

# Arizona Statewide

News for Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Families Across Arizona

## Meet This Month's Shining Stars:

### Christina and T.J.

Christina and T.J. both consider themselves a good friend to others because they stick up for their friends. These close siblings admit they are usually shy at first, but when they get to know someone they get pretty talkative!

T.J. loves to wrestle, ride his bike, and read. His favorite book is *The Outsiders*. He is also part of the Card Club at school where plays magic cards with other kids.

Christina loves animals and hopes to be a veterinarian one day. Her favorite animal is a kitten and she would really like to have one.

When it comes to food, their tastes differ: Christina is a big fan of Chinese food and her favorite place to eat is at Panda Express. T.J.'s favorite food is pizza and he could always go for a pizza with cheese, sausage, and pepperoni on it!

Both Christina and T.J. enjoy school but each would like to get

better at doing homework. Christina was born in 2001. T.J. was born in 2003.



## ★★★ Shining Stars ★★★

## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Justin

Justin has one wish and he isn't afraid to tell others: He wants to be adopted.

Justin says he is a creative thinker; he's also friendly and helpful.

He enjoys skateboarding, playing basketball and video games. Justin is proud that he can do an ollie, which is one of the fundamental jumps for skateboarders. He would like to get better at skateboarding and learn more tricks.

Justin's favorite foods are cheesecake, apple pie and orange chicken. He loves the auto mechanic class he's currently taking; this class has inspired him to dream of becoming a mechanic when he grows up.



Justin is gentle and loves animals. He is responsible for taking care of the dog and cat in his current placement. Justin hopes to visit California one day because of the beach and all the skate parks they have.

Justin was born in 2000.



2015 Adoption Issue

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## Arizona Celebrates Adoption Month

The adoptions of more than 400 children were finalized during Adoption Day events held across Arizona in November. Events were held in Tucson, Florence, Phoenix, Prescott and Yuma.

The celebrations kicked off on November 7 in Florence where 22 families adopted 33 children. Held at the Superior Courthouse, the celebration included family photos, crafts and refreshments. In addition, several community groups donated hand-made quilts, crocheted hats and books for all the children.

Pima County's Adoption Day in the Park, also held on November 7, saw 84 children adopted. This celebration of family included food, games, and a cakewalk. New this year was the human hamster balls (pictured left).

In Yavapai County, families entering the Juvenile Justice Center in Prescott on November 21 were met with teddy bears, books and handmade quilts, all community gifts for children and families (see photo above by



Lynne LaMaster, reprinted courtesy of Prescott eNews). There were 16 children adopted at this event

At the same time, Yuma County saw six finalized adoptions at their Juvenile Justice Center.

The annual Maricopa County National Adoption Day celebration was also on November 21. Held at the Durango Juvenile Court Center, it has become known as one of the largest one day events in the nation. This year did not disappoint — 280 adoptions were finalized. The celebration included games, face painting and other fun family activities.



### Children's Heart Gallery features Arizona Children

Even though more than 400 children were adopted during National Adoption Month, there are more seeking their forever families. The Children's Heart Gallery (CHG) features some of Arizona's children who are still waiting. Each issue of the *Arizona Statewide* features children from the CHG as our Shining Stars. In this, our annual adoption issue we are featuring six children. You can learn more about the children featured in the CHG by visiting [childrensheartgallery.org](http://childrensheartgallery.org)

## Child Safety Resources

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have two resources that foster parents may find helpful.

NetSmartz ([www.NetSmartz.org](http://www.NetSmartz.org)) is an online safety workshop, designed to educate, engage, and empower children, parent/guardians, and educators to navigate the Internet safely. It is available in English

and Spanish and is split up into different age categories and audiences including internet safety from gaming to sexting.

KidSmartz ([www.KidSmartz.org](http://www.KidSmartz.org)) is a real world safety program. Instead of teaching stranger danger, it teaches four rules of safety to prepare children to be empowered and make safe choices.

## Chandler Christian Church Supports Kinship Care

With a trailer full of donated diapers and nearly 1500 bags of gifts for children ages 0—9, members of Chandler Christian Church prepared gifts to be distributed to kinship care families in Maricopa County. The bags, color-coded by age and gender, included

socks, a toy, a storybook and age-appropriate hygiene items.

This is the second year that Chandler Christian

Church has gathered gifts to support children and youth in foster care. In 2014 they provided more than 300 youth in Arizona's Independent Living Subsidy Program who live in Maricopa and Pinal Counties with housewear and personal hygiene items. In addition, another 40 or so youth who most recently moved into their own homes received kitchen starter kits, including dishes, pots and pans and other handy utensils

This year's gift bags and diapers will be distributed to Maricopa County kinship families by DCS Specialists during their family visits.



Thank you, CCC, for your ongoing support of children in foster care!



## Social Media and Teens: Balancing Risks, Dangers and Advantages

Social media has become such an integral form of communication, especially among teens; it's easy to stay in almost constant contact with others. But this comes with some costs, particularly to those who are in or adopted from foster care. By understanding the risks, teens and adults can make better decisions about how to use social media safely.

### Possible Dangers

*Negative influences from the past.* Teens in care may have been exposed to negative influences. By engaging in social media, past influencers can maintain contact with a foster or adoptive youth, even after they've been placed with a family; leading to negative behavior.

*Unsanctioned contact with birth family members.* Social media makes it easy for there to be contact between a birth family and a teen in or adopted from foster care in situations where it's not in the best interest of the teen.

*Bullying.* The expanding reach of social media also expands the reach of bullies. Anyone can participate online and everyone can see. Unfortunately, our children may be the targets of bullies due to possible developmental delays from abuse or neglect or because they may have had to change schools frequently, which can put them behind academically and socially.

*Vulnerability to predators.* Social media can be a fantastic way to connect with friends or to meet new people. But it's also an easy way to share phone numbers, addresses, personal photos or a location inappropriately.

### Finding Balance

Knowing the dangers of social media may cause a person to want to immediately restrict or prohibit a teen access to social media, but in today's always connected world, it's nearly impossible to do. Many parents have noted that it's easier to help teens use social media effectively and responsibly rather than outright prohibiting access to it. Besides, with the implementation of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-183), it is mandated that youth in care have opportunities to have as normal a life as possible, including Internet use, as appropriate.

Despite the risks of using social media, there are potential benefits. Social media can help a teens meet and connect with friends, keep in contact with positive influences from the past, stay in touch with their birth family

where appropriate, join and participate in support groups and gain access to resources and information. Social media also helps parents stay connected to their teens and informed about their thoughts, feelings and what they're doing.

Here are some questions to consider as you and your teen determine what is the best course of action:

- How public should a teen's social media profile be?
- Should a real name or a pseudonym be used?
- What information is okay to share?
- What should be avoided?
- Is location tagging okay?
- Who is it okay to connect with?
- How much time should be spent on social media?
- How will digital activities be monitored?

### Other Tips

*Communicate. Make sure they understand:*

- The risks associated with connecting and sharing information through social media.
- Words and pictures emailed, texted or posted online are immediately out of one's control the second they are sent, and they can remain online indefinitely.

*Make a contract.* Create a contract, detailing how and when to use social media, including the consequences of breaking the contract.

*Friend or follow them.* It's not necessary to actively participate, but check occasionally to see what is being posted or with whom they are interacting. Pay attention to any declines in social media activity as that may mean you have been blocked from viewing certain posts.

*Search.* Perform a simple search of the teen's name, as something could pop up that shouldn't be publicly available.

*Monitor your own online behavior.* Teens learn from the adults in their life and do what they do. Foster parents need to be especially mindful, as states have rules and laws governing what information can be released publicly.

Helping teens use social media effectively and safely is today's version of teaching them how to answer the door or telephone. For teens, social media is very much about how they should present to the world — for the parent, it's a daily opportunity and challenge to parent wisely.

— Adapted from an article on [AdoptUSKids.org](http://AdoptUSKids.org).

## ★ Shining Star ★

### Meet This Month's Shining Star: Tiffany

Tiffany is outgoing, friendly, carefree and confident! She loves music and singing, and enjoys playing the drums. If she doesn't have any drums around, she might play on whatever surface is around her. Her favorite artists include Taylor Swift and One Direction. Her favorite movies are Elf and Night at the Museum. Tiffany says she keeps her room clean, most of the time.

Tiffany's dream is to become a veterinarian. She loves all kinds of animals, and would have a clinic that would take care of all animals including spiders and snakes. Tiffany is most proud of how helpful she is. She loves helping people. Tiffany is always thinking of others and even grew out her hair so she could cut and donate her hair to a child with cancer.

Given a free afternoon, Tiffany would ride her long board or her bike and listen to music. She would also play soccer and climb trees. Tiffany loves mint chocolate chip and cookie dough ice cream. Tiffany was born in 2002.



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## Understanding Grandparent Stipends

The Grandparent Stipend is a monthly payment of approximately \$75 per child available to grandparents who have taken grandchildren who are in the custody of the Department of Child Safety (DCS) into their home. "Grandparents" includes: step-grandparents, great-grandparents and step-great-grandparents.

Some children are also eligible for "child only" Cash Assistance (CA) through the Department of Economic Security (DES). A grandparent may receive the stipend OR the child only benefit (if the child is eligible) but they cannot receive both payments!

While Grandparents are encouraged to apply for DES "child only" CA for their grandchild before requesting the stipend, this does not always happen! Some grandparents are already receiving the grandparent stipend at the time they are approved for the DES "child only" CA program. In these situations, it is imperative for the grandparent to

alert their DCS Specialist when they receive notice of their DES benefits approval, so that the stipend authorization may be ended. This will prevent any dual payments (stipend AND "child only" CA) as these are considered overpayments. Overpayments must be paid back to the DCS by the grandparent receiving the stipend.

For example: Children are placed with an eligible Grandparent on October 1, 2015. The Grandparent Stipend is authorized with a start date of October 1, 2015. The Grandparent subsequently applies for the DES "Child Only" Cash Assistance program on December 1, 2015. Grandparent is approved by DES and begins receiving child only CA with an effective date of December 1, 2015. The Grandparent Stipend authorization must have an end date of 12-01-15 to prevent an overpayment.

If you have questions, please contact Amy Strike via email at [GrandparentStipend@azdes.gov](mailto:GrandparentStipend@azdes.gov) or by phone: (602) 255-2691.

### Need to Change your Child Care Provider?

No need to request a new DCS Child Care Assistance Referral. Now you can contact your assigned DES Child Care Specialist to make this change! Their name and phone number can be found at the bottom of the Child Care Assistance Approval notice or you can call toll free 1 (877) 822-2322.

## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Shawn

Shawn enjoys waking up in the morning and getting ready for school. He is eager to get on the school bus! Shawn is a happy-go-lucky child who likes routine. In his happy moments you can see him with a big smile as he skips off to the bus.

A good reader, Shawn likes his quiet time. He also likes listening to music, but is not too keen on others singing along. Shawn enjoys painting and the visual appeal of playing games on the computer. He is fascinated by new things.

Shawn needs parents who will patiently help him expand his abilities and learn. He is looking for a family who will accept him and all he has to offer. Shawn was born in 2002.



## ★ Shining Star ★

## Workgroup Seeks to Safely Reduce Children in Care

One of the many efforts being made to improve the child welfare system in Arizona is the Safe Reduction Workgroup, which has been meeting for more than a year. Focusing on timely permanency and safely reducing the number of children in foster care, the workgroup is co-chaired by Judge McNally and DCS Director McKay. It meets quarterly.

### A Bright Future for Your Child

There are also four subgroups that meet monthly: Family Engagement, Targeted Services, Consistent Decision Making and Community Engagement. A Judicial and Attorney workgroup also provides updates.

Workgroup participants are comprised of DCS staff, court staff, attorneys, non-profit child welfare organizations, and behavioral health staff. Every member takes their role very seriously and are truly amazing individuals with whom to work. I lead the Consistent Decision Making subgroup. We are currently focusing on the importance of the case plan and the many details that tie into it. Without a comprehensive case plan that all team members, especially the biological family, develop collaboratively, the child's permanency may be slowed down.

The Workgroup works in four stages:

exploration and design, installation, initial implementation and then final implementation. However whenever someone is able to share a "Quick Win" it is brought forward for immediate implementation.

Subgroups are currently between the installation and initial implementation stages. The Safe Reduction Workgroup is only one example of change in the making. There are an incredible amount of people in our communities that care about our children. If you have the chance to get involved, please do. Your experience with our children and the child welfare system is valuable and you can be a part of the solution.

### Safe Reduction Work Group Projects

These are just some of the exciting areas that have come to light so far and are either already being fully implemented or planned to be piloted:

- Mediation Pilot — Implement "real" mediation to create less time in the court room and more dialog with bio parents and DCS early on.
- Community Team Case Management — Focus on high level removal areas and set up on site community teams to support families to prevent removals.
- Master Calendar — Improve efficiencies and timeliness of hearings.
- Parent Time and Parent Peer Support — Parents need to spend time with their children not visit them, and parents who have successfully reunified with their children will be able to better communicate urgency to families with dependencies to accept and complete services leading to a healthier reunification.
- Placement Coordination and Pre-Removal TDM's — stronger chance of siblings staying together in OOHC or with family and opportunities for families, DCS and possibly community members to help a family stay together at home while receiving services.

— Mimi Condon is a foster and adoptive mom. Her column, "A Bright Future for Your Child," is a regular feature in the Arizona Statewide.

### **Nina Mason Pulliam Scholarship to ASU for Teens in Care**

The Nina Scholars program at Arizona State University is now accepting applications for ASU students starting the fall 2016 semester. Applications are due March 1st, 2016. For application materials and other details visit <http://bit.ly/1mb4XF1>.

### **SAVE THE DATE! MCCC Youth Summit**

Maricopa County Community Colleges will be hosting College 101, a one-day event on applying for and being successful in college for teens in foster care and the adults who care for them. The all-day event will be held Saturday, February 27, 2016, at the Mesa Community College campus, located at Southern and Dobson. For more information contact Jo Ann Lachance at Casey Family Programs 602-794-8423 or [JLachance@casey.org](mailto:JLachance@casey.org).

### **CMDP Covered Services**

Foster caregivers do not pay for medically necessary or dental fees for children in foster care. Members and foster caregivers should not be billed for any services that CMDP covers. Be sure you list CMDP as the responsible party. Do not give your own personal information. If you have to sign any forms, please write "(foster parent's name) for DCS/CMDP." Should you receive a bill, contact a CMDP Member Services representative at 1-800-201-1795. Also visit the CMDP website for a wealth of health care information. Check it out at <https://dcs.az.gov/cmdp>.

## **The Foster Care Review Board Values Your Input**

Calling all Foster Parents and Kinship Caregivers! Your voice is important and we need to hear from you!

The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) is made up of citizens who voluntarily serve by judicial appointment, pursuant to Arizona statute, to review the progress of children in out-of-home care. The FCRB believes that each child in out-of-home care has a right to and is deserving of a permanent home that provides nurturing, love and protection. The FCRB endeavors to review each child's case within six months of the child's placement in out-of-home care, and then every six months while the child remains in out-of-home care.

These reviews are to determine and advise the Juvenile Court on the adequacy of efforts and progress toward permanency in a safe and stable environment for the child. The FCRB makes recommendations to the Court to encourage and facilitate the return of each dependent child to their family whenever appropriate, to promote and encourage stability in the child's placement, to ensure that needed services and supports are in place for the child, parents, or caregivers; and to consider permanency options like adoption or guardianship when the return of a child to a parent's care cannot be accomplished safely. The FCRB's top priority in each review is ensuring the wellbeing of the child.

It is so important that we have the participation of the foster parents or kinship caregivers. As the child's primary caregiver, you have special insight into the child's daily life, accomplishments, and struggles. You are in a unique position to inform the FCRB

about and advocate for your foster child's developmental, emotional, educational, and medical needs. You can provide invaluable information about the child's strengths, experiences, and needs that will help the FCRB create meaningful, individualized, and timely recommendations to the Court.

Whenever possible, it is ideal for the FCRB members to have face-to-face contact with each person who is a part of the child's life. Foster parents and kinship caregivers will receive a letter in the mail notifying them of the meeting date and time. You are encouraged to attend in person. If you have questions about the review or are unable to attend, you can call the phone number on the letter to gain more information about the review, arrange to appear by phone, or provide valuable information prior to the meeting. Alternatively, you can provide a written statement by email or fax, which will be read during the review.

The FCRB values your foster child's perspective, too. While the FCRB is delighted to hear from any child in person, we understand that in person or by phone, participation may not be possible due to school, appointments, visitation, and childcare issues. Additionally, the FCRB will endeavor to discuss all aspects of the case during the review, some of which may not be appropriate or in the best interest of the child to hear. Your foster child is welcome to provide a statement by phone, email, or fax. They can also provide information by going to [www.fcrbyouth.org](http://www.fcrbyouth.org) when a notification letter is received.

Thank you for your wonderful care and commitment to Arizona's foster children!

## **All About Measles**

Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease, but not all children coming into care are up to date on their vaccines. It is, therefore, important for foster parents to be able to recognize the symptoms of measles and know how to respond. Below is some information from the Arizona Department of Health Services.

### **Measles Symptoms**

Measles is a disease that starts with a high fever followed by a cough, runny nose and/or red watery eyes. A red blotchy rash begins two to four days after onset. The rash begins at the hairline and spreads down to the face, body and then to the hands and feet over the next three days. The rash lasts five to six days and then fades in the same order in which it appeared.

Up to one-third of all measles cases become severe and may progress to pneumonia, seizures, encephalitis, brain damage and may even end in death.

### **How Is Measles Spread?**

Measles is very contagious and can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can live in the air and on surfaces for at least two hours. A person with measles is infectious for four days before the start of the rash until four days after the rash begins. In fact, measles is so contagious that hours after an infected person has left the room, an unvaccinated person can get measles just by entering that room.

### **What To Do If You Think You Have Measles**

There is no specific treatment for measles. Measures can be taken to possibly prevent measles in persons who have been exposed.

If you are caring for children who may not have received all their vaccinations, be sure to notify all medical staff prior to them having contact with your child or your family members. This knowledge alerts them to take special precautions to prevent spreading the disease.

## **Measles Prevention**

The best way to prevent measles is through two doses of MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine given according to the recommended schedule:

- First dose of MMR given on or after the first birthday
- Second dose of MMR given at age 4 to 6 years. It may be given as soon as one month after the first dose.

Since MMR vaccine is not routinely given to children less than one year of age, it is especially important for family members of young children to make sure that everyone in their household is up to date on their vaccinations to protect the family from illness. Please contact your health care provider or your local health department for further information about the MMR vaccine.

## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Francisco

Francisco dreams of being a police officer when he gets older. He says he would be a good police officer because he is caring and likes to help people.

Francisco loves to play basketball, football or ride his bike when he's outside. He also likes to play video games and watch any movie that has to do with superheroes! His favorite superhero movies include Thor and Avengers. Francisco recently traveled Colorado and his favorite part of this vacation was seeing all the different rivers.

Francisco's favorite subject is math. He also participates on his student government team at school. He proudly tells others that he stands up to bullies when other children are getting picked on. Even though Francisco's favorite subject is math, he would still like to get better at it.

To Francisco, adoption means finally having a family. Francisco was born in 2003.



★ *Shining Star* ★

## Arizona Statewide

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## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Lizeth

Lizeth, who likes to go by "Lizzy," is a sweet girl. She has a beautiful smile and playful personality.

In her spare time, she enjoys playing on the playground, dressing up, playing with her dolls and watching movies.

Some of her favorite movies are Home Alone and Tangled.

Lizzy loves to show off her dance moves. At a recent trip to the Musical Instrument Museum, she enjoyed shaking the maracas over her head and dancing around! She quickly jumped from one instrument to the next, loving all the different sounds that were produced.

Lizzy was born in 2003.

★ *Shining Star* ★