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BRIGHT THINGS

A Newsletter of Bright Futures Adoption Center,
a program of RFK Community Alliance, Volume XXV, Winter 2026

An Extraordinary Act of Generosity

by Stephanie

We found out about D the day before she was born. A few hours later, we learned that her first parents wanted to meet us. We were ecstatic! Bright Futures set up a forty-five-minute Zoom call between the four of us with Karen included, and while we were incredibly excited and nervous, we had no expectations for how it would go. Isaac and I told each other we would see how it went and make any decisions that needed to be made after the call. But then, we immediately felt so connected to D's first parents that halfway through the Zoom call, Isaac and I were texting each other, "I love them! I want to move forward if they do!" and "Me too!" Then, remarkably, they invited us to Boston to be there for D's birth the next day.



We packed our bags in about an hour, with Isaac's sister driving over a car seat to take with us in case we became D's parents. We drove through the night, taking turns driving and sleeping every few hours, until we arrived in Boston at 6:30am. We took a quick nap and shower at a friend's house (thank you, Jen!) and then made it to the hospital just before D was born. We walked into the hospital not knowing what to expect and not knowing if we would become D's parents, only knowing that our job was to support D's first parents and whatever decision they made during our time together.

What we encountered was an extraordinary act of generosity.

From the beginning, D's first parents welcomed us with openness and trust. They invited us into one of the most sacred moments of their lives and made space for us alongside them. When we entered their room for the first time, D's first dad greeted us with a giant hug, and it felt like we were old friends. When we joined them in the recovery room after D was born, they asked Isaac if he wanted to feed her. He held the bottle not knowing exactly what to do, and D's first parents talked him through feeding her, burping her, and swaddling her. It was the first of many special moments with D all together, the four of us.

In those early hours and days, something unexpected happened: we didn't just become parents, we became a family, together. There was laughter, shared meals (sushi for D's first mom's first post-birth dinner!), quiet conversations, and countless moments of care centered around this new person we all loved. On the second day in the hospital, after D's first parents confirmed that they wanted to move forward with the adoption, a nurse came in to give D her first sponge bath. *(continued on page 6):*



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There is still time to Donate Online at:
<https://secure.qgiv.com/for/brightfutures/>



WELCOME TO OUR NEW BRIGHT FUTURES STAFF!

In 2025 and early 2026, Bright Futures staff grew in leaps and bounds! We welcomed 8 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 needs of DCF and the children and families it serves. Welcome to this wonderful new group of clinicians!

Melanie Designas, LICSW

Amber Fitzwater, LICSW, SAC

Jennifer Griffith, LICSW

Cassandra Kachadoorian, LCSW

Danigny Jean Louis, LCSW

Jazmin Mendes, LCSW

Erica Siegel, LICSW

Angelina Verdieu, LCSW

WELCOME HOME – CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ADOPTIVE & PRE-ADOPTIVE PARENTS!

Abigail and Andrew on the arrival of O'Diamond

Abi and Ryan on the arrival of Anashaliz, Sabdriel and Noelle

Andrew and Patrick on the arrival of Jason & Shawn

Cara and Brian on the arrival of Ryan

Emma on the arrival of Everlee

Francis and Christine on the arrival of Amaury

Holly on the arrival of Star

Isaac and Stephanie on the arrival of Adella

Jannette on the arrival of Destiny

Jasmin and Jeff on the arrival of Kyle James

Jessie and Kurt on the arrival of Christiano

Karen and Doug on the arrival of Noah

Katie and Matt on the arrival of Emma

Katie and Steffen on the arrival of Michael

Lauren and Jamey on the arrival of Dalia

Meredith and Frank on the arrival of Harmony & Harper

Randy and Amber on the arrival of Madeline

Shannon and Nicholas on the arrival of Kyla

Susan and Rebecca on the arrival of Jackson

Sylvia and Bruck on the arrival of Marcus

Tina on the arrival of Philip



Becoming a Family: One Step at a Time

by Tara & Alex



Over the years, Alex and I talked about growing our family when we felt ready. Adoption came into the conversation early. When we felt ready, we decided to explore adoption from foster care. We completed MAPP training, but doubts remained – did we have the resources, patience, and right intentions to proceed? The commitment and responsibility seemed overwhelming, but we decided to take the next step and complete the home study. During this process we examined our own histories and abilities, and the type of child we could best support. Still, questions remained - what would life be like as pre-adoptive foster parents? Would we be able to handle it?

The next step was to explore possible matches. Karen’s guidance during this time was invaluable – she always asked the right questions and supported us when making decisions. One day, Karen contacted us to say that a DCF worker thought we might be a good placement for a six-year-old girl, Zakiyya. We learned a little more about her and were both excited and nervous about moving forward. We took the next step of meeting with DCF and current caregivers to learn more about her background and needs.

During this time, something clicked for us. The nervousness remained, but we were excited to commit to the placement and to meet her. For our first visit with her, we picked her up from her foster home and had a lot of fun getting to know each other at a nearby park and playground. As we drove away to take her back to her foster home, a deer suddenly stepped in front of the car (luckily, we weren’t going fast). The deer gazed at the three of us, together, and in that moment Alex and I felt that we were a unit.

After an overnight at our home and several Zoom calls together, Zakiyya moved in with us. Those first several months were a blur of helping her settle into her new routine, while doing our best to provide a sense of predictability and safety. We were both lucky that our employers offered parental leave for foster care and adoption. It was invaluable to have that time to dedicate to getting to know Zakiyya. The first year was incredibly challenging as she struggled to adjust and Alex and I alternated childcare and managing her services. We did our best to approach behaviors with curiosity and relied on many trauma-informed resources – therapy, podcasts, books, support groups, and Karen & Molly (who ran a fantastic support group). We still rely on those resources today!

Although the first few months were challenging, they included so many sweet moments – the first time Zakiyya gripped my hand tightly during a bedtime story, the first time she drew a picture of the three of us, the first inside joke we shared, the first time she let herself fall apart and cry on my shoulder, our first vacation to the beach.

As pre-adoptive foster parents, there were still many unknowns. We took Zakiyya to visits with her biological family and the complexities of adopting from foster care became more real to us. Zakiyya struggled to understand her situation, and it was hard to explain, since we couldn’t let her know for certain if she was staying with us since parental rights were not yet terminated. We tried to support her and take things day by day.

After about a year, Zakiyya was legally freed for adoption. Alex and I were overjoyed, but it was bittersweet for Zakiyya. We found a tiny book called “Adoption is Both” that helped us talk through all the feelings about being adopted, both happy and sad. We have an open adoption and are trying to help her maintain those vital connections with her biological family. *(continued on page 7)*

Meeting Our Son's Birth Mother

by Heather

On June 26, 2024, my husband and I learned about a sweet little boy being born at a hospital in Massachusetts. After finding out more about his birth mom and their circumstances, we prayerfully considered our decision and said "yes!" On the morning of July 2, 2024, my husband and I prepared to meet our son for the first time. We were asked to arrive at the hospital in three hours with some baby outfits, a carseat, and a few other supplies. We were also asked if we had selected a name, as our son's birth mom wanted us to choose his name. We were honored and thoughtfully selected John as his name. We didn't have a single baby item when we said yes, and we really relied on our family to help us gather the essentials.



When we arrived at the hospital, we were extremely grateful we had the chance to meet our son's birth mom for about twenty minutes or so prior to meeting our son. I am so glad we had this opportunity. I tried to pay attention to every detail of the conversation, so I could share everything I knew about her to our son someday. She expressed care for her son by asking about our jobs and how we would support him if he had a disability. I shared that I am a special education teacher, and that there are many supports available for kids in Massachusetts. We also told her that we are always open to asking for support. She shared some details about her experiences of working on a farm, and how her favorite food is pasta. At the end of our conversation, she looked to the social worker and said, "I picked the right people."

I remember during our pre-adoption training that Karen highlighted the importance of making the moments at the hospital meaningful and representative of the significance of what is taking place. I am grateful we had the opportunity to verbally thank our son's birth mother and to share that we would always express with our son how much she loves him.

We were told by the social worker at the hospital that our son's birth mom desired to pass him to us. This was an incredible honor, and I am so grateful that we have a photo of this moment taken by one of the social workers in the room. The photo shows the back of our son's birth mom with her hand stretched out as she passes him to me and my husband, with the image of our three hands extended towards our son, and with all of our love for him at the center.

Recently, we had the opportunity to meet with our son's birth mom through a virtual call, almost 18 months after we met her and our son for the first time. It was really nice to have the chance to connect with her again. We shared smiles, some laughs, and a mutual love for John. Our son's birth mom said that she could tell that the three of us have a strong bond together, which appeared to bring her a sense of peace.

We are so grateful that John is a healthy, funny, and sweet little guy who we love so much. While John has brought so much joy to us since bringing him home, I want to acknowledge that adoption is a complex experience for all members of the adoption triad. Through the moments of celebration and smiles we have experienced with John, we also recognize and feel the weight of grief within the different layers of adoption, with the contrasting emotions of joy and sadness frequently experienced at the same time.

We continue to be so thankful to John's birth mom, and we will forever be in awe of her courage, her resilience, and her act of sacrificial love in order to do what she felt would be best for John.

(An Extraordinary Act of Generosity - continued from page 1):

The four of us gathered around the tiny bassinet, all of us cooing, smiling, and taking pictures. At one point, I stepped back, my eyes full of tears. I saw four parents bound together by immense love for our little girl. I paused in gratitude for this gift.

Our relationship with D's first parents has continued beyond the hospital walls. Over these first months, we've FaceTimed on D's first mom's birthday so she could see her smile. We shared Christmas through photos and messages and a quick FaceTime to have a moment of connection on D's first dad's favorite holiday. We've sent emails and pictures, watching as D grows and grows, and planned our first in-person visit together (we're so excited!). Once, at D's pediatrician appointment, our pediatrician asked whether D's first mom had received the RSV vaccine during pregnancy so D wouldn't get a double dose. Isaac called D's first dad right then and the answer came easily. It felt both ordinary and profound.

We had no idea how beautiful openness with first families could be.

We don't know exactly what the years ahead will look like. But we know how it began --with an invitation into a hospital room. With four parents gathered around a bassinet, loving the same beautiful little girl. Five months in, that beginning still carries us forward, and every day, we are grateful for the generosity that brought us here. Isaac and I hope to approach all of our future decisions with D's first family with the same love, openness, and generosity they have given us since that very first Zoom call. We will spend our lives honoring the beginning of our family, and the people who made it possible.

Federal Adoption Tax Credit is Now Partially Refundable!

As you may know, the maximum Federal Adoption Tax Credit for 2025 is \$17,280. Families who adopted children in 2025 are eligible to claim the full amount regardless of expenses paid for the adoption and even if they are receiving an adoption subsidy. **What you may not know is that \$5,000 of that amount is now refundable!** This means that if a family finalized their adoption in 2025, they should be able to use \$5,000 of the adoption tax credit even if they have no tax liability, resulting in a tax refund. If the family does owe taxes, the family can use the adoption tax credit to offset their tax liability.

This change was the result of a bipartisan effort and is a major step forward for families with little or no federal tax liability. The nonrefundable nature of the tax credit makes it beneficial to a broader range of caregivers, including many who adopt from foster care, as well as grandparents and other relative caregivers who adopt. This change is important because the nonrefundable nature of the tax credit could open the door to permanency for more children in foster care and provide financial support to families with lower or fixed incomes. A refundable credit means that, whether you owe a large federal tax bill or none at all, you'll receive financial support. This financial support can help families access critical post-adoption services - like mental health care and assistance with school advocacy - that are needed for the long-term health and well-being of children and families when children have experienced trauma, loss and instability. Access to these resources is often limited by cost or health insurance limitations. The refundable portion of the tax credit can give families real dollars to invest in the care their children need to heal, grow and thrive.

Click <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/resource/adoption-tax-credit/> to watch a webinar about how to claim the adoption tax credit. The focus is on filing for the 2025 tax year but also covers applying for the credit for adoptions as far back as 2020.

ADOPTION CALENDAR, EDUCATIONAL & SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES

StageWise Parenting offers meaningful, timely, web-based educational adoption resources for professionals, parents, adopted individuals, and the families that love them. <https://stagewiseparenting.org/>

Post Adoption Support Resources Center for Early Relationship Support offers 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. <https://www.jfcsboston.org/our-services/center-for-early-relationship-support>

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>

PACT Family Camp: June 30 to July 5, 2026, will be held in Concord, NC. 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/>

2026 Rudd Adoption Virtual Conference, Adoption Across the Life Course: The Needs and Experiences of Adult Adoptees in the USA and UK: Webinar series of five recent research studies exploring the experiences of adult adoptees. Training & Events : Rudd Adoption Research Program : UMass Amherst

Concerned United Birthparents (CUB) Support meetings from 2 to 5 pm, the third Sunday of the month, September to May, at Plymouth Congregational Church in Framingham, MA. Call 508-498-6655 or visit [Support Groups — Concerned United Birthparents](#)

Bright Futures Birth Parent Virtual Drop Ins

The next Drop Ins are scheduled for **March 5th and May 7th at 6:00 pm**. These are designed to offer support to parents who have made an adoption plan for a child and to meet other birth parents. Email cglazier@rfkcommunity.org to register.

Bright Futures Birth Mother's Day Brunch Saturday, May 9, 2026

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!!!

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ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC
AUGUST 1, 2026**

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. Keep an eye on the website for 2026 retreat dates. 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 & Teen Connections Event: March 7, 2026 in Rockville, MD. "Where Every Story Matters & Every Voice Belongs," this conference is aimed at parents and professionals and brings together well-known keynote speakers to lead workshops and provide resources and tools. Teens ages 13–17 can take part in Teen Connections, a guided, adoptee-centered program running alongside the main conference. <https://barkeradoptionfoundation.org/barker-events/>

Adoption Journeys: Adoption Journeys offers an array of post adoption services for adoptive families. Visit <https://cfservices.org/pg-adoption-journeys.php> 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!