providing the highest level of service possible.

Caring for the at-risk children in our community is an enormous undertaking.

We know it's not just about coming up with great ideas; it's about following up and implementing. I'm determined to deliver on every promise I make, and what I can promise is better partnership. Let's work together to help the children who need us the most.

## FOSTER CARE & ADOPTION

# Myths and Misconceptions

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is responsible for the welfare and protection of all of Connecticut's children. Thousands of caseworkers, who oversee the needs of foster and adoptive families, are frequently asked to address myths and misconceptions surrounding this service. Here are the most common of these myths and the answers to them:

1

**MYTH** It's really hard to become a foster or adoptive parent.

**FACT** It's not as hard as you think!

While there are guidelines for approval, DCF will help you through them.

2

**MYTH** You must be married to be a foster or adoptive parent.

**FACT** Everyone is welcome!

You do not have to be married to be a foster or adoptive parent. People who cohabit, or are divorced or single, may be foster or adoptive parents.

3

**MYTH** People with criminal records or past involvement with DCF cannot be foster or adoptive parents.

**FACT** DCF evaluates each family on a case-by-case basis.

Each person's situation is unique and can be discussed with a DCF agency representative for further assessment and consideration.

4

**MYTH** You must own your own home to be a foster or adoptive parent.

**FACT** Not at all.

If you rent a home or apartment and the landlord provides permission for the child to live with you in his or her dwelling, you need not own a home to be a foster or adoptive parent.

5

**MYTH** You cannot be a foster or adoptive parent if you are gay/lesbian.

**FACT** DCF welcomes gay and lesbian parents as caregivers for Connecticut's children!

DCF does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Many gay and lesbian people have come forward to be a family for a child.

6

**MYTH** Only people who have children or whose children are grown can be foster or adoptive parents.

**FACT** Parenting experience is not a factor.

Those who have never been a parent can still be foster or adoptive parents. You will receive training and support to help foster a child from the DCF team!

# 7

**MYTH** People who work full time cannot be foster or adoptive parents.

**FACT** Many licensed foster parents and adoptive parents work full time.

Adults who work full time outside of the home can still be foster parents. A preschooler would need to be enrolled in a full-time licensed daycare facility. DCF helps with daycare costs. Adults who are working full time are also eligible to adopt.

# 8

**MYTH** Only younger adults can be foster or adoptive parents.

**FACT** On the contrary – adults of all ages have a wealth of experience to share!

DCF does not discriminate on the basis of age. Anyone 21 years or older may apply to become a foster or adoptive parent.

# 9

**MYTH** I can't have the neighborhood teenager babysit for my foster or adoptive child when I go out socially.

**FACT** Foster parenting and having a social life are not mutually exclusive.

If you know a local teen who you feel is appropriately trained to supervise children, he or she will be allowed to babysit a foster child in the foster family's home. Adoptive parents also have the right to select an appropriate babysitter for their child.

# 10

**MYTH** Biological parents are "bad" people who should never get their kids back.

**FACT** That's rarely true.

Biological parents love their children but they are having difficulties maintaining their safety and well-being. DCF ensures the safety of children, while helping parents access the resources and services they need to help overcome their current circumstances. The department works with biological parents, caregivers and community providers to assist with reunification when appropriate. However, when reunification is not possible, the department looks to place a child into an adoptive home.

# 11

**MYTH** A foster or adoptive child must have his or her own bedroom.

**FACT** Sharing a bedroom is permitted.

DCF will assist foster parents in determining bedroom arrangements during the home study process. Adoptive parents can determine the most appropriate sleeping arrangements for their children.

# 12

**MYTH** Foster or pre-adoptive kids can't go on family vacations with their caregivers.

**FACT** DCF believes that vacations are good for the whole family – including foster and pre-adoptive children!

With adequate notice, discussion with the biological parents, and authorization of DCF, foster families are actually encouraged to take foster and pre-adoptive children on family vacations. After adoption, parents are free to take their children on vacation.

# 13

**MYTH** Foster and adoptive kids can't participate in play dates or sleepovers at a friend's home.

**FACT** **Actually, both are permitted.**

DCF believes foster and adoptive children should have a normal social life. Of course, as with all parenting decisions, we ask that foster and adoptive parents use good judgment when making these decisions.

# 14

**MYTH** Biological parents will come to a foster or adoptive home to visit with their child.

**FACT** **DCF staff members work with biological and foster families to determine the best arrangement for them and the child(ren).**

In most cases, DCF encourages foster parents to have some connection with the child's family via letters, phone calls, emails or face-to-face contact. Visitation requirements are set by the court, but foster families are not required to hold visits in their homes. Contact after adoption finalization is determined by an open adoption agreement, if one was agreed to in court.

# 15

**MYTH** You need to have medical and dental insurance in order to care for a foster or adoptive child.

**FACT** **DCF assumes all medical and dental insurance for its foster and adoptive children.**

In most cases, the foster and adoptive families can choose their medical and dental providers, as long as these providers accept the insurance coverage offered by DCF.

# 16

**MYTH** Only wealthy families can be foster or adoptive parents.

**FACT** **Foster and adoptive parents don't have to be rich – just financially stable.**

Foster and adoptive parents need only demonstrate that they are able to pay bills and support their individual and family needs. DCF provides monthly reimbursement checks to help defray costs of food, clothing, extracurricular activities and other necessities that are incurred by a foster child or a child placed for adoption, prior to finalization. In certain circumstances, adoptive parents will receive an ongoing financial subsidy according to the child's special needs.

# 17

**MYTH** Foster and adoptive parents are required to pay college tuition for these children.

**FACT** **Not usually.**

DCF pays the tuition costs for foster children to attend college. While the foster child may attend the college of his/her choice, tuition is allocated on the basis of whatever Central Connecticut State University is charging for tuition each year. Any child adopted after Jan. 1, 2005 is eligible for the DCF college tuition assistance program.

# 18

**MYTH** Foster and adoptive parents must be able to speak English.

**FACT** **DCF does not discriminate on the basis of language.**

People whose first language is Spanish – or another language – are equally eligible to become foster or adoptive parents.



# Always a shortage of foster homes?

**I**n Connecticut, there has long been a shortage of foster homes for children who are temporarily, or even permanently, removed from their biological parents due to abuse or neglect. That means too many children must be sent to live in congregate care homes, or even sent out of state. This problem can be solved ... with your help.

For years, Connecticut's Department of Children and Families has struggled with the problem of too many foster children requiring emergency or long-term care – and too few adults stepping forward to take them in.

For kids who have already suffered from the trauma and uncertainty of a troubled or abusive background, the need for a warm, stable and supportive foster home is vitally important to their emotional wellbeing.

In 2011, a new administration headed by former Supreme Court Justice Joette Katz took over the helm of the DCF. Since then, she and her team have been working tirelessly to improve the way foster parents are identified, recruited and retained. The

mission? To ensure that adults and families with love to share get connected, and stay connected, with children in need.

In addition to overseeing a revamping and streamlining of the foster care process, Commissioner Katz was instrumental in the passage of new laws that will make it easier to accomplish that mission.

The first allows DCF to provide foster parents with important medical and emotional background information about the child, while still protecting the biological parents' identity. The second allows children of any age to be placed with people who have an established connection with them – such as a teacher or a coach

– immediately, until that caregiver is fully licensed by DCF.

The third law, among other things, waives any standard for separate bedrooms and room-sharing arrangements when placing a child in foster care with a relative.

The hope is that this combination of changes and improvements will make it easier for foster families, friends and relatives to open their homes and hearts to children who need them.

And the reward?

The warmth of a hug, a whispered “I love you,” and the satisfaction of knowing you have forever changed the life of a child.

## Children in foster care

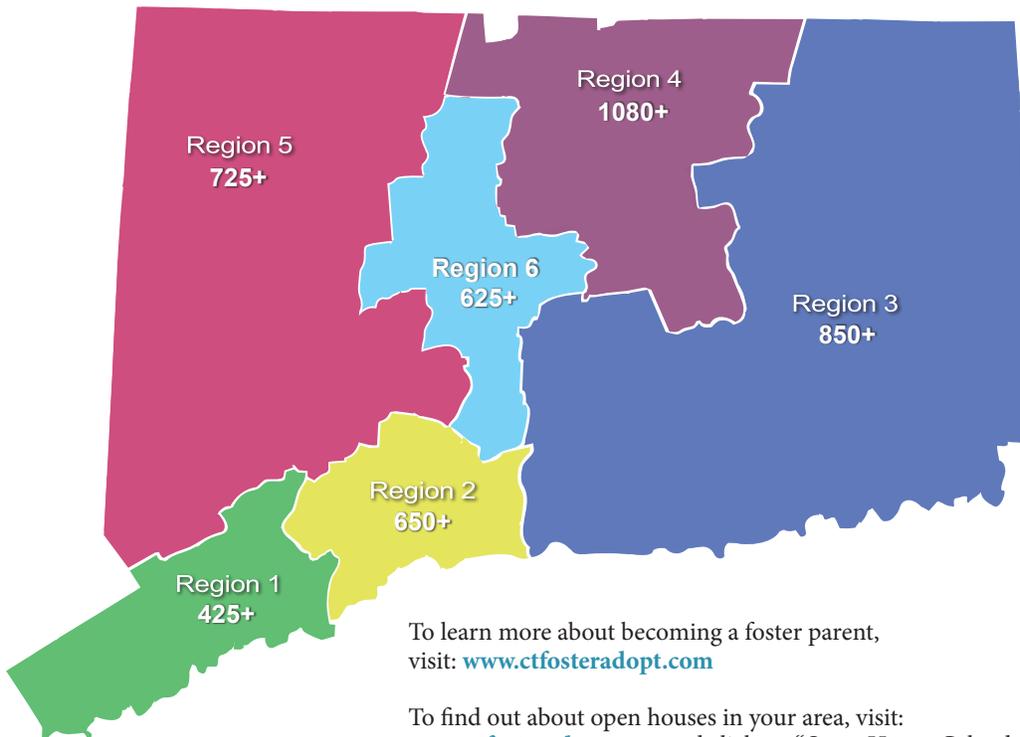
**STATEWIDE**  
Children in placement as of Feb. 1, 2012:

Foster care	1,953
Congregate care	1,221
Relative care	996
Special study	184
Independent living	131
Trial home visit	30
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>4,515</b>

Children in placement by region\*

1	425+
2	650+
3	850+
4	1080+
5	725+
6	625+

\*Numbers are approximate and changing



To learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit: [www.ctfosteradopt.com](http://www.ctfosteradopt.com)

To find out about open houses in your area, visit: [www.ctfosteradopt.com](http://www.ctfosteradopt.com) and click on “Open House Calendar”

## DCF Offices

### Central Office

Hartford  
505 Hudson Street 06106  
(860) 550-6300

### Region 1

Bridgeport  
100 Fairfield Avenue 06604  
(203) 384-5300

### Norwalk

149 Water Street 06854  
(860) 899-1400

### Stamford

401 Shippan Avenue 06902  
(203) 348-5865

### Region 2

Milford  
38 Wellington Road 06461  
(203) 306-5300

### New Haven

One Long Wharf Drive 06511  
(203) 786-0500

### Region 3

Middletown  
2081 South Main Street 06457  
(860) 638-2100

### Norwich

2 Courthouse Square 06360  
(860) 886-2641

### Willimantic

322 Main Street 06226  
(860) 450-2000

### Region 4

Hartford  
250 Hamilton Street 06106  
(860) 418-8000

### Manchester

364 West Middle Turnpike 06040  
(860) 533-3600

### Region 5

Danbury  
131 West Street 06810  
(203) 207-5100

### Torrington

62 Commercial Boulevard 06790  
(860) 496-5700

### Waterbury

395 West Main Street 06702  
(203) 759-7000

### Region 6

Meriden  
One West Main Street 06451  
(203) 238-8400

### New Britain

One Grove Street 06053  
(860) 832-5200

## DCF Facilities

### Middletown

Connecticut Juvenile Training School  
1225 Silver Street 06457  
(860) 638-2400

### Albert J. Solnit Center South

1225 Silver Street 06457  
(860) 704-4000

### East Windsor

Albert J. Solnit Center North  
36 Gardner Street 06088  
(860) 292-4000



Chelsea Loughlin (center) with her foster parents Alfredo and Melissa Viscariello, and their children Isabella and Alfredo Jr.

# The Most Precious Gift: A Future

**A rescued teen credits DCF and her foster family with saving her life.**

**M**et Chelsea Loughlin, an 18-year-old girl who recently spoke at her high school graduation. Her topic? The life-saving services provided by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families.

I first came into care when I was 14 years old; however, DCF had been in and out of my life from a very young age.

My family had a history of substance abuse and mental health issues that consumed their lives so much that they could not care for my sisters or me. I had a few healthy people in my life who helped me through a lot; however, they couldn't always be around and therefore could not protect me from everything.

Before I was removed from my home at age 14, I had already been exposed to drugs, alcohol, physical abuse, neglect, and also numerous suicide attempts. Many times, I've wished DCF had intervened sooner so that I could have had a more stable childhood and not have been exposed to so much at such a young age. However, I can say now that everything I went through made me a much stronger person and although it may have taken a while for me to get to where I am today, I am in a much better place.

When I was first placed in DCF care, I wanted to go back to my family. My first foster care experience was difficult due to conflicts between

myself and the foster family.

My second foster home experience was very different. The family was very trusting and I was given many opportunities, but I was still left feeling kind of alone.

At times, I contemplated requesting to no longer be in DCF care. I decided not to do so because I have a great social worker, Jennifer Block, who wouldn't let that happen, and who was always there to listen to my problems and needs. She worked extremely hard to get me a good home and family and, through trial and error, succeeded.

Without DCF being in my life, I would have never ended up where I am now – in a great home with amazing people who have made me feel like I have always been a part of their family. I finally have the support and love I needed to help me succeed and become the person I am today. I also would have not had the amazing opportunity of getting to go to college, which will open up endless possibilities for my future. I am now attending Saint Joseph College and am majoring in social work. I am inspired to help others who are in the situation I was once in, and to help them see the potential they have, and all of the opportunities that await.

Thank you to everyone who is involved with DCF, and know that those of us who have grown up with you in our lives will be forever grateful.



## Regular Foster Care

# Nicholas, Stacy, Sabrina

**T**en years ago, John and Doris Doucette were living as a happily blended family – the parents of John’s 22-year-old daughter Melissa, Doris’ 15-year-old son Bryan, and the couple’s son Christian, then 5.

During their marriage, John and Doris had taken in several foster children. But they were about to get a call that would change their lives – and their family – forever.

Baby Nicholas came into their lives as a foster child at the age of five months. The Doucettes cared for him for more than a year while they and the Department of Children and Families waited for Nicholas’ biological mom to fulfill the requirements needed so she could be reunited with him, but that never happened. “This was our sixth foster child; we weren’t really looking to adopt,” Doris recalls. “But when DCF asked us if we would adopt, we were very pleased to be able to do that.”

The adoption was completed in November 2004, when Nicholas was two. Five months later, a call came from out of the blue. “The folks at DCF said, ‘We have his biological sister.’ I was shocked,” Doris recalled. “When they asked if we would take her, we said yes. We really, really wanted to keep the children together.”

The new baby, Stacy, was already five months old. “We had room for a baby boy but not girls; we had to move our house quickly, within a couple of months.” With some well-timed teamwork, the house was re-arranged, allowing for Stacy to join her brother in the Doucette household.

The family continued to grow. In 2006, the phone rang again. “When the next one came along, DCF called as soon as she was born. We got Sabrina straight from the hospital.”

Before long, the Doucettes had adopted all three children. At that point, they considered their family complete. But four years later, the couple got another call. The children’s biological father now had a baby boy with another woman. “By this time, we were 50 and 55 years old, so we had a little bit of decision-making to do. We asked ourselves, ‘What are we able to offer this child? We’re going through teenage years and young adulthood with our other children.’”

Yet the decision was not long in coming. “It’s not just John and myself that we give him when we say we’ll adopt him. We’re giving him his siblings. As [our other children] grow up, I know they’ll be a resource for him as well, not just us. We felt it was important to us to do this.” The baby joined the family in mid-December 2010. His adoption is still pending.

Doris, who previously worked in the insurance field, now stays home with the kids. She and John couldn’t be happier with their decision to welcome all four children to their family. She said while many people who’ve been separated from their biological parents face identity issues, her adopted children will “have a lot of the answers in each other.”

That’s not to say that the entire experience has been easy.

When Nicholas started school, Doris began getting calls about his behavior. “In

the beginning, I was embarrassed. As a person who had already raised a child who never got into academic trouble, it was hard getting calls repeatedly from the school. Then I realized, he has an issue; it’s ADHD. It’s not about you – it’s about what we need to do to help him. You use the resources that are available. I feel blessed with all of the help that DCF, and all of the agencies that work around and through them, provided to us.”

The Doucettes also had to deal with the fact that both girls suffered from the effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. “Even with your own [biological] children, there may be problems down the road. You just do what needs to be done,” Doris said. “This is exactly what I do for my foster and adopted kids.”

These days, her children are thriving. Nicholas loves sports, especially hockey, “and being very active is a good thing for him.” Stacy, now 6, “does some academic and behavior issues, but she’s a real sweetheart. She really tries to be helpful, especially with cooking. I see her as being a good mother some day,” Doris said. As for Sabrina, “I call her my little monkey. She’s a feisty little girl. She holds her own and she climbs over everything.” And the baby is a delight.

And what are her days like as the mother of two grown children, a 15-year-old and four kids under the age of 10? “It’s busy. It can be chaotic,” she said with a laugh. “But it so pays off when they come up to you and say, ‘Mom, I love you.’ I wouldn’t want to change it for anything in the world.”

## Relative Care

# Henry

**H**enry, an East Hartford teen, has called his grandmother, Ethel, a “drill sergeant.” Ethel admits that she’s “a big pain at times.” But she doesn’t regret using tough love to keep Henry on the proper path after his father Gerard – her only child – died in 2002.

Henry was just 5 years old when his first DCF-sanctioned stay with her began in 1998. She served as his court appointed guardian until the end of 2000. After his father’s death, when Henry was just 9, he stayed with his mother for several years. But in 2008, when she could no longer care for him, Henry returned to his grandmother and became her official foster child in 2009.

Describing her grandson as “a sharp, bright kid ... who could’ve gone in any direction,” she said she “stepped in at that critical time, when he was an at-risk youth.”

Even though Henry had lived with

his grandmother on and off since he was a baby, there were some trying times. “It’s always difficult when a child is separated from his mother,” she said. “The challenge was working through Henry’s emotional state.”

But Ethel gladly accepted the challenge. “His future was most important,” she said. Even so, “there was some head butting. There was resistance. For a while, he wasn’t going to school.” However, she was able to devote the time to Henry, to help him adjust, and her firm approach helped him become more stable.

Today, Henry, who has wanted to become a lawyer since he was just a little boy, is taking steps towards that goal. The high school graduate just completed his first semester in criminal justice. Despite his occasional griping about his grandmother, it’s obvious that he loves her. “My grandmother is like my other



mom,” Henry said. “The experience has been great.” And although he keeps in contact with his birth mother, if he had stayed with her, “I think I would have been in trouble.”

“It’s a joy to have my grandson with me,” said Ethel.

The DCF provided Henry with counseling to help him adjust to the loss of his father, and paired him with a mentor. “Wonderful social workers” helped Ethel prepare for her grandson’s latest arrival, and relocate to a larger dwelling.

The DCF was there for Ethel and Henry “when it was really crucial,” she said. “I [always] had someone at my side.”

## Special Study

# Kadeem

**W**hen Kadeem Jackson’s mother passed away in 2006, his world changed forever.

“I was devastated about it,” said the 19-year-old, whose life became a dizzying whirl of emotions and of near homelessness after his mother’s death.

The New York City youth was supposed to live with an aunt but found that they did not get along. “So basically, I just ran away,” said Jackson, who spent many months at the homes of various friends and with his father Richard, “bouncing around,” from one place to the next.

“I was lost and confused,” said the Jamaican-American teenager, who started ditching school and who was arrested on a firearm possession charge that was later dropped. The circumstances convinced a judge to have the Department of Children and Families find a stable home for him.

He ended up in foster care in Windsor, Connecticut, where his guardian treated

him “like her own child,” and he settled back into high school. But in the eight months he stayed there, he often felt bored, restless, and alone.

Fortunately, his love of basketball led to a friendship with fellow high schooler George Curry Jr. Soon, Jackson was spending most of his free time at the Curry home, where dad George Sr. and mom Kerry were raising six children.

“With the Currys, I had other kids my age; I had things to do. I get along perfect with them. It’s like I was born there,” Jackson said.

When George Jr. suggested that the Currys become Jackson’s new foster family, everyone agreed.

He already seemed like “part of the family,” Kerry said of the Currys’ first foster child “It wasn’t like bringing a stranger in. It just seemed like a logical decision.”

Now a high school graduate, Jackson is also an aspiring rap music artist who spent part of last summer back in New York



City, recording music, writing lyrics and planning to release a video, to boost his budding career.

He credits both the Currys and DCF for bringing his life into balance.

“Once I got with the Currys, and with the DCF ... my life has been better,” said Jackson, who gave some advice for others who may find themselves in his situation. “If you’re a kid with the DCF, take full advantage of it, because they will help you do whatever you want.”

“They’ve been fantastic,” Kerry agreed. “Everybody we’ve dealt with has been so helpful. Obviously, they [DCF] want the best for Kadeem.”

# Real-life stories.

Foster children range from babies to teens, come from varying circumstances, and have a diversity of needs. Here are some of the many children who are blossoming in their foster families, despite coming from difficult backgrounds.



## Infant

When Jen and Chris became foster parents to “Sara,” she was three months old and had large motor delays. Sara’s birth mother, who had substance abuse issues, had neglected her. The baby was left in her car seat for long periods of time, “so she had no muscle development in her trunk and neck. She could only turn her head one way,” said

Jen. Physical therapy worked wonders, as did the love provided by her foster parents. After 7 months with the family, Sara went to live with her adoptive family in November 2011. “Her departure was painful but her adoptive parents are very interested in keeping us in her life. Our intention was to give her a good start and a solid foundation. I think we succeeded in doing that.”

## Siblings

Irene and her husband, who have foster and adoptive children and a biological child, know that when it comes to family, love is all that matters. When they adopted 17-year-old “Sam,” they learned that he had a younger half-brother, “Scott.” Said his foster mom, “he was bipolar, used expressive language, had problems with short-term memory because of ADHD, and was probably

operating on a first-grade level.” But they didn’t think twice about ensuring the boys were kept together. Since taking Scott in, they’ve had “good times and bad times,” but there is plenty to cheer about. “He’s a swimmer, and got a trophy for swimmer of the year last year,” his foster mom said proudly. Most importantly, when troubles arise, as they inevitably will, “he knows where to come when he needs me.”



## Adolescent

Many parents dread the onset of their children’s teenage years. Hilda is not one of them. In fact, she’s served as a foster mom to several different teens, after raising her own kids, who are now adults. Her husband Angel, who was married once before, never had children of his own, and loves being a parent. The teens, abused or neglected when they arrived, are now

doing well. “Tania” and “Nicole,” 15 and 16, are both interested in sports, and “get along as if they were sisters.” “Maria,” 18, is a museum manager, and “Zoe,” 21, is studying to become an EMT. Hilda said it took a while for the kids to adjust to their foster home, “but they don’t want to leave now. They feel secure, which makes me feel good. I like to see children thrive.”

## Medically Complex

During their marriage, a Watertown couple had been foster parents to 77 children – “some for a few days, some for several years.” So they took it in stride when they learned that their new twin foster daughters were medically challenged. “Molly” had “a lot of mental health issues, while “Melanie” had serious problems with her heart, vocal cords, esophagus

and trachea. Now five, the girls are still bright lights in a family that includes a variety of foster and adopted children and one biological child. Being a foster mom to medically complex kids “has to come from your heart,” said Irene. “Not everyone can do it. But for me, it has made me realize I have a purpose in life – to spend time with these kids as a family.”



Make a difference in the life of a child. Call today. 1-888-KID-HERO. DCF

