

## *Between Families*

# Life changing

## New Year's resolutions *every foster parent should make*

**By Crystal (Killion) Niehoff**

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Foster parenting is both a worthwhile endeavor and a tough job. Make some resolutions that will make it even more rewarding and life changing in the New Year. This is the time of year that many people begin to think about what they want to accomplish in the next year. Lose weight, stop smoking, spend more frugally. As important as these things are, foster parents have an amazing opportunity to influence others and to make a difference into the next generation and beyond. This year, make some resolutions for the New Year that will change lives.

*In the coming year, resolve to ...*

### ***Make a Lasting Bond***

Make a lasting bond with your foster children. Bonding with these kids can be tough. The longer they have been in the system, the harder it will be to bond with them. It may be impossible. However, everyone benefits when you try. Spend time one-on-one, work together on their Lifebook, make it a point to compliment them about

something each day, never criticize their birth family, write a short note of encouragement to them or draw a simple picture for a young child. Small things add up to a lot for these children.

### ***Advocate***

Advocate for them. As a foster parent, you are with them more than any other person in their life right now. Be their voice with their social workers, therapists, school personnel. Write a letter to the judge who oversees their case and give him or her a progress report.

### ***Take Care of Yourself***

Take time for you, your marriage, and your birth/adoptive children. Foster parenting is stressful and often thankless. Taking care of yourself and your family will help to prevent burn-out and, in the long run, help the foster children who come into your home, too.

### ***Self-Improvement***

Make time for self-improvement. Take a college class, learn how to do something you have always wanted to do but didn't, read a novel, join a gym. Children learn by example and your enthusiasm for learning will be contagious.

### ***Recruit New Foster Families***

Recruit another family to become foster parents. According to Family to Family of Orange County California, in an article titled, *Background: The Current Challenges of Public Child Welfare*, they estimate that over 550,000 children are currently in the foster care system; however, at the same time, they say that only 50% of those children will be placed in foster families due to the low number of foster homes available. When you recruit other loving families for these children, you touch countless lives. Every child deserves a family.

### ***Be a Mentor***

Mentor a new foster parent. You were there once. You know that foster parenting can be a lonely road to travel. Make an effort to connect with another foster family to mentor and to listen.

### ***Don't Quit***

Be committed as long as it takes. Foster children need somebody who won't give up. Resolve to be that person for them.

# Oklahoma news

## ***Oklahoma Governor & DHS kick off initiative to recruit more foster & adoptive parents.***

Oklahoma City – Governor Mary Fallin along with the Department of Human Services kicked off the Oklahoma Fosters initiative in November to recruit more foster and adoptive families for children who are in state custody.

Oklahoma Fosters is a statewide campaign uniting state, tribal and local governments, businesses, nonprofits and the faith-based community to end the foster care crisis in Oklahoma.

“There are nearly 11,000 children in Oklahoma’s foster care system and we desperately need the help of our entire community to care for them,” said Fallin. “These children are in state custody through no fault of their own. They need foster families to love and support them during their time of need.”

Oklahoma Fosters is asking businesses, state agencies and local governments to encourage employees, the faith-based community to encourage congregations and tribes to encourage citizens to consider being a foster or adoptive parent.

Persons also can help by passing out fliers at work or their place of worship, talking to their friends and neighbors or posting about Oklahoma Fosters on social media.

The first goal of the initiative is to help DHS recruit more than 1,000 new safe, loving foster families statewide by the end of June 2016.

The hope is that the Oklahoma Fosters campaign is the birth of a statewide movement around the foster care crisis.

Oklahoma Fosters is a renewed effort to recruit foster or adoptive families to support the state’s Pinnacle Plan, an effort launched in 2012 by DHS to reform the state’s child welfare operations. While successful on several fronts, the recruitment of foster and adoptive families continues to be a challenge. The rate of abuse and neglect of children in the state continues to keep the number of children in state custody high, hampering efforts of the Pinnacle Plan.

“We need a full-court press in this state, that’s what Oklahoma Fosters is about,” said Fallin.

DHS Director Ed Lake said his agency is doing everything it can to engage community partners and the faith community in its efforts to recruit foster and adoptive families.

“This is a crisis that government alone cannot solve,”

Lake said. “We must have the help of businesses, nonprofits and philanthropic foundations, along with our current community and faith partners. There is a role for everyone and it will take all of us working together to take care of Oklahoma’s children.”

Oklahomans can get involved by going to the Oklahoma Fosters website – [OklahomaFosters.com](http://OklahomaFosters.com) – and clicking on “Foster Care & Adoption” for information on being a foster or adoptive parent. They also can call the foster parent hotline, 800-376-9279.

“We are too good of a people to allow children to grow up in an environment without parental love,” Fallin said. “If we do, we all suffer, because the children that are neglected today could become adults that fill our prisons and continue a cycle of abuse and neglect.”

*\*Within two weeks of this news release being distributed, there were over 125 new inquiries for new foster and adoptive parents!*



# Outstanding foster care providers

## Kansas care providers of the month **Kris & Becky Smilko**

Kris and Becky Smilko have been foster parents with TFI since April 2013. The Smilkos have four biological children and primarily foster sibling sets in a great effort to keep siblings together. They have fostered a total of seven sets since opening their home, providing care to almost 30 children. Kris and Becky are always willing to work with biological parents and even help with transportation to make sure the children see their parents in situations when transportation is cancelled. The Smilko family does well keeping all agencies aware of things that are going on in their home. It's a joy working with and getting to know Kris, Becky and their children.



## Oklahoma care providers of the month **Michael & Ashley Hellman**

Michael and Ashley Hellman became certified as foster parents less than three months ago. Just over a week later, they accepted their first placement of a sibling set, a four-year-old girl and her three-year-old brother. These siblings were placed with their great grandmother for three years, but she began to have a difficult time physically while caring for them. The children were then placed in four different foster homes in two months, but subsequently returned to their great grandmother after each home asked the children be moved. Michael and Ashley took these kids into their home and have been amazing with them. They've already been asked by Oklahoma DHS to adopt the siblings and have agreed. Michael and Ashley are also very open to the children continuing a relationship with their great grandmother. The couple is glad she can be a part of their lives and can enjoy getting to just be grandma.



# Recruitment moment

## *We need your help!*

TFI wants your help. Too busy with the holidays, kids, work and other day-to-day activities we all participate in? No worries! This just takes a few minutes and will literally reach thousands of people.

**Q. What is the number one referral method for TFI Family Services, TFI Family Connections and Texas Family Initiative?**

A. Our current foster families

**Q. What referral method follows closely?**

A. Media referrals (Facebook, Google, Twitter, etc.)

We would like all of our families to take just a few minutes and go to the TFI Family Services , TFI Family Connections and Texas Family Initiative Facebook pages and give them a “like.” Then please share the pages with all of your friends and ask them to “like” us as well. Let’s get the word out about the need for more foster parents in Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Not only are you spreading the word

about a great cause – you may end up referring a friend or family member to be a foster parent, and then you will receive a \$500 referral incentive for doing so (once the family is licensed/certified).

So take a couple minutes and go to the Facebook page and give us a “like,” share, refer and enjoy! Let’s see if we can add 200 friends across all three states in the next 30 days. Ready? Set ... Go!

*By Jason Cecil, regional recruitment director*

## Happy anniversary

10 years

Madelyn Crawford

5 years

Leisa Baird

Daniel & Laura Bergman

Tommy & Tonya Williamson

1 year

Jonathan & Eva Bartley  
Adam & Jessica Bonewitz  
Warren Brice  
Larry & Laura Cardenaz  
LaDonna Clark  
Jordan & Lindsey Cooper  
Rachelle Dunlap

Lee & Jennifer Farley  
James & Amy Fournier  
Humberto Gutierrez  
Stephanie Hampton  
Stephen Harms & Trish Hamilton  
Aaron & Andrea Hill  
James & Jessica McMains

Kenneth & Pauletta Payne  
Jonathan & Nicola Rice  
Randy & Shelly Smith  
Christopher Sneed  
Neil & Dennise Tully  
Terra Turner  
Darrell & Megan Walker

**TFI** Family Services



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800-279-9914 | [tfifamilyservices.org](http://tfifamilyservices.org)

For the most current calendar for Kansas Children Alliance Training,  
go to [childdally.org/training.html](http://childdally.org/training.html)

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FOSTER  
*hope*  
FOSTER  
*love*  
FOSTER  
*care*

