

EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

COMPLETING OUR FAMILY: PREPARING FOR FOSTER PARENTING

A Resource Family's Story

My name is Deb, and my husband is Ken. We are high school sweethearts who will celebrate 30 years of marriage on our next anniversary. We have two beautiful children, Matthew and Emily, who are now adults. We have been foster parents with New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) for almost 11 years. We started our journey when my oldest two started to think they were too cool for mom. I was asked to no longer be at the bus stop on the first day of school to take pictures. My daughter no longer wanted to participate in Girl Scouts, where I had been her troop leader for 8 years. She, along with my surrogate daughters, were moving on and, as the leader to this merry band of mischief makers, I was no longer needed. The kids were no longer team members for Pop Warner football and cheerleading, so my involvement as a team mom and board member for the association was gone. I had a void. My children were growing up. How dare they! So, after a mini breakdown and a good cry, my husband and I discussed foster parenting. I had always wanted to be a foster parent after meeting a boy in high school who was adopted through foster care. My husband was a little more cautious and wanted to make sure we were doing it when it was right for our family. Well, the time had come.



We signed up for the licensing classes. Then the day arrived when we got that first phone call. Our first placement arrived in the form of a 12-month-old dynamo named Abigail. Her adoption was finalized just before her third birthday. Oh, how our lives have changed. We have faced challenges. We have seen the unthinkable and the heartbreaking, but ever present were our hearts that beat for these little beings that we are allowed to care for and love. We now have three more children that have joined the Bradley family, and we continue to foster. Is our family complete? I guess we never say yes because the next phone call is not far away.

In my passion to become a better informed caregiver and mom, I have expanded my role. I have been an active board member for the New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association for approximately 8 years and attended meetings regularly before my election to the board. I served a term as a secretary and two terms as vice president. I have been a committee member for the conference planning of our annual Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. I was recruited by DCYF to be part of two focus groups with the Court Improvement Project. I was honored with the DCYF Outstanding Leadership Award. Within DCYF, a position became available to become part of the Parent Partner Program. I was so excited to work with this team. Its innovative approach to working with parents aligned with what I was already doing with birth

parents. Working with the program allows me to connect with foster parents across our State and help facilitate an eye-opening experience, allowing them to meet birth parents in a neutral setting, where a space is created of nonjudgment. Through relationship building, foster parents are able to have change of thinking and heart. They begin a journey of change and shift their practice when working with families. They talk about the change in themselves and how they can help change the families they work with and the community we live in.

To learn more about the various family-centered services provided by the Division for Children, Youth and Families in New Hampshire, visit <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/>.



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