Governor Chris Sununu, DHHS Commissioner Jeffrey A. Meyers, and officials from the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) welcomed dozens of children and families to the State House in November to celebrate National Adoption Month, in recognition of the 215 children who were adopted through the foster care system from October 1, 2017, through September 30, 2018.

“We are so grateful for your service to the children and families in New Hampshire,” said Commissioner Meyers in his opening remarks. “The department is so eager to continue working with all of you to ensure that we foster successful adoption here in New Hampshire.” He went on to thank DCYF staff who have dedicated their careers to working with families throughout the entire adoption process.

Before introducing Governor Sununu, DCYF Director Joe Ribsam noted that the number of adoptions this year was the highest the State has ever seen. “The importance of adoption and permanency are greater than ever,” he said, “and that’s a testament to all of you, your generosity and your love.”

In his welcome, Governor Sununu stressed the value of working together with families. “An event like this in celebration of adoption month is just awesome because this is what it’s about. I can talk to Jeff and Joe about changing the system, but at the end of the day it’s about you. We need to know how it’s working…and challenge ourselves to make the system better.” After leading the children in a group cheer of “We love New Hampshire!” the Governor read a Proclamation recognizing Adoption Day continued on page 3
Message from the Director

It’s hard to believe it is already February! As we look back at 2018, I’m pleased with the progress we have made in our child welfare system, and we look forward to the year ahead. We have accomplished much, but there is still work to do.

I was happy to spend some time with those of you who attended the NHFAPA annual conference in October and the Adoption Day celebration in November. Two hundred fifteen children were adopted from October 1, 2017, to September 30, 2018. This is the highest number of adoptions in New Hampshire history, and that is a testament to the generosity and love of so many of you. We are grateful.

Thank you to those of you who have spoken at committee meetings and volunteered to be a part of focus groups and workgroups for our Child and Family Services Review (CFSR.) Your insights and input are valuable as we move forward in our transformation of the Child Welfare System.

Warmest wishes for a peaceful and prosperous 2019!

Be well,
Joe

Welcome from DCYF’s Foster Care/Adoption Administrator

The Connector is the perfect opportunity to introduce myself, and to provide you with some important staffing updates.

My name is Kara Buxton and I am currently the Administrator overseeing DCYF’s Foster Care, Adoption and Permanency programs. Throughout my 20-year career with the Division for Children, Youth and Families, I have had the opportunity to hold several different positions, including Assessment Worker; Family Service and Adoption/Permanency Worker; Permanency Supervisor; and Deputy Compact Administrator.

Some of my fondest memories from the many years I was a CPSW are of the foster and adoptive parents I worked with so closely. The relationships we formed were built on trust, mutual respect, and doing what is best for kids, and many of those relationships continue today.

I’m pleased to share some good news related to staffing. We have hired four additional practitioners in the Home Study Unit, bringing the total to nine. This will allow us to keep up with the demand of writing home study reports for families who are in the process of becoming licensed. An additional Resource Worker position has been added to the Manchester District Office, and we recently established a new Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) Unit, which is made up of three practitioners who complete home studies on New Hampshire families for other states. Previously, these out-of-state home studies were the responsibility of local Resource Workers. Removing ICPCs from Resource Worker caseloads will allow them more time to support you.

I will continue to provide you with important updates in future issues of the Connector. I look forward to meeting some of you for the first time, growing the new relationships I’ve made, and re-connecting with those I have not seen in some time.

Warmly,
Kara
Adoption Day
continued from page 1

November 18 as Adoption Awareness Day.

The event was the perfect backdrop for the introduction of New Hampshire’s new adoption resource exchange, AdoptNH, an online tool that connects foster children waiting for permanent homes with families looking to adopt. The exchange was made possible through funding from the Endowment for Health and was one of the final projects of former DCYF Administrator Eileen Mullen, who passed away in August. The celebration was dedicated to Eileen’s memory.

The event also featured the personal story of longtime foster parents Sheryl and Brian Stubbs, who are in the process of adopting their third sibling group, and a citation presented by Governor Sununu presented to Linda Pivin, a Child Protective Service Worker in the Berlin District Office, to commemorate her 29 years of service to DCYF.

For more information on AdoptNH, please visit adoptnh.org.

Top: Adoptive families pack the room at the adoption celebration. Middle: The Marcoux family waits for the celebration to begin. Far right: Sheryl and Brian Stubbs pose with Governor Chris Sununu after addressing the audience. Right: The Sillanpaa children of Portsmouth get their photo taken with Governor Sununu.
Nurse’s Corner

As your Foster Care Health Program Nurse Consultants, our goal is to ensure that children and youth receive the health care services necessary for optimal physical, emotional, and developmental health. We provide oversight and consultation, and work closely with DCYF staff, placement providers, community health care providers and the Medicaid Care Management plans. Deb Foss, RN, is your Nurse Consultant for the Berlin, Conway, Littleton, Rochester, Seacoast and Southern District Offices. Dee Houle, RN, covers the Claremont, Concord, Keene, Laconia, and Manchester District Offices.

We’d like to take a moment to thank you for opening your homes to children, and providing the compassionate care they need. We look forward to sharing information in upcoming issues of The Connector that is interesting and informative, but also meaningful in your work as foster parents.

If you have specific health questions, or if there are topics you would like us to address, please let us know. Your suggestions, recommendations and questions can be directed to the Nurse Consultant assigned to your local District Office. Deb Foss can be reached at (603) 752-8327, or Debra.Foss@dhhs.state.nh.us. Dee Houle can be reached at (603) 271-8945, or Dee.Houle@dhhs.state.nh.us. We look forward to hearing from you, getting to know you and providing important information about the health care topics that mean the most to you.

Best Wishes,
Deb and Dee

NH Adoptive Parents Honored Nationally

New Hampshire Senator Maggie Hassan recognized Gary and Jennifer Lamontagne as 2018 Angels in Adoption® Honorees for their outstanding advocacy for adoption and foster care issues. The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI), which coordinates the Angels in Adoption® Program, honored Gary and Jennifer at an awards ceremony and gala in September in Washington, D.C.

Gary and Jennifer were honored for their active role as both foster and adoptive parents, and for their tireless efforts to support families in New Hampshire.

The Angels in Adoption® Program is CCAI’s signature public awareness event and provides an opportunity for all members of the U.S. Congress to honor the good work of their constituents who have enriched the lives of children in the United States and abroad.

CCAI is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan organization dedicated to raising awareness about the tens of thousands of orphans and foster children in the United States in need of permanent, safe and loving homes through adoption.

The Lamontagne Family

Deb Foss, RN

Dee Houle, RN
Waiting Kids

Meet Allen and Sahleena

Allen, 6, and Sahleena, 7, are an adorable sibling group who are in need of a loving adoptive home where they can grow up together.

Allen is a sensitive, sweet, and shy little boy who values one on one time with adults. He does well at school and enjoys playing with his peers. Allen likes to be silly and make other people laugh. He is a creative child who enjoys being active.

Sahleena is an enthusiastic and playful little girl who loves playing outside. She is described as bubbly, sassy, and a free spirit who likes to protect her little brother. Sahleena is articulate and loves to share her opinions on various topics. Like her brother, she enjoys one on one attention from adults.

Both children would succeed in an adoptive home where they can be active and participate in extracurricular and family activities. These siblings are high energy and would do best in a two-parent home where they can each receive the one on one attention they crave and deserve. The children would respond best to a family who can exhibit clear structure and expectations. The children have a close connection with their birth mother, and it would be important for an adoptive home to support their connection with her.

For more information, please contact:

Karen Savage
NH DHHS
Division for Children, Youth & Families
129 Pleasant St. Concord, NH 03301
karen.savage@dhhs.nh.gov
603-271-1034

New Hampshire has its own adoption resource exchange!

AdoptNH matches waiting children with families looking to adopt.

For more information, visit adoptnh.org.
Dear Auntie Ann:
During our recent relicensing home visit, our resource worker talked with us about becoming an ISO foster home. She feels that becoming an ISO foster home might be a great next step for us. Can you explain what this is?
~ Wondering Walter

Dear Walter:
An Individual Service Option foster home, or ISO, is a placement for a child in DCYF who requires a more specialized foster home due to physical or behavioral challenges. An ISO foster family must complete a greater number of training hours per year, have the time and flexibility to meet with team members, and maintain more detailed records. DCYF works with several child placing agencies in New Hampshire that manage ISO foster homes that provide clinical oversight and case management to the child and family. There is a need for ISO foster homes in New Hampshire, so if this is something you are considering, continue the conversation with your Resource Worker.

Dear Auntie Ann:
We have been fostering two boys for the past five months. We recently learned that their aunt, who lives in another state, is requesting to be their foster parent. We're concerned about this as the boys are doing really well with us, and we worry about them leaving familiar surroundings. What is the process for placement with out of state relatives?
~ Caring Carol

Dear Carol:
If DCYF determines that a relative meets certain criteria, an Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) home study may be requested for the relative. Representatives from the state where the relative lives would conduct the home study and make recommendations around placement. DCYF would make the final determination on whether to move the children. Placement with a safe and appropriate relative is a priority. If it's possible, try helping the children become more comfortable with the relative prior to a potential move. If visits can happen, that's great. If the distance is too far, phone calls and Skype are an option. As the children’s primary caregiver, you will play an important role in helping the children adjust to any changes.

Dear Auntie Ann:
We were recently invited to an upcoming court hearing for the child we are fostering. We're relatively new to fostering and this would be our first time attending court. Is there anything we should know beforehand?
~ Preparing Pete

Dear Pete:
So glad that you’re planning to attend the hearing! When you go to the courthouse, you’ll see your DCYF caseworker, the child’s Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), the parents, attorneys for the parents and DCYF, and the judge. If appropriate, the child in your home will also be there for part of the hearing. The judge will hear from DCYF staff members, the parents’ attorneys, the GAL, and possibly other people associated with the case (such as a school department liaison.) You will likely be given the option to address the court and provide information about how the child is doing in your home. It’s a great opportunity for the judge to hear directly from the people who are providing the day-to-day care for the child. If you are unable to attend the hearing, you always have the option of writing a letter to the court, which would be shared with all parties.
Adoption Corner: July - November, 2018

July

- Mary and Stephen Roukey adopted Mia
- Diane and Jeffrey Boyle adopted Clayton
- Lisa and Elise Luke adopted Tanner
- Lisa and Richard McLaughlin adopted Shane
- Lisa Brown adopted Jenessa
- Nicole and Michael Bennett adopted Amiyra
- Teressa Somers adopted Adelynn and Ainsley
- Emily Bullock adopted Bailey
- Hannah and Nicholas Dean adopted Iona
- Ezra and Drew Temko adopted Lev
- Tasha and Kyle John adopted Cory and Aiden
- Maria and James Taylor adopted Joshua and Jaden
- Jennifer and Jesse Everleth adopted Jaelyn
- Amanda Fowler adopted Makaya and Deseree and Peggy
- Mary Runkle adopted Layla and Tatum
- Airial and Gary Sillanpaa adopted Georgia and Liam
- Robbie Biles adopted Trinity
- Birgitte Wilms adopted Sierra

August

- Audrey Ranieri and Nikole Grimes adopted Maddie
- Judy Patten adopted Kaliana
- Priscilla White and Raquel Tayag adopted Brian
- Sara and David Martin adopted Sarabeth and Skylar
- Bridge and Fuad Ashour adopted Ciera and Emily
- Karen and Michael Marchetti adopted Izabella, Brayden and Amaya
- Mivia and John Anastasio adopted Jayden
- Katie and Daniel Kimball adopted Nicholas
- Amanda and Joshua Ferland adopted Haley
- Jeannie and Billy Bryant adopted Noah and Bryson
- Samantha and Patrick Stevens adopted Rowan
- Robert and Jocelyne Wood adopted Thomas
- Bonnie and Edward Jones adopted Madison and Jeffrey
- Laurie and Garrett MacLeod adopted Serenity
- Wendelyn and Jerry Haskell adopted Mariah, Marissa and Maranda
- Dawn LaPlante adopted Rylan
- Lynette and Michael Kaichen adopted Michael Cody and Michael James
- Robecca and Robert Boisvert adopted Holly
- Nicole and Stephen Wooster-Goodwin adopted River
- Jacqueline Hernandez and Joyce Archer adopted Olivia and Mariah
- Laura and Ethan Sjolander adopted Karson
- Stacy and Bradford Marsch adopted Christopher
- Kathleen Wright and David Farrell adopted Logan and Savannah

September

- Doreen and Barry Brado adopted Garrett
- Billie Landon adopted Arianna
- Kennie Braley and Cindy Shaver adopted Gavin and Ashera
- Angela and Guzman Andrada adopted Ramona
- Fallon and Marano Chambers adopted Trevor Jay
- Candice and Lindsay Martin adopted Alison and Melanie
- Lindsey and Stephen Foss adopted Maddox
- Renee and James Bennett adopted Irie and Sophia
- Krystle Pridham adopted Gabrielle and Alexu and Aiden
- Karen and Heath Savage adopted Josephine
- Alicia Gadow adopted Nevaeh
- Joseph Hurley and Dawn Holdsworth adopted Charles
- Janice and Keith Allen adopted Elena
- Olga Castro adopted Xiomara
- Danielle and Michael Ladd adopted Clover
- Nicole Miller and Christopher Lemire adopted Shianne, Dylan and Aylah

October

- Jessica and Sage Quimby adopted Cameron
- Cindy Robie adopted Wyatt and Juliona
- Anthony diCampo adopted Lexi
- Sarah Duffey and Christopher Taylor adopted Jaelani
- Leslie and Allen Sawyer adopted Zoey
- Helene and Harold Rayborn adopted Peyton
- Deanna and William St. Laurent adopted Taleah and Deja
- Martha and Bruce Pouliot adopted Nicole and Hunter
- Richard and Janna Burke adopted Erikjomael
- Sarah and Bryan Moshier adopted Anthony
- Christopher and Teal Pulse adopted Alexander

November

- Kristen and Brian Johnsen adopted Mandie
- Jamie and Bethany Franz-Morin adopted Carter
- Lisa and John Marro adopted Dustin
- Heather Stowell adopted Michael
- Tracy Conway and Timothy Duchesnaye adopted Ayden, Nickolas and Jaxson
- Jennifer and Robert Ingham adopted Jesenia and Joseph
Child & Family Services is Now Waypoint

Child and Family Services, the oldest children’s charitable/family service organization in New Hampshire, has changed its name to Waypoint. The name change comes as part of an entire rebrand of the organization that includes a new look, logo, website, and digital media presence.

A waypoint is an intermediate point or place at which a course of action or path is changed. The purpose of all Waypoint programs is to help change the course for those who need help negotiating life’s challenges.

“Our agency has evolved over the years as we have responded to the needs of each new generation,” said Borja Alvarez de Toledo, president and CEO of Waypoint. “Our new name and look better reflect who we are today, a state-of-the-art, nonprofit human service agency that provides a lifeline across the lifespan.”

This rebrand happens after years of expansion and extensive research, including polling of the agency’s many constituencies: clients, partners, donors, community leaders, advocates, legislators, educators, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and other referral sources.

“We heard our constituents loud and clear,” said Alvarez de Toledo. “Our name was no longer reflective of everyone we serve. Our new name does not try to specify every population, but rather, reflects the part we play in individual lives and the life of our community.”

The agency will also carry a mark of distinction - it is now accredited by the Council on Accreditation, meaning that the organization meets the highest standards of practice in the field of human services. Waypoint is the only agency of its kind in New Hampshire to be COA accredited.

While the name and look have changed, the agency is still the same New Hampshire-based nonprofit, with the same dedication to people throughout New Hampshire and eastern Vermont. Waypoint’s mission: empowering people of all ages through an array of human services and advocacy.

Through 14 office sites across New Hampshire, Waypoint offers 28 different programs and services that include the following: child abuse prevention, family empowerment and support, services for children with developmental or chronic health concerns, mental health counseling, home care for seniors and people with disabilities, foster care, adoption, prenatal and pregnancy counseling, a homeless youth continuum, family preservation, human trafficking response, services for adjudicated youth, and a summer camp for kids. The agency plays a dual role as direct service practitioner and advocate, working at the legislative level to shape public policies toward the best interests of children.

To learn more about Waypoint, visit waypointnh.org.

Coming soon... a new and improved way to notify foster parents about court hearings. Watch for details in 2019!
Families Learn and Connect at NHFAPA Annual Conference

More than 130 foster and adoptive parents, relative caregivers, and professionals gathered at Plymouth State University in October for the annual New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NHFAPA) Conference.

The conference provides foster and adoptive parents with an opportunity to attend workshops on topics of interest, and to network and exchange ideas with fellow parents. The day also gives the NHFAPA Board of Directors a chance to introduce themselves to other members of the foster parent community who otherwise may be unaware of the work NHFAPA does all year. Foster and adoptive parents often work in isolation from one another. Their main points of contact are DCYF, the courts, CASA, and other official entities. The annual conference provides an opportunity for caregiver needs to be addressed and contacts to be made with others who are also doing this important work. It is also an important vehicle for validating and appreciating the work that foster and adoptive families do all year.

Ribsam and Moira O’Neill from the Office of the Child Advocate led a panel discussion on questions posed by foster and adoptive parents. No NHFAPA conference would be complete without the amazing raffle baskets graciously donated by the local district offices and child placing agencies in New Hampshire.

As many of you know, New Hampshire lost an incredibly dynamic champion of children in August of this year. Eileen Mullen spent her entire adult career advocating on behalf of children and youth in care and was steadfast in her resolve that every child needed and deserved a “forever family.” This year’s conference was dedicated in her memory and NHFAPA announced its creation of the “Eileen Mullen Youth Award.” This award will be granted to a youth aging out of care who needs additional resources for independent living. NHFAPA will make a more formal announcement in the weeks to come.

NHFAPA is looking forward to next year’s conference and hopes to continue to grow the attendance to meet the training and networking needs of foster and adoptive parents and relative caregivers. If you have an interest in being part of the planning process, please don’t hesitate to reach out. We’d love to have you join the conference planning committee to help shape the day for 2019!

Bobbie Gaudette
Executive Director
NHFAPA
A Special Thank You to Rep. Mariellen MacKay


As part of a local foster parent support group, Mariellen saw the need to promote activities and opportunities for foster parents statewide, and to ensure the representation of the foster parent point of view in policy and practice implementation. She went on to help create what would eventually become the New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (NHFAPA), to improve the circumstances for children and families involved in foster care and adoption statewide.

Mariellen was a member of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, representing Hillsborough District 30 since 2012. As the Chair of the Joint Legislative Committee to Examine the Independent Review of DCYF, she led the Health and Human Services Oversight Subcommittee on Foster Care, which was created in the fall of 2017 to examine foster care issues in New Hampshire through the lens of foster parents, with the best interest of the child as a priority.

Mariellen welcomed the input and testimony of foster and adoptive parents at the sub-committee hearings and provided a platform for foster parents to express their thoughts on how to improve the system for children. With the support of the sub-committee, several items were addressed by the Legislature, including allowing DCYF to obtain medical guardianship when a birth parent is not able or available to sign consent, Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards legislation, and both the Foster Children’s and Foster Parent’s Bill of Rights.

Mariellen continues to be a part of the Interagency Team for the Child Welfare Systems Transformation (CWST). We would like to take the opportunity to thank Mariellen for her leadership and service over the years, which have made a lasting and positive impact on foster care in our state.
Governor Chris Sununu and DHHS Commissioner Jeffrey A. Meyers joined leadership of the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) at a recent celebration of the parents involved in DCYF’s Parent Partner Program. The program provides an opportunity for fathers, mothers and other adult caregivers to provide input and share their experiences with DCYF staff and other parents, in order to promote communication and understanding between parents and the Division.

Program Manager Geraldo Pilarski thanked parents for working to improve the lives of children and families, and stressed the critical role parents play in child wellness. “For children to be safe, we have to have strong parents and strong caregivers – people that are committed to ensuring that our children are well,” he said.

In her remarks, Associate Commissioner of Human Services and Behavioral Health Chris Tappan said that inclusion of the parent voice is an important part of constructing a safer environment for all children, and that as part of the Child Welfare Systems Transformation (CWST), collaboration with parent partners is critical to preventing families from entering the child welfare system. This “whole family” approach is just one feature of the CWST that includes simplifying structures, integrating services and working upstream to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Parent speakers at the celebration said that while offering their perspective is a benefit to DCYF staff and leadership, their involvement with the program has been good for them, too. Parents echoed the feeling of value they experienced from sharing their stories, and stressed the importance of peer support throughout a process that can often seem overwhelming. Some said working as a Parent Partner gave them a deeper awareness of the complexity of child protection work and a new appreciation for the DCYF staff who work with families each day.

For Paula Carrier, involvement with the program over several years led to a permanent staff position as a training coordinator for DCYF, something she never thought would be possible. “It’s truly beyond my wildest dreams that I have a career in child welfare,” she said.

For more information on the Parent Partner program, contact the caseworker in your local District Office, or call 271-0532.