



Quarterly Newsletter

ISSUE NO 17 | January 2025



Welcome to 2025!



As we transition into a new year, we want to take a moment to celebrate our 2024 Adoptive Parents of the Year, share some of our recent activities and provide some amazing resources and news!

In November, we celebrated National Adoption month, a time dedicated to recognizing the incredible work you do as foster and adoptive parents and the importance of youth voices. Additionally, many teams across the state organized holiday-themed events that brought joy and togetherness.

As we look ahead, we have some important events coming up that we encourage all foster parents to participate in! Take a look at the News From Central office section to find a link to the Annual Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey and information about hosting an Impact Screening for The Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot.

Thank you all for your commitment to the children and families of our communities! Your dedication makes a profound difference, and we are grateful to have you as a part of our foster family. Enjoy this issue of FosterKY and start the new year off with a bang!

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Family Spotlights

2024 Adoptive Families of the Year

Wayne & Leslie Carr
Cumberland Region



Jonathan & Elizabeth Johnson
Salt River Trail Region



Connor & Georgia Mook
Northern Bluegrass Region



Sharekia Tunstall
Jefferson Region



Kayla & Joseph Bragg
The Lakes Region



Thomas & Amanda Elkins
Southern Bluegrass Region



Kaylee & Austin Arthur
Northeastern Region



Rickey & Catherine Dowdy
Two Rivers Region



Harold & Deanna Adkins
Eastern Mountain Region



Family Spotlights Continued



ADOPTION STORIES 2.0

In the summer of 2019, after a draining shift at one of the busiest emergency departments in the country, I came home feeling like I needed to "do more." The next morning, I told my husband I wanted to foster. While he initially suggested having another baby, I explained that fostering felt like the right way to expand our family. We attended a foster and adoption information session, and my husband admitted his fear of getting attached and having to say goodbye. The instructor's response—that attachment is vital to show these children love—shifted our perspective completely. Week after week, we returned and completed our training in November 2019, keeping our plans private to avoid outside influence.

By April 2020, we finalized the paperwork and prepared for our first placement. With daycare closures due to COVID, we adjusted our age range to newborn-2 years. On May 12, 2020, we got the call: a 3-day-old, 4-pound baby girl needed a home. Nervous and excited, we picked her up that afternoon, not realizing how profoundly she would change our lives.

After 626 days in foster care, in January 2022, she officially became ours. She stole our hearts from day one and completed our family in ways we never imagined. Her journey strengthened our village and faith, and we've never looked back.

Saying "yes" to the unknown and scary was hard, but saying "yes" to loving a child was the easiest decision of all. Our family of six is now complete, and we can't imagine life without her. She was truly the missing piece to our puzzle.

-The Halenkamp Family



Jefferson County foster parents, Nikiya Thames and Johnathan Walker, came to DCBS from a private agency and have been an amazing asset to the children in Kentucky. The family desires to fill their family with younger children but have graciously opened their home to all ages for emergencies. They are very trauma informed and are strong advocates for the children placed in their home. Nikiya and Johnathan have taken many teens on an emergency basis to keep them from sleeping in a non traditional placement. They have even taken children on their birthdays or within days of their birthdays and completely gone above and beyond to make these children feel special with a birthday blowout. Nikiya and Johnathan are truly amazing foster parents for our children and deserve a huge shout out.

Thank you Nikiya and Johnathan for all you do!



Angie Ashburn has been a West Lakes Region Foster Parent since 2022. Angie has continually demonstrated empathy and love toward biological families and works closely with families during the reunification process. She maintains connections with the children she has cared for and continues to mentor their families after reunification. Angie works collaboratively with the Cabinet and other community partners to ensure the needs of every child placed in her home are met. Angie, along with others, has built a small community in the county where she resides, meeting monthly, providing respite for each other, and standing in the gap when needed. Angie is always willing to step up and assist other foster parents when placements are made whether she is providing necessities or guidance to ensure the children and the foster parents have a smooth transition. Angie is the kind of foster parent every R and C Worker hopes for and the Lakes Region is very blessed to call her ours!

John and Jean Webster were approved to foster on September 27, 2023. They originally were approved to foster a child Jean had gotten to know through her work at the local school. They quickly discovered they had a heart for foster care and wanted to open their home to other teen boys. Since that time, they have offered a loving and safe home to many of our teen boys. They are willing to give most of them a chance regardless of how negative their history sounds on paper. The children they foster thrive in their care. The Websters are very nurturing and patient and enjoy having the opportunity to expose the children to new activities and experiences. They are also willing to provide respite for other foster parents who have teen males placed in their homes. We are very fortunate to have them as a resource for the children in our region.





Alexis is a bright and kind girl who can be very considerate. She enjoys arts and crafts activities including crochet and diamond art. Alexis is creative and often expresses herself through her drawings as art is a form of therapy for her. She loves animals, especially horses and is interested in equine therapy. Alexis would benefit from a family that is patient, supportive and nurturing, a home where she could grow and explore her interests and have the ability develop trust and build safety.

Learn more about Alexis at [Child view - AdoptUSKids](#)

Armon (11/08) is a friendly and personable youth who has a happy disposition. He has a smile that will light up a room! Armon wants and desires social interactions with others- both peers and adults. He enjoys outdoor activities like fishing and basketball. He loves superheroes and movies. His favorite superheroes are Black Panther and Blue Beetle. Armon also enjoys activities with peers such as sports, Legos, and board games, and will initiate play with them. Armon reported that he likes cooking and likes going places and being outside. He has a great imagination and reportedly plays well with his peers. He has recently started creative dance and loves it! Armon is also very inquisitive and likes asking questions. Armon is eager to please those around him and hopes to find a family that will not only love him like their own but will guide and support him through life.

Learn more about Armon at [Child view - AdoptUSKids](#)



A'miya (July, 2009), is a remarkable young woman who has shown incredible resilience despite her significant trauma history. She is a fiercely independent and helpful individual, always eager to lend a hand and stand on her own two feet. With a creative spirit, she's incredibly talented in the arts, finding joy in painting, working with her hands, and styling her hair. Her artistic talents are just one way she expresses her vibrant personality.

This young lady knows what she wants and isn't afraid to advocate for herself. Articulate and confident, she can clearly communicate her needs and isn't hesitant to ask for help when she feels it's necessary. She enjoys being around other children, bringing laughter and energy wherever she goes. Described as fun, loud, and vibrant, she has a contagious zest for life that makes her a joy to be around.

In addition to her love for art, she's a sports enthusiast who enjoys playing volleyball, softball, and baseball. She's also passionate about music, often losing herself in songs and singing along with all her heart. While she thrives in the company of others, she does particularly well with younger children and would benefit from a home with fewer children, where she can continue to grow and shine.

If you're looking for a creative, strong-willed, and fun-loving teenager to welcome into your home, A'miya is ready to bring her vibrant energy and artistic talents to a family that will nurture her growth and celebrate her individuality.

Learn more about A'miya at [Child view - AdoptUSKids](#)



Meet Ean (July, 2008), a vibrant teenager with a passion for music, video games, and books. Ean's love for music is evident in the way he lights up when he talks about his favorite bands and the joy he finds in playing his guitar. He enjoys hanging out with friends, whether it's jamming together, and/or playing video games.

Ean also enjoys the library, where he finds solace in the quiet corners filled with stories that transport him to different worlds. His enthusiasm for reading is matched only by his excitement for the next big video game release. Despite his energetic nature, he also has a gentle side that shines through when he's immersed in a good book or a meaningful conversation.

While Ean has faced trials in the past, he is resilient and eager to learn and grow. He has shown strength and determination to overcome adversity. With the right support, Ean can overcome his past obstacles and reach his full potential.

Ean is looking for a family that understands his unique needs and can provide a stable, loving environment where he feels safe and supported. He thrives in settings where he can express himself creatively and where his love for music, reading, and video games is encouraged. With the right support, Ean has the potential to flourish and continue to grow into the remarkable young man he is destined to be.

Are you ready to open your heart and home to Ean? If you believe you can provide the nurturing environment he needs, please reach out to today. Together, we can help Ean find the loving family he deserves.



Learn more about Ean at [Child view - AdoptUSKids](#)

Ace (9/2010) is a friendly youth and is generally very easy going. He loves to spend time with family and those he has grown close to. He is generous and likes to share. He has great manners and when someone is upset, he wants to offer comfort. He can be impulsive at times. He likes to finish tasks and will become agitated if he has to move on before completing something. He thrives with structure and routine. He is typically easily redirected. He is able to express his wants and needs well. Ace describes himself as funny. He likes to joke around and be silly. He loves to play his Nintendo Switch, loves collecting cards, and loves scary movies. He likes to read books.

Ace wants to be adopted. He wants a family that he loves and can remain with forever. He wants a family who loves him and lets him ride his bike and play video games. Ace needs a family who is able and willing to provide him permanency through adoption.

Learn more about Ace at [Child view - AdoptUSKids](#)



Regional Happenings

The Northern Bluegrass Service Region hosted their Inaugural Foster Family Virtual Pumpkin Carving Contest!



Northern Bluegrass region participated in the Annual Story Walk at Warsaw River Park in Gallatin County.



Northern Bluegrass region participated in the Community Day of Service. Individuals looking for volunteer opportunities came to see the different opportunities available in the community.



Salt River Trail Region Southside R&C team held it's annual Fall Festival Trunk-or-Treat at the Hardin County DCBS office on Oct. 24, 2024. This event started in 2018 and has continued to grow and become a collaborative event with local PCC's agencies, DCBS local office staff, and community partners attending. We served over 200 foster/adoptive youth throughout the region this year!



Salt River Trail Team Norris, in collaboration with Marine Reserve Toys for Tots, came together to bring joy to foster and adoptive families and recommitted youth. Through their combined efforts they distributed brand new toys, brightening the holiday season for many children. Operation Salt River Santa supported over 1,400 children, making a significant impact on their lives.



Regional Happenings CONT'D

In the Southern Bluegrass Region, nearly 60 families (250+ adults and children) from across the Bluegrass joined us for an afternoon of fun, food, photos with Santa, prizes and gifts. DCBS staff, UK, and OCA came out to offer services, support, and holiday joy while multiple businesses and individuals provided toys & food for the families.



The Northern Bluegrass Region hosted a Christmas party for their foster parents on each side of the region!

The Northern Bluegrass Region South R&C and the Foster Parent Network hosted a Candyland Christmas Party for foster and adoptive families. Over 150 kids attended the event with their families! Each child was able to get a gift from their wishlist and participated in activities such as dancing with a DJ, visiting Santa and pizza!

In the upper Northern Bluegrass Region, Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (FAPA) of Northern Kentucky hosted Grinchmas for Foster and Adoptive families. The event hosted 60 upper Northern Bluegrass Region families-- 207 kids! Families in attendance participated in activities such as visiting Whoville, meet the Grinch, Santa, princesses and other characters, balloons from Itwist, pizza/cupcakes/hot chocolate, selfies photobooth, Whoville Zoo (hosted by Cool Critters Outreach), picking a present and a Madcap Puppets show!



Regional Happenings CONT'D

Alfred Ladson, a dedicated member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.; Vennice Furlow and Kae Cooper, esteemed members of the Fort Knox Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.; Bishop Cynthia Little of New Beginnings Ministries; and SSC Colandra Sealey all generously volunteered their time and efforts to serve the foster and adoptive families during the Salt River Trail Team Norris Annual Holiday Party. This festive event was hosted at Skateland in Radcliff, Ky, and brought together a community of supporters and families for a day of joy and celebration. These volunteers played a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the event, contributing their time to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The holiday party featured a variety of engaging activities, including skating and a visit from Santa, making it a memorable occasion for all.



Jack Cooper Transport of Bowling Green donated around 800 pair of socks, 6 blankets and \$800 in gift cards to be used for children entering out of home care. Thank you for your generosity and support!



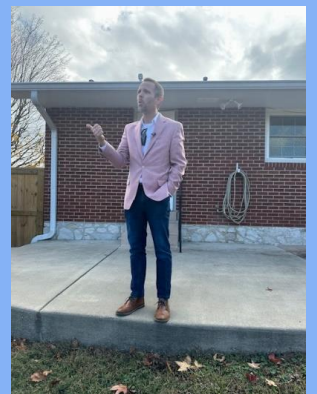
A new nonprofit in Bowling Green (Two Rivers Region) is tackling the crisis in the foster care system by providing a safe, temporary home for children awaiting placement with foster families.

Foster House, Inc. officially opened its doors November 20, 2024. Their goal is to help address the growing need for support in Warren County, which has one of the highest numbers of children in out of home care in Kentucky.

Read the full article here: [Foster House Article](#)



Warren County P&P staff, contractors, business leaders and foster families who were present for the dedication.



Daniel Super, TR Foster parent who began this journey and was instrumental in opening the Foster House



Warren County foster families and staff who helped in several areas of the Foster House

Foster/Adoptive Parent Resources

Building bonds year-round: A guide for creating lasting connections with those in your care



Forging a strong relationship doesn't happen overnight. Rather, it requires showing up consistently and with compassion. In her latest blog post, adoption expert Mary Boo unpacks potential challenges when creating bonds and delves into the art of building trust through gestures like embracing differences, adjusting expectations, and prioritizing connection before correction. Whether you're starting fresh with a new placement or navigating a rocky patch, this post is packed with practical strategies for helping your family grow stronger together for life.

[Learn how to build meaningful relationships with those in your care – AdoptUSKids blog](#)

"I want to show other teens in foster care that they are extraordinary people who can achieve their dreams."

Brian and Jarrod's journey to parenthood defied their early misconceptions about adopting an older youth. A family friend had fostered a 13-year-old and recommended the couple open their home to the teen, Logan, who had spent most of his life in the system's care.

[Read the full story](#) of how this family of three navigated a pandemic, formed deep bonds, and became active and vocal advocates for adoption of teenagers in foster care.



Listen and learn: New podcasts provide insights and supports for families

Adoption is a journey filled with unique rewards and challenges. Fortunately, our Navigating Adoption podcast is here to guide you as you travel that path. Hosted by April Dinwoodie, a transracial adoptee and author, this series features experts and individuals with lived experience as they offer useful insights into foster care, trauma, birth family relationships, and more.

Check out [the six episodes and the accompanying discussion guide](#) to access this valuable support.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION (NASDSE) GUIDELINES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Presented by Cheryl DeConde Johnson, Ed.D.
Cheryl is a co-founder of Hands & Voices and is an educational consultant and advocate for deaf and hard of hearing children through ADE-vantage. She served on the writing team for NASDSE's Educational Service Guidelines for Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Who should attend:

- ✓ PARENTS
- ✓ EDUCATORS OF D/HH STUDENTS
- ✓ DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
- ✓ STATE STAKEHOLDERS
- ✓ EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS
- ✓ PROFESSIONALS WHO SUPPORT D/HH CHILDREN

Optimizing Outcomes for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Educational Service Guidelines
Third Edition
National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc.

Register Now

FEBRUARY 10, 2025
12:00-1:30PM ET

News from Central Office

Foster Parent Surveys for ALL foster parents

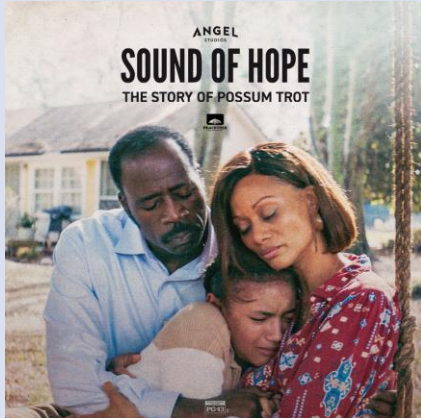
The Annual Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey has been created to solicit feedback regarding your experiences during the past year, what has been successful and where we can improve. We value the feedback and experiences of each of our foster/adoptive parents and want to hear from you!

Each year, your feedback contributes to changes in practice, new trainings, new support groups and more. It may take time to see the changes but we want you to know that we hear you and we are working hard to show our appreciation and include you as part of the team for children and youth in Kentucky.

This year, we have extended the surveys to foster parents who are open with private child placing agencies. We want everyone's feedback to make Kentucky's foster care system the best it can be.

A survey link has been distributed through email to all current DCBS foster/adoptive parents and to agency personnel. We encourage you to please complete this survey so we can improve support and services for our foster parents. Survey responses are anonymous unless you chose to identify yourself at the end of the survey. The survey will close February 28th so don't wait!

Please find the link to the survey here: [2024 Satisfaction Survey](#)



Kentucky has partnered with Angel Studios and Kentucky Kids Belong to host impact screenings of the Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot across the state. Many of these screenings have been hosted at churches and community theatres and have hosted community partners, Kentucky Kids Belong and DCBS to speak about the need for foster and adoptive homes across the state.

Find out more about how to host an impact screening at [Impact Screenings - Sound of Hope](#). Reach out to Rena.Hardin@ky.gov to include Kentucky Kids belong and/or DCBS in your event.

After a screening in the Two Rivers Region, a member at Christ Fellowship Church was drawn to the ministry of helping foster families in need of home repairs. As the movie portrays a church family helping a single foster mom needing her washer fixed, this Christ Fellowship Church member is being matched with a foster family in need.

President of the Network and member of Christ Fellowship, Laura Mattingly, said "I love this because there is always room for more."



Northern Bluegrass Impact Screening hosted at Crossroads Church.