



RFK
COMMUNITY
ALLIANCE

BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of RFK Community Alliance, Volume XXII, Winter 2023

Crystal's Story by Desiree Ayala

In late 2021, Crystal was a 20-year-old young woman who was pregnant with her first child, a baby boy. She contacted Bright Futures looking for information on adoption and was connected with one of our adoption counselors. When asked why she was considering adoption for her baby, Crystal explained that she wanted her child to have the kind of life she wished she had. She had struggles throughout her own childhood and felt that in her current situation she couldn't provide her son with the stability, consistency and healthy environment that she knew he deserved. Furthermore, due to instability in her relationship with the father of her child, she felt that they wouldn't be able to be a strong parental unit. There was no doubt that Crystal loved her son, and that love is what motivated her to move forward in creating an adoption plan.



One of the most crucial steps in Crystal's journey was choosing an adoptive family. Crystal was provided several adoptive family profiles, and she carefully reviewed each of them. When she found L and B's profile, she says that she was instantly drawn to them. She admired that they were very family oriented, had lots of support from their extended family and shared her own values. She says that although the other families all seemed lovely, she didn't feel the "click" she felt with L and B. She felt eager to meet them and, when they learned about Crystal, L and B were also very eager to meet her.

Crystal, L and B met while Crystal was pregnant, and they seemingly did click right away. They shared many of the same interests and values, and naturally connected in a way that we often see in the matching process. As a birth parent counselor, I marvel in watching expectant parents and adoptive families meet; each person coming with their own anxieties and fears, and slowly watching that melt away once they begin to connect on all different sorts of topics, from shared pet names to obsessions over Star Wars. By the end of their first meeting, Crystal, L and B were laughing, sharing stories, and planning to meet again.

Not long after their first meeting, Crystal gave birth to a precious baby boy who they named Jackson. At Crystal's request, L and B were present at Jackson's birth and involved in caring for Jackson during his hospital stay, and all of them were able to experience the joy of his arrival and first days together. Since then, their relationship has grown stronger. Crystal describes her relationship with L and B as "inclusive". They text often about various things such as Jackson's development, his interests and activities, his clothes and what makes him laugh. Crystal receives numerous pictures of him, which she treasures. Crystal shared that whenever she is having an emotionally hard day, she will let L know, and without hesitation, L sends extra pictures and videos of Jackson to

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Thank You to All of Our Donors!
Creating and Maintaining Connections Campaign
Continues through June 30, 2023 (see below)

Amber & Randy	Ellen & Jim	Kyle & John	Shannon & Nathan
Andrea & Luke	H.Kay & Kyle	Laurie	Shari & Mimir
Brian & Matt	Hannah	Laurie & Rick	Stephanie
Bridie & Tom	James & Kelley	Lesia & De'Porres	Vicki & Peter
Britt & John	Jenn & Tony	Linda & Roger	<i>And a very special THANK YOU to JEN & DAVID and MADDIE'S MISSION for hosting an amazing event to raise money for and awareness about our Foster Care Adoption Program. We are so blessed to have you as part of the Bright Futures Family!</i>
Carole & Thomas	Jenna & Justin	Mary Rose & Michael	
Chantal & Blaine	Jennifer & Jed	Michelle & Eric	
Cheryl & Tom	Jennifer & Joe	Nancy & Kjartan	
Christina & Kyle	Karen & Charles	Patricia	
Dave & Matt	Karen & John	Robert	
David	Kathleen & Mark	Ruth	
David & Jeffrey	Kathleen & Timothy	Sara & Joe	

There is still time to help! Donations can be made at brightfuturesadoption.org, click on the 'Donate' button and choose Bright Futures from the drop down menu, or mail a check made payable to "RFK Community Alliance" to Bright Futures, 971 Main St., Lancaster, MA 01523

WELCOME TO NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

Courtney Glazier, LICSW, has been a LICSW for over 16 years. She has worked as a medical social worker at a local hospital and as a mental health counselor for a community health center. She is a mom of 3 young boys and a huge dog lover. She has always had a great interest in getting involved in the field of adoption and is so excited to join the team as an expectant/birth parent counselor.

Eliza O'Brien, LICSW, has been working with children and families involved with DCF for almost 10 years, and has been working in adoption since 2017. Eliza joined the Bright Futures team in 2022 and is completing child assessments and pre-adoptive license studies. When not working, Eliza likes to experiment in the kitchen with delicious meals for herself and her family and travel to warm places to escape the New England winters (and falls, and springs)!

Rachel Levy, LCSW, has nearly fifteen years of experience working with youth and families in inpatient, intensive outpatient, outpatient, and community-based settings. She has joined the Bright Futures team and is completing child assessments and pre-adoptive license studies. Rachel is excited to shift her clinical focus within the field to adoption services. She has two young children at home, has started painting as a new hobby, and loves being outside with family and friends.

WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Amber & Randy on the arrival of Ollie

Amber & Ryan on the arrival of Kyle & Morgan

Amy & Jason on the arrival of Julia

Cameron & Sequoyah on the arrival of Lilla

Christa & Todd on the arrival of Keyria

Dana & Paul on the arrival of Mila

Danielle & Gaurav on the arrival of Alaiya

Elizabeth & Rachel on the arrival of Zachariah

Emilie & Joey on the arrival of Dominic

Erin & Stephen on the arrival of Javon & Jermiah

Gabrielle on the arrival of Avianna

Julie & Charles on the arrival of Phoebe Grace

Kevin on the arrival of Sergio

Kimberly on the arrival of Ally

Lindsay & Brian on the arrival of Jackson

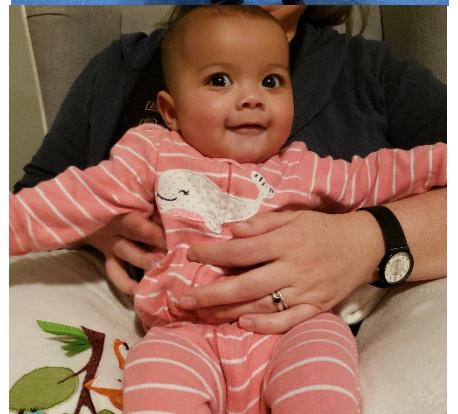
Melissa & Chris on the arrival of Brianna, Harmony, Noah & Connor

Natalia & Noah on the arrival of Violetta

Sherri-Ann on the arrival of Edenia

Tina & Arthur on the arrival of Maria

Trish & Chuck on the arrival of Cameron, Christian & Cristani



And SPECIAL CONGRATS to adoptive mom Shannon and her family on receiving the 2022 STEM TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD for Massachusetts!

A Birthmother's Search Finds an Unexpected Reunion*

By Marissa Zwelling



A year ago, Bright Futures received a phone call from Carol, a birthmother who surrendered her baby and placed him for adoption in 1964. Carol said that at 78, she was now ready and eager to find him. The timing of being “ready” is always unique to the individual, but Carol’s story is one she shares with many birthmothers of her era. Ann Fessler, author of, *The Girls Who Went Away*, speaks in her book of the myth that women who placed babies for adoption in the era of closed adoptions moved on with their lives and forgot. Fessler writes, “In truth, none of the mothers I interviewed was able to forget. Rather, they describe the surrender of their child as the most significant and defining event of their lives” (Fessler 2006). Carol’s decision to place her son for adoption was not made freely. At that time, she had just graduated from high school and was employed, but unable to be a single parent. Her father contacted the Florence Crittenton League (“FCL”), and Carol moved into a maternity home where she lived “hidden” until her son’s birth. Months after Carol’s son was placed with a family, she wrote FCL a letter to let her social worker know that she was adjusting and had returned to work.

Carol did eventually “move on” with her life. She married and had a beautiful daughter, but she never stopped thinking about her son. Carol asked Bright Futures to help her search for him in hopes that they would be reunited and begin a relationship. It was not long before records sadly revealed that her son, Steven, had died in 2005, in an accident. His obituary described him as an outgoing person who enjoyed the outdoors, rebuilding old cars, and was beloved by his family and friends. He left behind a wife and a five-year-old daughter. When Carol received this information, she was devastated. She had not imagined that searching for her son would result in mourning her deep loss again.

Carol asked Bright Futures if we could help her contact her son’s widow. She wasn’t sure how it would go, but did not want to give up on finding a connection to him. She wanted to know about what his life had been. It did not take long to find Lisa, Steven’s widow. Lisa recalled her initial response when she was contacted by Bright Futures, “I was so surprised, happy and in disbelief at the same time.” She added, “We had always wanted to find Steven’s birth mother.” It was something that she and Steven had discussed early on in their relationship, and again when their daughter, Addie, was born. However, when Steven died unexpectedly, Lisa let that dream go.

Following several months of correspondence between Carol and Lisa through which the two women established a wonderful rapport, Carol’s daughter Kelly (Steven’s half-sister) had occasion to travel to Boston where Lisa and Addie (now in her 20’s) were living. Kelly, Lisa and Addie met and by Lisa’s report had a wonderful time getting to know each other. The biggest connection in this reunion, though, has been between Carol and Addie. Lisa described it as amazing and just beautiful. She added that Addie’s connection with her paternal biological grandmother has brought her so much joy and love. “They [Carol and Addie] have become very close. They FaceTime at least once a week and Carol sends Addie postcards and notes all the time,” she stated. Just recently, Addie traveled to California to spend time with Carol, also meeting a biological aunt and other extended family. Lisa stated that Addie’s connection with Steven’s biological family has given her daughter so much, especially after the loss of her father. “It’s been very powerful for Addie to now know that piece of her dad and to now have this part of our family in our lives.”

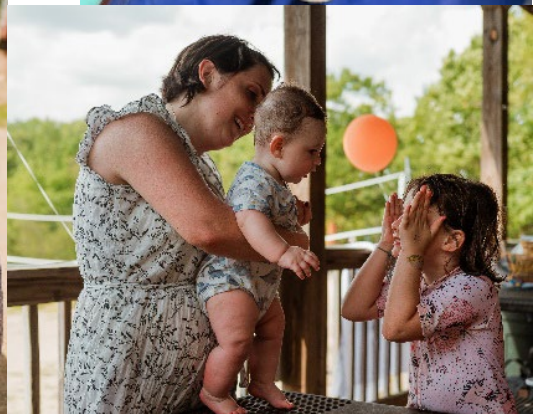
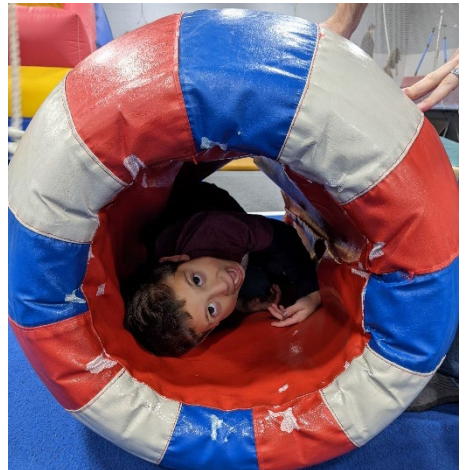
* all names changed to maintain confidentiality

Maintaining Connections through Bright Futures Annual Events

Each year since 2000 (with the exception of the first year of the pandemic in 2020), Bright Futures has hosted an Annual Summer Picnic. The picnic is for birth parents, adoptive parents and children and has a goal of providing a supportive and fun setting where families can share an experience and through this shared experience continue to grow their relationships with one another. Many families come to this event year after year and in so doing normalize for their children their experience of living in an open adoption where they have access to both of their families. In addition, they see that other families share their experience, and the children have the opportunity to connect with other children who are adopted, birth parents have the opportunity to connect with other birth parents and adoptive parents have the opportunity to connect with other adoptive parents. ***Being part of a community of adoption is helpful to all members of the adoption triad and gives our children and families the chance to learn from one another and feel part of the Bright Futures Family.***

About eight years ago, we realized that our children and families wanted to spend more time together and started the Mid-Winter Social, a gathering at an indoor playspace called One Stop Fun for adoptive families and their children. It has been a wonderful opportunity for these families to share their joys and challenges and maintain their connections. After the social in January 2023, we received this email: *"We had such a great time connecting with J & J and meeting their boys tonight. Thank you for putting on the mid-winter social. Our kids are already looking forward to playing with their boys at the summer picnic!"*

A million thank you's to One Stop Fun and Jed, Jenn and Elena for making this event possible in 2023!



Crystal's Story (continued from page 1): cheer her up. Crystal particularly enjoys when L sends a video of Jackson laughing because in her own words, "Who doesn't smile at a baby laughing? It's contagious!" Crystal also sends the family videos or links of things that she would love to see Jackson try, and they are incredibly receptive. This makes Crystal feel involved and validated.

Though it seems like Crystal's experience reads as beautiful and full of joy, Crystal wants others to know how emotional and difficult it is. She described making an adoption plan for Jackson as the hardest decision she has ever had to make, but for her and Jackson, she says it was the best decision. She feels comfort in knowing that Jackson now has a large, loving family who will give him "the best life". In creating this adoption plan with L and B, she has also become a part of their family. They just gathered to celebrate Jackson's first Christmas, and Crystal shared how special she felt when L and B gave her gifts they knew she would like. It was a small reminder that she made the right choice in choosing L and B to raise Jackson.

WORDS FROM OUR FAMILIES

Adoption from Foster Care



Thank you so much to all of you who helped with this process. Thank you for your kind words and wishes. O is doing amazingly well. She is so happy and well adjusted and really enjoying her new life. We invited the kids over to celebrate on Saturday for dinner. Our family is embracing O. She is officially a C now and the kids all have her back. She will always have family here and the support she needs to blossom and grow. She belongs here! I just couldn't imagine it working out any differently. This is why we wanted to take this journey as well. She is so deserving of our love and everything that we will provide for her. Keep doing what you all are doing. These kids need you! Thank you for all that you have done for O and for our family. Have a wonderful summer! Hope to hear from you from time to time. Please feel free to reach out at any time too. Gratefully, Julie and Bob C.

From a Birth Grandmother

Hi Karen, I just received your letter and it always makes me cry, just a little, because if it weren't for you....I shudder to think what this journey would have looked like. S calls me anytime he wants on FaceTime and we literally chat for well over an hour. I am coming up to join them this weekend for Cirque du Soleil at the Wang Center. S doesn't know I'm coming up. I'm beyond excited!!

K and P (S's adoptive parents) are amazing. I remember K telling me he was not initially interested in an open adoption until he sat through a few of your sessions. So thank you once again for everything!! Happy Holidays -- L

From An Infant Adoptive Family



Hi Karen,
We celebrated A's second birthday this September and were finally able to have his birth family get-together. His birth father, birth mother, paternal grandmother, paternal aunt and two paternal cousins and A's half-brother were all able to join us.

My parents are visiting and were also able to meet all of them. It was a lovely gathering. Everyone felt very relaxed, at ease and were able to spend quality time with A. Thank you again for your help and guidance. We are forever grateful. -- P

Weekend Family Connections- Expanding Family for Youth

How can we better serve teenagers in foster care with a plan of adoption? Is it possible to provide them with family experiences even as they wait for an adoptive family? These were the questions Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) asked three years ago when they launched the innovative Weekend Family Connections (WFC) program. Bright Futures is excited to announce that we are a partner agency for this program. Through our participation in this program, we are hoping to expand the definition of family for some of the most vulnerable kids in Massachusetts.



WFC pairs adolescents who are waiting for adoption while residing in a residential treatment program, with families who can make a minimum of a one-year commitment to welcome the youth into their home one weekend day/night twice a month. Although these families are not immediate adoption resources, they regularly show up with an open heart to remind kids that they matter!

Even as teens are becoming more independent, they need a caring, consistent, adult to support them. This adult presence can be a parent, but it can also be a coach, teacher, neighbor or friend. Research shows kids who have experienced trauma experience healing in the context of a caring, consistent relationship. Bright Futures is committed to preparing families and helping build these relationships.

When they enter the WFC program, these teens will also have an opportunity to have experiences what many of their peers take for granted. Sadly, many kids who reside in residential programs have limited “real world” interactions. While kids are staying with their host family, they get to *practice* family life. Even mundane tasks like walking the dog, running errands, or cooking a meal together create a sense of belonging. The host family also provides the youth with opportunities to meet other adults in their lives, such as neighbors, co-workers, members of their faith communities, or coaches. These opportunities to build relationships outside of residential life can be life changing. As MARE explains, “research shows that these youth are most likely to be adopted by someone who has already had the opportunity to get to know them as an individual”.

This is **more than a mentor program**. WFC families attend the 30-hour foster/preadoptive training and go on to complete a full pre-adoptive home study. It is possible that some of the WFC families will ultimately adopt the child they are matched with and if they do, they are already approved to move forward.

WFC launched in 2020 and, unfortunately, Covid significantly impacted MARE’s ability to recruit families and families, once recruited, often had a long wait to attend the required training and be assigned a clinician. MARE approached Bright Futures to ask if we could help fill this gap and we agreed.

We are thrilled to have recently graduated 8 committed, thoughtful families from training. We are confident that these families can make a significant difference for this vulnerable group of children. Our clinical team is looking forward to licensing and supporting these families through this unique journey of **showing up and making connections**.

ADOPTION CALENDAR, EDUCATIONAL & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

Adoptive Families Together offers monthly parent support groups in MA and NH, education sessions for those touched by adoption, and an online discussion group which provides a 24-hour support forum, focusing on children with challenging behaviors and complex needs. Visit www.mspcc.org/aft/ or call 800-277-5387.

Adoption Learning Partners offers meaningful, timely, web-based educational adoption resources for professionals, parents, adopted individuals, and the families that love them. adoptionlearningpartners.org

Post Adoption Support Resources:

Center for Early Relationship Support offers twice monthly support groups for adoptive parents to share their unique experiences of parenting a child through adoption. For parents and babies up to age one year. Contact Adoption Resources at 617-332-2218.

Adoption Journeys: Adoption Journeys offers an array of post adoption services for adoptive families. Visit child-familyservices.org to learn more.

Boston Post Adoption Support: Offers individual and family therapy for all those touched by adoption, child and parent support groups, and search and reunion support. Visit bpar.org to learn more.

NACAC Annual Conference, July 18-21, 2023: This conference informs and encourages all members of the adoption and foster care community. The event will offer about 70 workshops from expert speakers covering a wide variety of foster care and adoption topics. nacac.org/get-training/conference

TBRI® Training: an evidence-based, attachment-centered intervention designed for caregivers of children who have experienced relationship-based traumas such as institutionalization, multiple foster placements, abuse, and neglect. Presented virtually on 10 Tuesdays beginning March 7, 2023. Visit Fosteringhope.org for more info.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

**BRIGHT FUTURES
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC**

AUGUST 5, 2023

Talk to your child's adoptive family or birth family now to arrange to spend time together that day.

Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) Support meetings from 2 to 5pm, the third Sunday of the month, September to May, at Plymouth Congregational Church in Framingham, MA. For more information call 508-473-4066 or visit cubirthparents.org/boston.php CUB also offers a retreat for birth parents, adoptees, adoptive families, relatives and professionals. concernedunitedbirthparents.org/retreats

MPower Alliance: Birth Parent Therapeutic Retreat, April 14-16, 2023 in Mill Valley, CA. This retreat provides a nurturing, safe space for birth mothers/parents to connect, grow, and heal with others who understand their experiences. Other resources and supports for birth parents are available as well. mpoweralliance.org/birthmother_retreats

PACT Family Camp East: July 31-August 5, 2023 Will be held at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge, MD. PACT Family Camp East is a six-night/five-day event that brings together families with adopted children of color from across the country to share experiences, learn from experts, and build community. Visit pactadopt.org/pact-camp

Bright Futures Birth Mother's Day Brunch Saturday, May 6, 2023

Come and join other birth mothers who placed their children through Bright Futures or the Florence Crittenton League to share, learn, give and get support, and celebrate your incredible journey of motherhood. Pre-registration required. Please email kcheyney@rfkcommunity.org or call 978-263-5400.

You can contact Bright Futures by calling 978-263-5400 or visiting brightfuturesadoption.org

Friend us on Facebook and get updates about what's happening in the Bright Futures Family!