

## HONORING, UNITING, AND CELEBRATING FAMILIES

### GIVING YOUR FULL HEART BEFORE AND AFTER FOSTER CARE

#### A Caseworker's Story

Being a foster parent is not for the faint of heart. Foster care is about loving children who have suffered abuse and neglect, and welcoming them through your front door and into your heart. That is the philosophy of Kelly and Jim, who became certified foster parents after raising their own kids into adulthood. They are affectionately known as “Nana” and “Papa” to the little ones who enter their home. But foster care is not just about whole-heartedly caring for children, it is also, when appropriate, about creating a bridge back to the birth family. That’s what Kelly discovered when Nokomis, age 5 months, came into their home in 2007. She was the fourth child of mom, Chyanne. Kelly and Chyanne developed an organic relationship while Kelly transported Nokomis to the Department of Human Services' offices for visits with her mom. It was during drop off and pick up that Kelly started handing Chyanne weekly updates and pictures of her child and engaging in conversation with her. Chyanne received these updates with immense appreciation.



Some cautioned Kelly to put a “buffer around your heart,” seeing that she was quickly falling in love with this little girl, but Kelly said, “If I can’t give 100 percent, why am I doing this?” Kelly and Jim moved forward in loving Nokomis with all of their heart while maintaining a respectful, encouraging relationship with Chyanne.

Because Kelly went above and beyond to keep a strong bond between Nokomis and her older sister, who was placed in another foster home, she was asked to pick up Nokomis’ sister and bring her to Chyanne’s house. Kelly knew that if Chyanne could parent this child well, Nokomis would be transitioning to her soon.

Just after the 2 year mark, reunification between Nokomis and her mother was right around the corner. Kelly’s heart was full of hope for Chyanne, but after giving Nokomis her whole heart in foster care, Kelly wondered, “Will I ever see her again?”

Soon after reunification, Chyanne called Kelly and said, “My daughter misses you so much. She really needs to see you!” Kelly credits Chyanne with being a loving, selfless mother who could

recognize that her daughter needed the comfort and assurance of her foster mom in addition to her birth mom. Kelly and Jim provided respite care often for Chyanne, and the two families even enjoyed camping together until Chyanne and her family moved to California.

Nokomis still calls regularly to talk with Nana and Papa. Chyanne still calls to chat with Kelly and share the ups and downs of life. Kelly listens, shares her perspective, and encourages Chyanne. Kelly recently flew to California to surprise Nokomis for her sixth birthday and to take her to Disneyland.

Chyanne calls Kelly and Jim her angels for the way they helped her feel connected to her daughter while she was in foster care and for giving so much of themselves in the process. Their openness to engaging with her and including her set the tone for a respectful interconnectedness between both families that continues today.

Learn more about the foster care services and supports offered through and [Growing Resources and Alliances Through Collaborative Efforts \(GRACE\)](#), a Children's Bureau's Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System project.



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