

Arizona Statewide

News for Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Families Across Arizona

Meet This Month's Shining Stars: Isaac

Isaac is talkative and funny, and really loves a good joke.

Isaac is a truly nice and polite young man. In a candid moment, Isaac very sweetly remarked that he thinks he's "pretty cool." His favorite foods are the typical staples among young boys: pizza and mac n' cheese. He likes games and just about every sport there is, especially soccer and football and dirt bikes. In his words, "I'm extreme."

Isaac would like to serve in the U.S. Army when he's older because he believes it is important to step up whenever there is a need. He wants his forever family to have the same philosophy: To be there for him in times of crisis and to always support and care for him. If Isaac could change one thing in the world, it would be for there to be more foster parents who could adopt more children who need a loving home.

Isaac was born in 2000.



★★ Shining Stars ★★

Meet This Month's Shining Star: Kiki

Kitanna, "Kiki," is bright, articulate, creative, and loyal. She loves playing with Barbies, drawing, climbing trees, eating McDonald's and double stuff Oreos.

A music fan, Kiki likes listening to country and Christian music, but turns on today's hit music when she needs to "get into her jam."

Kiki enjoys watching TV shows like iCarly and Sam and Cat, but she also likes shows that "fight crime," like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Power Rangers. Kiki is always eager to spend quiet time doing arts and crafts and drawing, but also loves to be active, play with friends, and go to Pump it Up — an inflatable



playground.

Someday, Kiki would like to go to college and become a teacher as well as a foster mom. Kiki's forever family should reside in Arizona so that she can maintain her current connections.

Kiki was born in 2006.



Spring 2016

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Pima Federal Credit Union Supports Foster Kids

The Children's Heart Gallery (CHG), an initiative of DCS, has partnered with Pima Federal Credit Union (PFCU) to help find homes for children who are free for adoption with no identified placement.

PFCU will display Heart Gallery photographs on its television screens in each

of the five financial centers within Pima County. In addition, PFCU will offer materials with more information for individuals who are interested in the

program.



Thank you, Pima Federal Credit Union for your support of Arizona's children!

Shining Stars Featured in Children's Heart Gallery

Each issue of the *Arizona Statewide* features Shining Stars, Arizona children who are free for adoption with no identified placement. For more information on any of these children, please visit The Children's Heart Gallery (CHG) childrensheartgallery.org

Arizona Tuition Waiver

The Arizona Tuition Waiver is available to foster youth and former foster youth attending public Arizona State Community Colleges, and Universities. Young Adults can apply for the Tuition Waiver as they apply for an Education and Training Voucher at www.statevoucher.org.

CarePortal Launches in Tucson

The Department of Child Safety launched the CarePortal from the First Assembly of God Church in Tucson in December.

The CarePortal will help DCS staff link multiple churches to needy children and families involved in the child welfare system. Often, families caring for children in foster care are presented with a variety of challenges that could place a stable home in jeopardy. Without help, this could result in a child being displaced unnecessarily.

Access to the CarePortal will be through DCS staff who will formally request assistance for a child or family in need. The CarePortal will electronically distribute the request to multiple churches engaged in Pima County. When a church offers the remedy, they are immediately connected back to DCS where together, they deliver the solution.

"This type of connection between faith based organizations and government is vital to restoring balance between protection and charity," said DCS Director Greg McKay. "As the good book says, a cord of three strands is not quickly broken; DCS, The Church, and the CarePortal just formed three strands."

With the foster care system so overwhelmed, DCS cannot afford to lose loving kinship and licensed foster families due to avoidable hardships. The CarePortal brings

"Pima Federal Credit Union is proud to partner with Arizona's Department of Child Safety to aid in the mission of finding stable homes for our state's foster youth. Recent foster care statistics reveal that nearly 17,000 Arizona children are in out-of-home care.... The credit union's involvement is simple, but the results for these foster youth can be life-changing," says PFCU President/CEO Eric Renaud.

The project was unveiled on January 27, 2016, at the Thornydale branch of the credit union. A short video is available here: <http://bit.ly/21HnAUG>

The CHG is a digital exhibit of high quality, compelling photographs capturing the unique personalities of children in Arizona who are waiting to be adopted.

For more information about the Children's Heart Gallery or to see photos of the children featured, visit the website at childrensheartgallery.org. For more information about Pima Federal Credit Union, visit their website at pimafederal.org.

immediate relief and provides a way for people to help in many capacities.

"Arizona citizens are ready and willing to answer the call to help these children," said McKay. "Too often however, their desire to serve and provide for someone in need is stymied by lengthy bureaucratic processes."

DCS staff in Pima County feel the intense need to help children and families but desperately need help. Program Manager Pauline Machiche and her team created a YouTube video in the spring called "DCS-Church Partnership." That partnership spurred a larger expansion to include The CarePortal.

December's launch event concluded when DCS provided the CarePortal the first request for assistance and the churches were ready. Billy Thrall from the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family was in attendance and answered McKay's request to bring the CarePortal to the rest of the state.

"Billy is a tremendous man of faith with decades of experience and connections with church leaders in Arizona," said McKay. "Who better to spread the word; I'm grateful for him."

As for Pima County's DCS staff, McKay concluded, "They possess the hearts and minds to spark real change that truly helps all people. I couldn't be more proud of their innovation."

Assisting Youth with College Applications

A common starting place for students applying for post-secondary education is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, commonly known as the FAFSA. The FAFSA determines a student's eligibility for Federal Grants and Federal Student Loans. A grant is money that does not have to be repaid upon graduation. Federal loans, on the other hand, will need to be repaid after the student leaves school.

There are special considerations for foster and adopted youth. Most students who fill

out the FAFSA have to enter their parent's or caregiver's financial information as part of the application process. However, children who spent anytime in foster care after their 13th birthday, even if they were subsequently adopted or reunified with their birth parents, are automatically considered "Independent" with an estimated family contribution of zero.

The FAFSA is completed online. Free live help and explanations are available by calling 1-800-4-FED-AID. Check with the school's financial aid office for application deadlines.

Helping Teens Form Healthy Relationships

It is especially important for teens in foster care to learn how to be part of loving, healthy relationships. Foster parents can help by modeling healthy behaviors as well as providing guidance for youth.

Consider discussing these eight tips with youth to help them build healthy relationships.

■ **Respect Yourself.** Are you accepted for who you are? No one should pressure you into doing things you are not comfortable with such as drinking, drugs, or unwanted physical contact.

■ **Be Safe.** Do you feel safe emotionally and physically? You should feel comfortable being you without fear of being put down. Being hurt or pressured is definitely not safe!

■ **Support One Another.** Do your friends care for you and want what is best for you? Your friends should understand if you can't hang out because you have to study or if you have plans with other friends.

■ **Be Yourself.** Do you pretend to like something you

don't or be someone you aren't? Be yourself; after all, being an individual is what makes you, you!

■ **Practice Fairness and Equality.** Do you have an equal say in relationships? From the activities you do together to the friends you hang out with, you should have equal say in the choices made in relationships.

■ **Accept Yourself and Others.** Do your friends, girlfriend or boyfriend accept you for who you really are? You shouldn't have to change who you are or compromise your beliefs to make someone like you.

■ **Be Honest and Trustworthy.** Are you always honest? Honesty builds trust. You can't have a healthy relationship without trust! If you have ever caught your friends or boyfriend or girlfriend in a huge lie, you know that it takes time to rebuild your trust.

■ **Communicate.** Do you talk face to face (not just text!) about your feelings? Listen to one another and hear each other out. Text or Facebook messages should be respectful, not mean or inappropriate.

Arizona Justice Summit, Defending Orphans

More than 50 churches in Phoenix and 30 churches in Tucson gathered at the Arizona Justice Summit, Defending Orphans to talk about the crisis facing Arizona and gain the knowledge, tools and partners to do something about it. Sponsored by Christian Family Care and in partnership with DCS, the conference included 20 equipping breakout sessions taught by local community and church leaders, most of which are foster or adoptive parents themselves.

Keynote speaker, Jason Johnson, a foster and adoptive father who regularly writes and speaks on orphan care related issues, is the Director of Church Ministry Initiatives with Christian Alliance for Orphans where he helps church leaders implement structure, strategy and sustainable mechanisms of orphan care ministry within their churches.

The vision for this conference was to help churches and communities as a whole to play their role in orphan care. "Not everyone can take a child into their home," states Jason. "That is OK because there are many things that need to happen when helping kids and strengthening families so we should not all be doing the same thing, but we should all be doing something."

Attendees heard from partners, organizations and churches about strategic, practical ways to get involved as well as preventative programs. "This was an excellent event because each of us left knowing practical ways to serve children and families in our communities." Billy Thrall, Director of Faith and Community Initiatives of the Arizona's Governor's Office.

Mandatory Foster Parent Training

The federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act mandates "normalcy" for children in foster care. Normalcy means children in foster care are allowed the freedom to do the kinds of activities their friends do and to have the opportunity to participate in experiences similar to those of their peers who are not in out-of-home care.

To achieve this goal, the law requires the Department of Child Safety to implement a "reasonable and prudent parent standard" for decisions made by caregivers and to provide all caregivers with training.

The DCS Office of Licensing and Regulation, Training

Development and Delivery Accountability Team has developed the training and has nearly completed training licensing agency staff. Licensing agencies have been tasked with presenting this three-hour training to their licensed foster families. This course will provide the attendees with the information, resources, and knowledge needed for caregivers to make decisions regarding foster children's attendance to activities and normal childhood experiences under the provision of the Arizona DCS Caregiver Procedures of the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard.

Contact your licensing agency for more information.

Ask Dr. Sue

Is It Too Late for Influenza Vaccinations?

In late February, the Maricopa County Department of Public Health confirmed the first influenza-related pediatric death of the 2015-2016 flu season. "This is a very sad reminder how serious the flu can be, and why we all need to make sure we are vaccinated," said Dr. Bob England, director of the Maricopa County Department of Public Health.

"What protects us, our children and our loved ones, is not just the flu vaccine that we receive but the vaccinations of everyone around us. The more people who get vaccinated from the flu, the less chance they have of spreading it to others."

Last year Arizona also had one child die from influenza. Hospitalization and death are real risks of the flu especially in the very young and very old.

All children over 6 months-of-age and adults should receive the flu shot. Although immunity (protection) takes about 2 weeks after the shot, it is not too late for children and family members to receive the vaccine for this flu season.

— Susan M. Stephens, M.D., is the Medical Director of the Arizona Comprehensive Medical & Dental Program.

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Looking Back — Looking Forward

Kinship Caregivers Receive National Award

Kinship caregiver and former U of A football player Makani Kema-Kaleiwahea and his wife Brianna received the 2016 Casey Family Program's Excellence for Children Awards.

Makani grew up in Hawaii in an adoptive family of six children, including his brother, a female cousin and three other boys. Following his high school graduation, Makani received a football scholarship to the University of Arizona. He came to the mainland and his entire adoptive family joined him here. All the children suffered abuse in the home, which continued after the family moved to Arizona.

At age 18, Makani courageously took action to protect his siblings and stop the abuse, then made sacrifices to become their caregiver so they would not be separated in the child

welfare system.

While a full-time student playing on his college football team, Makani created a home for the children. His high school sweetheart, Brianna Summers, moved to Arizona, and together they cared for the younger siblings.

With assistance from Casey Family Programs, the couple found extended family members who wanted to help. One couple adopted one child, their great-niece, and another couple became parents to two others.

Makani and Brianna married in 2014 and adopted the other two children. The Kema-Kaleiwaheas' efforts, and those of relatives, have had invaluable impact for five vulnerable children. View their video story at:

<http://bit.ly/1Tc2oRH>.

Watch Kids Around Water!

Good water safety practices and constant supervision is the cure to prevent child drowning and non-fatal drowning incidents. It only takes a short pause in supervision for a child to slip away and fall into a pool or any open body of water. Although there are documented drownings for each month of the year, they significantly increase during the spring and summer. Most children drown in backyard pools, but some children drown in areas of open water, toilets, buckets and bathtubs.

Mark Your Calendars: May Is Foster Care Month!

Foster Care Month celebrations will get off to an early start this year in Arizona. Howard Air and the Arizona Rattlers invite all foster and kinship families to an Arena Football League game on Saturday, April 16, where the Rattlers will play the Tampa Bay Storm in the team's home opener. The game is free, but pre-registration is required at <http://www.arizonablueribbon.org>. The Rattlers play at the Talking Stick Resort Arena in downtown Phoenix. The fun begins on the plaza at 4:00

p.m. and the game starts at 6:00 p.m.

Join the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents (AZAFAP) in covering the state in blue wristbands and blue ribbons to create awareness about foster care this May. A 'show your courage' kickoff picnic event is planned for Saturday, April 30. Visit www.showyourcourage.org to learn more.

The Tucson Blue Ribbon Event will be held at Thoroughbred Nissan on Sunday, May 1, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Foster Parenting: Your Service Is a Gift

You have accepted one of the most important roles in society and are in a unique position to help make a beautiful difference in the life of a child. What a gift you are! Thank you for opening your heart, home and family to a child who just needs a safe place to call home

and a warm hug and nutritious meal. year later, — like me! This has never been an easy decision for any foster parent. Caring for our kids can become an addiction. Below are some other ways that we can all stay involved making a difference:

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). This is similar to the work that a GAL does but it is a volunteer position. There is no experience necessary, however, being a foster parent is a huge plus for the child for whom you would be advocating.

FCRB (Foster Care Review Board). Once a month you will participate on a board reviewing cases with the team members as a volunteer.

Respite! Get your baby fix in for a weekend or enjoy the company of a toddler or teen and then return them to their loving placement.

Parent Aide or Case Aide. If you have the education required, this would be a great paid position. Your experience plus your compassion would make you a strong asset.

With so many kids in care, we all need to stay on board in one way or another. Being a foster parent is truly one of the greatest gifts we can give our children, but all the positions mentioned above are equally important to bringing a healthy and speedy permanency to our children.

Whether our day as a foster parent has been rewarding or challenging, we still are the lucky ones to be given this life to keep safe and bring towards a brighter future.

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

Double Check for Kids in Cars!

The warm weather brings with it this reminder: Since most infant carseats are rear-facing, adults don't always see babies from the front seat. Experts suggest placing something you use often, like a purse or phone, into the back seat of the car to create a habit of going to that part of the car to grab it. Another tip is to place a large stuffed animal in the front seat of the car every single time that your baby is in the back seat. That way, when you're driving and you look and see that stuffed animal, you remember that your child is in the back row



A Bright Future for Your Child

and a warm hug and nutritious meal.

While on this journey, know that there are so many people out there doing the same thing. There are other foster parents out there who would love to share their helpful tips with you.

- If your child attends child care, speak with the director to coordinate a group of parents at the facility.

- Attend church? Check with the office to see if they have a foster parent group that meets and if not, maybe you can start one!

- Your pediatrician may know of an experienced foster parent who would love to meet you.

- Call your licensing worker to see if they can refer you to another foster parent who has been caring for children for a number of years.

- Contact the Arizona Association for Foster & Adoptive Parents (AZAFAP).

Whenever we work together we are so much more successful. I have met so many beautiful people in the child welfare arena. We truly are a great group of loving and compassionate individuals and together we do work miracles.

From time to time a foster parent will close their license permanently, just to re-open it a

Exploring Cultural Differences

In the world of adoption and foster care, we often talk about transracial and transcultural families as being those families who are made up of members representing different ethnic groups or racial backgrounds. But, in truth, while many foster and adoptive families are transracial, all of our families are transcultural.

Culture is something that is crafted by and comprised of people. A nation can have a culture, as can a religious group, a business, or a family. Culture can include language, food, art, gender identity and sexual orientation, among other things. It is the structure that forms how a particular group of people behave or live.

Sometimes the cultural differences are subtle, as in the case of a family who is caring for a child of the same race as their own. In other families, those differences may be more apparent.

There are a variety of methods to explore culture, both your family's as well as others, including books, movies, food, discussion, visiting familiar spaces and places, creating new traditions, or recreating and incorporating celebrations of other traditions and holidays. Here are a few possibilities:

■ Visit a local ethnic grocery store.

Exploring a grocery store or a farmers market that offers never-before-seen fruits, vegetables, or even baked goods is a wonderful way to explore a different culture. Make it an adventure by preparing a scavenger hunt list ahead of time.

■ **Cook or bake a new food.** Make cooking together a family activity and try something entirely new and different. If your child is hesitant to try a new food, perhaps ease them into it by baking a dessert specific to a particular culture. Sometimes children are more willing to try something they helped create.

■ **Fun with fruit.** Apples come in a variety of shapes and colors, but they're all pretty much the same on the inside. Conversely, two watermelons may look the

same on the outside, but one can be yellow on the inside while another is red. Some have seeds, some don't. Fruit offers an opportunity to combine snack time with important lessons in diversity.

■ **Take day trips.** Arizona offers endless opportunities to experience a wide array of cultures and experiences. Start with your own backyard and expand from there. What are the differences and similarities between neighborhoods, cities, and counties within Arizona? Think about the five "Cs" of Arizona's economy: cotton, citrus, copper, climate and cattle. All within a few hours' drive, you can experience everything from big city life to cowboy towns; from snow to the desert, a rural agricultural setting, to an American Indian reservation and everything in between.

■ **Purchase a map or globe.** A map is a great springboard for exploring differences in cultures, climates, accents/ languages, foods, customs, and lifestyles of people and places.

■ **Attend cultural events.** There are a host of opportunities to experience free and low cost events through churches, community centers, ethnic festivals, and cultural centers.

■ **Story telling.** Asking people of different ages, cultures, and experiences to share their stories is a powerful way to teach your child about diversity.

■ **Watch movies that introduce new people and places.** A Disney movie or foreign film can introduce new worlds.

Together you and your family can learn to embrace your individuality, your family culture, and the cultures of others. Be prepared to be surprised, inspired, and to let your children and family lead and teach you new things. Just as, in the words of Ghandi, "a nation's culture resides in the hearts and soul of its people," so does a family's culture reside in the hearts and souls of each family member – birth, foster, or adopted.

— Adapted from *Partners*, a publication of the Wisconsin Coalition for Children, Youth & Families.

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.

Did You Know?

All CMDP members are eligible for family planning and birth control services.

A CMDP nurse is also available at 602-351-2245 or 1-800-201-1795 to answer questions. Callers do not have to give their name to find out more about these services.

Family planning services do not include abortion or abortion counseling.

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>.

Post-Adoption Depression in Parents

A recent recommendation on screening mothers during pregnancy and postpartum for depression also should include parents who are adopting children, says a Purdue University expert on "post-adoption blues."

"In addition to birth mothers, adoptive mothers and fathers should also be screened for depressive symptoms before and after placement of a child," says Karen J. Foli, an associate professor of nursing and co-author of "The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenges of Adoption."

It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of new mothers experience postpartum depression, according to Foli, and the rate for post-adoption depression may be higher. "We are trying to understand why," Foli says. "What we've found so far is that adoptive parents hold high expectations of themselves as parents, their children, their friends and family, and society that often are unmet or unrealistic."

She added that the adoption process is rigorous and intrusive as parents apply for

certification to adopt. They frame themselves as 'superparents' in order to pass the tests of the home study, the financial disclosures, and the psychological interviews. "Now, we better understand how additional psychological symptoms and interpersonal variables may affect a parent," she added.

Because of the adoption process and the standards that they hold themselves to, adoptive parents may not be as likely to share concerns about their mental health.

"Mental health professionals also need to be aware of the dynamics specific to the adoptive process to best support their patients," says Foli.

"Preliminary evidence collected by our team indicates that parental depression may exist prior to and after placement of a child for certain adoptive parents," says Foli, who is looking at post-adoption depression in a long-term study to better understand predictors and buffers to depressive symptoms for both adoptive mothers and fathers.

Meet This Month's Shining Star: **Rex**

This may come as no surprise, but Rex loves sports! Football, soccer, track and basketball- you name it-he likes it! Rex's eyes light up when he has the chance to talk with others about different sports. In fact, he would like his future forever family to know that he "is an athletic kid who can play any sports he tries."

Rex does well in school and he says it comes naturally to him. Being able to play school sports is a huge academic motivator for Rex! He would love to go paintballing and learn how to play Rugby. Rex hopes to play college football someday. He is also considering a career in the military as well.

In addition to team sports, Rex enjoys lifting weights and playing video games. He is also an avid music fan, listening to all types of music as well as playing the drums.

Rex was born in 2002.



★ *Shining Star* ★

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Meet This Month's Shining Star: **Jessica**

Jessica is a young lady with a cheerful disposition and a curiosity for life.

She loves art, hanging out with friends at the park, and watching crime TV shows. Jessica is bubbly and talkative but also enjoys quiet time in which to think. She likes to be funny and joke around with people.

Christmas is her absolute favorite time of year! In school, she loves Social Studies, especially learning about the Presidents. She thinks she would like to be a police officer one day.

Jessica loves all kinds of food and has an interest in learning how to be a better cook. She also enjoys listening to music, going to youth group, and getting a Vanilla Bean Crème Frappuccino.

Jessica was born in 2001.

★ *Shining Star* ★