

# Arizona Statewide

News for Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Families Across Arizona

## Meet This Month's Shining Stars: Daniel

As an older teen, Daniel understands the importance of family and really wants to be adopted. This caring, artistic and easy going young man enjoys drawing and listening to music. In fact, Daniel's favorite subject in high school is art and he is interested in taking a class on airbrushing.

Outdoors, Daniel is a bit of a handyman; he enjoys landscaping and fixing things. When he's not putting around, he also likes swimming, hiking, playing football and going to the river. Although he doesn't watch much TV, Daniel does like to go to the movies with his friends.

Daniel's Christian faith is important to him and he enjoys regularly attending both church services and youth group. Giving back is also important to Daniel. "The church even asked me to design the

church logo," he declared happily.

When it comes to family, Daniel says, "I would like a family to give me a lot of attention, but I am comfortable doing things on my own as well." Daniel would do well in a one or two parent home with or without siblings.

Daniel was born in 2000.



## ★ ★ Shining Stars ★ ★

## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Jonathan

A morning person who loves to play and splash around during bath time, Jonathan is a very happy little boy. He enjoys plush toys that light up — especially if they can also talk. Picture books and music are other favorites, as one can tell by his chatty "babbling" verbalizations.

Jonathan is sitting up and beginning to crawl and scoot all over the place! Although he is 2 years old, his current developmental level is in the 6-9 months range and he will need adaptive equipment in the future.

Jonathan is transitioning to table food, although most of the time it is still soft or pureed.

Jonathan has a genetic disorder and requires 24-hour supervision.



A two-parent household is desired. Jonathan's forever family will need to be well educated in relation to his medical necessities and fragility as well as being understanding of the time and high attention he requires.

Due to Jonathan's medical condition, at this time he is not able to attend pre-school or daycare. Jonathan receives a number of individualized services which will need to continue throughout his future.

Jonathan was born in 2014.



Winter/Spring 2017

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### 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. These children are also featured in the Children's Heart Gallery. For more information on any of these children, and to see additional photos, please visit The Children's Heart Gallery (CHG) [childrensheartgallery.org](http://childrensheartgallery.org)

### Jacob's Law — Behavioral Health Services for Children in Foster Care

The Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) is committed to ensuring the availability of timely, quality health care for foster children, including behavioral health services through their three contracted regional behavioral health authorities (RBHAs) and the Children's Rehabilitative Services (CRS) program. For more information visit <http://bit.ly/2d0w4IV>.

## Please Participate in the Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey

The Department of Child Safety (DCS) is once again collaborating with Arizona State University's College of Public Service and Community Solutions — Center for Child Well-Being (ASU) to conduct a research study to better understand the experiences of licensed foster parents. While most of the questions in this electronic survey are multiple choice, foster parents will also have the opportunity to provide narrative feedback.

It's important for foster parents to participate in the survey because the results will help DCS identify and understand the strengths in the foster care program and areas

which may need improvement. A survey link will be sent via email to all foster parents whose email address are listed in Quick Connect. The email is expected to be sent in early to mid March.

A similar survey will be sent to foster parents who have closed their licenses.

The previous Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey was launched in 2014 and nearly one-fourth of all foster parents participated. The full report from the previous survey is available at <https://dcs.az.gov/services/foster-care-and-adoption/current-foster-and-adoptive-parents>.

## The Importance of Early Intervention and Head Start

The importance of early intervention for all children cannot be understated, especially for children in out-of-home (OOH) care or at risk of being in OOH care. The Arizona Head Start Programs provide high quality services with a strong parent involvement focus such as: early childhood education, nutrition, health and mental wellness, programs for children with disabilities and additional social services.

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) and the Arizona Department of Education have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), outlining how Head Start programs and DCS will work to improve access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs throughout the state for children in foster care. The following are a few key components to be aware of:

- Children in foster care are given priority placement for Head Start services for the Regional Head Start Grantees that participates in the MOU;

- Head Start provides training and information to DCS staff about Head Start services and enrollment process;

- Children in foster care who are placed in Head Start may begin attending Head Start without immunization and other medical records, proof of residency, birth certificates, or other documents in order to give the family reasonable time to present these documents;

- Service boundaries for children in foster care are eliminated (when it is in the best interest of the child and family);

- Head Start supports goals established by other services providers; and

- DCS will refer caregivers of children in foster care who may be eligible for Head Start services to the appropriate Head Start program

To locate a Head Start program in a child's area, go to <http://www.azheadstart.org/head-start-programs.php>.

## Resolved: To Take Time for Me!

As a foster, adoptive or kinship parent, you may have set new goals and resolutions for your life as the new year dawned. For many, those goals may have already faded away as the day-to-day realities of life barged in. It's particularly important that you, as caregivers, take care of yourselves. Here are some ideas to get you started:

### ■ Consider slowing down

Take an activity inventory. Are there any unnecessary things you could take off your plate as a family? Instead, perhaps you could come together as a family to enjoy some simple things like game nights, crafts, winter hikes, cozy hot chocolate moments, family yoga, reading, movies, and more.

### ■ Explore forgiveness

Harboring negative feelings for ourselves or others can really add weight on a person's shoulders. Or maybe you've been feeling bogged down by circumstances that cause a sense of regret. (This can be true for our children as well.) Is there someone you need to forgive? Remember that forgiving someone is a mental decision, and not based on feelings. It doesn't mean that you immediately forget about what happened. And it certainly does *not*

mean that you have to trust the person again.

### ■ Try something new

Were there any areas of life for your family last year that had you feeling stuck in a rut? Trying something new can lead to family fun and adventure. Take turns occasionally to choose an activity that you've never done together. Perhaps a family member who doesn't typically prepare dinner takes a shot at it or kids cook for parents one night. You could choose a volunteer activity for the family to do together. There are many things you could do. Even packing a picnic lunch and visiting a different park could provide a refreshing change of scenery. Include the family by asking for input. The kids can help with some creative ideas.

### ■ Take time to care for yourself

Take a look at your wellness — inside and out — and check in with your partner and children, too. How is everyone feeling and doing as an individual? What's on your child's mind? Is there something that has been particularly irking you lately, or something you have been struggling to move past? Perhaps some planned one-on-one parent/child time and parent respite time are in order.



# Talking with Your Adopted Children about Their Birth Parents

Many children who have been adopted from foster care remember their birth parents and miss them, regardless of the situation that brought the children into care. For parents, the challenge comes in knowing when to bring up birth parents and how to answer tough questions. Should you bring it up? Should you wait for your child to come to you?

If you wait for your child to bring it up, it might not happen. They might be afraid of hurting your feelings or they might not know it's okay to talk about their birth families.

While the subject can seem scary, talking about birth parents with your child can actually reinforce the bond you share and strengthen your relationship. But it's best to do a little preparation and think it through in advance. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Consider your child's story.** Every child's story is unique. Based on the age of the child and their story, are there questions you can anticipate?
- **Know where your child is in their journey** Being honest about your child's past doesn't mean you have to share everything at once. It's more important to consider your child's mental and emotional level of development and only share what he or she can handle at this time. The questions children ask provide wonderful insights about their level of understanding. Allow your child to leave the conversation and give them time to process the information. They will return when they have additional questions.
- **Let your children set the tone.** The conversation

can be informal, brief and informative. Answer questions and wait for a response. Your children will guide you to what they want to know. Keep in mind that your children may have questions about their birth parents to which you don't know the answer. That's okay.

- **Utilize books and movies.** There are great books and movies for all ages that may help you. Both are a particularly great resource because they refer to someone else's story, and it's a non-threatening chance for both of you to make comments and ask questions. The movie *The Blind Side*, for example, could be a good conversation starter.
- **Talk with other adoptive parents.** Ask them what questions their children have asked and if any questions took them by surprise.
- **Keep emotions in perspective.** Children of all ages can sense when an emotional response has been triggered. Rather than focusing on your emotional response, consider what emotion caused your child to ask a certain question or act a certain way.
- **Respect your child's response.** Some children who have been adopted feel it's disloyal to discuss birth parents. Reassure your child that it's okay to think about or miss their birth families. Recognize that it doesn't mean they don't love you.

Keep in mind that you also may have conflicting feelings. But that's okay. Above all, you and your children will get through any tough times together as a family, just like you enjoy the good times together as a family.

## AFFCF: Helping Children in Foster Care and Their Families

Arizona Friends of Foster Care Foundation (AFFCF) helps children in foster care pay for things they may otherwise not be able to afford.

In December alone, AFFCF granted a total of 429 awards. The largest number of awards gave Arizona's children in foster care bicycles. Other awards assisted with fees associated with sports, including sporting equipment purchases, team registrations, and gymnastics, swim, karate, and dance lessons.

AFFCF also assisted children and families by awarding

grants for tutoring and music lessons in addition to tickets to theme parks.

Five of these awards were given to youth in the Young Adult Program who were setting up their first apartments. In addition, their *Keys to Success* program empowers youth aging out of foster care to become thriving, self-sufficient adults. In 2017, *Keys to Success* plans to serve more than 100 youth with career development and employment services.

For more information on the work of AFFCF, visit <http://www.affcf.org>.

### Ask Dr. Park

## What Is a Dental Home and Why Is It Important?

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) defines a dental home as "a place for infants, children, adolescents, and persons with special health care needs to be seen for their dental care." However, the dental home is so much more.

It begins a relationship between the patient, parents, and dentists. This relationship allows everyone to interact. Having a dental home also helps families develop a better understanding of all issues impacting a child's oral health. The idea is similar to the medical home, with well care checkups and prevention.

A child's first visit to a dentist should take place between 6 and 12 months of age. This early visit allows a dentist to evaluate a child's risk for developing a cavity. They can then make suggestions for home care and preventive care. This will help reduce a child's risk of decay.

A child who has a dental home is more likely to receive proper oral health care. Identifying a child who is at risk early for cavities, may help to stop a cavity or prevent the

need for stainless steel crowns.

Dental decay is the most common chronic disease in children in the United States. It is about five times as common as asthma. It is seven times as common as hay fever. However, it is preventable.

Children will lose more than 51 million school hours each year to dental-related illness. This has a direct impact on the child's schoolwork.

In addition, it affects the parent who must take time out of their routine to bring the child to the dentist. This can cause them to lose time from work.

It's important to start early and keep up regular dental care. This can make dental visits a more pleasant and less stressful experience for both the child and parent.

— Sara Park, M.D., is the Chief Medical Officer of the Arizona Comprehensive Medical & Dental Program.

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# Helping Substance-Exposed Children

The opioid, heroin, and methamphetamine epidemic has swept through our nation, and has not excluded Arizona. While the impact across the state has been huge, the impact on children is even greater.

Children who come into out-of-home care from homes where substance abuse existed may have experienced neglect or chaotic home environments. Perhaps they had little predictability from day to day.

In some cases, a child may have been living in a home where drugs were not only used, but also manufactured. Children exposed to these chemical filled environments may also be at higher risk of medical issues.

All of this can seem and feel very overwhelming — for the child and for you, as a caregiver. If you are caring for a child who has been exposed to substances, either in the womb or in a home environment, there are things you can do to help the child in your care:

- Provide a stable, predictable

environment. Children tend to feel safer when they know what to expect day to day.

- Seek medical advice. Due to the possibility of developmental and medical issues, seek clarification and guidance from a trained professional, preferably one who has specific experience with the effects of substances on children.

- Provide a soothing, calm environment for infants and babies. They may be sensitive to sounds and light; calm sounds and low light may help to soothe them.

- Talk with older children about their experiences, their feelings and the risks of substance use and dangers of substance abuse.

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this epidemic. The scope of the problem is wide and complex. What we can do, however, is help keep children in out-of-home care safe and cared for. Seeking information and support can be vital for a caregiver, as well as for the child(ren) in your care.

## Supporting Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care

Children in foster care have faced many life challenges. Perhaps none is as daunting as the challenge of transitioning to independent living. But foster parents can help ease the transition. From the time a child comes into your home, begin teaching children how to care for themselves, specifically:

- Household tasks, including cleaning, cooking, caring for their clothes and shopping
- Regular house and car maintenance.
- Money management and banking.
- Navigating the world of dental, medical and mental health care.
- The importance of education and what is needed for different kinds of work. Talk

about college placement tests; encourage them to go to technical college and four-year college fairs to learn about careers. Talk about your own work.

It is also vitally important for foster parents to help youth maintain a life book with legal, birth and family history facts, dates, and information.

Few adults turned 18 and negotiated adulthood alone without much trial and many errors — and most do not have the added hurdles that our youth in care have had. Be available. Help the youth identify adults whom they can trust and help them maintain those relationships.

## The Importance of Documentation

As foster parents we are an important part of the team and can assist the DCS Specialists with whom we work by simply keeping track of key details. For example, I keep all appointments in my calendar, which can be very helpful in documenting parent visits. If a parent visit is ever cancelled, I make a note of it and send an email to the team.



## A Bright Future for Your Child

In the email I keep my communication brief and to-the-point. I also include back up documentation. Recently, within moments after sending my email, I received a very sincere thank you. By helping DCS keep track of things like this, I was able to demonstrate that DCS had been making reasonable efforts with services but that the family chose not to participate at various times.

Family reunification is always our first goal. While working towards that goal, it is important to ensure that our children are as healthy as they can be, physically, emotionally and mentally. As caregivers, we are not only a part of the DCS team, but we are also a team with other caregivers.

By reaching out to one another for support, we can utilize a network that can greatly

benefit our children. Of course we all know not to share confidential information pertaining to a child or their family, but hopefully we are sharing our experiences. It is important that we don't feel alone in this. There are families within your community that are either foster parents or know of others who are. When we share with one another, not only do we learn and grow, but so do our kids, and sometimes, we may even save a child from a disruption.

When my child's parent visits recently resumed, he was old enough now to realize that he was leaving a comfortable environment to go away with a stranger. You may have experienced this and have seen the effect on your child. A fellow foster parent shared this link for a behavioral service available for our children that are under the age of five: Good Fit Center (<http://bit.ly/2lxFFRS>). Another helpful website is <http://azfamilyresources.org/resources.html>.

We are all on this journey together; there is no reason to go it alone. Please reach out to other foster parents and help one another advocate for our children in care. By sharing your wisdom, you might help keep a child in their placement and avoid disruption.

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

### 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.

### It's Not Too Late For a Flu Shot!

Young children, older people and people with certain health conditions are a high risk for serious complications from the flu. Most healthy people will recover from the flu in about a week or two. However, if a child has more severe symptoms — refusing to eat or drink, is getting dehydrated, is in pain or is having difficulty breathing — take your child in to see the doctor immediately. Everyone should get the flu vaccine each year to update their protection against influenza. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that an influenza vaccine be given yearly to all children starting at 6 months of age.



# Volunteers Needed for Children’s Heart Gallery Photo Shoots

The children featured as Shining Stars in this newsletter are all part of the Children’s Heart Gallery. This gallery featuring Arizona Children was launched in 2012.



Foster and adoptive parents who have a current finger-print clearance card are invited to volunteer at Children’s Heart Gallery photo shoots. There are typically four to six photo shoots held throughout the year. They are typically held on Saturdays, and

in the past have been in Phoenix, Tucson and Prescott.

Foster parents are eligible to receive two hours of training credit that can be used for their required license renewal hours. Because the focus of the day is on children in need of forever families, this is an event for adults only. The only children in attendance are those who are being photographed.

For more information please visit <http://www.childrensheartgallery.org/about/volunteers>. At the bottom of this page are two videos. One is the Volunteer Orientation; the other video documents a typical day.

In addition, a video about the annual Tucson photo shoot, held at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort is available at <http://www.childrensheartgallery.org/about/history>.

Volunteer forms may be submitted at <http://www.childrensheartgallery.org/content/volunteer-interest-form>.

## Boeing Builds Bikes for Kids in Foster Care

Employees from The Boeing Company’s Executive Flight Operations built 100 bikes for kids in foster care during their annual kick-off meeting in the Phoenix area on January 3rd. Pilots, mechanics and other employees had a great time assembling the bicycles for Arizona Helping Hands.

The highlight of the evening came at the conclusion of the project when bikes were presented to 15 Arizona children in foster care.

The Boeing team was greeted by beaming smiles on so many boys and girls faces – what child isn’t excited to receive the gift of a bicycle?

The remaining bikes will be used throughout the year in Arizona Helping Hands Birthday Dreams program to celebrate the special day of children in foster care. For more information on Arizona Helping Hands, visit <http://www.azhelpinghands.org/>.

## Helping Children in Care Build Trusting Relationships

Children in foster care have suffered unimaginable losses. Many have given up their parents, siblings, school friends, pets, toys and even their own beds. And every time there is a change of placement, more losses are added to the list.

Trust is defined as, “reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence,” or “confident expectation of something; hope.”

Life experiences have taught many of our children in foster care not to trust. Some of these may include: trauma, low self-esteem, unresolved grief, fear, divided loyalties between birth parents and foster parents, and lack of control and consistency.

### Building Blocks for Increasing Trust

Foster parents can model what a trusting relationship looks like to the children in their care. Children are always observing. Demonstrating healthy relationships can help them know how to begin to build them. Some ways include:

■ **Acceptance.** Foster parents who are accepting of the children as they are and who accept their birth families without negative words or condemnation go a long way in building meaningful relationships. Let your children know that you consider them to be an important part of your family.

■ **Make yourself available.** By engaging kids in meaningful conversations about feelings and expectations, you can help

them begin to feel comfortable coming to you about how they feel without fear of judgment or rejection. By simply giving your time and attention, you are showing children that you are there for them.

### ■ Stability and consistency.

When children live in a stable, consistent environment they learn what to expect from day to day. Part of being able to trust is knowing that they can be confident that you will keep them safe.

### ■ Space.

Let your relationship with the child grow at a pace that is comfortable for them. Giving your children space and not trying to force the relationship can also help them begin to trust themselves again and give them a sense of control.

### ■ Patience.

Children often test their boundaries — and your patience — and may plan (intentionally or unintentionally) to sabotage their relationship with you. They may feel that it is safer to risk their placement in your home before risking the possibility of trusting you and liking you. It’s a powerful defense mechanism, but your patience may help break through that barrier.

### ■ Celebrate the small

**accomplishments and goals!** When you manage your own expectations you set the stage for positive outcomes. Progress may not come in a huge package. Remember: You are making a positive difference in the life of the child who is entrusted in your care!

### Suicide/Crisis Hotlines by County

Arizona child suicides increased from 38 in 2014 to 47 in 2015 and accounted for six percent of all child deaths. Here are the suicide/ crisis hotline numbers by County:

**Maricopa County** served by Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care: 1-800-631-1314 or 602-222-9444

**Cochise, Graham, Greenlee, La Paz, Pima, Pinal, Santa Cruz and Yuma Counties** served by Cenpatco Integrated Care: 1-866-495-6735

**Apache, Coconino, Gila, Mohave, Navajo and Yavapai Counties** served by Health Choice Integrated Care: 1-877-756-4090

**Gila River and Ak-Chin Indian Communities** served by EMPACT: 1-800-259-3449

## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Ashley H.

Ashley's confident, bold, and humorous demeanor brings fun with her wherever she goes. Sports are important to her; she enjoys playing soccer, basketball and football.

Indoors, Ashley enjoys hanging out with her friends, listening to music and watching thriller and action films on Netflix. All these suspenseful flicks have encouraged her to consider joining the FBI after she graduates from college; she's thinking of attending Southern New Hampshire University. Or she might consider studying medicine at Harvard to become a surgeon. Either way, she has some big goals and a cheerful countenance to help her reach them.

Ashley is was born in 2002.



★ *Shining Star* ★

# Arizona Statewide

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## Meet This Month's Shining Stars: Emily



Emily has a sweet spirit that exudes kindness towards everyone. She is proud of helping others and recalls helping out a child in school recently who was lost. Emily not only helped this child but also walked her to her classroom!

Emily loves going to school and her favorite subject is history. She enjoys learning about different important people and their roles throughout history. She hopes to get better at math.

Emily also plays the piano in her school band and performed two songs at her last school performance. When asked who her favorite musical artist was she excitedly proclaimed, "the Bee Gees!"

Emily aspires to be a fashion designer when she grows up because she can "make cute outfits for people." Her biggest wish is to travel to London and be Queen Elizabeth's stylist. Emily was born in 2001.

★ *Shining Star* ★