



RFK
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BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of RFK Community Alliance, Volume XXIV, Winter 2025

I BELIEVE

by Caroline

I didn't necessarily always want to be a parent. It was always something I'd think about in the "future". And so at age 33, after spending three years with the first person I wanted to spend my life with, the discussion of kids came up. My partner Emily always wanted to be a parent, and after many discussions about what that would mean for us, we were both on board. Adoption always appealed to me because there are already so many kids out there who need someone to love and believe in them.



At first we reached out directly to DCF to inquire about adoption from foster care, and we got some basic information. Soon a friend of a friend told us about Bright Futures and we enrolled in a virtual MAPP training group. It was such a great combination of education, advice, and unvarnished truths. It made us realize that adding a kid into our small house near a busy intersection and our recently fully remote jobs was not going to jive. So another few years passed before we landed in our current home and we finally started matching.

I was nervous to become a parent because I didn't really have recent experience with children, so the idea of matching with a 5-8 year old seemed ideal, because I figured they'd be able to talk about their wants and needs. I knew I would really struggle with a messy house. I knew I'd be the strict rule-follower and that Emily would be the fun and caring one. I knew my practical nature wouldn't allow us to accept an emergency placement. I knew Emily, who was a former educator, had a lot of experience with kids that we could rely on. What I didn't know is that the MAPP exercise where we write down all our hopes and dreams for us and our kid, and then crumple it up and throw it out, was absolutely true.

The matching process was one of the hardest things we ever did together as a couple. By one line of thinking, how could we say no to any child, knowing that we had a stable and loving home? By the other line of thinking, we both held full-time jobs that we knew we needed to work around. It was hard to stay calm and collected while waiting for a match, and sometimes we struggled with the fear (unfounded in hindsight) that it would never happen for us. Saying 'no' to some possible matches was the hardest part of matching. But when we were both ready to say 'yes,' everything felt right.

Nine months after starting the matching process, we said 'yes' to an emergency placement for Jenna – a creative, witty, and wiggly eight-year-old girl. This was exactly within the range that Molly, our incredible Bright Futures social worker, had told us it would probably take. And as the three of us settled into our life as a family, it turned
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25th Anniversary Campaign

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<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/brightfutures/>



WELCOME TO OUR NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

In 2024 and early 2025, Bright Futures staff grew in leaps and bounds! We welcomed a dozen new part-time adoption social workers to our DCF Assessment Program, all of whom are completing child and family assessments that help children achieve permanency. This growth is helping to meet the need of DCF and the children and families it serves. Welcome to this wonderful new group of clinicians!

Kayla Abunaw, LICSW

Kerry Cavanaugh, LICSW

Anne Madeiros, LCSW

Danisa Batista, LICSW

Marielle Egan, LICSW

Candi Sisterhenm, LCSW

Katie Buckley, LICSW

Jessica Glynn, LICSW

Michelle Vazquez, LCSW

Erika Cadena, LCSW

Shardae Gomes, LICSW

Carly Wilson, LICSW

WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Aaron and Alissa on the arrival of Koralyce

Ben, Darrell and Stella on the arrival of Ayla

Betty on the arrival of Ge'Reem

Brenda and Alec on the arrival of Heavenly

Caroline and Emily on the arrival of Jenna

Danyelle, Jay and family on the arrival of Lane

Jeff and James on the arrival of Jeremy

Jenn, Chris, Zoey and Louis on the arrival of Desmond

Jessica and John on the arrival of Aiden

Julia, Matt and Isaac on the arrival of Gabriel

Kathleen, James and Alisha on the arrival of Violet

Olga and Francis on the arrival of Nathan and Jenelisse

Phoebe, Tommy and Oliver on the arrival of Phoenix

Shannon on the arrival of Austin

Stephanie and Fernando on the arrival of Christina



A Weekend Family Connections Success Story: Building Bonds

The Weekend Family Connections Program (WFC) creates meaningful connections between youth in residential care and supportive adults. This initiative pairs kids awaiting adoption who are aged ten and older with caring families who commit to spending at least one weekend a month together. During these visits, host families integrate the youth into their daily lives and community activities. Launched by the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) in collaboration with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), WFC provides a unique opportunity for youth who have been in care for an extended period. Bright Futures teamed up with MARE to train, approve, and support WFC families in 2022.

Meet Shannon and Austin: To take a closer look into WFC, we interviewed Shannon, a 48-year-old single woman and middle school math coach, and Austin, a 13-year-old boy who loves building things. They connected through WFC one year ago. Initially, Shannon had reservations about adopting as a single parent despite her love for working with children. Then two things happened. Her ailing father encouraged her to follow her heart AND she learned about WFC. The prospect of making a meaningful monthly commitment to a youth without the expectation of full-time parenting felt right.



Breaking the Ice: The initial meeting in WFC can be a little awkward. Many of the youth may feel self-conscious, struggle with social skills, or be distrusting of new people due to their past experiences. To ease this, families create a short video introducing themselves and their home. The video allows the youth to learn about the family and gives them control to determine if they want to meet. Austin was particularly impressed by Shannon's video, noting how it made him feel at ease. Their first meeting occurred on Zoom with Austin's therapist facilitating. They prepared questions to ask each other, which fostered a smoother interaction. They quickly found common ground and arranged to meet in person the following week.

Getting Comfortable: The first in-person visit takes place at the residential program, St. Ann's. Austin shared that he thinks it's a "good idea for kids to be able to meet in a familiar environment". Visits then move into the community and when Austin was ready for an overnight at Shannon's house. Austin shared how different it was to stay in a family setting compared to St. Ann's. He shared, "I needed to raise my hand and ask permission to go to the bathroom" at St. Ann's. Shannon added, "He still asks if he can go to his room, even though I've told him he doesn't need to." Also, Austin was used to sleeping knowing staff would be available during the night. This is obviously not an option in a family's home. To enhance his comfort, Shannon and Austin decorated his room with cozy blankets, painted it his favorite color and added LED lights and a walkie-talkie for Austin to know he could communicate with Shannon during the night if needed. Shannon recognizes the impact of Austin's past trauma and loss on his behavior. Her acceptance and commitment to understanding and supporting Austin's needs provides him with the confidence he needs to safely explore his independence. This approach has helped Austin feel safe and secure in his new environment.

Connecting Through Everyday Moments: Both Shannon and Austin emphasized that the foundation of their relationship grew from *simple, everyday moments* rather than grand gestures. Shannon enjoys just being in the same room as Austin where she may be working on an art project while Austin is chatting with her and playing with the dogs. Austin treasures their shared experiences, which include preparing meals and watching TV together. Their bedtime routine of snuggling with the dogs and reading was also a comforting, predictable ritual during the early months of Austin's visits. For families considering WFC, Shannon advises, "You don't need to plan big events every weekend; comfort and familiarity are essential." (continued on page 7)

(I Believe - continued from page 1):

out that I didn't care about our messy house and rules after all because bonding with Jenna was more important. Emily found that her teaching experience was useful in many ways, but that truly we were both starting from scratch as first-time parents, getting initiated together into the sometimes-chaotic-but-always-exciting business of living with and caring for a child. In practice, our parenting personas weren't exactly what we expected, but we found that as parents we balanced each other in some really nice ways.

Jenna's been with us for about nine months now, and we've felt our family connection grow much stronger. Some things we all love: cuddling with our big orange cat Pepperjack, family movie night, crafting together, playing in the woods, baking and cooking together (Belgian waffles just joined the rotation!), and trying new games. Some things we don't universally love but we're still trying sometimes: talking about emotions ("borrrr-ing!") and vegetables.

Home life became easier once we figured out the mundane things like bedtime routine, what foods we could all enjoy together, and how to navigate transitions like daily pickup from summer camp. School life has sometimes been hard, but we've been working closely with the school to find what works for Jenna. During the bumpy times, we've leaned heavily on the team that's in place to support us. In particular, Jenna's DCF social worker is one of the hardest working, proactive, caring, and understanding people on the planet. Despite so much of what we had expected being turned upside down, and the lows and the highs we didn't see coming, we are so in love with this wonderful little human who is so curious and bright. But the one thing I was right about all along is that I believe in this girl like crazy, and I absolutely love being her mom!

Accessing Your Original Birth Certificate in Massachusetts: What Adoptees Need to Know

Many adopted people experience a natural curiosity and longing to understand their roots, cultural heritage, and genetic background. For some, learning about their biological family and the events leading to their adoption can provide a sense of closure or context that enriches their personal narrative. Others may seek this information to answer critical and more ordinary questions about medical history. Uncovering these details can bring clarity and a deeper connection to their unique story and identity. But where do you begin, if you don't know your birth parents' names or location?

In 2022 Massachusetts revised its regulations to enable all adoptees over the age of 18 (and adoptive parents of children under age 18) to request and receive a copy of their original birth certificate from the MA Registry of Vital Records and Statistics. This may provide a good starting point for beginning a search for birth family. An original birth certificate contains the birth parents' names, dates of birth and address or town of residence at the time of birth. Please keep in mind that if a woman is not married, she is not required to list the father on the birth certificate, so in many cases the birth father's information may not be listed. One can request their original birth certificate by mail or go in person to pick one up at The Registry of Vital Records and Statistics located at 150 Mt. Vernon Street in Dorchester. The Bureau's web address is www.mass.gov/locations/registry-of-vital-records-and-statistics and phone number is 617-740-2600. To access the birth certificate request form on-line, make sure you search for "adoptee's original birth certificate".

It is important to recognize that searching for and learning information about one's adoption can be emotional and complex. Discovering birth family members often leads to mixed feelings – joy, curiosity, sadness, uncertainty or even anxiety. It is important to approach the experience with an open mind and realistic expectations, as not every discovery leads to a reunion or answers all questions. Surround yourself with supportive people, whether it's family, friends, a therapist, or an adoption support group, to create a safe space where you can share and process your feelings and experiences.

Special Moments from Bright Futures 25th Anniversary Year

During the past year, we have found many ways to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Bright Futures with all of you. Since inception Bright Futures has prioritized bringing kids and all of their parents together to create a supportive adoption community with a goal of building a strong and healthy adoption identity. The year began with a sunny warm day at Davis Farmland in April where kids and families could spend time with one another and meet and feed all of the wonderful baby animals. The festivities continued with our Annual Summer Picnic at Hale Reservation in August where birth, adoptive families and children come together to foster their connections with others who share their experiences.

In September, we held our 25th Anniversary Celebration at Kimball Farm where kids, families and friends of Bright Futures came together to play, eat and hear the stories of those who have been touched by the work of Bright Futures. There was a slide show of families over the years as well as a 30-foot printed timeline of the milestones of the last 25 years. It was a full circle moment when we realized that one of the babies we placed for adoption and whose photo was on the timeline, was serving ice cream at our event!

Many thanks to Michelle and Ava for sharing their journey from foster care to adoption **and to Lindsay, Ellen and Megan** for sharing their story of living in an open adoption for 22 years. Your words mattered and brought to others a deeper understanding of the joys and challenges of adoption lifelong.

In November, adoption was further celebrated at the RFK Community Alliance Embracing the Legacy Gala where **Susan Harris O'Connor**, MSW, LICSW, a practitioner, activist, author, performance artist and adoptee, **was honored for living the legacy of Robert F. Kennedy, Sr.** *(continued on next page)*



(Building Bonds - continued from page 4):

Finding Permanence: Ultimately, Shannon realized she did have the capacity to be a full-time mom, and has now committed to adopting Austin. Austin was placed in her home in July 2024 and they are now waiting for a date to finalize the adoption. Although there are bumps in the road as everyone adjusts, WFC has provided Austin with a path to permanence.

Other youth in WFC are benefiting from a new supportive relationship and experiencing the world outside of their residential setting. Simply having caring adults show up in their lives and express “you matter” can make a world of difference for a child. **To learn more about WFC please email kbernstein@rfkcommunity.org.**

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through her work lifting up the voices of Black and Brown children and making their needs a priority in the field of adoption. To read more about Susan, click here: <https://www.rfkcommunity.org/events/embracing-the-legacy-2024>.



Adoption was further celebrated when one of our adoptive families, Stephanie, Corey, Jamellah and Kye, generously shared their adoption story by participating in a video about their journey from foster care to adoption. Following the video, Stephanie spoke with great poise while her children cheered her on. We are forever grateful to them for helping others to understand the work of Bright Futures and what permanency means for children.

To view the video, click here: <https://brightfuturesadoption.org/adoption-from-foster-care-2/>

Words from Our Families

Good Morning, Karen,

Thank you so much for your email. And thank you for another informative, very well-done information session last night. We truly appreciate and are inspired by the important work you all at Bright Futures are doing with integrity and such a focus on and commitment to the young people you serve, and to social justice, equity, inclusion, belonging and diversity. We are inspired and grateful to be connected to you and your organization. We're so glad the stars aligned and that our child and I were down the road at Look Park at the same playground, on the same day, at the same time, as [B and his daughter]!

Being trauma-informed sometimes happens in talk, and not always aligned in action (as we've all seen I'm sure, even when people/organizations are well-intentioned). D and I are really appreciating the ways you all are clearly and deeply aligned with trauma-informed best practices as they intersect with social justice, equity, inclusion, belonging and diversity, with the children always at the center, as they should be. So, that is all to say, thank you, for all you are all doing on behalf of the young people, and their families that you work with, collaborate with, advocate for, and serve. We are inspired & grateful. – E & D

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.

Second Nurture: 2N creates circles of compassion and support for foster families so that they are held, resilient and successful—and kids have the loving, growthful relationships and resources they need to thrive. Visit <https://www.2nurture.org/aboutus> to learn more about what's happening in Massachusetts!

PACT Family Camp: July 28 to August 2, 2025, will be held at the Riverhouse Lodge in Bend, OR. This 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 <https://pactadopt.org/pact-camp/>

Bright Futures Birth Parent Support Group
Meets virtually the 2nd Sunday of each month at 10:00 am.
The group is designed to offer support to parents who have made an adoption plan for a child and to meet other birth parents. To register, email cglazier@rfkcommunity.org.

Bright Futures Birth Mother's Day Brunch
Saturday, May 10, 2025
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 cglazier@rfkcommunity.org or call 978-263-5400.

SAVE THE DATE!!!

**BRIGHT FUTURES
ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC
AUGUST 9, 2025**

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

MPower Alliance: Birth Parent Therapeutic Retreat, San Francisco, CA. No cost for birth parents to attend retreat and MPower Alliance can assist with some travel expenses. The retreat provides a nurturing, safe space for birth mothers/parents to connect, grow, and heal with others who understand their experiences. Other birth parent resources/supports available as well. https://www.mpoweralliance.org/birthmother_retreats

Barker's Annual Adoption and Foster Care Conference March 1, 2025: This conference offers 9 workshops from expert speakers covering a wide variety of foster care and adoption topics. **Barker's Teen Connections-Our Voices, Our Stories, Adoptees Creating Connections:** A workshop aimed to strengthen and support teens. Visit <https://www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org/about-us/events/2025-barkers-annual-adoption-and-foster-care-conference>

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

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!