

# Arizona Statewide

News for Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Families Across Arizona

## Meet This Month's Shining Stars:

### Cami and Zoe

Even though Cami and Zoe are sisters, their personalities are very different. Outdoors, both girls enjoy playing on the slide and swings. But if you ask Cami what Zoe's favorite thing is, she doesn't hesitate to say that Zoe enjoys poking her sister!

Big sister Cami is the more outgoing of the two. She enjoys watching *SpongeBob* and *Paw Patrol* on TV. She says she's a good friend because she is nice to people. When it comes to food, Cami like Spaghetios, chili hot dogs, fruit and even broccoli. But she does not care for pepperoni.

Despite her age, younger sister Zoe is a bit of an old soul. She likes to paint flowers and enjoys eating pepperoni pizza, bananas and oranges.

These sisters are clearly bonded to one another and look forward to growing up together!

Cami was born in 2008 and Zoe was born in 2010.



## ★★ Shining Stars ★★

## 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 he 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 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.



Fall 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).

## Foster Families and DCS Staff Join to Fight World Hunger

Over 400 foster parents and children joined Department of Child Safety staff on Saturday, August 12, to fill roughly 39,000 meal packs to send to starving children across the world.

Feed My Starving Children (FMSC), the Phoenix Mercury and DCS partnered to hold the first Scoops and Hoops event where foster families volunteered to hand-pack meals at Talking Stick Resort Arena. The 39,000 meals packed will feed 185 kids for one year.

"FMSC's mission is to feed God's starving children (who are) hungry in body and spirit. This event was a perfect example of fulfilling that mission," said Janine Skinner, Feed My Starving Children's development advisor.

"While the meals we packed will feed starving children around the world, we were also able to feed the spirits of so many wonderful foster families and the DCS staff that supports them. It was an incredible experience to have them join us and to watch the power of kids feeding kids. I hope every child who joined us understands

what a huge impact they made at our event."

As part of the event, foster families received a free dinner, tickets to the Phoenix Mercury game, and the satisfaction that they contributed to combating malnutrition across the world.

Arizona Helping Hands also generously donated 300 backpacks stuffed with school supplies so the kids who attended the event could get back-to-school ready while volunteering their time to help others.



## DCS Management Pitches In At Arizona Helping Hands

Arizona's largest foster care support and resource center, Arizona Helping Hands (AHH), and the Department of Child Safety

teamed up on August 16 to make birthday packages for kids in foster care.

"Today is a joyful day," said Dan Shufelt, president and CEO of Arizona

Helping Hands, Inc. "We've got people here today packaging up birthday presents for us for kids in foster care."

It all starts with requests that AHH

receives from foster families across Arizona. Volunteers select the birthday gifts, then wrap the gifts and build the birthday package.

All of the items in the birthday kit are new. "The bikes are all brand new," Shufelt said, adding, "We give helmets out with every one of them."

Arizona Helping Hands provides birthday gifts for kids from 1 through 18. Gifts for older kids include gift cards, a rolling duffle bag and a book about the things you can see throughout the world. "It's a message of hope and positivity for kids who have had such a tough time," Shufelt stated.

More donations are needed, especially items for kids ages 8 to 12. "Things like craft sets, Legos, and sports equipment are great to help celebrate that group," Shufelt concluded.

For more information, visit <http://azhelpinghands.org>.



## DCS Receives Technical Assistance from Harvard

The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) has selected DCS for its Technical Assistance (TA) program. As a result, Harvard sent Glynis Startz, a government innovation fellow to work with DCS on developing a strategy to deliver critical services to children and families.

The overall goal is to achieve faster permanency times for children and reduce the likelihood maltreatment will reoccur.

In addition to the fellowship, DCS will also receive direct support from other GPL staff including research assistants, data analysts, senior technical advisors, and GPL Director Jeffrey Liebman.

GPL's assistance will further advance the Department's on-going improvement efforts to better serve Arizona families.

Since 2011, the GPL has provided pro bono government-side technical assistance to 40 jurisdictions in 24 states to address social problems including homelessness, prisoner re-entry, juvenile justice, and substance abuse.

The GPL received 27 applications for technical assistance in a national competition.

DCS and six other jurisdictions were selected to receive technical assistance to improve government agency operations in order to improve their core human services spending.

# Time Out for Parents

Perhaps you know the feeling: You're already five minutes past your "this is the absolute latest time we can leave" rule and your child is on the ground, refusing to get in the car. Meanwhile, you're feeling the flush of anger.

Anger is a normal, healthy emotion that may be triggered when parenting a child who has experienced trauma. Remember, children who have experienced trauma have intense feelings such as fear, stress, or helplessness — resulting in emotional dysregulation.

Rather than responding from an emotionally dysregulated place ourselves — yelling, clenching our fists, pounding the table — try some of the following tips and suggestions:

- **Hit the "Pause" Button.** When anger begins getting a grip on you, act early. Do something that is the very opposite of anger — relax. One way to begin relaxing quickly is through deep breathing. Take a slow, deep breath from your belly, not from your chest. Exhale and repeat.
- **Use Rhythm to Calm the Brain.** As you begin deep breathing, repeat a word or phrase to yourself, such as "Take it easy" or "This will pass." Repeating the word is a form of rhythm, and doing something rhythmic helps our brains relax. Turning on some music could have the same effect.

- **Take a Timeout.** Instead of giving your child a timeout, take one yourself. Of course, it's always easier if there's another adult who can take over while you take a break. If that's not possible, however, you might step into the next room, or go outside — even if it's just your porch or patio. The exact location doesn't matter as much as just finding a place where you can begin to feel calmer.
- **Use "I" Statements.** Using I statements and connecting them to your feelings can help you avoid placing blame. Say, "I am upset you broke your eyeglasses," instead of, "You always break everything." This will also model for your child how they can identify their own emotions.
- **Engage Your Wit.** Turning a tense moment into laughter can ease tension and provide relief. It may also help everyone lighten up.
- **Recognize the Feedback Loop.** You might notice your reaction is matched by your child. When you model healthy behavior you reinforce your own efforts to emotionally regulate.
- **Practice.** As with any skill, practice is the key. Start by choosing one or two strategies that you will try to use consistently. And be patient with yourself — parenting is tough! Your confidence with grow as you practice.

# Getting and Keeping the Lead Out

National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week is coming up October 22-28, 2017. The Centers for Disease Control reported that in 2015, Arizona had 526 children with elevated blood lead levels. Children and adults who are lead poisoned usually look and feel healthy, but may experience life-long consequences.

Lead poisoning is a condition caused by swallowing or breathing lead. Even a small amount of lead can harm children's intelligence, hearing, and growth. Very high blood lead levels can cause serious brain damage, convulsions, coma and even death.

- Some common sources of lead in Arizona include:
- Homes built before 1978 with flaking paint.
  - Imported candy or spices, such as turmeric, coriander, thyme, hanuman, and sindoor.
  - Imported glazed pottery and cookware, as well as certain toys.

- Home remedies such as greta or azarcon (traditional medicines taken for an upset stomach, constipation, diarrhea, and vomiting).
  - Jobs or hobbies that involve exposure to lead (such as mining, auto repairs, construction, plumbing, shooting, hunting or fishing).
- Lead poisoning is a completely preventable disease; it can be prevented, reduced and eliminated with proper nutrition. Serve your family foods that are high in:
- Iron (eggs, lentils, dal, spinach and red meat)
  - Vitamin C (citrus, tomatoes, green peppers)
  - Calcium (milk, yogurt, green vegetables)
- For more information, including high-risk Arizona ZIP codes, visit <http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/childhood-lead/lead-screening-guide.pdf>.

# Preventing Childhood Obesity

Children who are overweight are at risk for health problems which may include diabetes, asthma, and heart disease. The number of children diagnosed with diabetes has increased. This condition can be life-threatening.

A child with extra weight may have problems breathing which could lead to asthma. Obesity can cause the heart to work harder. Children who are obese may grow to be obese adults and develop heart problems.

There are many reasons children reach unhealthy weights. Children who spend time watching television are not as active and may be influenced by ads promoting unhealthy food choices. Larger portion sizes mean that children are eating extra calories. Sugary drinks add unhealthy calories. Access to good food choices may be limited in some neighborhoods.

You can make a difference by committing to a healthier lifestyle.

- Turn off the television and put away the phones.
  - Enjoy more physical activities such as bike riding, hiking, outdoor sports, and walking the dog.
  - Spend quality time together. Involve children in shopping for food and allow them to make healthy choices.
  - Try to eat a meal together (such as dinner) once a day and let children help with the meal if possible. Make mealtime family time.
  - Keep plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain products on hand. Low fat or non-fat dairy foods as well as lean meats, fish, poultry, and beans are also good choices.
  - Skip the empty calories of sugary drinks and choose water instead. Limit the amount of fruit juices offered because they often contain added sugar.
- For more ideas visit [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov). Remember, when you encourage healthy eating habits, small changes can make a big difference.

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# Children’s Heart Gallery Volunteers Needed

Foster and adoptive parents are needed to assist at Children’s Heart Gallery (CHG) photo shoots. The shoots are held periodically on Saturdays, in Phoenix, Tucson or Prescott.

Parents serve as guides for the children, making sure they have an opportunity to visit the hair stylist before getting their photos taken as well as playing games and doing crafts and having lunch with the children.

All children featured in the CHG are free for adoption with no identified placement. They are also featured as Shining Stars in this newsletter.

“We love having our foster and adoptive parents assist with photo shoots,” said Janine Ramirez, DCS staff lead for the CHG. “They are so knowledgeable about our kids, and have a better understanding of what their needs are.”

Another great reason for foster and

adoptive families to volunteer is that they get to meet children in a less formal setting. Licensed foster parents also receive 2 hours of training credit counted toward license renewal.

If you would like to volunteer, please email Janine Ramirez at [Janine.Ramirez@azdcs.gov](mailto:Janine.Ramirez@azdcs.gov).

Pictured Right: Calvin, the DCS therapy dog, visited a recent CHG photo shoot, bringing joy to all..



## After Visitation Tips

Having family visiting is so important for maintaining relationships. But at the same time, coming home from these visits can take a toll on your child and your family.

Be aware that your foster child may experience significant mood swings after visitations. These mood swings may be those of joy to sorrow, hopefulness to disappointment, or anticipation to frustration. Be understanding of these emotions, and offer

compassion as well as patience.

Following visitation your foster child may have many questions. Try to be as open and honest as possible when answering them. Listen to their hopes and worries with a compassionate ear and do not speak negatively of their family.

If they share any concerning comments, discussions or activities from the visitation, report these to the DCS Specialist.

## Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) Support Kids in Foster Care

In 2006 I became a foster parent and in 2011 I became an adoptive parent. For a short while I felt the need to step down from fostering, but I was afraid to step away from advocating for our children. This is when I decided to apply to be a volunteer CASA.

Being a CASA is such a great gift for our kids! CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates. CASA volunteers are everyday people appointed by a judge to speak up for abused and neglected children in court.

### A Bright Future for Your Child

A CASA, first and foremost, is an advocate for what is in the best interest of a child. The child’s CASA reports to the judge after gathering information.

A CASA’s voice is heard in the courtroom. Their words are powerful and they do make a difference in the life of each child. When a foster parent has extra time, is taking a sabbatical, or has closed their license for one reason or another, being a CASA helps you to stay connected to helping our children.

I used to say that the biggest difference between being a CASA and a foster parent was that at the end of the day I wasn’t able to spend that quality time with my child. However, as a CASA I have access to most of the same documents that the DCS Specialist does. I attend CFT’s, observe parenting time, sit by the GAL in court, and spend time with my child twice a month.

DCS Specialists work with a minimum of 25 children on their caseloads. As a CASA we work with one child at a minimum.

Heavy caseloads create a similar situation for an attorney serving as *guardian ad litem* (GAL). This ability to focus on just one or two children makes a CASA’s input so very valuable.

It is no easy job to capture all the necessary details in a child’s case, but as a CASA, you not only communicate what you have learned to the GAL but also the child’s DCS Specialist. Being a CASA helped me gain a deeper appreciation for everyone’s role in a child’s life.

One of the things I like to do in the beginning of a case is to create an email chain with the GAL and DCS Specialist. This is a great way to keep everyone on the same page and steadily move towards permanency.

The CASA Program has been in Arizona since 1985, empowering everyday citizens to get involved by lending their voice to a child in foster care. As one volunteer said: Be the glue that connects the pieces in a complicated child welfare system.

There are 15 county CASA programs administered by the CASA of Arizona office, which is a program of the Dependent Children’s Services Division of the Arizona Supreme Court Administrative Office of the Courts. For more information on the program, visit <http://www.azcourts.gov/CASA>.

— 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 Flu Shot Time!

The flu can be very dangerous for children and cases have already been reported in Arizona. You have the power to protect your child and your family from flu this season by getting vaccinated and making sure everyone in your family 6 months and older gets their yearly flu vaccine too. It is recommended that people get vaccinated by the end of October, if possible. If your child does get the flu and has severe symptoms — refusing to eat or drink, is getting dehydrated, is in pain or is having difficulty breathing — seek medical care immediately.

**Kinship Contacts**  
Ursula Garza, Statewide  
Kinship Specialist  
602-255-2628 or [Ursula.Garza1@AZDCS.GOV](mailto:Ursula.Garza1@AZDCS.GOV).

Arizona Grandparent  
Ambassabor contacts  
**Northern Arizona GA**  
[info@azga.org](mailto:info@azga.org)  
**Central Arizona GA** (602)  
465-0762  
[centralazga@gmail.com](mailto:centralazga@gmail.com)

**Southern Arizona GA**  
(520) 722-5945  
[ldjas@msn.com](mailto:ldjas@msn.com)

**September is Suicide Prevention Month**  
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 Cenpatico 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

# Adopting a Teen?

Older youth who are adopted from foster care are more likely to finish high school, go to college, and be more emotionally secure than their peers who remain in or age out of foster care without a permanent family. Youth never outgrow needing a family; everyone needs a sense of belonging.

Some may be concerned about the expense of adopting a teen when it comes to the costs of college or technical school. However, children and youth who were adopted from foster care at age 13 or older are considered to be an independent student on the Free Application

for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, which means they don't have to count family income and are more likely to qualify for financial aid.

There may be additional supports that assist foster youth in setting and meeting educational and life skills goals and outcomes. Youth who were adopted from the Arizona foster care system at age 16 or older may be able to access Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program assistance, which provides up to \$5,000 per year (based on need) for youth who are in college or at an accredited vocational or technical training program.

## Honoring Your Child's Heritage as You Adopt

Fall is in the air and, for many families, so are preparations for Adoption Day. It is a time for celebration — but it can also be bittersweet.

Underneath the feelings of joy and relief and celebration, comes the recognition that another family is experiencing a time of loss. As your family bonds are being tightly tied, the legal relationship between your child and their birth family is being disconnected. Here are some ideas to celebrate adoption while honoring your child's past.

Ask your child for ideas of what they would like to do for their special day. Maybe a visit to a favorite restaurant following the court hearing, or a small party at home with immediate family members and a special entree or dessert.

If your child remembers a special or favorite food shared with birth parents or other family members, consider including that item in your celebration as a special way to honor

the child's birth family.

Perhaps a family outing to see a movie, visit a favorite park, or go bowling is in order. Every child and family is unique, so look for your own creative ways to make it meaningful and memorable for your family.

You may also want to honor your child's birth family after adoption day by including some photos of birth family members in your child's room. And don't forget about adding photos to your child's life book.

Some families put together a memory box for their children to keep their special items safe. Your child could continue to add items to their box as they grow.

Regardless of how you celebrate, adoption day is certainly a special day. But don't be caught off guard if you and your child both feel some conflicting emotions as you recognize this milestone and move forward together.

## Supporting Children for Success in School

For many children, school is a place of learning and laughter; a place to make friends and form relationships. But for children in foster care it can be a very difficult place. The effects of their trauma can lead to academic failure and behavior problems.

For your foster child to have a chance to succeed, you must lead the charge and blaze a path as an advocate. To do so, you need to become as involved as possible. The more active foster parents are in school and activities, the more likely children will succeed. Here are just a few things you can do to help your child from foster care succeed in school.

Reach out to school employees and form a positive working relationship with them. Let school counselors, teachers and administrators know that they can always call or email you if needed. Also obtain contact information from your child's teachers. Attempt to remain in regular contact with them. Use all forms and means of communication. Through text messages, email, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, there are numerous ways to reach out to teachers and school employees. It is essential that you remain up to date with your child's progress, both with academics and behavior.

Remember that communication is a two-way street. It is important for you, as the foster parent, to provide information to the school as well. If your foster child is having a particularly difficult time at home, let the

teachers and counselors know. This allows these educators to be prepared and equipped to handle any difficulties that might come their way.

Find out where the child's learning ability and level of knowledge is, and work with them at this level. Talk to your child's teachers about their abilities and if any accommodations need to be made. Encourage your child to set goals and expectations, and remember to celebrate every success, no matter how big or small they may be.

Encourage your child to participate in activities outside of the classroom. Many schools have extracurricular organizations and activities with various school sports, music, and clubs. Along with this, community sports and organizations also allow kids the opportunity to not only participate and develop these skills, but to learn new skills, develop talents and to exercise.

Remember: School may be the last place your foster child wants to be. He wants to go back home, to his family, and is simply trying to survive each day. Foster children often have a difficult time exhibiting proper school behavior during the school day, perhaps because it is a constant reminder that they are, indeed, foster children.

— Dr. John DeGarmo has been a foster parent for more than 14 years; he is the author of *The Foster Parenting Manual*. He can be reached at [drjohndegarmo@gmail.com](mailto:drjohndegarmo@gmail.com) or at his website <http://drjohndegarmofostercare.weebly.com>.



## Meet This Month's Shining Star: Anastasia

Anastasia, is fun and creative! She loves art, drawing, and church. Anastasia's future plans are to go to college and then fulfill her dream of becoming an actress and child advocate.

With an outgoing personality and a good sense of humor, Anastasia enjoys a good conversation, and is fun to be around. She likes having a consistent daily routine, a lot of attention and she looks forward to the opportunity for fun new experiences.

Anastasia would like her forever family to know that she likes music, art, playing on her tablet, and going to church. She would also like her forever family to know that she is very close to her sister and maintaining a connection with her family is very important to her.

Anastasia was born in 2002.



★ *Shining Star* ★

# Arizona Statewide

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## Meet This Month's Shining Stars: James



★ *Shining Stars* ★

James is a fun loving young man, who enjoys meeting new people. Those who know James best describe him as helpful, thoughtful, active, well-mannered, and talkative.

James has a love for animals and especially dogs of any kind. James has participated on his high school swim team and shares that he enjoys being in the water any chance he gets. Anyone who meets James will quickly learn about his enthusiasm for Pokémon as well his heart for music.

James states that he wants to be part of a family who is active and will encourage him to do fun things. James also shares that he wants a family who will believe in him and allow him to dream big.

Some dreams that James has for his future include going to college, becoming a 3-D graphic games designer, traveling the world, and maybe even becoming a Navy Seal.

A family who will give the time and structure for James to grow in his Christian faith through participating in church and youth group is also a high value.

James was born in 2001.