

Arizona Statewide

News for Foster, Kinship and Adoptive Families Across Arizona

Meet This Month's Shining Stars:

Savannah and Juan

Savannah and Juan are incredibly close siblings and, as such, they both enjoy sports, art and Mexican food.

Savannah enjoys creating a variety of different art projects, but drawing is her favorite. She is particularly proud of a drawing she did of a flower. Juan enjoys drawing too, but prefers painting.

Savannah is a rollerblading extraordinaire; she's excited she will soon begin rollerblading in her P.E. class. When Savannah grows up, she dreams of being a professional artist with her own gallery. Savannah's best subject is Math, because she enjoys addition.

Juan enjoys both playing and watching baseball. His favorite team is the LA Dodgers and he's even attended a few games! Juan thinks the best part of going to a baseball game is watching the batter's swing and hit the ball.

Juan's best subject in school is P.E. because he can "run around and play games." "When he grows up, he hopes to be a fireman, so he can "save people and carry the fire hose up ladders."

When it comes to food, Savannah's favorite dish is chorizo con papas, which she says is "a little spicy." Juan likes it all, and doesn't have a favorite.

Juan was born in 2006. Savannah was born in 2003.



★★★ Shining Stars ★★★

Meet This Month's Shining Star: Valerie

Valerie is active in basketball, volleyball and cheerleading. Her favorite subject is Physical Education and Valerie's dream is to become a professional cheerleader.

She considers herself a good student, despite not being a huge fan of Math. Although Valerie is active in sports and maintaining good grades, she still finds time to play the guitar.

Like girls her age, she loves watching Teen Wolf and Vampire Diaries. When Valerie hangs out with her friends, they are either watching one of their favorite television shows or going to the movie theatre. Valerie's favorite movie is Fault in The Stars.

Valerie is a big fan of roller coasters and thrill rides. She went to Disneyland and her favorite ride was the Tower of Terror. Valerie also

enjoys the beach and hopes to visit the beaches of Hawaii one day.

Valerie was born in 1999.



Fall 2014

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A Letter from DCS Director Charles Flanagan

Dear Foster and Adoptive Parents:

You are a critical component of child welfare in Arizona and I am very grateful to you for your service. Moreover, I am humbled by the willingness you have to serve our community by taking vulnerable children into your homes, families and hearts. We are trying very hard to make lasting positive changes to child welfare through the new Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS); however, we recognize that this will be a long and work-intensive process and may take time for you to see the positive changes affect your reality. Nonetheless, please know that they are coming and that I and this agency are committed to making these changes and creating a positive legacy of which we can all be proud.

I believe that in spite of the hard work and caring hearts of many of my colleagues in the former CPS and the current DCS, we have not done an acceptable job of working with you, supporting you and helping to retain you as foster parents. I continually communicate to our employees that we can no longer treat you as a resource to be used; rather, we must treat you as valued colleagues to be supported. We must provide you the information and supports to help you successfully integrate foster children into your homes and families successfully. Please understand that our staff are still working under a crushing workload and they cannot always achieve the highest of expectations, but that is our goal and we will get there together.

To that end, I encourage you to reach out to speak with anyone you need to in our chain of command, up to and including my executive team or myself. I have implemented an "open door/open phone/open e-mail policy" without fear of retaliation or retribution. We welcome your ideas, suggestions and concerns. I believe that we must be collaborative in our efforts to create the best possible child safety system. I can now announce that we have hired a Bureau Chief for Prevention, Madge Haynes, and once she joins the team at DCS, she will be responsible for community outreach and partnerships, as well as for an Ombudsman office. I am also committed to hearing from foster and adoptive parents through an employee that has been one him/herself.

I know that we have a long way to go, but I want to give you some positive updates about the agency and our progress. I am hoping that this will serve as part of our ongoing communication and the beginning of a new partnership.

I am extremely pleased to have the opportunity to share with you the great strides that we are making to improve the Department of Child Safety. We continue to make amazing progress as a direct result of the hard work, commitment and contributions of DCS staff in fixing the problems inherited over time. I am absolutely committed to our success and continue to ask you to partner with us through this transition. With this in mind, I wanted to take a moment to highlight some of the major accomplishments we have achieved:

First: We have completed all 6,596 NI cases in record time! We have also committed to reactivating all of the 13,024 "inactive backlog" of cases that we must report on to the legislature by January before Governor Brewer leaves office. Thanks to everyone's hard work, significant progress has been made with the inactive case backlog. I can report to you that we have already closed over 3,164 of those cases and have assessed and reactivated all but approximately 52 cases; and there are only currently 111 volunteer staff working on these cases! There is a lot of work to do, but it is really possible that we could close most of these by the end of this fiscal year and be able to begin next fiscal year in July

without the albatross of past mismanagement and inadequate resources around our necks.

Second: We have taken the first steps to bring ourselves into the 21st century! We have distributed the first 192 laptops with 4G air cards to allow staff to work from the field remotely. Other than a few glitches, the feedback has been very positive. I signed the paperwork to purchase, prepare and distribute all 1,700 of these critical efficiency tools to all of our specialists, with the intent to do so as soon as possible...not spread out over the year.

Third: Under the leadership of Deputy Director Chad Campbell and Bureau Chief Brooke Essayli, the improvements we've made to our Intake Bureau are making headlines! This ABC15 Report highlights the drop in wait time and dropped calls we have been able to accomplish. From an abandoned call rate of over 32% in February 2014, this professional team of our colleagues reduced it to an astounding 4.1% in September. Additionally, we upgraded the telephony system at no cost to the agency, which is helping staff to manage the calls more efficiently and with accurate outcome data. Our colleagues at the call center also answered the calls in 60 seconds or less 76.01% of the time in September...all while handling more calls than in previous comparable months.

Fourth: A pilot program has proven successful in reducing the time to prepare all communication types (meaning more efficiency) and will now be rolled out to the entirety of the Intake staff. What this could mean for you is that the program that was developed will reduce the time that staff have to work in CHILDS. It will allow reports to be filled out in a logical format that will "auto-populate" in CHILDS. I am going to ask that we work to adapt this tool for field specialists.

Fifth: We are making great progress in working with ASU (and other universities and entities) on numerous fronts, but of particular interest is the complete overhaul of our pre- and in-service training, so that it is shorter, more effective and prepares people for the real job you do. This is essential, because it has a direct impact on solving the capacity problem. I have heard the concerns about training for foster parents, and we will work with you to overhaul that training as well at some point in the future.

Sixth: We are in the midst of working with Yale University and Casey Family Foundation to completely re-envision the role, training and preparation of supervisors. Additionally, we have hired all of the vacant and new supervisors, except for 3 that will be hired as soon as possible, so that we can begin to address the horribly high attrition (loss) rate of our employees, which is costly on so many levels. Additionally, our focus is to prepare our supervisors to train, supervise, mentor and support their employees, since the lack of these things are considered the most detrimental to the attrition rate.

Seventh: Under the hard-working and energetic leadership of Ed Richard, our HR Recruitment Manager, we are making amazing strides to hire all of the approved and funded Specialist, Case Aide and first line supervisor positions before the end of October. In fact, the latest report shows that we hired all but 76 Specialists. Of the 96 remaining Specialists to be hired, there are 87 in the final stages of hiring, which leaves us with a potential "excess" of 11 positions...and 42 interviews are pending! Also, there are only 35 remaining Case Aide positions to be filled. Clearly, hiring all of these positions this quickly is something nobody thought we could do...but we are. If they are hired and trained faster and better, this will result in us seeing a real impact on lessening the workloads of staff by January-ish!

Eighth: We are currently in the process of reviewing over 200 applications for the Department

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Contact Director Flanagan

Email your comments to Director Flanagan at DCSDirector@azdes.gov.

Keeping Babies Safe

It may sound familiar, but the only safe place to put a baby to sleep is in a crib or bassinet that is compliant with current U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standards. Even in a crib or bassinet, be mindful of excessive bedding, crib bumpers, stuffed toys or other objects that can strangle, choke or suffocate a baby. Do not place sleeping babies on adult beds, couches, bean bags, car seats or any place that is not intended for an infant. The most recent Arizona Child Fatality Report showed Arizona still had more than 70 preventable deaths per year from unsafe sleep practices.

Looking Back, Looking Forward — An Adopted Child’s Most Important Gift

When Jon Perryman and his wife Christi first considered becoming adoptive parents, they never realized just how much their lives would change. The parents of three biological children, they first attended an orientation. He recalled how they were told all sorts of things that could happen, “but we thought we knew how to beat that system,” he said, adding, “But that was not the case.”

Jon describes his adoptive son as being “so neglected that at 18 months old, he didn’t know what a hug was.” Over the years and with two adoptions — a son and later a daughter — the Perrymans learned about ADHD, Bipolar Disorder and reactive attachment disorders (RAD).

But what the Perrymans learned most of all is what it means to be completely committed to the children they adopted and how to utilize the resources available through adoption subsidy. “We’re not the kind who give up,” he stated, “This is my son.”

That determination has not gone unnoticed. “This family is one of the most committed families I have ever encountered,” says Melissa Juergensmeyer, the Perryman’s adoption subsidy case manager. “That is the most important gift an adopted child can receive; a family who is committed no matter what challenges arise.”

For the first years, the Perrymans chose to use their personal insurance instead of the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). As the children’s behaviors escalated, however, Juergensmeyer urged them to reconsider using all the resources available to them. Looking back, they wish they had utilized AHCCCS services earlier.

The Perrymans have recommendations for other parents who adopt children from the foster care system. Their recommendations include:

- Learn all you can about the behavioral health system. Start using available services early. If you wait to engage AHCCCS services, it may be more challenging to get the needed services in place.

- Be persistent. Don’t just take “NO” for an answer or

sign documents if you do not agree. Insist on the services your child needs. You need to do what’s best for your child. It’s ok to disagree with the findings of the behavioral health team.

- Document everything and copy everyone. This includes the RBHA staff, DCS and others who may be involved.

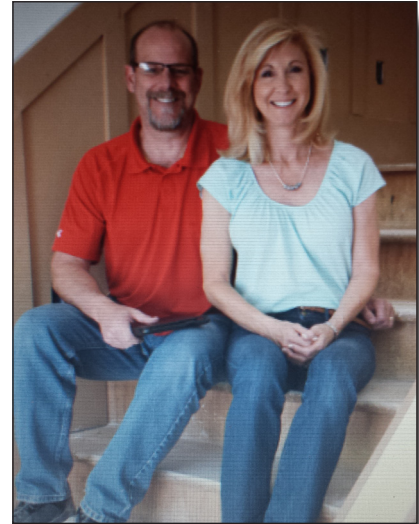
- Advocate for yourself and your child. No one else knows your family and what is best for them.

- Make your significant other a priority. You will need their support. Operate as a team.

- Remember that kids will test you in all kinds of ways to see if you will give up on them. Even children who were adopted as infants realize as they grow older that they were abandoned.

- Stay in touch with your adoption subsidy case manager. They have so much to offer, including resources and encouragement. Ask them for help!

“It’s normal to wonder from time to time if you made the right decision in adopting,” Jon added. When that happens, he recommends parents seek out support groups and mentors. “There’s really only one question to ask,” he says. “Do you love this child? If so, you will do whatever you have to for someone you love. Once you make that commitment, the decisions are easier.” That is the kind of commitment this family made and it has made all the difference.



Ask Dr. Sue

Children with Special Health Care Needs Are Especially Vulnerable to Flu

When children become ill with influenza they experience longer periods of infection and more complications than adults. Children and youth with special health care needs are at an even greater risk of exacerbated flu illness and associated complications, such as pneumonia, croup, bronchiolitis, bronchitis, sinus and ear infections and even death.

Seasonal influenza immunizations are recommended for all people, including all children and adolescents, 6 months of age and older during the 2014–2015 influenza season, especially people with chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes mellitus, immunosuppression or neurologic disorders months; pregnant and nursing mothers and those who work with vulnerable populations.

It is important that children, as well as all those

in their household, are vaccinated to prevent infection. Parents should look to their child’s health care provider for information on vaccines.

Most parents today have never seen first-hand the devastating consequences that vaccine-preventable diseases can have on a child, a family or community. Thanks to vaccines, many of these diseases are not common in the U.S., but they persist around the world. Immunizations are still the best way to protect children from 14 vaccine-preventable diseases when parents follow CDC’s recommended immunization schedule.

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

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program • Under Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI & VII), and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) of 2008; the Department prohibits discrimination in admissions, programs, services, activities, or employment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetics and retaliation. The Department must make a reasonable accommodation to allow a person with a disability to take part in a program, service or activity. For example, this means if necessary, the Department must

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DCS Receives Federal Title IV-E Waiver to Reduce Congregate Care

On September 30, 2014, the Children's Bureau, an Office of the Administration for Children and Families, approved the Department's Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Proposal. The waiver is designed to realize savings which can then be reinvested into states' child welfare systems.

The focus of the demonstration project was selected to "rightsize and redesign" the current congregate care system. All aspects of congregate care will be thoroughly analyzed and researched in an effort to examine why congregate care use has increased, its impact on children and the most promising opportunities for reducing its use. The ultimate goal is to change agency culture about when and for how long congregate care should be used.

DCS received guidance and assistance

from Arizona State University, Casey Family Programs, the Children's Bureau and Public Consulting Group.

"We believe the demonstration project will help to maintain the momentum needed to create our new child welfare agency," said DCS Director Charles Flanagan in announcing the waiver. "Transforming the congregate care system directly aligns with and will influence our broader agency transformation goals and will be another mechanism to improve outcomes for children and families."

According to Director Flanagan, this endeavor will require everyone pulling together to collectively develop the proposal. Input from youth and families, child welfare stakeholders, other community members and DCS staff is vital in the design and implementation planning process.

Foster Care Tax Credit

The Foster Care Charitable Organization Tax Credit is easy to claim, repays you for your generosity and makes a real difference in the life of a child in foster care. No need to itemize. Earn a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to \$400 for individuals and up to \$800 for those filing jointly. Give NOW or before Dec. 31st! Visit <http://bit.ly/1vb9LaW> for a list of qualifying organizations.

Kinship Information Sessions

Kinship Information Sessions are an opportunity for kinship foster caregivers to attend a meeting where experts talk about things of interest such as court, DCS policies affecting kinship foster caregivers, financial resources and more.

Sessions are held at least once a month in various locations throughout the Phoenix area and at one single location in Tucson. Child

care is offered to all children except those in diapers.

Sessions are offered in the mornings and also in the evenings, in addition to a few on Saturdays and in Spanish.

For more information call a Kinship Navigator at (480) 748-9269. Many who have attended said they wish they had attended sooner; the information was so valuable.

Are You Speaking for the Child in Your Care?

A great way to bring your voice to the Judge is through the FCRB (Foster Care Review Board). As a foster parent, I personally found this to be priceless! Over the last eight years I never walked away from a review without validation; in fact I felt quite confident with the status of the case. The board consists mainly of volunteers and one paid staff who have reviewed the documents pertaining to the case. It is their job to interview parties to the case that come to the FCRB and then report directly back to the judge with their findings.



A Bright Future for Your Child

As a foster parent, every six months you have the opportunity to share how the child in your care is doing, as well as hear an update on how the biological parents are doing. Your review appointment will likely be just prior to a scheduled Report and Review (court hearing). I usually make my reports to the FCRB in person, but I tend to prepare a one page report that I can read while I am there. This is helpful because:

- I won't forget any important details.
- It can be attached to the board's final report so all parties have important information about the child's well being.
- It is good history for you to have for your own reference, as well as for your child in the future.
- For the next FCRB, you can pick up where you left off.
- If you planned on attending and at the last minute you are unable to, you can email

(rpfferb@courts.az.gov) your report to the board as long as they receive it before the end of their day (varies from approximately 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.)

In order to give a balanced report this is a format that seems to have worked well for me.

- Child's physical and mental state when they arrived in my home;
- Currently how the child is doing; and
- Things that I am working on with the child.

If you have additional information regarding the progress of the case plan, you can share this too. However, you can also provide your information through a Participation Form that can be found under the Adult Participation portion of the FCRB website on <http://bit.ly/1oX5r2E>. At a minimum you will want to provide information pertinent to the child's needs (medical, dental, therapeutic, educational); progress towards the permanency plan; barriers; concerns; and etc. Also include if there are any services you or the child in your care need.

Because this time only comes twice a year, and the information taken at the FCRB is brought to the judge, it is very important you don't miss your date. When you initially receive a child in your care contact the FCRB (602-452-3400) to see if there is a date scheduled as of yet. This forum is the only one that I know of in the DCS organization that will deliver their findings to all participants before you leave the room.

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

CMDP Website

The Comprehensive Medical and Dental Program (CMDP) website has a wealth of health care information. The site has past editions of CMDP newsletters for members and health care providers. It also has a list of health care providers and a list of preferred medications. Check it out at

www.azdes.gov/cmdp.

November is National Adoption Month

The next issue of the *Arizona Statewide* will be our annual adoption issue! It will feature details about the adoption celebrations held across Arizona and highlight Arizona children who are still seeking their forever families.

H.R. 4980 Becomes Law

On September 29, 2014, President Obama signed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. This legislation:

- Requires states to better track children at risk of being victims of sex trafficking (including children who run away from foster care) and report any children who are victims of trafficking;
- Requires states to develop a process by which foster parents and other caregivers have permission to grant children and youth in care the opportunity to participate in the normal activities of childhood;
- Limits the use of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) for children under 16;
- Provides children 14 and up the

opportunity to participate in their case planning process;

- Funds Family Connections Grants for one more year;
- Renews and enhances the Adoption Incentive program, creating a guardianship incentive and, over time, transitioning to an incentive system based on the rate of adoptions, rather than a baseline number; and
- Requires states to spend 30% of the funds they save as a result of the Fostering Connections Act's expansion of federal adoption assistance eligibility on post-adoption, post-guardianship, and other family support services.

Learn more at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr4980#summary>.

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.

Obituary: Ronald Clanton

Long-time foster parent and child advocate Ronald L. Clanton passed away on August 3, 2014 at the age of 60. Clanton advocated for and helped write the Foster Parents Bill of Rights, which he personally witnessed being signed into law.

Adopted as a child himself, he was a director of the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents organization.

He also served on the National Foster Parent Association Board of Directors as a regional vice-president and was active in O.C. J. Kids, a ministry for youth in foster care.

Clanton is survived by his wife, Eva, three biological sons, two adopted children, four grandchildren, a sister, many half- brothers and sisters and countless children in foster care he and Eva cared for.

Free Educational Programs for Youth in Foster Care

Arizonans for Children, located in Maricopa County, is offering educational programs to all youths in foster care. These programs are completely free. All programs are taught by dedicated, background checked and trained volunteers.

Tutor/Mentor Program — an adult mentor/tutor is assigned to work with a child in foster care for a minimum of 2 hours per week for one year to help improve educational and emotional outcomes.

Justice League Program — a legal education program teaching youths in foster care, ages 12 to 18, about their rights and responsibilities under law in the state of Arizona. Speakers include Juvenile Judges, Lawyers, DCS Young Adult Division staff and other motivational speakers who help encourage youths to make smart choices in preparing to age out of foster care.

Financial Literacy, Aging Out Program — partnering with Take Charge America; they have developed an Aging Out Program with emphasis on learning life skills to successfully age out of foster care. These are practical, interesting and innovative classes.

Dance Program — partnering with Ballet

Arizona, Boys & Girls Clubs and ASU Sun Devils Stadium; they provide weekly dance classes for youth in foster care, including classes in Jazz, Modern, Ballet, Hip Hop, Salsa, Meringue, Bachata and break dancing.

Cooking Program, Sewing & Craft Classes — they offer weekly cooking, craft and sewing classes at valley-wide locations. Students will learn techniques in food preparation, safety and nutrition, hand and machine sewing as well as how to make creative and low cost craft projects.

Arizonans for Children is a 501(c)3 organization that has been working to improve the lives of children in foster care since 2002. They offer free programs and events for all youth in foster care and are pleased to facilitate visits at one of their three children's visitation centers in Peoria, Mesa or Central Phoenix. They also offer free tickets to events for foster families, monthly birthday parties, annual holiday party and a Spring Festival for foster families and children at Encanto Park.

For more information or to complete an application for the child in your care, please contact Annie Ansell 602-252-2270 or az4children.annie@gmail.com.

Save the Date!

The 2015 Foster Carnival will be held at Encanto Park's Enchanted Island in Phoenix on Saturday, March 7, 2015, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is free for children in foster care and their families. It will include food, drinks and educational events, in addition to amusement park rides. Major sponsors of the event are Grace Walk Community Church, the owners of Enchanted Island Amusement Park and Arizonans for Children.

Letter from the Director, *continued from page 2*

of Child Safety Community Advisory Committee. There was a particularly strong representation of foster applicants, so thank you! The Committee will provide an opportunity for the Department and community stakeholders to collaborate so that together we accomplish our mission of protecting vulnerable children and helping struggling families. We anticipate convening the Committee in November.

The great news is that these are only some of the amazing things we are doing to fix the problems of the past, create a new agency and get resources and systems needed to be able to reach our shared goals.

In closing, I want to say how important your partnership is to the agency and especially the children of Arizona. There are so many components to the successful transition of the agency and foster care and adoption are definitely a priority. We are actively looking at opportunities to implement improvements as these areas are so very important to us. I welcome your recommendations and look forward to sharing some of our initiatives that will lead to positive improvements in the Department.

We can and will succeed in our mission because we simply must for the vulnerable children we are charged with protecting...and for each other.

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

Joseph, or "Joey," is an outgoing boy who loves all sports, especially football and basketball. He plays both sports at school and prefers tackle football to flag. Joey has a lot of energy to expend and he also enjoys to skateboard, ride his bike or do anything outdoors!

If you looked in his room, you would see posters of all his favorite sports teams, including Cardinals, Cowboys and Patriots. He particularly loves Tony Romo and believes he is the absolute best quarterback. If Joey could travel anywhere in the world, he would go to The University of Phoenix Stadium where the Arizona Cardinals play.

When Joey is not doing something sports-related, you will find him reading a Marvel comic book or one of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, playing violin or hanging out with his friends. Joey enjoys school and does well academically. He currently has a tutor to perfect his math skills. Joey's favorite holiday is St. Patrick's Day, because he loves the desserts and Leprechauns.

Joey has his mind set for his future; he would love to become a professional football player for the Cardinals one day. Joseph was born in 2003.



★ **Shining Star** ★

Arizona Statewide

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

Albert is a happy-go-lucky kid who loves playing video games and volunteering at his local church.

Albert is proud of his ability to play football. He recently joined his school football team as a linebacker and looks forward to each practice. His favorite teams are the Broncos and Titans.

Albert has a passion for U.S. history and those who serve in the military. He proudly says that his last Halloween costume was a soldier and that soldiers are awesome because they fight bad guys.

Albert likes dinosaurs and the SyFy Channel on TV. He says it would be pretty cool to have a T-Rex as a pet and if he did have a T-Rex, they would be friends. Albert adds that he would put a collar on his pet T-Rex and ride it to get around town.

Albert is affectionate with the people he is close to and would add a great deal of joy to his forever family.

Albert was born in 1999.

★ **Shining Star** ★